

The Influence Of Short-Form Video On Earthquake Preparedness Among Young Adults Using Structural Equation Modeling: A Cross-Sectional Study In China

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Abstract

Frequent earthquakes in early 2025 underscored the urgent need to enhance public awareness of disaster preparedness. In China, short-form videos have emerged as a vital medium for disseminating disaster-related information and engaging audiences with earthquake topics. Despite their growing role in disaster risk communication, empirical investigations into how short-form video content influences individual preparedness behaviors remain limited. This study examines the relationship between exposure to short-form videos and earthquake preparedness among young Chinese adults (aged 18–36). Data were collected through an online survey, yielding 403 valid responses. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26.0 and Jamovi 2.6.24 to test the proposed hypotheses. Results indicated that exposure to short-form videos was positively associated with social realism and anxiety. Dual serial mediation effects were identified: (1) through social realism and the first-person effect, and (2) through anxiety and perceived spatial distance, linking short-form video exposure to earthquake preparedness. The findings extend empirical evidence on the formation of earthquake preparedness among young adults, particularly within a collectivist context.

Keywords: short-form video; earthquakes; first-person effect; young adults; survey.

1. Introduction

Natural disasters are extreme events caused by natural forces that pose serious threats to human life and property. Among these, earthquakes stand out as especially destructive due to their sudden onset and widespread impact (Fan et al., 2019). In 2023, earthquakes in Syria and Turkey resulted in approximately 56,000 deaths. Similarly, Japan's series of earthquakes, including the Fukushima disaster, affected over 193,000 structures, with economic losses estimated between \$1.8 and \$3.3 billion (Solís, 2013). In China, the Jishishan earthquake was among the deadliest in recent years in China, causing 113 deaths, 536 injuries, and triggering a destructive mudflow due to soil liquefaction (Wei et al., 2025). The recurrence of such events highlights the urgent need to develop context-sensitive strategies that address both geographical vulnerabilities and sociocultural factors.

Across different strategies aimed at reducing the impact of earthquakes, earthquake preparedness is widely recognized as one of the most effective means of minimizing harm and strengthening both individual and community resilience (Whittaker et al., 2020). Disaster preparedness refers to the knowledge, strategies, and capacities developed by governmental agencies and disaster response organizations to promote proactive engagement from communities and individuals in anticipation of potential natural hazards (Nazli et al., 2014). The concept of earthquake preparedness has evolved to encompass two key dimensions. Actual preparedness involves concrete actions, such as assembling emergency kits and developing evacuation plans, while perceived preparedness refers to individuals' self-assessment of their readiness to respond in the event of an earthquake (Kirschenbaum et al., 2017). This study examines earthquake preparedness (EP), defined as young Chinese adults' intentions to engage in preparedness behaviors (e.g., preparing a first aid kit, securing essential medications, and obtaining devices for receiving emergency updates).

As preparedness strategies evolve, social media has become a primary communication channel due to its accessibility and ability to reach diverse audiences (Houston et al., 2015). It serves a pivotal function in disseminating information and raising public awareness about earthquake preparedness and disaster management (Mavrodieva & Shaw, 2021). Its real-time capabilities enhance public engagement in preparedness efforts (Kanellopoulos et al., 2023). Recent studies suggest that targeted communication strategies can significantly increase participation in preparedness behaviors (Abunyewah et al., 2018). Media exposure to disaster-related content has been linked to heightened risk perception, increased trust in information sources, and attitude shifts (Lai, 2022). However, these effects vary by context, bringing attention to the potential mediating role of contextual and psychological factors in shaping the relationship between media exposure and EP.

An increasing body of literature has examined the psychological factors influencing disaster preparedness from two key perspectives. First, perceived spatial distance (PSD) refers to an individual's subjective sense of how near or far an event feels, which influences mental representation, emotional response, and risk perception. These are core processes described in Construal Level Theory (Wilson et al., 2013). For instance, perceiving distant climate events such as hurricanes or wildfires has been found to be associated with individuals' sense of threat (Carmi & Kimhi, 2015). Second, growing evidence suggests that the first-person effect (FPE) functions as a vital cognitive mechanism mediating the relationship between media exposure and preparedness behavior (Chung, 2019; Huang, 2023). It reflects the tendency to perceive media messages as more influential on oneself than on others. Taken together, these

perspectives highlight key psychological mechanisms such as perceived distance and media-related cognitive processing that may shape individuals' engagement with EP.

