

REVIEW ARTICLE

ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND COUNTERMEASURES OF NETWORK PUBLIC OPINION IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEW MEDIA ERA

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development and widespread adoption of new media, network public opinion in universities has become increasingly complex, dynamic, and fast-spreading. The rise of digital communication platforms has facilitated instant information exchange, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge and rapidly evolve. Particularly when universities encounter unexpected incidents, crises, or controversial topics, online discussions can escalate quickly, drawing significant social attention. The anonymity and openness of digital platforms further contribute to the amplification of emotions, leading to polarization and even misinformation. Such developments not only influence the reputation of higher education institutions but can also impact campus stability and governance. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of network public opinion is crucial for effective crisis management and public opinion guidance. This paper systematically examines the key features of network public opinion in universities within the new media landscape and proposes strategic countermeasures to mitigate risks, enhance information control, and foster a more balanced and rational online discourse.

KEYWORDS

New media, universities, network public opinion, public opinion monitoring, new media characteristics

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of new media technology, the speed and breadth of information dissemination have reached unprecedented levels. Social media, in particular, has greatly accelerated the spread of public opinion, leading to more dynamic and unpredictable information flows (Chen and Li, 2023). In this context, network public opinion in universities has exhibited new characteristics and brought numerous challenges. Firstly, the dissemination of information is highly fragmented and diversified, allowing various voices both inside and outside the campus to rapidly converge and form different public opinion arenas (Gao and Sun, 2020). This decentralized communication structure makes it difficult for university administrators to control or guide discussions effectively. Secondly, the anonymity and openness of online platforms make public opinion dissemination more emotional and extreme, especially when it comes to sensitive topics (Huang and Kim, 2020). Under such circumstances, group emotions can quickly ferment, leading to polarization effects and exacerbating conflicts within the university community (Liu and Zhang, 2021). If left unchecked, these public opinion crises may escalate and negatively impact campus order and social stability (Smith and Chen, 2021).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF NETWORK PUBLIC OPINION IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEW MEDIA ERA

The rapid dissemination of information on digital platforms necessitates effective strategies to regulate public sentiment and mitigate crises (Jones and Wang, 2021). The booming development of new media technologies has made university network public opinion distinct from traditional media. These characteristics mainly manifest in the following aspects:

2.1 Fast Dissemination Speed and Wide Reach

Platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, and Bilibili have revolutionized information dissemination in China, enabling rapid and extensive sharing of content. Weibo, akin to Twitter, allows users to post short messages that can be quickly reshared, amplifying their reach. Similarly, WeChat facilitates instant messaging and supports the sharing of articles and videos, making it a central hub for information exchange. Douyin, known internationally as TikTok, specializes in short-form videos, fostering viral content that spreads swiftly across user networks. Bilibili, initially a platform for animation, comics, and games, has evolved to host a diverse range of user-generated videos, further contributing to the rapid spread of information.

The combined features of these platforms allow content to go viral, with discussions and reactions spreading across different user groups and regions. This rapid dissemination can propel internal university matters into broader public discourse, attracting attention beyond the immediate academic community. While this extended reach can enhance transparency and community engagement, it also necessitates careful management to address potential challenges associated with widespread information sharing. Social media dynamics significantly impact how crises unfold in universities. Case studies illustrate that online discussions can escalate crises if not managed properly (Lee and Zhao, 2020).

2.2 Diverse Information and Fragmented Content

In the new media environment, network public opinion in universities comes from a variety of sources, including official information from the school and voices from students, parents, media, and others. Information exists in various forms such as text, images, videos, and audio, often presented in fragmented forms that are quick to consume. Although this fragmented information facilitates fast dissemination, it can also lead to facts being taken out of context or distorted, which poses a challenge to the judgment of public opinion. Universities often experience cyber public opinion crises that demand strategic mitigation approaches. Successful

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crisis management cases highlight the importance of proactive measures (Brown and Lin, 2022).

2.3 Strong Interactivity and Low Participation Threshold

New media platforms have transformed public discourse by providing channels for instant interaction, allowing teachers, students, alumni, and the public to participate in discussions through likes, comments, and shares. This low threshold for participation enables individual voices to quickly coalesce, forming multifaceted public opinion arenas that encompass a wide range of perspectives.

The strong interactivity inherent in these platforms not only accelerates the dissemination of information but also fosters emotional engagement among users. This heightened emotional involvement can lead to intensified discussions, occasionally resulting in clashes of extreme sentiments. Such dynamics underscore the need for effective moderation and digital literacy initiatives to navigate the complexities of online public opinion formation.

2.4 Emotional Expression and Polarization

Online public opinion frequently carries strong emotional tones, with users often infusing their subjective feelings into their expressions. This is especially evident when discussing sensitive topics such as internal university conflicts or public incidents. Such emotional expressions can lead to intense group resonance, resulting in the polarization of opinions. This polarization not only destabilizes information dissemination but also presents significant challenges for university management.

