

Comparing Social Media in China and Kyrgyz Republic: Trends, Influence, and Cultural Differences

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ABSTRACT

Considering the increasing importance of intercultural interaction, the study of the development of social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic, two countries with unique cultural and social contexts, becomes a relevant issue for research. The purpose of this study was to compare the characteristics of social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic, as well as to identify trends, assess the impact of social media on the societies of these two countries and investigate cultural differences that affect their use and perception. The following methods were used in the study: analysis, generalization, comparison, statistical method. The study highlighted the policy of regulating the media and the Internet. Specifically, it found that in China there are restrictions on the use of particular social networks, unlike Kyrgyz Republic. Based on the conducted research, it was found that more than 1.067 billion people joined the number of Chinese Internet users as of December 2022, while in Kyrgyz Republic, at the beginning of 2023, the number of Internet users reached 5.21 million. The study also examined trends in the development of social media, namely, China and Kyrgyz Republic adhere to a policy aimed at high-tech and innovative development. As a result of this study, the essence and role of social media was highlighted, specifically, modern social media plays a major role in the dissemination and exchange of information, in the development of popular culture, communication, education, business, and entertainment.

Keywords: *Public opinion, user behaviour, political regulation, information exchange, Internet.*

INTRODUCTION

China and Kyrgyz Republic, as representatives of distinct cultures, can serve as models for understanding the impact of social media in distinct cultural and political contexts. This study will help to better understand the diversity of the impact of social networks on society in various parts of the world. A comparison of social media in these countries helps to identify common trends that may later become the subject of interest for global research, which helps to generalise knowledge and understand how universal or unique the effects of social networks are. The problem is the need for a more profound understanding of how social media in different cultural and political contexts affect society and shape user behaviour, as well as what cultural characteristics and political conditions can affect the development and use of social networks in these regions.

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Social media includes a variety of online platforms that enable the creation, sharing, and exchange of user-generated material, facilitating connections, communication, and collaboration among persons in multiple situations. These platforms include social networking sites, microblogging services, picture and video sharing tools, and collaborative projects, among others. They function as virtual environments where users may participate in activities such as publishing updates, exchanging multimedia material, participating in debates, and building communities based on common interests or goals. The interactive characteristics of social media have profoundly altered communication patterns, information distribution, and social relationships in modern society.

In China, platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin (the Chinese equivalent of TikTok), and QQ are among the most popular (Jiang & Wang, 2024). WeChat is an application that combines messaging, social networking, and financial services, establishing it as a pivotal platform for daily digital interactions. Weibo operates akin to Twitter, enabling users to disseminate brief messages, photographs, and videos, as well as participate in public discourse. Douyin has achieved significant popularity for its short-form video material, although QQ continues to be a mainstay for instant messaging and online gaming. The social media scene in the Kyrgyz Republic features a varied range of platforms, notably including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Freedom House, 2024). These platforms are extensively utilised for social networking, content distribution, and information dissemination. Moreover, platforms such as VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, which are prevalent among Russian-speaking communities, possess a substantial user base in the region.

Mao (2020) argues that social media play a significant role in the activation of the feminist movement in China. These platforms, according to the scientist, allow the feminists of the country to find like-minded people, discuss critical issues, and influence public opinion and politics in the country. The scientist emphasizes that activists use social media to raise issues of gender equality, combat discrimination and violence against women, and draw attention to women's rights in China, so social media is becoming a powerful tool for feminist activism and mobilization in China. It is worth studying this issue more carefully.

In the study Hao et al. (2018) pay attention to WeChat, a popular social network in China, which has a profound impact on the development of civil society. According to scientists, back in 2017, the active development of the WeChat Mini Program began, and since then this platform has been rapidly gaining momentum. Researchers are convinced that the new generation of mobile Internet is focused on creating "micro, light, and small" applications, and the WeChat mini-program, which is a revolutionary lightweight application without the need to download, which combines the functions of publishing, advertising, and service, becomes an attractive choice to replace conventional mobile client applications. It is worth exploring popular social networks in China in greater detail.

According to a study by Arkabaev and Bazarbaev (2023), in recent years there has been a marked increase in the popularity of the Internet and social networks in Central Asia. Scientists emphasize that the use of social media in the Kyrgyz Republic is accompanied by certain risks, such as the posting of illegal content, about which users should be informed and careful. Scientists also note that apart from compliance with the legislation and rules of social networks, non-compliance with standards can have civil consequences. In light of these trends, there is an urgent need for a more profound investigation of the features of social media in Kyrgyz Republic to better understand the unique aspects of each social platform.

