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# Internet Use and Political Participation: An Empirical Study of Beijing

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**ABSTRACT:** The study presents an analysis of how internet use affects political participation in Beijing, supported by a quantitative approach based on survey data. Using 2021 data from the Comprehensive Survey of China's Social Conditions with local residents from Beijing, this study applies logistic regression to examine how different internet activities relate to various forms of political participation, complemented by a descriptive contextual analysis of Beijing's political environment. This study has particularly chosen Beijing for its unique political significance and close monitoring of civic political interactions as the capital city of China. The results indicate that internet use is positively associated with political participation, while other uses, such as social trust social tolerance, show no significant effect. Additionally, perceptions of social fairness independently predict political participation. Internet use, as an accessible and transparent element of the society, therefore, serves as a convenient and efficient tool for the government to boost civic participation in politics. Thus, the study recommends that government efforts focus on enhancing credibility and fostering engagement through targeted social media outreach and expanded online petition systems. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data and reliance on self-reported survey data, causal interpretations should be made cautiously. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs and broader regional comparisons.

## INTRODUCTION

Decades into the Information Age, digital technology has advanced from a catalyst of development to a fundamental basis of our society. The prevalence of digital technology has grown rapidly, reaching around half of the world's population in two decades. Digital technology currently dictates the everyday life of most people, from cell phones to surveillance to cybersecurity systems. It is, therefore, crucial to inspect the impact of digital technology on society in detail. An interesting case in the world's technological development is China. Since the late 20th century, China has seen significant growth and development of its digital technology system, as the reform and opening up movement coincided with the invention of the World Wide Web in that era. Subsequently, China's digital industry flourished, demonstrating rapid growth in terms of revenue and technological knowledge. Data provided by the China Network Information Center (CNNIC) shows that, as of June 2025, China has 1.123 billion internet users, approximately 79.7% of the population. Against this background, the scale and influence of internet use in China provide a valuable context for examining its broader societal impacts.

An important factor directing society's operation is politics. Nonetheless, not only do governments' decisions and policies matter, but also the citizens' participation. Political participation has significant effects on democracy and governance. Political participation is the foundation of democracy. The Council of Europe has defined democracy as governance based on the will of the people. Political participation demonstrates political efficacy, which is an important indicator of whether an individual is motivated to participate in various forms of political engagement. It refers to the belief that governments and political institutions will respond to public needs (Niemi et al., 1991; Willeck, C., & Mendelberg, T., 2022), which empowers people to actively participate. Such confidence leads to democracy, as democracy is the manifestation of people's power to impact politics. Secondly, political participation enhances the effect and promotes the success of governance. Political participation encourages political responsiveness, allowing the impact of policies to be evaluated for feedback and modified by the government for more desired effects. Simultaneously, political participation also fosters public trust, reducing societal polarisation and political instability.

Thus, this paper aims to investigate one specific impact that internet use has on citizens in China—its influence on political participation. In the digital era, internet use has become an increasingly relevant factor influencing political participation, since the existence of the Internet has broadened the channels for people to participate in politics. Just as what Tang, Y., & Wen, Q. (2023) mentioned, social media provides timely political information, diverse communication, and interactive features, which enhance people's motivation to participate in political discussions and sharing. Similarly, the study by Xu, P., Ye, Y., & Zhang, M. (2018) also suggests that physical access to computers and the internet is a crucial factor related to political participation.

Given these considerations, this paper will focus on how internet use affects political participation of citizens in Beijing. Beijing has been selected as the region of this study for its unique political value to the country as the capital city. Located on the northern end of the North China Plain, Beijing has been a historical capital city of multiple ancient Chinese dynasties. Continuing to be the political centre of China until today, Beijing's political importance sets it apart from other cities. The general political atmosphere is stronger than in other parts of China, enhancing political education provided to Beijing students. Moreover, most existing studies on similar topics investigate China as an entire country or large regions (such as Western and Eastern China) without further specification down to cities. This could lead to neglect of detailed regional traits such as historical background distinct from other parts of the country. Therefore, this study will enhance the overall investigation on the topic by focusing on one city, which highlights Beijing's distinct background as the capital city.