Despite growing research on disaster preparedness, three key gaps remain. First, although psychological distance and cognitive biases have been extensively examined in Western contexts (Garfin et al., 2022), their relevance in collectivist societies such as China remains underexplored. Second, most studies have focused on adolescents and older adults (Janatri, 2023; Songlar et al., 2019), with limited attention to young adults. Given their high engagement with short-form video platforms (Dong & Xie, 2024) and their potential to influence preparedness behaviors, it is essential to investigate how young Chinese adults respond to earthquake-related content. Lastly, the recent 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Thailand and Myanmar on March 25, 2025, in regions geographically close to China, underscores the urgency of examining how perceived spatial and psychological distance may influence EP.

The purpose of this study is to examine the association between exposure to short-form videos (ESFV) and EP among young Chinese adults (aged 18–36). Grounded in the FPE, the study extends the theoretical framework by incorporating PSD to assess its applicability and potential to explain preparedness behaviors in the context of natural disasters, specifically earthquakes in a collectivist society. It further explores the complex relationships among direct, mediated, and parallel-serial mediation pathways related to preparedness participation. The findings aim to advance empirical understanding and offer theoretical and practical insights for disaster risk communication research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theory of FPE

The third-person effect (TPE) was first theorized by Davison as the tendency for individuals to perceive others as more influenced by media messages than themselves, thereby attributing greater persuasiveness to the message's impact on others (Moser et al., 2024). The theory has been widely applied to explain decision-making processes related to perceived media influence across various platforms (Lim et al., 2025; YALIN & Kim, 2025; Yang & Tian, 2021). Building on Davison's foundational work, subsequent studies have identified and tested two primary hypotheses within the TPE framework. The perceptual hypothesis posits that individuals generally believe others are more susceptible to media effects than themselves (Paul et al., 2000), whereas the behavioral hypothesis asserts that this perceived influence on others can motivate behavioral or attitudinal changes in oneself or others (Sun et al., 2008). TPE has demonstrated strong applicability across diverse media contexts and has served as a key theoretical lens to explain how individuals' perceptions and reactions are shaped by health-related messages (Chen & Fu, 2022), international political issues (Lo et al., 2022), and advertising content (Goldbach et al., 2022).

Recent studies have increasingly examined the TPE in the context of socially desirable media content, with findings often revealing a reversed pattern known as the FPE, where individuals perceive media messages as more influential on themselves than on others (Huang, 2023). This perceived self-relevance has been linked to greater behavioral compliance, such as infection prevention and public health actions (Gilbert, 2022). FPE is commonly defined as the tendency to overestimate media influence on oneself while underestimating its effect on others

(Yao & Dai, 2025). Extending this theoretical approach, the present study explores how ESFV influences young Chinese adults' earthquake preparedness. In this study, FPE conceptualized as a perceived greater media impact on oneself that strengthens intentions to engage in earthquake preparedness.

2.2 Short-Form Video in Chinese Earthquake Communication

In China, short-form video applications have become widely used communication tools, particularly among young adults such as college students (Wu et al., 2021). With the rapid growth of telematic technologies, platforms such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) and WeChat short video now dominate the social media landscape. Douyin, for instance, reports nearly 400 million daily active users, with young adults, especially college students, comprising the most active user group (XGZJ, 2025). These platforms are primarily used for entertainment, content creation, and social interaction (Yang & Ha, 2021).

Among various content types, natural disaster videos have garnered significant public attention, particularly during and after major earthquakes (NELS, 2024). Short-form video content now functions as a primary medium for real-time updates and post-disaster reporting (NELS, 2024). Following a series of earthquakes in Gansu Province in 2023, short-form videos circulated widely on platforms such as WeChat and Douyin, with some individual clips exceeding 100,000 views and total viewership surpassing 30 million (Qi Xingfu, 2024). This pattern highlights the expanding role of short-form video platforms in disseminating earthquake-related information and fostering public engagement. In light of this context, the present study examines how exposure to such content is associated with earthquake preparedness among young Chinese adults, with particular attention to the mediating and serial mediation mechanisms underlying this relationship.

