

The Role of Short-form Video Platforms in Shaping Public Opinion: A Comparative Analysis of Content Moderation and User Engagement in Hong Kong and Mainland China

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Abstract: Short video platforms have become central arenas for the generation and dissemination of public opinion, with their opinion-shaping functions influenced by regional management mechanisms and user behavioral characteristics. This study examines short video platforms in mainland China and Hong Kong, comparing them across three dimensions: content management (institutional logic and regulatory models) and user engagement (platform preferences, content orientation, and interaction characteristics). Findings reveal that mainland China has established a robust regulatory framework characterized by “policy guidance + platform accountability,” resulting in public discourse that exhibits a pronounced aggregation effect around mainstream values. Hong Kong, in contrast, features a “free and open + bottom-line regulation” approach, fostering diverse and dispersed public expression. User participation landscapes differ significantly between the two regions: Mainland platforms foster consensus-building through contextual engagement, while Hong Kong’s coexisting platforms catalyze diverse discourse collisions. This study proposes respecting regional differences, leveraging platforms’ positive value in guiding public discourse, and promoting cross-regional cultural exchange and consensus-building.

Keywords: Short Video Platforms; Public Opinion; Content Management; User Participation

1. Comparative Analysis of Content Management on Short Video Platforms in Hong Kong and Mainland China

1.1 Management Logic: Regulatory Orientation vs. Freedom Orientation

Mainland China's short video platforms operate under a top-down regulatory framework centered on “safeguarding national security and promoting mainstream values.” Regulations such as the “Provisions on the Management of Online Audio-Video Information Services,” issued by the Cyberspace Administration of China and other departments, explicitly require platforms to implement primary responsibility for information content security management. This includes employing professional reviewers and establishing systems for real-name user registration, information release review, and emergency response. At the platform level, a combination of algorithm optimization and manual review is used to strengthen the promotion of positive content, curb the spread of illegal and non-compliant information, and ensure that public opinion aligns with core socialist values. This management logic emphasizes the orderliness and positivity of the public discourse arena, achieving cohesive public opinion through policy guidance.

Hong Kong's content management, however, adheres to the fundamental principle of “freedom and openness.” Guided by the freedom of speech rights enshrined in the Basic Law, it implements a policy of complete liberalization for social media services, with no restrictions on foreign ownership or licensing requirements. Its regulatory focus centers on baseline constraints, primarily regulating privacy-invasive actions like “doxxing” through laws such as the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data issues removal notices to platforms. This management logic grants platforms and users greater content autonomy, fully unleashing diversity in public discourse expression, but lacks proactive guidance on public opinion direction.

1.2 Regulatory Model: Centralized

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Coordination vs. Decentralized Bottom-Line Approach

Mainland China implements a centralized regulatory model combining “multi-departmental coordination with industry self-regulation.” Departments including Cyberspace Administration, Culture and Tourism, and Radio and Television conduct routine oversight and periodic inspections based on their respective responsibilities, requiring platforms to retain network logs and cooperate with law enforcement. Industry associations promote the establishment of industry standards and credit systems, urging platforms to provide services in compliance with the law. This model creates a comprehensive regulatory network capable of swiftly responding to major public opinion incidents and promptly curbing the spread of harmful information. For instance, regarding online rumors, platforms must establish fact-checking mechanisms, take timely corrective actions, and report to relevant authorities.

Hong Kong's regulatory model, however, exhibits decentralized and baseline characteristics. Regulatory authority is dispersed across multiple departments, lacking a unified lead agency, resulting in relatively lax daily oversight of platform content. Its regulatory actions are primarily reactive, intervening only when illegal information or rights infringements occur. By the end of 2022, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data had issued 1,500 notices to 26 platforms demanding the removal of “doxxing” information, involving over 17,000 links. This regulatory approach serves more as a remedy for public discourse misconduct, struggling to proactively guide public opinion.