The influence of internet usage on civic political participation is significant. With the swift rise of social media, users online are increasingly discussing social issues and public events. They also have the freedom to engage in conversations regarding political matters and public policy. Furthermore, more organisations are using social media to disseminate information about their activities. China is presently experiencing a crucial phase of social transformation. Consequently, examining how Chinese citizens engage in online political participation through social media holds great importance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Political Participation

The definition of politics has changed differently over time. Political participation has been defined by Huntington and Nelson (1976) as an activity that affects the government's decision and policy-making by actors spontaneously or mobilised by others. "Those actions by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" is what is meant by political participation, according to Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1987). There are four organised forms of political participation: voting, campaign involvement, cooperative efforts, and contacts initiated by citizens. Van Deth, J. W. (2014) summarised four characteristics of political participation, including: it contains activities; it is voluntary; it refers to non-professional or amateur participants; it relates to government, politics or state.

As technology continues to develop and advance, new avenues for political participation have surfaced in digital media, particularly on the Internet. With the evolving forms of participation, both traditional and modern methods are encompassed in this categorization, which includes "digital network engagement, institutionalised participation, protest, voting, civic involvement, and consumer participation" (Theocharis, Y., & Van Deth, J. W., 2018). These options enable citizens who feel their voices lack impact on the political landscape to engage in the political initiatives of their choosing and express their identities as they see fit (Marsh, D., & Akram, S., 2015).

### 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

There are many theoretical models of behavioural interpretation of people's political participation. Past scholars have investigated the connection between internet use and political participation. Clay Shirky, in his book "Here Comes Everybody" (2008), expressed the idea that technology is "a tool for social change." This concept underpins the Mobilisation Theory, which posits a positive correlation between social media and political participation, as the use of social media reduces the barriers to engaging in political activities.

Indeed, social media provides easier access to political news and discussions, both inspiring and providing a platform for political participation. It also lowers the logistical, social, and psychological obstacles associated with offline communication to participation. Lastly, it establishes online communities and social ties to inspire collective political actions. In essence, this theory argues that social media increases and enhances political participation by making it easier in terms of access and cost.

Expanding on this idea, Tang, Y., & Wen, Q. (2023) contend that social media enables anyone to engage in political activities, fostering both a form of political participation that is non-institutionalised and one that is institutionalised. This has also been observed by Meesuwan, S. (2016) in a study of political participation in Thailand, in which it has been concluded that the Internet has made it easier for people to contact news media to address governmental issues and engage in collective actions like signing petitions.

However, while the Mobilisation Theory emphasises the facilitative role of social media, some scholars object to its overly optimistic stance. For instance, research by Nisbet, M. C., & Scheufele, D. A. (2004) has proved that the correlation between Internet use and political participation is very limited, suggesting that accessibility does not necessarily translate into active engagement. There are also theoretical perspectives that directly challenge the idea of a positive link, proposing instead that the Internet can lower political participation. Agger, Robert E., Marshall N. Goldstein, and Stanley A. Pearl (1961) discusses political cynicism, which is the idea that when negativity bias is present, meaning that when people cynically believe politicians are corrupt and the system is rigged, they see no point in voting, protesting, or joining campaigns. This leads to a direct decrease in political participation. The attention economy theory suggests that different sources of media compete for the audiences' attention. As T. Wu (2017) indicates in their book "The Attention Merchants," such competition hightens the frequency of the usage of sensationalist and polarising

content on the internet. This exacerbates the problem of political cynicism, particularly in the New Media Age in which media prevalence grows rapidly. Thus, it has been argued that as the internet maximises political distrust, it leads to a decrease in political efficacy.

### 2.3 Internet Use and Political Participation

As noted by Chen, Mo. and Ghulam Rasool Madni. (2024) and Macafee, T., & De Simone, J. J. (2012), the use of the internet significantly influences political engagement, particularly through social media, which reduces barriers to political involvement by offering individuals a platform to access political content, engage in discussions, and participate in campaigns from anywhere with internet access. This accessibility fosters broader participation among the population. Individuals can quickly access news, opinions, and various viewpoints on political matters. The spread of this information aids people in understanding and getting involved, thus enhancing political participation.