2.3 ESFV, Social Realism, and Anxiety

Realism is widely recognized as a key construct in understanding how media shape audience interpretations of reality. For example, exposure to news content has been found to enhance perceived veracity (Aslett et al., 2024). A prior study conceptualized perceived realism as the extent to which media content, such as a news story, appears lifelike or authentic, often influenced by how familiar, relatable, or natural the content seems (Sundar et al., 2021). Similarly, research on public responses during the COVID-19 pandemic defined social realism as the extent to which news coverage is perceived as realistic, logical, and believable (Liu et al., 2021). Extending prior research, this study examines how ESFV shapes young Chinese adults' interpretations of earthquake-related events. In this context, social realism refers to the extent to which viewers perceive short-form video coverage of earthquakes as factual, authentic, and believable.

Prior studies have provided vital evidences support idea that social realism associated by media exposure. For instance, cultivation theory posits that prolonged and repeated exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of social reality. That is, consistent engagement with media portrayals may lead audiences to interpret mediated content as reflective of actual societal conditions (Liao, 2023). Similarly, prior research has demonstrated that increased exposure to news content, such as coverage related to media violence, can lead to greater belief change, particularly when the sources presenting the information are perceived

as realistic and factual (Martins et al., 2018). Moreover, frequent exposure to news related to natural hazards across various media platforms is positively associated with individuals' social realism (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: ESFV is positively associated with young Chinese adults' social realism.

Anxiety is defined as an emotional response triggered by ambiguous danger or threat (Lazarus, 1991). It typically arises when individuals appraise a future event or issue as uncertain or potentially harmful (Yang & McAllister, 2020). In the present study, anxiety refers to the extent to which young Chinese adults experience anxiety about earthquake disasters following exposure to earthquake-related short-form videos. Prior research has provided empirical evidence linking media exposure to heightened anxiety levels. For example, exposure to online COVID-19 news has been positively correlated with increased anxiety (Shabahang et al., 2020). Similarly, social media use has been shown to significantly elevate anxiety during the pandemic (Gu et al., 2023). In addition, exposure to media content related to climate change has been associated with increased climate anxiety (Maran & Begotti, 2021). Drawing on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: ESFV is positively associated with young Chinese adults' anxiety.

2.4 Mediating role of FPE and PSD

Previous research has explored the potential mediating role of the FPE in the relationship between social realism and EP. For instance, social realism has been shown to negatively correlate with the TPP. That is, when individuals perceive natural hazards as realistic and credible, they are more likely to believe that such hazards affect themselves rather than others, reflecting the FPE (Liu et al., 2021). In addition, individuals who perceive preventive messages as personally relevant (an effect similar to the FPE) are more likely to engage in protective behaviors such as social distancing (Huang, 2023). Similarly, individuals who experienced greater social presence through immersive virtual reality disaster storytelling exhibited heightened threat perceptions and emotional responses, including fear and affective empathy (which align with processes commonly associated with the FPE) (Lee et al., 2023). Furthermore, prior research has demonstrated that the TPP is negatively associated with preventive behavior. For example, during the H1N1 swine flu outbreak, individuals exhibiting stronger TPP were less likely to adopt protective measures (Liu & Lo, 2014). In other words, greater personal risk perception is associated with increased engagement in preparedness behaviors. Drawing on this body of literature, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 3: FPE positively mediates the relationship between social realism and EP.

PSD, as conceptualized within construal level theory by Trope and Liberman (2010), refers to individuals' subjective perception of the geographic proximity or remoteness of an object or event (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The theory identifies four primary dimensions of psychological distance: spatial, temporal, social, and hypothetical (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Among these, spatial distance is particularly salient due to its direct association with geographic proximity. For example, individuals are more likely to perceive a flood as threatening when it occurs near their place of residence (O'Neill et al., 2016), suggesting that spatial proximity

plays a critical role in shaping perceived urgency. Construal level theory further posits that psychological distance influences mental construal, with distant events processed in abstract terms and proximal events construed more concretely, thereby affecting individuals' evaluations, decisions, and behaviors (Trope & Liberman, 2012). This mechanism is especially relevant in the context of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods (Geng et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). In this study, PSD is defined as the individual's subjective sense of geographic proximity to earthquake events following exposure to short-form videos content.