The study conducted by Suimonova and Israyhalova (2022) emphasises that social networks provide a user platform for active expression of positions from different issues. Scientists are convinced that in the political sphere, the evaluation of opinions often exceeds the importance of proven facts, which highlights the potential impact on political polarization in society, which can have political benefits to various forces. The researchers also warn against the negative consequences of such a situation and believe that every citizen should evaluate the information on which he relies and prefer reliable sources over not always verified information disseminated through social media. It is important to study the influence of social networks on the development of public opinion and social dynamics in different regions more thoroughly, specifically in Kyrgyz Republic and China.

Abdikerimova (2020) stresses the importance of analysing the multitude of information sources that influence the formation of modern information space in Kyrgyz Republic. These sources, according to the scientist, cover a wide scope, ranging from local media, news agencies, and press services of state institutions, and ending with international media. The researcher also notes that with the advent of the Internet, there have been substantial changes in the methods of information dissemination, which led to the creation of a unique environment that differs in the technical capabilities of the network. Author emphasises that the development of Internet media occurred organically and naturally, with a limited theoretical basis and lack of statutory regulation. These aspects emphasise the need for a more in-depth investigation of trends in the development of online media in Kyrgyz Republic. The main purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of the major features of social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media research is an active and multifaceted field that attracts the attention of scientists from all over the world. This is due to the rapid spread and introduction of social media in various spheres of human life and society. Hao et al. (2018) and Tu (2016) conducted extensive studies focusing on the social network WeChat, which is the leader among the most popular social platforms in China. Their research helped to penetrate deeply into the analysis and understanding of this platform, considering its key position in the world of the Chinese Internet. These studies provide valuable practical and theoretical knowledge about the development of WeChat and its impact on society and the business sphere, which reflects the importance of this social network in the context of Chinese Internet culture and economy.

Lu and Lu (2019) as well as Yang et al. (2023) focused on analysing and studying the features of Douyin social network. This social platform, known for its short videos, has gained massive popularity in China and many other countries. During their research, scientists revealed various aspects of the functioning of Douyin, including the impact of this platform on user behaviour and interaction, as well as assessing how it affects the sphere of entertainment, information exchange, and communication in the modern digital world. The obtained results helped to better understand the role of Douyin in modern society and the dynamics of changes in the use of this social network. Chen and Lin (2020) paid attention to the social network QQ in the context of user behaviour research, especially in the field of tourism and information sharing. They studied how users of the QQ network interact and share information on this platform, as well as what impact this has on tourism activities and the exchange of experience.

Huang and Sun (2014) focused on the analysis of the oldest platform, Weibo, which first appeared in China, and which is also a prominent platform today. A study by scientists confirmed that Weibo contributes to the creation of networks and communications between provinces in China. Scientists have noticed that the reliability and activity of microblogging users directly affect the dissemination of information, since users who take an active part in the creation and distribution of content form stronger connections with subscribers, which contributes to more effective dissemination of information. The study also highlighted the role of networks of followers focused on concrete issues or topics. These networks contribute to a more effective dissemination of information related to the subject under study. Each of the above-mentioned studies provided valuable information about the impact of social media on various aspects of society and culture, as well as the specific characteristics of popular social platforms.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, scientific research methods were used, including analysis, statistical method, generalization, and comparison, for a profound and comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic, identifying trends, influences, and cultural differences. The analytical research method was used to investigate social networks in China and Kyrgyz Republic, such as Instagram, Facebook, WeChat, Douyin, QQ and Weibo for China, and Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Tik-Tok, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki for the Kyrgyz Republic were examined using the analysis. Using the analytical method, it was possible to identify the features of the afore mentioned social media in specific regions, their functionality, audience, and prevalence. The study examined how social media influence the formation of public opinion, cultural communication, and political dialogue in both countries. Using the analytical method, it was possible to investigate the role of social networks in the dissemination of information and their impact on events and processes in society. The influence of political and legislative factors was analysed. Specifically, the study considered the impact of political decisions and legislative acts on the development of social media in both countries. Based on this research method, the policy of regulating the media and the Internet directly affects the accessibility and freedom of use of social networks, as technological innovations, such as the development of mobile devices, affect the popularity and use of mobile social networks.

The study utilises secondary data sources, drawing all information from pre-existing databases, scholarly research, governmental papers, and industrial analysis. The sample includes quantitative data from entities including Statista (2022, 2023) and Freedom House (2024). Furthermore, qualitative data is derived from policy documents, scholarly publications, and reports from digital rights organisations, enabling a comprehensive examination of regulatory frameworks, user behaviour, and cultural impacts on social media utilisation. A comparative framework is employed to organise the study, utilising media ecology theory and technological determinism. Media ecology theory analyses how digital platforms influence communication and social interaction, whereas technological determinism investigates how the availability of specific platforms affects user behaviour.