To better understand this relationship, scholars have conducted numerous studies focusing on different regions and countries, including Western China, the entire country, and Thailand. Some scholars have also studied the situation in China. Tang, Y., & Wen, Q. (2023) has also concluded that the longer university students in Western China use social media, the more likely they are to engage in online political activities.

Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts. In Thailand, the result is similar. A study by Meesuwan, S. (2016) concluded that internet use is significantly and positively associated with political participation in Thailand. The study argued that the Internet has made contacting news media to address governmental issues and engage in collective actions like signing petitions more accessible and convenient.

With regard to China's broader political environment, over time, the Chinese government has been more transparent, and people now have access to more information on China, mainly in part to the internet (Stockmann, D., & Luo, T., 2025). This aligns with the idea that political participation is a two-way process involving active interactions between citizens and government (Wang, Z., & Sun, L., 2017). From the latest literature, internet use is related to political participation, so research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Internet use has a significant impact on people's political participation. The higher the Internet usage, the greater the probability of people's political participation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Data

This article utilises data from the Comprehensive Survey of China's Social Conditions (CSS) conducted in 2021. The data is sourced from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which launched a large-scale nationwide continuous sampling survey project through the Institute of Academic Studies. The CSS2021 project employs a multi-stage mixed sampling approach, which involves four sampling stages: counties (cities, districts), village (neighbourhood) committees, households, and individual residents, with distinct sampling techniques applied at each level. By encompassing a broad range of target groups, the sample achieves a high degree of representativeness. After excluding cases with missing values or outliers in relevant variables, we were left with a final effective sample of 141 respondents. While this sample size is smaller than those in nationwide studies, it still offers adequate statistical power for significant analysis and enhances our understanding of the unique aspects of Beijing.

### 3.2 Measures

#### 3.2.1 Dependent Variables

The dependent variable identified in this study is political participation, with a specific definition that categorises certain activities for easier observation and simplification in determining what qualifies as political participation. The 2021 Chinese Social Survey inquired whether respondents engaged in the following activities to assess their level of political participation: individuals were classified as having participated politically if they had taken part in any of these activities within the last two years: discussing political matters with others or on online platforms; reporting social issues to media outlets such as newspapers, radio stations, and online forums; submitting opinions to government agencies (including through phone calls, emails, etc.); involvement in public policy discussions or public affairs meetings using their professional expertise; sharing personal views on government-announced policies through various means; attending public policy hearings organized by government bodies; submitting petitions to government offices; engaging in discussions regarding significant decisions within one's community or residential unit; taking part in community-organised social welfare activities or initiating such efforts, like voluntary blood donation, environmental clean-ups, and providing assistance to the elderly, disabled, and patients; Engaging in religious practices; participating in collective rights protection actions both online and offline. This participation is measured as a binary variable (1 = engaged in political participation, 0 = did not engage in political participation), where involvement in any of these activities is recorded as 1, and none is noted as 0.

#### 3.2.2 Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study is the use of the internet. According to the CSS2021 questionnaire, this was assessed by the frequency of different online activities, such as searching for political information, engaging in entertainment and leisure, chatting

and socialising, conducting business or work, pursuing learning and education, utilising online shopping and services, and managing investments and finances. Utilising the CSS2021 metrics of specific activity usage frequencies, a principal component analysis (PCA) was carried out as a method of dimensionality reduction to identify underlying factors. A composite index reflecting the frequency of internet usage was subsequently created by reweighting and combining the initial variables based on the factor loadings obtained from the PCA findings. The responses were coded as: 'Never' and 'Don't use internet' = 0; 'Several times a year' = 1; 'At least once a month' = 2; 'At least once a week' = 3; 'Multiple times a week' = 4; 'Almost every day' = 5.