A growing body of research suggests that PSD may function as a mediating variable between anxiety and EP. For instance, prior research has found that individuals' greater emotional intensity, including anxiety, reduces their perceived psychological distance (Van Boven et al., 2010). Similarly, psychological distance, particularly PSD, has been negatively associated with individuals' preparedness (Zhang et al., 2022). In other words, individuals experiencing greater anxiety tend to perceive events as physically closer, which in turn enhances their motivation to engage in preparedness behaviors. Consistent with these findings, a previous research also identified a negative association between anxiety and PSD in the context of measles outbreaks (Yang & McAllister, 2020). Moreover, lower psychological distance has been positively associated with individuals' intentions to comply with health guidelines (Ahn, 2025). Drawing on previous empirical research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: PSD negatively mediates the relationship between anxiety and EP.

As outlined earlier in this study, media exposure may serve as a key antecedent positively associated with individuals' social realism (Liu et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2018). Previous research has provided empirical evidence for the mediating role of the FPE in the relationship between social realism and preventive behaviors (Huang, 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Building on these insights, the present study proposes a potential serial mediation pathway in which ESFV is associated with EP through sequential effects on social realism and the FPE among young Chinese adults (i.e., $ESFV \rightarrow \text{social realism} \rightarrow FPE \rightarrow EP$). Prior research has also demonstrated that exposure to information plays a significant role in shaping individuals' anxiety (Gu et al., 2023; Maran & Begotti, 2021; Shabahang et al., 2020). Moreover, PSD has been identified as a mediator between anxiety and engagement in preventive behaviors (Ahn, 2025; Yang & McAllister, 2020). Based on these findings, the study proposes a second serial mediation pathway among young Chinese adults: $ESFV \rightarrow \text{anxiety} \rightarrow PSD \rightarrow EP$. Specifically, frequent ESFV may increase anxiety, which in turn may reduce PSD, subsequently influencing engagement in EP. In light of these insights, this study proposes the following hypotheses and presents a hypothesized model to illustrate the relationships among the key variables.

Hypothesis 5: Social realism and the FPE play a serial mediating role in the relationship between ESFV and young Chinese adults' EP.

Hypothesis 6: Anxiety and PSD play a serial mediating role in the relationship between ESFV and young Chinese adults' EP.

3. Methods

3.1 Measurements

The survey measurements were adapted and revised based on established instruments from prior studies (Ahn et al., 2021; Chung, 2019; Hamid et al., 2020; Kolathayar et al., 2017; Lombard et al., 2009; Većkalov et al., 2024; Yang & McAllister, 2020). Accordingly, six scales were selected for use: ESFV, social realism, anxiety, PSD, and EP. Given that these instruments were originally developed and applied in diverse cultural and national contexts, modifications were made to ensure their appropriateness for the present study. Two language experts initially translated the original English instruments into Chinese. Subsequently, content validity indices were applied, as this process aimed to ensure both linguistic accuracy and conceptual relevance within the target cultural context. Following procedures established in prior research (Wong, 2021), the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) was employed to assess the content validity of the measurement items. A panel of three experts specializing in emergency communication was invited to independently rate the relevance of each item using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, 3 = quite relevant, 4 = highly relevant) in response to the question, “To what extent do you consider this item relevant?” Items with an I-CVI score below 0.80 were subsequently revised to enhance conceptual clarity and cultural appropriateness.

A pilot study was conducted to confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument and to minimize potential response bias (McCormack et al., 2010). Following recommended procedures (Chen et al., 2023), 50 volunteers were recruited via Chinese social media platforms (WeChat and Rednote) between May 2 to May 15, 2025, solely for pilot testing. Participant feedback on unclear items led to minor revisions. The results indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.79–0.90) and construct validity, with the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett’s test ($p < 0.001$) supporting data factorability. All factor loadings exceeded the 0.50 threshold.

Ethical approval was granted by the Academic Committee of the School of Journalism and Communication at Central China Normal University on April 29, 2025 (Approval No. CCNU20250429). Written informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the e-survey.