This research examines the political, economic, and social variables influencing social media growth in China and the Kyrgyz Republic, identifying similarities in policy implementation, information management, and user-generated content methods. A qualitative comparative approach is utilised, underpinned by content analysis and descriptive statistical techniques. The initial phase of the research entails a systematic compilation of data

from credible academic databases, governmental portals, and industry publications. The research collected data from peer-reviewed scholarly publications (2018-2024), government reports, Statista social media analytics, and industry reports, choosing sources based on their credibility, recency, and relevance to the research aims. To guarantee a thorough understanding of the social media setting in China and the Kyrgyz Republic, only papers published in English, Chinese, or Russian were considered. The content analysis approach is employed to investigate regulatory frameworks, user behaviour patterns, and the impacts of government policies on social media accessibility. This entails analysing policy papers and industry reports to discern regulatory disparities between China and the Kyrgyz Republic. The key themes analysed include: social media regulation policies in China and Kyrgyz Republic; user engagement and online behaviour; censorship and freedom of expression; technological innovations shaping platform usage.

To augment qualitative findings, descriptive statistical analysis is utilised to illustrate numerical trends in social media engagement, internet penetration, and platform popularity. This guarantees that quantitative insights bolster qualitative interpretations, providing a more comprehensive understanding of social media's role in both nations. A comparative approach is used to highlight differences and similarities in platform accessibility, user engagement trends, and governmental influence on social media content. China's digital environment is governed by strict rules and government control over key platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, whereas the Kyrgyz Republic sees a more open, yet developing, regulatory framework that enables unfettered access to Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The research assures validity and reliability by triangulating sources, meaning that various data points from different organisations and academic studies are cross-referenced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media: Development and Use in China

The development and widespread use of social networks have led to the emergence of a unique environment for user interactions, which is designated as mobile social networks. These networks combine the characteristics of conventional social platforms with the possibility of mobility, convenience, and use of big data analysis. Mobility and convenience enable users to log into social networks anytime and anywhere, which substantially expands their access to network interactions. Mobile devices, such as smartphones, have become an integral part of everyday life, and they facilitate the unhindered participation of users in online communities. Data mining in the context of mobile social networks adds another layer of convenience by providing users with personalised content and recommendations based on an analysis of their preferences and behaviour.

Today, the role of social media in people's daily lives is increasing. Social media has become an essential element of the information environment, which influences the processes of artificially increasing political activity and influencing election results (Statista, 2022). Mobile social networks are a unique means for social interaction that combines convenience, accessibility, and analytical data processing capabilities. This phenomenon has a profound impact on the daily life and interaction of users in modern society. Therefore, it is a critical task to develop cost-optimized strategies to counter misinformation and the spread of false information in various regional social media contexts. Effective strategies are becoming a key tool for ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of information in the field of mobile social networks, especially in the context of universal availability of mobile technologies and the

popularisation of social media (Zlenko & Dudar, 2024). This study is intended to provide valuable scientific recommendations and practical solutions to maintain the reliability of the information space in various regions of the world, considering their specific features and challenges (Tu, 2016).

According to the China's 2023 Social Media Platform Guide (2023), as of December 2022, the number of Chinese network users exceeded 1.067 billion people, and the Internet penetration rate reached 75.6%, of which 95.13% of all network users account for the number of social network users. Social media catalyses changes in social media platforms and content formats. The average Internet user spends 26.7 hours a week on the Internet, and 99.8% of them use mobile phones to access the Internet. The era of mobile screens is rapidly changing people's lifestyle, and flexible and iterative technologies have made social media marketing more exciting (Lu & Lu, 2019).

The usage habits of Chinese social media users are diverse. The popularisation of the mobile Internet leads to the fact that mobile users of social networks make up a very large proportion, and most users get access to social media platforms through mobile phones. People are used to viewing Moments, Weibo, Douyin, and other platforms anytime, anywhere, and tend to watch short videos, which offer quick information and are suitable for fragmented content. Furthermore, the use of social media between work and leisure is also relatively common. Users can read news and share news in their free time, as well as communicate and collaborate through platforms such as WeChat at work.

Status of development of representative social media platforms in China

In the third quarter of 2022, the most popular social networks in China were WeChat, Douyin, and QQ, with 81.6%, 72.3%, and 61.6% of users, respectively (Figure 1).