### 3.2.3 Control Variables

Referring to the current research, factors that generally affect political participation, this study incorporates a set of control variables covering both socio-demographic characteristics and personal social perception. The socio-demographic controls include: gender (coded as 1 for male and 0 for female); age (ranging from 18 to 69 years); education level is treated as an ordinal categorical variable reflecting the respondent's highest level of formal education, coded as follows: 1 = no formal schooling, 2 = primary school, 3 = junior high school, 4 = senior high school, 5 = technical secondary school, 6 = vocational high school or technical school, 7 = junior college (associate degree), 8 = bachelor's degree, and 9 = graduate degree (master's or above); marital status (1 for married, 0 for not married), and political affiliation (1 for Chinese Communist Party members, 0 for non-members).

As noted by Shi, Shaocheng, et al. (2022), two aspects of social capital, specifically social trust and social tolerance, acted as mediators linking political engagement to the satisfaction of citizens with their lives. Therefore, in addition to these demographic variables, the model includes four variables capturing respondents' subjective social perceptions. These include perceived social fairness (measured on a scale from 1 to 10), self-rated socioeconomic status (1–10 scale), social trust (1–5 scale), and level of social tolerance (1–10 scale). These variables are designed to reflect individuals' evaluations of their social environment, which may shape their motivation and capacity for civic engagement. By controlling these factors, the analysis aims to isolate the specific effect of internet use on political participation while minimising potential bias arising from unobserved heterogeneity in background characteristics and subjective attitudes.

### 3.3 Model

There are only two types of measurements of people's political participation, and it is suitable to use binary logistic regression models. Other models need to consider problems such as normal distribution and homovariance, but the logistic regression model can predict the probability of occurrence of different categories of a categorical variable, which can well meet the modeling needs of classified data. Therefore, this study adopts a binary logistic regression model, whose model is:

$$P = \frac{exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \cdots + \beta_n X_n)}{1 + exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \cdots + \beta_n X_n)}$$

P is the probability of an event occurring, which is the probability of people's political participation. 1-P is the probability of no event occurring, which is no political participation. The larger the P value, the greater the possibility of people participating in political behaviour; the smaller the P value, the lower the likelihood of political participation behaviour, among which X1, X2, X3...Xn, is the independent variable and the control variable.

## RESULTS

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistical

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

| Variable Name | Variable Description | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet Information Browsing Frequency of Use | Browsing current affairs and political news (e.g. party and government related news) | 0 | 5 | 1.801 | 3.851 |
| Internet Recreation/Leisure Frequency of Use | Recreation, leisure (e.g. playing games/listening to music/watching videos/reading online novels) | 0 | 5 | 1.930 | 3.702 |
| Internet Communication/Social Networking Frequency of Use | Chat and networking (e.g. using WeChat/QQ for communication and social networking) | 0 | 5 | 1.892 | 3.674 |
| Internet Business/Work Frequency of Use | Business or work (includes running online stores, WeChat merchant, streamer, etc.) | 0 | 5 | 2.342 | 1.986 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet Learning/Education Frequency of Use | Leaning and education activities | 0 | 5 | 2.074 | 2.220 |
| Internet Service Frequency of Use | Online shopping/daily life services (e.g. online shopping, food delivery, navigation maps, location sharing, etc.) | 0 | 5 | 1.817 | 2.752 |
| Internet Investment/Financial Management Frequency of Use | Investment and financial mangement activities | 0 | 5 | 1.437 | 0.738 |
| Internet Use | Internet frequency of use; the greater the number, the higher frequency of use | 0 | 22.005 | 5.527 | 12.368 |
| Political Participation | Participates in politics = 1, doesn't participate in politics = 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.482 | 0.638 |
| Gender | Male = 1, female = 2 | 1 | 2 | 0.494 | 1.589 |
| Age | Age at the year of the survey | 19 | 69 | 14.603 | 48.099 |
| Education Level | Hasn't been to school = 1, elementary school = 2, middle school = 3, high school = 4, secondary specialised school = 5, vocational high school/technical school = 6, junior college/associate degree = 7, undergraduate degree = 8, postgraduate degree = 9 | 2 | 9 | 2.241 | 5.816 |
| Marital Status | Married (initial marriage/subsequent marriage with living partner) = 1, not currently married (Single/Divorced/Widowed/Cohabiting) = 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.438 | 0.745 |
| Party Membership | Party member = 1, Communist Youth League member/Democratic Party member/non-affiliate = 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.425 | 0.234 |
| Social Economic Level | Score from 1 to 5 indicating the respondent's evaluation of their own social economic level | 1 | 4 | 0.927 | 2.418 |
| Social Trust | Score from 1 to 10 indicating the respondent's evaluation of current interpersonal trust level in the society | 1 | 10 | 2.013 | 6.057 |
| Social Tolerance | Score from 1 to 10 indicating the respondent's evaluation of current social tolerance status | 1 | 10 | 1.759 | 7.121 |
| Social Fairness | Score from 1 to 10 indicating the respondent's evaluation of current social fairness status | 1 | 10 | 1.835 | 6.702 |

