

# Survey on the Relationship between Social Network and Government Trust

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**Abstract:** At present, scholars have made a lot of detailed researches on social network and government trust as well as the use of social network to study government trust. First, from the perspective of social network research, there have been many controversies in the academic circles about its connotation, which is mainly divided into two aspects: functional meaning and structural meaning. Nowadays, the academic understanding of social network is mainly spread out from these two levels. Secondly, from the perspective of government trust research, there are some problems in the field of localization research, especially in the introduction and review of western government trust theory and there is no localization research theory. Empirical research focuses on the analysis of government trust of certain groups. Thirdly, from the perspective of the relationship between social networks and government trust, most people hold different views that different social networks will lead to different government trust. Domestic scholars mostly focus on urban residents and rural residents, and study on social network and government trust of specific groups is less.

## 1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, China's economy has achieved rapid development and society has made great progress. The total economic output has leapt to the second place in the world, and people's living standards have been continuously improved. However, it is undeniable that with the development, a series of outstanding problems emerge one after another, and the interests and contradictions are intertwined. In the field of governance, the occurrence of some public events is constantly undermining the reputation of the government. Especially after some major events with wide influence, the public does not believe the facts and reasonable explanations published by the government, but believes in "Internet rumors" and "gossip" [1]. After a series of events such as "official corruption", "fishing and law enforcement", "violent land acquisition", the public trusts the government increasingly falling into the "Tacitus trap".

Therefore, in the critical stage of China's economic and social transformation and building a well-off society in an all-round way, it has become a very urgent practical issue to understand the trust of the people's government, explore the mechanism behind it, so as to enhance the recognition of the government, which is also the due meaning of strengthening social governance in the transformation period and "drawing the biggest concentric circle" for reform and development.

Since the birth of the concept of social network, especially the emergence of some classic works and important documents, social network theory has been widely used in social, political, economic, cultural and other fields, and more and more scholars have applied it to the study of government trust to explore the mechanism of the role of the public social network in government trust.

## 2. The Connotation of Social Network

The systematic introduction of the concept of "social network" can be traced back to the research of Barnes, a British scholar. Since then, with the continuous research and expansion of many scholars, especially the emergence of some classic literature, social network has attracted wide attention and been applied to many academic research fields. In recent years, a large number of documents have

reached consensus on the basic issues of social networks, but there are still topics to be further explored.

Barnes found that the typical role concept was not enough to fully reflect the social life of the village through the field investigation in Norwegian fishing villages [2]. He began to use social networks to describe the important connections around individuals. Mitchell further explained that social networks are defined as "the total connection between all members of a particular group" (for example, a village community or a bounded Working Group), and the concept of social networks is extended to "a unique set of connections between specific individuals"[3]. In the following research, the definition of social network gradually evolved into two different contexts. The first is to define "what is the use of social network" from the perspective of functionalism. Granovetter creatively proposed the function meaning of social network. He pointed out that social network is a structure that individuals can identify and use in the process of obtaining information, resources and social support [4]. Walker also believed that social networks are a series of social connections through which people establish self-awareness and obtain emotional, material and information support. Linnan pointed out that social network is composed of the relationship between actors, which is a coordination system in which social resources are embedded to maintain collective resources and can obtain valuable resources. At the same time, he stressed that individuals can obtain and use resources contained in social networks through purposeful actions, obtain returns in instrumental behaviors (for example, find better jobs), or maintain benefits in expressive behaviors.

Compared with the functional meaning of social network, the second kind of definition is from the perspective of structuralism, focusing on "what kind of social network is". In his book "Making Democracy Work: the civil tradition of modern Italy", which established him as an authority in western academic circles, Putnam described social network from a broader social perspective and clearly pointed out that social network is a relatively stable correlation system formed by interaction between people. The definition of Wellman emphasizes the structure of social network. He thinks that social network is a kind of relationship model that social members connect with each other, which embodies the characteristics of social structure [5]. Emirbayer and Goodwin emphasized that social network is a series of social connections or relationships that actors (individuals or organizations) shape in a certain cultural environment and affect actors in turn. Adler and Kwon defined social network comprehensively and systematically on the basis of previous studies. They believed that social network is a relatively stable system formed by social relations among different individuals (including organizations), including not only kinship, but also market transaction, authority and other social relations.