Formal participant recruitment was conducted through Credamo (<https://www.credamo.com>, accessed on 20th May 2025), a Chinese professional e-survey platform widely used for academic research, with a database of over 1.5 million users (Zhang & Cheng, 2023). The platform has been specifically applied in fields of study including psychology and public health in China (Wu et al., 2022). Participants were required to meet the following three inclusion criteria: (1) be aged 18 to 36; (2) actively use short-form video applications such as Douyin, Kuaishou and Wechat video; and (3) To minimize regional bias, participants from Guangxi and Yunnan were excluded. As part of the border region near Thailand and Myanmar, these provinces may encounter more frequent disaster communication, which may compromise the representativeness of the sample. Recruitment began on May 20 and ended on July 13, 2025. Of the 510 young Chinese adults invited via the e-survey platform, 411 completed the questionnaire. After excluding responses submitted in under 160 seconds ($n = 3$) and those displaying straight-line answering patterns ($n = 5$), a final sample of 403 participants was retained.

An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. With an alpha level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.90, an effect size (f^2) of 0.15, and five predictors in a multiple regression model, the required minimum sample size was 116. The final sample of 403 thus provides sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing.

Discriminant validity was assessed to determine whether the measurement constructs clearly represent distinct concepts (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). Specifically, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied prior to hypothesis testing. The results indicated that the square root of each construct’s average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded its correlations with other constructs, confirming acceptable discriminant validity (see Table 1).

To examine the presence of systematic measurement error, Harman’s one-factor test was performed, as is commonly recommended in cross-sectional research (Yang et al., 2023). The analysis revealed that a single factor accounted for 31.10% of the total variance, which is well below the 50% threshold, indicating that common method bias is not present in this study.

Table 1. Fornell-Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
ESFV	0.77					
Anxiety	0.44**	0.87				
PSD	-0.41**	-0.50**	0.90			
Social Realism	0.33**	0.30**	-0.33**	0.80		
FPE	0.14**	0.21**	-0.15**	0.64**	0.78	
EP	0.48**	0.40**	-0.37**	0.41**	0.40**	0.76

** $p < 0.01$, ESFV = exposure to short-form videos, PSD = perceived spatial distance, FPE = first-person effect, EP = earthquake preparedness.

Confirmatory factor analysis is a vital procedure used to verify whether the observed data fit a hypothesized measurement model. Following established procedures, this study specified a one-factor model to assess the model fit for key variables. The analysis was conducted using Jamovi 2.6.24, and the results indicated an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.24$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, and RMSEA = 0.05, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.05 to 0.06. These results underscore that the model provides a satisfactory representation of the data.

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

The current study employed SPSS 26.0 and Jamovi 2.6.24 as the primary tools for data analysis. SPSS was used to assess measurement reliability and validity, summarize descriptive statistics, and test mediation effects. Jamovi was utilized to perform confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM). Specifically, model fit was evaluated based on commonly accepted model fit indices (e.g., χ^2/df , GFI, CFI, SRMR, RMSEA, TLI).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Data

A total of 403 valid responses were collected. The key demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 403).

Variables	Item	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	178	44.2%
	Female	225	55.8%
Education level	High school	27	6.7%
	Undergraduate	282	70.0%
	Postgraduates	94	23.3%
Age range	18–23 years old	137	34.0%
	24–28 years old	177	43.9%
	29–36 years old	89	22.1%
Monthly household income (RMB)	1,000–3,999	22	5.5%
	4,000 and 8,999	185	45.9%
	9,000 and 13,999	121	30.0%
	14,000 < RMB	75	18.6%
Total		403	100%

The majority of the sample were female (N = 225, 55.8%). Most participants were either undergraduate (N = 282, 70.0%) or postgraduate students (N = 94, 23.3%). In terms of age range, the largest group fell within the 24–28 category (N = 177, 43.9%), followed by those aged 18–23 (N = 137, 34.0%). Regarding monthly household income, most respondents reported earnings in the 4,000–8,999 RMB range (N = 185, 45.9%), followed by 9,000–13,999 RMB (N = 121, 30.0%) and above 14,000 RMB (N = 75, 18.6%).

4.2. Path Analysis Tests

To test the direct hypotheses (Hypotheses 1 and 2), path analysis was conducted using Jamovi 2.6.24. The exogenous variable was ESFV, with gender and age included as control variables. The endogenous variables consisted of Anxiety, PSD, Social realism, FPE, and EP. Model fit was assessed using multiple indices. The results indicated an acceptable model fit, with $\chi^2/df = 3.56$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.91, SRMR = 0.05, and RMSEA = 0.08, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.06 to 0.11. Taken together, the model demonstrated an adequate fit to the data.