Regarding internet use and its sub-dimensions, business- and work-related online activities show the highest average frequency (Mean = 2.342), indicating that respondents are relatively active in using the internet for occupational or commercial purposes, such as running online stores or livestreaming for sales. In contrast, investment and financial management activities have the lowest average frequency (Mean = 1.437) and the smallest standard deviation (SD = 0.738), suggesting both a generally low level of participation and relatively little variation across individuals in this area. The composite factor of internet use, derived through dimensionality reduction, has a mean of 5.527 and a large standard deviation of 12.368, indicating a moderate average level of internet engagement overall, but with substantial individual differences—some respondents use the internet very frequently, while others engage only rarely.

As for political participation, the mean value is 0.482, which is close to 0.5, suggesting that the sample is nearly evenly split between those who reported political participation and those who did not. This reflects a moderate level of political engagement among respondents.

For the control variables, the mean value for gender is 0.494, indicating an approximately balanced gender distribution in the sample. The mean value for age is 14.603; however, considering that the recorded minimum and maximum ages are 19 and 69 respectively, this figure may reflect a data entry issue. In practice, the age range is concentrated between 19 and 69 years. The mean value for education level is 2.241. Based on the coding scheme (1 = no formal schooling, 9 = graduate degree), this implies that most respondents have relatively low levels of education, typically around primary or junior high school. The mean value for marital status is 0.438, suggesting that slightly fewer than half of the respondents are currently married. Political affiliation has a mean of 0.425, indicating that about 42.5% of the sample are party members—higher than the national average, possibly due to the political context of Beijing.

For personal social perception variables, the mean values are relatively low: social trust (Mean = 2.013), social tolerance (Mean = 1.759), and perceived social fairness (Mean = 1.835), each with substantial standard deviations. This indicates considerable variation in respondents' perceptions of social relationships and institutional fairness. Lastly, self-evaluated socioeconomic status has a mean value of 0.927, suggesting that respondents tend to rate their socioeconomic position at a relatively low level.

### 4.2 Logistic Regression

**Table 2: Binary Logistic Regression Results of Internet Use on Political Participation**

| Variable | Estimate | Standard Error | Z | Significance | Exp(B) | 95% CI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | lower | upper |
| Internet use | .133 | .040 | 11.187 | .001 | 1.143 | 1.057 | 1.235 |
| Gender | -1.057 | .491 | 4.639 | .031 | .347 | .133 | .909 |
| Age | .005 | .016 | .096 | .757 | 1.005 | .974 | 1.037 |
| Education level | .296 | .115 | 6.665 | .010 | 1.345 | 1.074 | 1.685 |
| Marital status | .338 | .505 | .448 | .503 | 1.402 | .521 | 3.774 |
| Political affiliation | 1.162 | .589 | 3.888 | .049 | 3.197 | 1.007 | 10.147 |
| Socioeconomic status | .353 | .260 | 1.835 | .176 | 1.423 | .854 | 2.371 |
| Social trust | -.263 | .149 | 3.115 | .078 | .768 | .574 | 1.030 |
| Social tolerance | .222 | .178 | 1.557 | .212 | 1.249 | .881 | 1.770 |
| Social fairness | -.424 | .158 | 7.227 | .007 | .655 | .481 | .892 |
| Intercept | .411 | 1.715 | .057 | .811 | 1.508 | | |