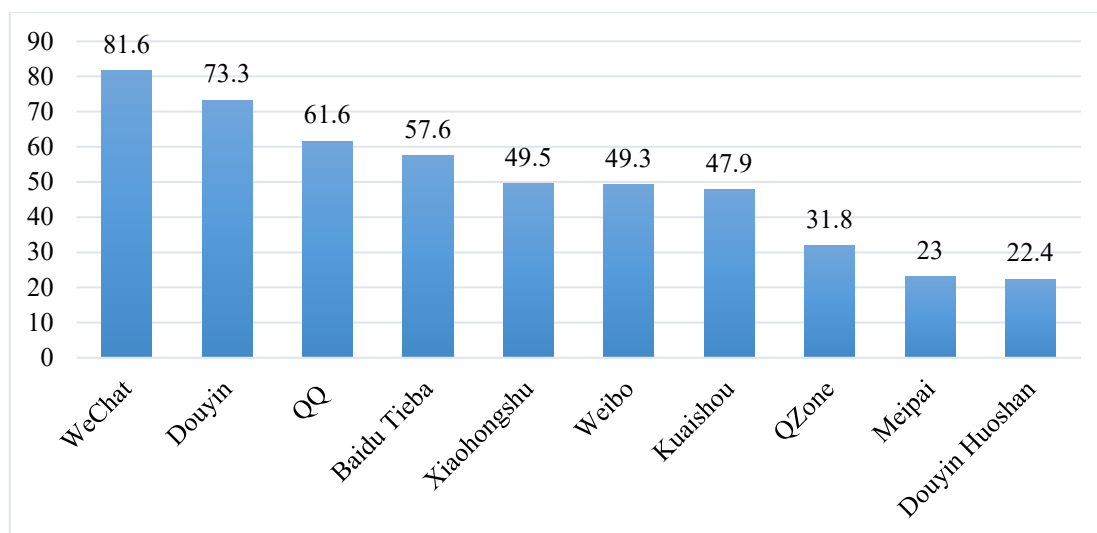


Figure 1: Chart of popular social networks in China (in percentage, %)
Source: Statista (2022)

Small, closed networks in WeChat provide a convenient space for discussions and contribute to the development of alternative public spheres. These networks contribute to exchange of opinions and the development of new forms of public discussion. WeChat also plays a major role in facilitating online debates and popular protests, even in the face of tightened Internet censorship. This allows citizens to express their opinions and disagreement with government policy. The WeChat platform creates new ways of communication between

ordinary people and promotes solidarity in society. However, WeChat is also characterised by instability. This platform becomes an arena of conflict between the market, the state, and civil society, and its use can both promote the development of civil society and create obstacles for it (Tu, 2016).

The main functions of WeChat include instant messaging, circle of friends, public account, payments, etc. These functions are integrated into one application, which allows users to perform social networking, payments, entertainment, shopping, and other needs on the same platform. WeChat Moments allows users to share text, images, small videos, etc., which has become an important platform for people to show their lives and exchange emotions. The official account provides media and businesses with a channel to publish content and promote the brand and has gathered many admirers. WeChat payments have contributed to the popularity of mobile payments and have become a valuable tool for online shopping and offline consumption. Douyin, a platform for sharing short videos, ranked second among popular social networks in China. Douyin is the Chinese equivalent of TikTok, which gathers over 750 million active users per day and is still one of the leading applications in China. According to ByteDance's parent company, Douyin has more than 600 million daily active users (Lu & Lu, 2019). The introduction of mobile applications in Chinese culture, specifically Douyin, has created new opportunities for entertainment and information exchange. This popular mobile application has become a significant player in the streaming industry, as some users prefer to watch short videos instead of live online broadcasts (Yang et al., 2023).

However, Douyin's success is not limited to entertainment content. The platform attracted users not only with its simple and user-friendly interface, but also with a variety of informational and practical content. Users can easily create fascinating short videos and share them on their profiles, as well as interact with other users by expressing their preferences through likes and comments. This quick and instant feedback provides users with satisfaction and a sense of connection with the community. At the same time, the content presented on Douyin reflects current trends, creativity, and stimulates the self-expression of young users. Prominent tools of this social network are streams that have gender differences in popularity on the platform. Male streamers, because of their high reliability, usually contribute to successful sales of entertainment products. On the other hand, female streamers are better at selling products through search, especially if the streamer has a high popularity. This underscores the importance of choosing suitable streamers for brands and suppliers, considering the conformity of the product and the needs of the streamer audience (Chen & Lin, 2020; Fujiwara et al., 2023; He et al., 2016).