For the first direct pathway (Hypothesis 1), ESFV demonstrated a significant positive association with social realism ($\beta = 0.31$, $z = 6.38$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.28]), accompanied by a low standard error (SE = 0.03), indicating a high degree of precision in the estimate. In the second pathway (Hypothesis 2), ESFV was also positively associated with anxiety ($\beta = 0.43$, $z = 9.21$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.35, 0.54]), with SE = 0.04, suggesting the effect size was estimated with high precision. Taken together, these results provide empirical support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

To test the proposed mediation hypotheses, Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) was employed in SPSS 26.0, using maximum likelihood estimation with 2,000 bootstrapped resamples to generate 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Age and gender were included as covariates. The results for the first mediation pathway indicated that social realism was positively associated with FPE ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, FPE was positively related to EP ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect (social realism → FPE → EP) was significant ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI

[0.08, 0.30], SE = 0.05). In addition, the second mediation pathway demonstrated that anxiety was negatively associated with PSD ($\beta = -0.54, p < .001$), and PSD was negatively related to EP ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.001$). The negative indirect effect (anxiety \rightarrow PSD \rightarrow EP) was significant ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 0.13], \text{ SE} = 0.04$). Therefore, these empirical findings provide support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

The serial mediation hypotheses (Hypotheses 5 and 6) were tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 6) in SPSS Version 26.0. Both age and gender were included as covariates in the analysis. Results for the first serial mediation pathway indicated that ESFV was positively associated with social realism ($\beta = 0.21, t = 6.35, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.15, 0.28]$). In turn, social realism was positively associated with FPE ($\beta = 0.64, t = 16.70, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.56, 0.71]$), which was subsequently associated with higher levels of EP ($\beta = 0.35, t = 5.15, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.21, 0.49]$). The overall serial mediation effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.05, t = 8.51, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.08]$), with a standard error of 0.04, suggesting that the effect size was estimated with high precision. The second serial mediation pathway indicated that ESFV was positively associated with anxiety ($\beta = 0.45, t = 9.16, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.55]$). In turn, anxiety was negatively associated with PSD ($\beta = -0.42, t = -7.79, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.53, -0.32]$), which was subsequently negatively associated with EP ($\beta = -0.10, t = -2.87, p < 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.17, -0.03]$). The overall serial mediation effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.02, t = 9.81, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.04]$), with a standard error of 0.04, suggesting that the effect size was estimated with high precision. In summary, both Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported.

Figure 1 presents the research findings for all hypothesized pathways.

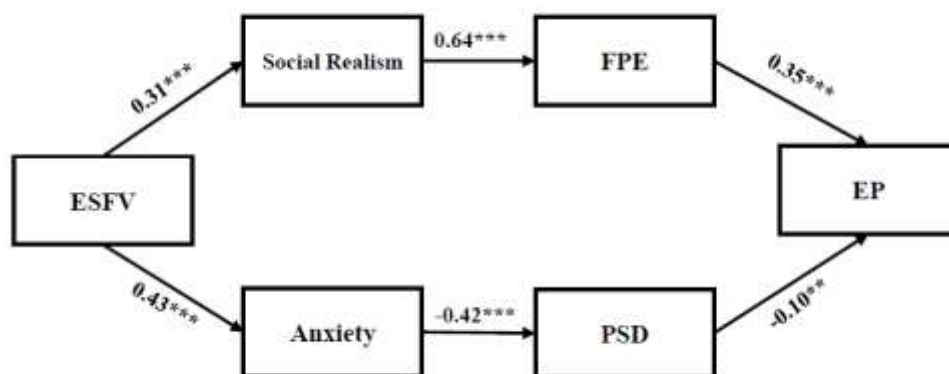


Figure 1. The Tested Structural Model of Predictors Associated with Earthquake Preparedness.

5. Discussion

Despite growing scholarly interest in disaster communication, the role of short-form video platforms as a key source of earthquake-related information in China has received limited empirical attention, particularly concerning how such media exposure shapes individuals' perceptions and behavioral responses. This study addresses this gap by examining how exposure to short-form video content influences young Chinese adults' interpretations of earthquake events and their subsequent engagement in preparedness behaviors. Drawing on

first-person effect theory and the concept of perceived spatial distance, the study reveals dual mediated effects and complex serial mediation pathways among young Chinese adults (aged 18–36). The study was conducted in the aftermath of major earthquakes in neighboring border regions, including Thailand and Myanmar, underscoring the urgency of understanding how the recurrence and proximity of such disasters may shape preparedness perceptions among young Chinese adults. These findings contribute both theoretically and practically by informing targeted communication strategies and advancing research in the field of risk communication.