The intertwining of emotions and opinions in online discussions can create echo chambers, where individuals are primarily exposed to viewpoints that align with their own, reinforcing existing beliefs and deepening divides. This environment complicates the task of university administrators, who must navigate and address the heightened emotions and polarized views within their communities. Effectively managing such dynamics requires a nuanced understanding of the emotional undercurrents in online discourse and the implementation of strategies to foster constructive dialogue and mitigate polarization.

Research indicates that emotional intensity in online communications can amplify opinion polarization, even among users exposed to the same information. This phenomenon underscores the need for universities to proactively engage with their communities, promoting balanced perspectives and addressing emotional concerns to maintain a harmonious and informed campus environment.

2.5 Anonymity and Virtuality Enhance Freedom of Speech

Most new media platforms have anonymous features, allowing users to express their true thoughts in a relatively hidden environment. This anonymity both facilitates the free flow of information and makes some statements irresponsible, leading to irrational or even extreme comments. Furthermore, the construction of virtual identities and online communities allows groups that were originally unrelated to quickly unite on specific topics, forming more complex public opinion networks.

Thus, the network public opinion in universities under new media exhibits characteristics such as fast dissemination speed, diverse information, strong interactivity, emotional expression, and high anonymity. These features present severe challenges to university public opinion management and require universities to adopt more comprehensive and effective measures in areas such as information monitoring, crisis response, and digital literacy education to ensure campus stability and harmonious development.

3. CAUSES OF NETWORK PUBLIC OPINION IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEW MEDIA ERA

3.1 Internal Factors

3.1.1 Limited Expression Channels: The Internet Becomes the Main Outlet for Appeals

In traditional university management systems, students have historically faced challenges in expressing their demands or concerns due to the limited and often indirect channels of communication. Institutions typically rely on suggestion boxes, class advisors, student unions, or official meetings to facilitate the flow of student feedback. While these channels are well-intentioned, they are often cumbersome and involve multiple layers of transmission before reaching the university's decision-making bodies. This delay can result in students' voices being diluted or ignored, leading to unmet needs or unresolved issues.

However, the rise of the internet and the proliferation of social media

platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Bilibili have revolutionized the way students communicate with both their peers and the wider public. These platforms offer students a direct and immediate outlet for expressing their opinions, grievances, and emotions. Through a simple post, video, or message, students can share their views and quickly attract the attention of a broad audience, including fellow students, faculty, and even external stakeholders. This speed and accessibility allow issues to be raised and addressed in real-time, often bypassing the traditional bureaucratic hurdles that once hindered communication within university systems.

The internet has, therefore, become a powerful tool for democratizing student expression, enabling voices that may have once been overlooked to be amplified. While this shift has its advantages, it also brings with it new challenges, including the need for careful management of the flow of information and ensuring that online discourse remains productive and respectful. Nonetheless, social media platforms have undoubtedly become central to how students engage with university life and advocate for their rights and concerns.

3.1.2 Lack of Information Literacy: Easy to be Misled

In the age of new media, the rapid flow and diversity of information across social platforms have created a double-edged sword for students and society at large. On the one hand, these platforms provide an unprecedented opportunity for individuals to share their ideas, express opinions, and access a wealth of knowledge. On the other hand, the sheer volume of content and the ease with which anyone can publish online content have led to an overwhelming presence of misinformation, rumors, and misleading narratives. This rapid dissemination of unverified information has become a significant concern, particularly among students who may lack the necessary information literacy to discern credible sources from unreliable ones.

Many students, particularly those who are new to navigating digital spaces or have not been adequately taught critical thinking and media literacy, are easily misled by misleading headlines, rumors, and sensationalized stories circulating online. Social media platforms, with their viral nature, allow unverified claims to spread quickly, often without any checks or balances. When these claims are repeated or amplified by influential figures or peers, they can appear more credible, even when they are far from accurate. This is especially problematic in the context of sensitive social or campus events, where the stakes of misinformation can be high. For example, rumors about campus protests, administrative decisions, or social controversies can escalate tensions and spark unnecessary panic if they are not properly verified.

Lacking the skills to critically evaluate information sources, many students may engage in online discussions without considering the authenticity of the content they are sharing or responding to. This can lead to the formation of polarized or extreme viewpoints, further deepening divides within the student body or creating unnecessary conflicts with university administration. In this context, the importance of promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and fact-checking cannot be overstated. As information becomes more democratized, ensuring that students are equipped with the tools to navigate this vast sea of content responsibly is crucial for fostering a more informed and rational digital discourse.

3.2 External Factors

3.2.1 Complex Network Environment: External Information Infiltration, Ideological Confusion

The current network environment is characterized by an overwhelming flood of fragmented, diverse, and rapidly shifting information, which has created a dynamic yet challenging space for students in universities. While students typically rely on internal information from their institutions, such as official communications or campus-based media, they are simultaneously exposed to a vast array of external voices and perspectives. These external sources, which come from various social media platforms, news outlets, and online communities, often represent a wide range of ideological positions and biases, further complicating the landscape of information that students must navigate.