QQ is a Chinese social network and messenger created by Tencent. This platform, originally developed in 1999, has gained massive popularity in China and other countries, especially among young people. QQ provides the user with a wide range of functions, including messaging, multiplayer games, music services, social groups, and much more (Fujiwara et al., 2023). The QQ network is characterized by its versatility and versatility, which makes it popular as a means of communication, entertainment, and information exchange. It is also known for its "QQ contacts" or QQ balls, which allow users to quickly find and add new friends to their network. Thus, QQ plays a considerable role in China's digital culture, providing a platform for social interactions, communication, and entertainment, including tourism research and information exchange, as the researchers emphasise in their paper. However, the number of active users on the QQ platform is gradually decreasing. In the second quarter of 2023, QQ

had about 571 million monthly active users, which compares with about 574 million in the same period of 2022 (China's 2023 social media platform guide, 2023; Statista, 2023; Huang & Sun, 2014).

It is also worth paying attention to the social network Weibo – one of the first social networks that appeared in China and achieved remarkable success. The platform allows users to publish short texts, pictures, videos, and other content, as well as to support interaction, forwarding, and comments. Weibo has a vast user base in China, numbering hundreds of millions of active users, and has become one of the key platforms for news, entertainment, and the dissemination of public opinion. The Weibo platform provides the potential for creating interregional networks and communications, even despite the factor of geographical proximity. The reliability of microblogging users indirectly contributes to the dissemination of information and the development of connections with their subscribers. Furthermore, the existence of networks of followers focused on concrete issues also contributes to the dissemination of information related to the subject under study. Microblogging services can have a long-term impact on collective actions, contributing to the creation of networks on issues between civil society organizations and activists from different regions and provinces (Kemp, 2023).

Relying on the genes of its Sina portal website and a commercialization model that started early and clearly developed, Weibo is unique in the field of information about current events, hot topics, celebrity entertainment, movies, and TV shows, etc. The content on Weibo is always relevant. Weibo can instantly connect strangers with a topic. Like the slogan of the Weibo brand “Discover new things anytime, anywhere”, popular search, hashtag, and super chat can quickly attract a lot of users and provide active communication. The characteristics of short content and the unlimited frequency of publication reduce the threshold for creating, reading, and viewing content: a sentence, a picture, or even a single word represents a point of view. Numerous forms, such as lottery draws, voting, and comments, increase the interactivity of the content. This interaction happens not only between brands or creators and users, but also between users, and then allows the content to spread further.

Development and Use of Social Media in Kyrgyz Republic

As of the beginning of 2023, there are 5.21 million Internet users in Kyrgyz Republic. The Internet penetration rate in Kyrgyz Republic is 77.9% of the total population. At the beginning of 2023, there are 2.75 million social network users in Kyrgyz Republic. The number of users of social networks in Kyrgyz Republic is equivalent to 41.1% of the total population, of which 2.4 million users aged 18 and older use social networks. In January 2023, 52.8% of the total base of Internet users in Kyrgyz Republic (regardless of age) used at least one social media platform. 51.9% of social media users are women, 48.1% are men (Maksutova, 2021).

In Kyrgyz Republic, the habits of using social networks are different. Firstly, mobile internet dominates. Due to the popularity of mobile phones and the convenience of the mobile Internet, most Kyrgyz social media users are used to accessing social media platforms via mobile devices. Mobile phones have become their main tool for viewing information and communicating with friends. Secondly, social interaction often occurs. Kyrgyz Republic is value social interaction, and social media platforms have become an important way for them to stay connected with friends and family. On social networks, they communicate with others, share their lives, and express their emotions by posting Moments, comments, and private messages. Finally, in Kyrgyz Republic, social media communication is an opportunity for both information and entertainment. Kyrgyz users of social networks combine communication, access to

information and entertainment. They pay attention to news, entertainment, music, celebrities, and other social media content, as well as entertainment content such as a circle of friends and short videos. 92% of users in Kyrgyz Republic prefer to use social networks as their news sources. While only half turn to official websites for news information.

Instagram, Facebook, Vkontakte, Tik-Tok, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter) are among the social networks that are popular in Kyrgyz Republic. Furthermore, messengers such as Telegram and WhatsApp also play an important role in the dissemination of information. Only 4% of users in Kyrgyz Republic do not use social networks at all. Instagram, Facebook, X, Instagram, Vkontakte, and TikTok are more popular among young people, while Odnoklassniki and My World find their users among all age categories. Men use social networks to a lesser extent compared to women. The audience composition on these platforms is distributed as follows: there are about 740 thousand users on Facebook in Kyrgyz Republic, including 710 thousand users in Bishkek. On Instagram, the number of users in Kyrgyz Republic is about 2.5 million people, among whom there are about 1.5 million users in Bishkek (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019).