### **3. Sources of Government Trust**

There are two ways to explain the source of Government Trust: institutionalism and culturism [6]. The explanation path of institutionalism is mainly to find the reason of government trust from the perspective of government performance, that is, to determine whether the government is trustworthy. People's trust in the government is based on the government's ability to provide public goods. Government performance determines the degree of political trust, which is the premise of political trust. According to Citrin, the ability and performance of political officials and government agencies determine their legitimacy, and the overall economic situation of the country affects the level of political trust [7]. More scholars have found that: when citizens are dissatisfied with economic performance, they will be dissatisfied with the government; but when prosperity returns, trust will increase. Furthermore, the economic condition factor is regarded as the main reason of

government trust. In Chinese context, some scholars have studied the relationship between economic development and government trust, indicating that China's great economic achievements have brought a high degree of support to the party and government [8]. In addition, the research of Meng Tianguang and Yang Ming found that the positive evaluation of the government's governance performance in the fields of economic growth, people's livelihood and welfare, and pure public goods by the residents in mainland China was positively related to political trust. Hu Rong also revealed the importance of government performance in improving government trust.

Different from the institutional approach, the cultural approach pays more attention to the formation mechanism of government trust from the perspective of grand historical and cultural context. Putnam pointed out that different societies have different cultural psychology, so government trust has cross-cultural and cross social differences. For example, in China, some scholars believe that the moral ties and cultural traditions (such as the values of "good government") with a long history between the state and society are related to the high government trust of the people at present[9]. Other scholars have come to a similar conclusion. Shi found that there are two aspects in Chinese traditional culture that affect people's attitude towards the government: one is the orientation of power and authority based on patriarchal ideology, the other is the non conflict orientation in traditional culture[10]. Ma took 8 countries and regions in Asia as the research object, and found that authoritarian values, as a cultural factor, had an important impact on the formation of people's political trust in East and Southeast Asian countries. In China, political trust depends more on traditional values. Zhou Yi and Zhou Limin pointed out that as the power dependent culture in the heart of Chinese farmers, it plays a strong role in maintaining and improving the trust of grass-roots government.

#### **4. An Empirical Study on Social Network and Government Trust**

In his book on democracy in the United States, Tocqueville mentions that "extensive participation in formal social groups and informal networks will encourage the public to cooperate and trust each other, so that they will take actions to monitor government behavior, prevent the variation of state power, and thus enhance the public trust of the government." In Putnam's research, citizen participation not only improves the operation performance of local government in an objective level, but also improves the public's trust in local government, which is especially reflected in the public's community participation. Putnam believes that on the one hand, community participation fosters the habit of cooperation and solidarity among its members and fosters the public spirit. On the other hand, a large number of second-class associations form a dense network to enhance the interest aggregation and expression. Therefore, it improves local governance, improves government performance and government trust. Newton pointed out that government trust is a kind of social cognitive behavior, which is the ability of individuals to gain trust in others and maintain cooperative relations through social experience and socialization process[11]. Therefore, trust comes from the social interaction process of social members and is affected by the social groups they belong to. Rather than that government trust is the product of individual rational evaluation of government performance, it is better to it is the result of social construction in social communication. Grannovetter and Uzzi believe that government trust is formed by social members in social network, in which social network plays an important role, that is, government evaluation with perceptual characteristics spreads and influences social members' government trust through social network channels.

Luhman believed that people's trust in "non interpersonal" objects, such as government and system, is the evaluation of their trust media as their own judgment, which are usually relatives, friends, colleagues, etc. in the personal social relationship network, due to the lack of accurate information and direct experience. The cognitive balance theory of Hyde also emphasizes the influence of

interpersonal relationship on social attitude. People's attitude towards a cognitive object is often influenced by other people's attitude towards the object, and a close social relationship network will form normative pressure, which will promote members of the network to form a more consistent cognitive structure and social attitude. Yamagishi believed that if a person's social network has more strong relationships, the network will become relatively closed and dense. Such network characteristics are conducive to the spread and influence of political attitudes in small circles, and will also form greater group pressure on members, so that members of the network have similar political attitudes [12].

However, not all studies have shown that there is a relationship between social networks and government trust. Newton based on individual research data, found that there is only a weak and partial relationship between membership and trust in voluntary organizations. Because of the limited time and energy, most people are not as active in volunteer activities as they are in work and study. Therefore, the influence of community participation on government trust is questionable. Kim and Ji Young through an empirical survey in South Korea, found that social participation such as community activities and interpersonal communication did not have a significant relationship with political trust [13], so they questioned patnan's over exaggeration of the political effect of social activities. Similarly, when Maria and kestil studied the relationship between social capital and political trust in Finland, they also found that voluntary community participation was not a significant indicator to predict the level of political trust [13].

## 5. Conclusion

Generally speaking, since the research on social network and government trust originated in the west, it has gradually formed solid theoretical and empirical research results in decades.

However, domestic research is relatively late. On the basis of learning from western theories, combined with the specific situation in China, more and more quantitative research methods are used. There is still room for further deepening and expansion in the future.

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