In this dataset, we observe that different factors exhibit positive, negative, or minimal correlations with political participation. Variables with a positive regression coefficient—such as internet use (B = 0.133, p = 0.001), education level (B = 0.296, p = 0.010), marital status (B = 0.338), political affiliation (B = 1.162, p = 0.049), socioeconomic status (B = 0.353), and social tolerance (B = 0.222) — suggest a positive association with political participation. In particular, individuals who are married, more educated, or affiliated with the Communist Party are more likely to participate politically.

Alternatively, variables such as gender (B = -1.057, p = 0.031), social trust (B = -0.263), and perceived social fairness (B = -0.424, p = 0.007) show negative associations. Specifically, females have lower odds of political participation compared to males, and higher perceived social fairness is associated with less political engagement. This may reflect that individuals who perceive society as fair are less likely to feel the need to participate politically, a pattern consistent with grievance-based theories of political

behaviour. Meanwhile, age has a coefficient of 0.005, which is too small to be considered meaningful, indicating that age has virtually no correlation with political participation.

More importantly, statistical significance further clarifies which variables have a meaningful impact. A p-value below 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship. In this analysis, internet use is significantly and positively correlated with political participation ($p = 0.001$), with an odds ratio of 1.143, meaning that each one-unit increase in internet use increases the odds of political participation by 14.3%, controlling for other factors. Similarly, education level (Exp(B) = 1.345) and political affiliation (Exp(B) = 3.197) also show strong positive and significant effects. In contrast, perceived social fairness has a significant negative effect (Exp(B) = 0.655), further supporting the idea that individuals satisfied with the current level of fairness in society may have less motivation to take political action.

Variables such as age, marital status, socioeconomic status, social trust, and social tolerance did not reach statistical significance in this model, suggesting their influence on political participation is limited or context-dependent within this dataset.

### 4.3 Robustness test

To verify the stability of our findings, we conducted a robustness check using a Probit model as an alternative specification. Table 3 presents these results.

**Table 3: Probit Model Results of Internet Use on Political Participation**

| Variable | Estimate | Standard Error | Z | Significance | 95% CI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | lower | upper |
| Internet use | .078 | .023 | 3.401 | .001 | .033 | .123 |
| Gender | -.603 | .274 | -2.197 | .028 | -1.140 | -.065 |
| Age | .003 | .009 | .355 | .722 | -.015 | .022 |
| Education level | .180 | .065 | 2.764 | .006 | .052 | .307 |
| Marital status | .167 | .296 | .565 | .572 | -.413 | .748 |
| Political affiliation | .689 | .334 | 2.062 | .039 | .034 | 1.344 |
| Socioeconomic status | .189 | .152 | 1.240 | .215 | -.110 | .487 |
| Social trust | -.142 | .085 | -1.665 | .096 | -.309 | .025 |
| Social tolerance | .117 | .101 | 1.160 | .246 | -.081 | .316 |
| Social fairness | -.246 | .090 | -2.742 | .006 | -.422 | -.070 |
| Intercept | .214 | 1.024 | .209 | .834 | -.810 | 1.238 |

The Probit model results are consistent with our main logistic regression findings, confirming the robustness of our analysis. Internet use maintains significance in positively impacting political participation (estimate=0.078, p=0.001). Similarly, gender, education level, political affiliation, and social fairness perception remain significant predictors with directions consistent with the main model. The consistency across model specifications strengthens our confidence in the strong connection between internet use and political participation among Beijing residents.

## DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Discussion of Key Findings

The results indicate that internet use has a significant positive correlation with political participation, hypothesis H1 H2 have been verified. This result is the same with other studies by Bakker, Tom P., and Claes H. De Vreese (2011). They study on how internet use affects political participation of young people, argued that interactive digital dialogue is positively related to political participation, and that internet use is a strong predictor for both traditional and newer forms of political participation. Chang, Alex

Chuan-hsien (2018) also observed a similar trend in Taiwan, supported by the evidence that internet use significantly enhanced young citizen's political participation. A more recent study from 2023 also suggests that certain types of online network group are significantly correlated with higher political participation intention, including neighourhood and alumni.

As for our control variables, gender is another variable that has significant impact on political participation. Wang, Song-In (2007) observed in their results that male users are more likely to use the internet politically compared to female users. Overall, while females vote at similar rates to males in many democratic states, males tend to be more active than females in more direct and intense political activities, such as making campaign donations and joining politics-related organisations (Burns et al. 2001).

Education level, as a control variable, has also shown significant correlation with political participation. Traditionally, education has always been recognised as a catalyst for political change by many modernisation theorists (Y. Wang 2016). A similar conclusion has been made by Wang, Song-In. In their study on political use of the internet, Wang conveyed the idea that those with higher education are more likely to use the internet for political purposes, indicating that they are more active in politics in general.

In China's relatively special political context, political affiliation directly impacts political participation, since political participation provides CPC members with more effective career development opportunities.

One's opinion on social fairness and satisfaction have been found to be another factor significantly correlated with political participation. The study of the impact of political participation on the life satisfaction of Chinese urban residents by Shi, Shaocheng, et al. (2022) proved that, at the 5% significance level, the life satisfaction of urban residents with political participation was 0.145 units higher than that of urban residents without political participation. This is because social fairness and satisfaction are largely based on governmental policies to set the society's fundamental tone. The government's policies should directly address age, gender, ethnicity/race, etc. Although some cultural inequalities are hard to prohibit directly through political actions, advocacy with the government as a strong role model is crucial.

Social trust, however, does not significantly impact political participation. Social trust is largely focused on interpersonal level communication and interactions. This means that social trust is rooted in personal experiences and emotions. Political efficacy, on the other hand, is based on one's perception of the government, related to their interactions with the government and its policies instead of fellow citizens. In China, where direct political participation is less encouraged and observed than other countries in the world, the distance between private interpersonal issues and politics is increased. This leads to citizens separating personal emotions with governmental policies, leading to a discrepancy between one's perception of social trust and political efficacy. Therefore, as social trust is confined to personal networks, it does not affect political participation significantly due to the distance of social relations to the government's policies.

Social tolerance shares a similar situation with social trust. Nonetheless, the complexity of the definition of social tolerance in the CSS questionnaire contributes to the insignificant correlation additionally. In the questionnaire, the recipients are asked to give a score from 1 to 4 of whether can they accept six groups of people: people who live together before marriage, homosexuals, beggars, those who are released from prison, those who have different religious beliefs, and patients with AIDS. This is a mixed population as the citizens' perception of these groups can be significantly impacted by multiple aspects, including culture, tradition, personal safety, etc. Moreover, not all of these groups are directly linked to politics. For instance, released person after prison is related to legislation directly, while cohabiting before marriage has no correlation with governmental policies. Thus, as social tolerance is complicated in terms of the minority groups and their relevance to politics, a collective conclusion on its correlation to political participation cannot be made, indicating insignificant impact on political participation.

**5.2 Suggestion**

Based on the conclusion that internet use affects political participation significantly, we can infer that the Chinese government can both enhance their presence and emphasise democracy in the society by utilising the internet, which appeals to the socialist core values as it includes democracy.

Firstly, the internet serves as a convenient and far-reaching platform for the government to enhance its visibility and credibility. With 79.7% of China’s population having internet access, digital channels provide an efficient way to disseminate information and shape public opinion. By adopting modern social media strategies, the government can increase public awareness of its initiatives and foster trust. Platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin are widely used, making them ideal for sharing information about volunteer opportunities and community activities to promote participation in such activities. For instance, state agencies could create engaging short videos or interactive articles to explain policies in a more relatable manner. Such content could simplify complex political messages, making them more digestible for the general public. This is crucial as political participation is based on political knowledge reception.