Users of the world-famous social network Facebook can share life updates, track current news, and chat with friends on the platform. The different ages of users make the content on the platform rich and diverse, reflecting the interests and needs of different age groups. The presentation of news in social media, especially on platforms such as Facebook, depends on internal media norms and principles, as well as on the unique style of communication that is inherent in conventional newspapers and journals. This means that the influence of media logic, which has been forming for decades in the newspaper industry, continues to have a strong impact on the way news is presented in online environments. One of the key aspects of this impact is that the media logic developed for conventional newspapers determines which news will be prioritised, how they will be structured, and how the headline will be designed. These style norms can also influence the choice of subject matter, language, and even visual elements that are used in the presentation of news in social media. Thus, even in the digital age, old media standards and traditions continue to shape the ways in which we perceive and interact with news in the online space. This is an important reminder of how the history and development of media can have an impact on how we perceive information sources in the modern world (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019).

In Kyrgyz Republic, the use of Facebook is mainly focused on the delivery of information, news, entertainment. Many government agencies, media, and commercial enterprises have created official Facebook pages to publish information and promote activities. Therewith, Facebook is also widely used in Kyrgyz Republic for business promotion. Many companies create professional pages on the platform to advertise products and services and interact with customers. Furthermore, governments, non-governmental organizations, also use Facebook to spread information about public welfare, conduct promotional events. Facebook is also an important platform for political and social interaction in Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyz people can share their opinions on political and social issues on the platform, take part in discussions and interactions, as well as contribute to the development of public opinion and involvement in political life. Social network X (formerly Twitter) is a unique environment for information exchange and communication between users. X is an important platform for discussing current events, exchanging opinions, and disseminating information in real time (Ismailbekova, 2023).

Users can express their opinions about social and political events, take part in discussions on public issues, and interact with other users through X. Some politicians, public figures, and media organisations are also active on X, spreading their opinions and news content. In Kyrgyz Republic, X is also used as one of the sources of news and information. Some media outlets, journalists, will post news updates, links to reports, etc. on X so that users can find out about news events at home and abroad in real time. Some professionals, scientists, journalists, authors may use X as a platform for professional discussions and communication. They can share their professional views, research results, via tweets, communicate with their colleagues, and expand their professional networks. X, as a global social media platform, allows Kyrgyz users to communicate and interact with people from other countries. This helps to expand international horizons in diverse regions and cultures.

Instagram is a social platform with images and short videos as the main content, and its audience are mainly young people. Users demonstrate their creativity and personality through carefully edited images and short videos. Filters, tags, stories, and other Instagram features can provide users with a unique creative space. Instagram has also become an important showcase for some Kyrgyz artists, photographers, and designers. Through the visual nature of Instagram, these creators show the world what is unique about Kyrgyz Republic, helping to spread and raise awareness of Kyrgyz culture. In Kyrgyz Republic, the Instagram platform has become a new medium for highlighting important societal issues, becoming essential for female audiences who use it to raise key issues related to women's roles and participation in the Islamic movement. Based on the historical context, Islamic communities in Kyrgyz Republic have long been characterised by conservative tendencies, and therefore women's activism on the platform reflects a substantial socio-cultural turn (Zuo & Wang, 2019). It should be emphasised that women actively involved in religious spheres can influence not only aspects of religious practice, but also political decision-making and the development of socio-cultural trends in the country. This increase in women's Islamic activism, particularly on the Instagram platform, has the potential to have a considerable impact on Kyrgyz Republic and could be part of wider changes in the religious and socio-cultural life of the region.

TikTok users in Kyrgyz Republic are predominantly young people. Users in this age group like to create short videos and share them on TikTok to showcase their talents, creativity, and lifestyle. They express their personality and interests through short videos in the form of music, dance, parody, humour, etc. TikTok is also used in Kyrgyz Republic as an important form of entertainment and recreation to help relieve stress and relax. TikTok's social attributes are also quite prominent. Users can interact with other users through likes, comments, reposts, etc., establish fan relationships and become "friends" online. TikTok promoted cultural exchange in Kyrgyz Republic. Users can share local traditional dances, national costumes, music, and other content on the platform, showcasing Kyrgyz Republic's unique culture to the world. This is useful for cultural inheritance and popularisation and allows users from other countries to learn more about Kyrgyz Republic.