5.1 Direct Effects of Exposure to Short-Form Videos on Social Realism, and Anxiety

As a primary and rapidly evolving media source in China, short-form video exposure is associated with higher levels of social realism among young Chinese adults. This association illustrates the tendency for those reporting regular engagement with earthquake-related content to regard media portrayals as more representative of actual earthquake risks. This result aligns with prior studies indicating a significant positive association between information exposure and social realism (Liu et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2018). For example, empirical findings have shown that exposure to news content on media platforms related to natural hazards is associated with individuals' evaluations of social realism (Liu et al., 2021). Second, prior studies have found a positive association between media exposure and elevated levels of anxiety (Gu et al., 2023; Maran & Begotti, 2021; Shabahang et al., 2020). For instance, exposure to climate change-related content has been shown to significantly predict climate anxiety (Maran & Begotti, 2021). Consistent with these findings, the current study identified a similar pattern, in which greater exposure to short-form videos content was associated with higher levels of anxiety among young Chinese adults. While both direct effects were significant as expected, the path from exposure to short-form videos to anxiety was notably stronger than that to social realism, as reflected in the higher standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.43$ compared to $\beta = 0.31$), with both estimates showing high precision (standard error = 0.03–0.04). This suggests that emotional responses, such as anxiety, may be more strongly activated than cognitive appraisals such as social realism. One possible explanation is that disaster-related imagery on social media often elicits emotional arousal by appealing to fear and sentiment (Hassan et al., 2022). Fear-based narratives are commonly employed in Chinese short-form videos addressing environmental issues. Such narratives are likely to enhance emotional engagement and intensify the perceived seriousness of the content. This may help explain the relatively stronger association observed between exposure to short-form videos and anxiety among this demographic.

5.2 Primary Mediating Mechanisms Shaping Earthquake Preparedness

In terms of mediated effects, psychological distance and cognitive biases were incorporated as primary lenses to examine how social realism and anxiety are associated with earthquake preparedness through parallel mediating mechanisms among young Chinese adults. The first-person effect played as a mediator in the relationship between social realism and earthquake preparedness. Specifically, when young Chinese adults perceived earthquakes as factual and credible, they were more likely to view media portrayals of recent earthquakes as personally relevant and impactful, perceiving the messages as more influential on themselves than on others. This perception was subsequently associated with increased earthquake preparedness.

This finding aligns with prior research demonstrating that the first-person effect mediates the relationship between social realism and protective behaviors (Huang, 2023; Liu et al., 2021). In addition, perceived spatial distance was found negatively mediated in relationship between young Chinese adults' anxiety and earthquake preparedness. This finding aligns with empirical evidence indicating that individuals' emotional intensity, such as anxiety, is negatively associated with their perceived psychological distance (Van Boven et al., 2010). Moreover, perceived spatial distance has been shown to be negatively related to individuals' preparedness (Zhang et al., 2022). These findings support the proposed theoretical pathway and underscore the critical mediating role of psychological distance and cognitive biases in shaping young Chinese adults' earthquake preparedness. Notably, prior research has reported mixed results regarding perceived spatial distance. For example, a recent study found that when individuals perceive the impact of climate change as geographically distant, they are less likely to be motivated to engage in pro-environmental behavior (Keane et al., 2025). However, the current study confirmed that recent major earthquakes in China's neighboring border regions, such as Thailand and Myanmar (magnitude 6.0 to 7.5), have provoked elevated anxiety among young Chinese adults. In contrast to other natural incidents, these specific earthquakes markedly reduced perceived spatial distance, which subsequently strengthened individuals' engagement in earthquake preparedness. This study adds to the growing empirical literature suggesting that real-world earthquake exposure can reduce perceived distance (i.e., increase perceived closeness) and, in turn, shape preparedness behavior among young Chinese adults.