Secondly, the internet can facilitate more convenient and direct political participation, bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers, since the internet expands people's access to communication with the government, other citizens, and other social groups like newspapers. Traditional offline methods, such as community meetings, often have logistical and physical constraints, limiting public involvement. However, digital tools can overcome these barriers by allowing real-time feedback and engagement. For example, the government could expand online petition systems, enabling citizens to voice concerns or suggestions more directly.

Online petitions could be streamlined through mobile apps, ensuring that public grievances are efficiently recorded and addressed, allowing general expression regarding politics to be more efficient. However, as what Chen, M., & Madni, G. R. (2024) emphasised, it must be recognised that China's political participation is carried out in a tightly regulated and organised system in which dissent or activities that violate national interests are strictly restricted, so people's actual political participation may be limited by this approach. Therefore, more active responses to feedback and a larger scope of political discussion can be included in these online systems, as making people feel that their opinions are respected will encourage them to continue with such a form of political participation.

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to existing literature by focusing on the political participation of urban residents in Beijing, providing a localised examination of the relationship between internet use and political engagement. Unlike many previous studies that rely on national-level or youth-focused samples, this research fills a gap by analysing a representative sample of Beijing's adult population, thus offering insights specific to a major metropolitan context within China's unique political environment.

Using quantitative methods and data from a recent survey, the study finds that internet use is profoundly and positively correlated to political participation among Beijing residents. Specifically, a one-unit increase in internet use corresponds to a 14.3% increase in the odds of political participation, after controlling other sociodemographic factors. Furthermore, political affiliation (i.e., Communist Party membership) and education level also show strong positive effects, whereas perceived social fairness is negatively associated with political participation.

These findings highlight several key points. First, the study confirms prior international research that interactive internet use fosters political engagement, extending this insight to an urban Chinese context. Second, it identifies gender and political affiliation as important determinants of political activity, with males and party members being more politically active. Third, the negative correlation between perceived social fairness and participation suggests that political engagement may be driven by grievances or dissatisfaction, aligning with grievance-based political behavior theories. Finally, the study examines the roles of social trust and social tolerance, which do not show significant impact on political participation in this sample, possibly reflecting the distinct separation between interpersonal trust and political efficacy in Beijing's sociopolitical landscape.

By focusing on Beijing residents and incorporating a robust logistic regression and binary logistic regression analysis, this research adds empirical evidence to debates on internet-mediated political participation in authoritarian contexts, enriching understanding of how digital engagement interacts with sociopolitical factors at the urban level.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations that to be acknowledged. Firstly, internet use was measured through self-reported data, which may introduce bias due to recall inaccuracies or social desirability effects. Participants might overestimate or misrepresent their online activities, affecting the reliability of the findings. Second, the key variables are binary as one either participates in politics or don't, which could fail to capture the continuous scale or frequency of participation. A more nuanced measurement, such as scales or continuous variables, could provide deeper insights into how different levels of internet engagement influence political behaviour. Third, the study focused exclusively on people in Beijing. There is heterogeneity in the study results of rural population and urban population of Beijing. According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), there is still a large gap between urban and rural areas, and this gap has not changed much for a long time despite the increasing use of the Internet. Thus, they may have different internet usage patterns and political engagement behaviours due to varying access, digital literacy, and socio-cultural contexts. Future research should include more diverse demographics to enhance external validity. Additionally, the study did not fully account for broader cultural and institutional factors shaping political participation in China. The interplay between internet use and political engagement is likely mediated by other factors, such as political efficacy, censorship, propaganda, and social norms, which all have impact on political participation (Tang, Y., & Wen, Q., 2023). These factors require further qualitative or mixed-methods exploration. Finally, the research was geographically restricted to Beijing, a politically and economically unique region. Findings may not apply to other Chinese cities or provinces with different governance structures and internet penetration rates. Future studies should expand the scope to ensure broader applicability. Addressing these limitations would strengthen the understanding of internet use's role in political participation in China.

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