Social media plays a considerable role in the development and dissemination of popular culture. The influence of social media in shaping cultural norms and values is becoming increasingly visible. Specifically, the researchers focus on TikTok and its unique place in this dynamic. TikTok is described as a platform that empowers users to create and consume short videos that can quickly go viral and influence popular cultural trends. This allows TikTok to be considered a means of actively influencing popular culture (Stewart et al., 2017). Some Kyrgyz users have also managed to establish some influence on TikTok and

become so-called “internet celebrities”. This has prompted some companies to use TikTok for advertising and promotion, and to collaborate with internet celebrities to promote products and services, forming the phenomenon of the “internet celebrity economy”. As local Russian social platforms, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki have a large audience in Kyrgyz Republic due to the advantages of the Russian language and similar cultural backgrounds. VKontakte is a popular platform for sharing entertainment and artistic content. Young people in Kyrgyz Republic like to share music, videos, artwork, and other content on VKontakte to showcase their interests and talents. Musicians, artists, photographers, etc., can use VKontakte to promote their work and communicate with fans (King et al., 2017).

As a multilingual social media platform, VKontakte also facilitates communication between different cultures in the multicultural context of Kyrgyz Republic. There are several ethnic groups in Kyrgyz Republic, and members of these ethnic groups can share their culture, language, traditions, and other content on VKontakte, thereby promoting cultural diversity. Music, art, literature, etc., are widely displayed and distributed on VKontakte. Odnoklassniki is a popular social network in the post-Soviet countries. It is similar to Facebook, emphasising on connecting relatives, friends, classmates, and old colleagues. Odnoklassniki has played a similar role, becoming an important platform for social interaction, information sharing, and human connections in Kyrgyz Republic, where people value kinship and social connections.

Comparative Analysis of Social Networks in China and Kyrgyz Republic

Influenced by unique cultural, political, and social contexts, China and Kyrgyz Republic have developed their unique social media ecosystems. These differences influence the choice of social media platforms and shape user characteristics, which affects socio-cultural and information interactions in society. To better understand the impact of social media development on society and to guide cross-cultural communication and cooperation, it is necessary to analyse and compare social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic, considering the choice of platform and user specifics. The approach to this analysis contributes to a better understanding of the impact of social media in distinct cultural contexts and creates opportunities for academic study and practical application of these research findings in international relations and intercultural information exchange.

It should be emphasised that the Chinese government, like Kyrgyz Republic, is focusing considerable resources and providing strong support to stimulate the development of social media in their country. This has led to positive results in the dissemination and strengthening of national culture, as well as the promotion of online education in the context of the use of social media. Instead of actively engaging in dialogues and arguments on social media, the Chinese government often uses the tactic of creating fake posts to strategically divert attention. Rather than engaging in open dialogue and discussion, the purpose of such posts is to create a variety of distracting events and information noise to shift the public’s attention away from key topics and issues that might require vigorous debate or argument. This approach, they argue, contributes to strengthening state control over information and managing public discourse (Estes, 2020). A similar trend is observed in the policy of the Kyrgyz Republic government (Biibosunov et al., 2019).

Notably, social media platforms in China and Kyrgyz Republic are fostering the development and creation of user-generated content (UGC) models. Guiding users to produce high quality and engaging content is a key aspect for successful creation, promotion, and sustainability of social media platforms. Notably, the development of social networks in these

countries shares familiar challenges and problems, despite plain differences in stages of development. Challenges in the areas of information security, protection of minors' privacy and digital inequality are common aspects faced by both states (Kurylo et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges is an integral part of the social media and digital communications strategy in these regions. The social networks of the two countries have a high degree of similarity in terms of cultural communication and public opinion formation, but the differences in cultural, political, economic, and other development still make the development of social networks in the two countries clear.

When one considers the choice of social media platforms in China and Kyrgyz Republic, the difference in approach becomes clear. Kyrgyz Republic openly welcomes access to the world's social networks and allows its audience to freely use popular platforms, including Facebook. This is due to the variety of information and communication sources available to Kyrgyz audiences. However, in the Chinese context, national security policies restrict access to many of the world's social media platforms, including Facebook, leading to the formation of internal platforms and applications, and restricting the free exchange of information with the global community. This difference in platform choice between the two countries emphasises the importance of political context and national interests in determining the accessibility and regulation of social media. In China, national security plays a significant role in determining which social platforms are available to ordinary citizens. This aspect influences cultural and informational interactions and creates its own unique social media ecosystem. While in Kyrgyz Republic, where policies on access to social media are less restrictive, citizens have the freedom to choose social platforms, which favours diversity and accessibility of information for the audience (Freedom House, 2024).