2. Comparison of User Engagement on Short Video Platforms in Hong Kong and Mainland China

2.1 Platform Preferences: Local Dominance vs. Diverse Coexistence

Mainland Chinese users exhibit highly concentrated engagement on domestic short video platforms. Platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou dominate the market through functional designs and content ecosystems tailored to local lifestyles. Integration with social tools such as WeChat and QQ further enhances user stickiness on these domestic

platforms. Users access diverse content—including government information, daily services, and cultural entertainment—through these platforms, forming a unified and expansive public opinion sphere.

Hong Kong users exhibit a participation pattern characterized by “dominance of international platforms with emerging local presence.” International platforms like YouTube and Facebook have long occupied top positions due to the open network environment, serving as primary channels for information access and social interaction. International communication tools such as WhatsApp and Messenger form closed-loop dissemination networks with short video platforms. In recent years, local platforms like Douyin have achieved rapid growth through localized operations. Content featuring Cantonese language, Hong Kong-style humor, and local business explorations has attracted a large number of young users. However, the average daily usage time remains lower than that of YouTube, and the landscape of multiple coexisting platforms has not yet changed.

2.2 Participation Characteristics: Consensus Building vs. Diverse Collisions

Mainland Chinese users exhibit distinct “consensus-building” participation patterns. Platforms leverage positive content to drive discussions around public issues, local culture, and urban development. For instance, grassroots influencers like “Chicken Cutlet Brother” share regional cuisines and cultures through short videos, sparking massive user engagement. Cities like Chengdu and Jingdezhen leverage their traffic to boost tourism and consumption, creating a virtuous cycle of “online discovery → offline participation → secondary dissemination” that fosters regional cultural identity and economic consensus. Users also actively engage in government-related discussions, serving as a vital channel for policy dissemination and public feedback.

Hong Kong users' participation highlights the “clash of cultures” characteristic. Due to the platform's open ecosystem, users encounter diverse cultural content, leading to more fragmented public discourse. On one hand, local users share Hong Kong lifestyle and traditional culture through short videos, fostering local cultural identity; On the other hand, the presence of international influencers fosters

cross-cultural interactions. For instance, American influencer “Hyperthyroid Brother” attracted 7.48 million viewers during his Hong Kong livestream, but cultural misunderstandings sparked accusations of “cultural appropriation,” exposing cognitive gaps in cross-cultural exchanges. Some users also engage in social issue debates on the platform, where clashes between differing viewpoints are intense, making it difficult to reach unified public consensus.

3. Differences in Short Video Platforms' Role in Shaping Public Opinion and Implications

3.1 Core Differences in Public Opinion Shaping

The core distinction in public opinion shaping between mainland and Hong Kong short video platforms is pronounced. Mainland platforms exhibit a “consolidation effect”: content guidance under strict regulation combined with the aggregation of local users enables the public opinion sphere to coalesce around mainstream values. During major events, this facilitates rapid dissemination of official information, unification of perspectives, and full realization of positive value. Hong Kong platforms, however, exhibit a “dispersive effect”: their free and open management coupled with a diverse ecosystem foster multifaceted public discourse. Yet this also leads to fragmented opinions lacking central guidance, often resulting in divergent understandings, difficulty in reaching unified views, and even potential misdirection by negative information.

3.2 Implications for Cross-Regional Cyberspace Governance

It is essential to respect the distinct online environments of both regions, uphold the “One

Country, Two Systems” principle, and establish differentiated content management frameworks. Mainland China can continue strengthening its “policy guidance plus platform responsibility” oversight approach, improve algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, and enhance the accuracy of public opinion guidance. Hong Kong can draw on mainland industry self-regulation practices to develop a more comprehensive public opinion guidance system. While safeguarding freedom of speech, it should curb the spread of negative discourse, promote collaboration between mainland and Hong Kong short-video platforms, and build cross-regional cultural exchange channels. Support local platforms in deepening localized operations, uncovering shared cultural elements between the two regions, and leveraging short video content to enhance cultural understanding and emotional connections among users. For instance, utilize the cross-regional dissemination capabilities of platforms like Douyin to facilitate interactive promotion between Hong Kong's distinctive cuisine and traditional customs and mainland cultural tourism resources.

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