In relation to the final hypotheses (H4–H5), both serial mediation pathways were statistically significant, aligning with prior research that has demonstrated direct effects of media exposure on social realism (Liu et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2018) and anxiety (Gu et al., 2023; Maran & Begotti, 2021; Shabahang et al., 2020). Previous studies have also confirmed the mediating roles of FPE and perceived spatial distance in shaping preparedness behaviors (Ahn, 2025; Huang, 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Yang & McAllister, 2020). The present findings extend this body of evidence by revealing a more complex mechanism involving both cognitive and emotional pathways. Specifically, the results highlight the role of first-person effect as a cognitive bias that may explain why higher perceived social realism increases preparedness engagement in the context of urgent natural disasters. Similarly, the pathway from anxiety to preparedness is clarified by identifying perceived spatial distance as a mediating factor. These insights not only advance theoretical understanding but also encourage future research to further examine the layered psychological processes underlying natural disaster preparedness (i.e., earthquake preparedness).

5.3 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The current study makes two key theoretical contributions. First, while prior research has examined the role of the first-person effect and perceived spatial distance in the context of urgent global crises such as COVID-19 and climate change, the present study extends theoretical exploration to earthquake-related contexts in early 2025. Specifically, guided by these theoretical frameworks, this research is among the first to explore how exposure to short-form videos may influence individuals' engagement in earthquake preparedness. Second, integrating perceived spatial distance into the theoretical framework of the first-person effect enhances the explanatory power and applicability of this theory within the domain of

earthquake-related communication in China. This integration confirms and expands the theoretical relevance of both constructs in disaster preparedness research.

The findings of the current study offer practical implications for earthquake preparedness communication. First, prior research has shown that traditional didactic messages are generally ineffective in motivating the public during urgent public health crises, as they demonstrate limited persuasive impact in encouraging preventive behaviors. In contrast, narrative messages that incorporate emotionally engaging and cognitively stimulating storytelling have consistently increased individuals' likelihood of engaging in such behaviors (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2021). Building on these insights, this study recommends applying persuasive media framing strategies to short-form video platforms, particularly narrative framing, and emphasizes the importance of algorithm-driven dissemination of earthquake-related content following major earthquakes. This approach is expected to more effectively activate psychological mechanisms such as anxiety and reduced perceived spatial distance, thereby enhancing users' engagement in preparedness behaviors. Second, recent research has demonstrated the persuasive potential of virtual humans, showing that exposure to virtual influencer content can evoke mimetic desire, which in turn increases engagement in behaviors such as purchase intention (Li et al., 2024). Given young adults' strong interest in digital human content, along with the rapid advancement of AIGC technologies within China's media industries (Zhang, 2024), this mechanism may similarly support earthquake preparedness communication. Future research is encouraged to explore how mimetic desire elicited by virtual humans may enhance preparedness among young Chinese adults.

5.4 Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the current research employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables, including direct, mediated, and serially mediated pathways. Future research is encouraged to build on these findings by incorporating longitudinal or experimental designs to strengthen the empirical evidence in this domain. Second, the coefficient for the serial mediation pathway (exposure to short-form videos → anxiety → perceived spatial distance → earthquake preparedness) was relatively small ($\beta = 0.02$). One potential limitation is the lack of key control variables, such as prior earthquake experience or individuals' knowledge of disaster preparedness. Future research should incorporate these contextual factors to improve the explanatory power and accuracy of the serial mediation model. Lastly, the sample was limited to young Chinese adults. While this demographic focus provides valuable insights, future research should consider including participants from neighboring countries that are geographically proximate to recent earthquakes. Expanding the sample in this way may help determine whether similar patterns of media influence on earthquake preparedness are observed across different national contexts.

6. Conclusions

Guided by the theory of the first-person effect and the pivotal concept of perceived spatial distance, the current study investigated the relationship between exposure to short-form videos and earthquake preparedness among young Chinese adults (aged 18–36). Despite its relevance, this relationship has received limited scholarly attention within the fields of earthquake

communication and disaster management. The findings advance the theoretical development of the first-person effect by enhancing its explanatory power and applicability in the context of earthquake-related communication in China. Notably, the integration of perceived spatial distance extends the applicability of this theory to disaster preparedness research. Practical implications are offered for improving risk communication strategies and media content, particularly through the use of cutting-edge AI-generated content such as virtual human influencers, which may more effectively engage and motivate young adults toward earthquake preparedness.

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