There are also differences in the current stages of social media development between the two countries. Compared with the high degree of digitalisation of the Chinese market, the trend of social media development in China is more inclined towards high-tech and innovative development. However, the number of social media users and the popularity of the platform in Kyrgyz Republic is small, and the potential for social media development is still massive, and therefore the focus in Kyrgyz Republic is on popularising the Internet and expanding the market. Finally, there are differences in regulatory policies between the two countries. The political environments of the two countries are different, leading to obvious differences in concrete regulatory strategies concerning the media. China has developed relevant legislation and regulations as social media has rapidly evolved, resulting in an advanced system for regulating the Internet and promoting its healthy growth in tandem with social media. The Internet in Kyrgyz Republic is still in the development stage, and therefore the government is still actively exploring relevant policies.

It is necessary to compare the use of the most popular social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic more thoroughly (Table 1).

Table 1: Popular social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic

Name of the social network	In China	In Kyrgyz Republic
WeChat and QQ	WeChat (or Weixin) and QQ are popular social networking sites in China. WeChat is an all-in-one application that provides chats, video calls, payment options, games, and other features. QQ is also used for messaging and includes "QQ Balls" for finding friends.	In Kyrgyz Republic, these Chinese social networks are not as widespread, and they are usually not available to users.

Douyin and TikTok	Douyin is the Chinese version of the popular TikTok. This app allows creating and sharing short videos with musical accompaniment.	TikTok is widely used in Kyrgyz Republic, especially among young people, to create and share video content.
Facebook and Instagram	These social media outlets are blocked in China and are not accessible to Chinese users without the use of a VPN (virtual private network) or other specialised tools to circumvent censorship. The Chinese government blocks many foreign social media and web resources for reasons of censorship and information control.	In Kyrgyz Republic, as in many other countries, Facebook and Instagram are two of the most popular social networks.
Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki	Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki are also inaccessible in China without using a VPN or similar means. As Russian-language social networks, they are not popular among Chinese users.	In Kyrgyz Republic, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki are popular among Russian-speaking users. They provide features for socialising, creating groups and sharing content, and are used to connect with friends and former classmates.

The blocking of foreign social networks in China is creating a gap between Chinese and foreign online communities. Kyrgyz Republic differs from China in its free access to global social platforms, which facilitates international communication and content sharing. Social media plays a significant role in communication, business and entertainment in both countries, but the popularity of different platforms varies greatly. It is important to consider differences in access to social media when developing intercultural communication strategies in China and Kyrgyz Republic.

CONCLUSION

Social media is a significant phenomenon in today's world, playing a key role in a variety of aspects of society. They serve as an important channel for communicating, sharing information, and influencing opinions, covering a wide range of areas. These platforms play a key role in communication and interaction on both personal and professional levels. They also serve as a source of information, shape cultural expressions, provide educational resources, and facilitate discussion of important public issues. Businesses and marketing have found in social media a powerful tool for promotion and advertising. In doing so, these platforms influence public opinion, mobilisation, and activism, and facilitate the exchange of experience and knowledge. Furthermore, social media provide vast sources of data for research and analysis in different fields, and its global nature fosters connections between different cultures and peoples. It is important to emphasise that these platforms also have an impact on the field of development and innovation, both as a research object and as a source of new technologies. Social media is thus an integral and important part of modern society, making an important contribution to many aspects of our lives, encompassing both personal and global spheres of influence.

The results of a comparative study of social media in China and Kyrgyz Republic emphasise the growing importance of this sphere in both contexts as a means of communication, cultural expression, and shaping public opinion. However, the analysis also revealed considerable differences in areas of political regulation, stages of technological development and preferences in the use of social media platforms. These differences highlight the importance of a tailored approach to analysing and developing social media strategies in

each of these regions. The results also show that social media are increasingly integrated into the everyday life of societies and have become a key tool for education and information exchange. The need for more careful consideration of cultural, political, and technological factors in the design of social media strategies is emphasised, so that such strategies can be more effectively adapted to the unique characteristics of each of the countries under consideration. Summarising the above, a comparative study of social media in different countries helps to gain a better understanding of the relationship between culture, politics, and technology, and to identify trends and strategies important for the future development of this area.

Future social media researchers and scholars should focus on analysing data security and user privacy measures in social media, including studying data leakage incidents and developing methods to protect personal information. This research will contribute to the scientific knowledge in the field of social media, especially in terms of its impact on contemporary society, as it is important in today's information landscape and may have an impact on the development of social media and its interaction with society in the future.

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