The influx of external opinions, particularly those that are extreme or irresponsible, can cause ideological confusion among students. Unlike traditional forms of media, which were typically regulated and curated by editorial teams, the internet allows anyone to express their views, regardless of their qualifications or accuracy. As a result, students are often bombarded with conflicting messages, which can create cognitive dissonance or emotional instability. These external influences can disrupt students' ability to form balanced, informed perspectives, particularly when they are emotionally charged or ideologically skewed.

This environment can lead to a heightened sense of confusion and

volatility, especially when external information contradicts the values or policies of the university. In some cases, students may find themselves torn between internal university messages and the persuasive narratives they encounter online. As the internet becomes a dominant source of information, the boundary between internal university affairs and external societal discourses becomes increasingly blurred, leading to a complex and sometimes destabilizing atmosphere. In such an environment, students may struggle to filter reliable information from misleading or biased content, further fueling ideological polarization and emotional upheaval. Therefore, universities must find ways to help students navigate this complex network environment with a more critical and discerning approach to the information they encounter.

3.2.2 Impact of Social Events: Emotional Resonance and Changes in Campus Atmosphere

Social events, particularly those that have a direct connection to campus life, can profoundly influence university network public opinion. When a significant social event—such as a national crisis, political controversy, or cultural movement—intersects with issues occurring within the university, it can trigger strong emotional responses and lead to widespread online discussions among students. These events often evoke a deep sense of resonance, as students tend to view them through the lens of their own experiences, identities, and values. The ability of social media to rapidly disseminate information means that these events can quickly become focal points of debate, with students voicing their opinions, sharing personal stories, and rallying around causes they feel passionate about.

For instance, if a national social justice movement aligns with a local campus issue, such as a university's stance on diversity or student rights, it can catalyze mass engagement from students. Emotional resonance is particularly strong in these instances because students often feel that these broader societal issues have personal relevance. As a result, the campus atmosphere can change significantly, with debates, protests, and online discussions permeating every corner of university life. The emotional intensity of such events can amplify students' sense of solidarity or division, as they seek to align themselves with others who share their views or challenge those who hold opposing opinions.

Moreover, these discussions can shape the overall campus atmosphere. What might begin as an isolated online conversation can quickly evolve into a campus-wide phenomenon, affecting not only student interactions but also influencing the university's policies or response to the issue. As a result, social events that generate emotional resonance can have long-lasting effects on both the emotional climate and the public discourse within universities, highlighting the powerful role that social media plays in shaping campus dynamics.

4. COUNTERMEASURES FOR MANAGING NETWORK PUBLIC OPINION IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEW MEDIA ERA

Given the rapid development of new media, network public opinion has become an important factor influencing university management, campus culture, and social reputation. In response to the increasingly complex and variable public opinion environment, universities must adopt practical measures to optimize public opinion management, resolve conflicts, and maintain campus stability and harmony.

4.1 Network Literacy Education

Network literacy education plays a pivotal role in today's information age, where digital platforms provide easy access to vast amounts of data. As the internet has become a primary source of knowledge and communication, it has also become a breeding ground for misinformation, rumors, and misleading content. Therefore, it is essential to enhance students' ability to navigate the digital landscape by equipping them with skills to identify, verify, and analyze information critically.

The first step in network literacy is helping students develop the ability to recognize the reliability of online sources. They should be trained to assess the credibility of the content they encounter, considering the source, authorship, and whether the information is supported by evidence. This helps to differentiate trustworthy information from unreliable or biased content.

Second, students should be taught how to verify the information they come across. This involves cross-referencing multiple sources, fact-checking, and using reputable platforms to confirm the validity of claims. This step is particularly important in the context of combating fake news, as many false stories are deliberately designed to manipulate public perception.

Thirdly, the role of government and universities in regulating public opinion on digital platforms is crucial for maintaining stability and

ensuring responsible discourse (Brown and Lin, 2022).

Finally, students need to develop analytical skills that allow them to understand the context and implications of the information they consume. It's not enough to simply recognize or verify information; students must also evaluate its relevance, implications, and potential impact on society. By fostering these critical thinking skills, network literacy education empowers students to be more discerning digital citizens, reducing their susceptibility to false narratives and ensuring they can make informed decisions in an increasingly complex digital world.

4.2 Improving Public Opinion Monitoring and Early Warning Mechanisms

Improving public opinion monitoring and early warning mechanisms is crucial for universities in managing and addressing potential crises related to public sentiment. In today's digital age, opinions and discussions spread quickly across social media platforms, making it challenging to predict and control the flow of public discourse. Establishing specialized public opinion monitoring teams and early warning systems can significantly enhance a university's ability to detect and address potential issues before they escalate into full-blown crises. Artificial intelligence plays a significant role in analyzing online public opinion, enabling institutions to respond effectively to emerging issues (Davis and Zhou, 2020).

Specialized public opinion monitoring teams should be composed of experts who are trained in understanding and analyzing online trends, social media discussions, and news coverage related to the institution. These teams can use advanced tools and technologies to track mentions of the university across various platforms and identify early signs of discontent, controversy, or misinformation. By monitoring the public's sentiment, universities can quickly pinpoint emerging issues and assess their potential impact.

In addition to monitoring, the implementation of an early warning system is essential. This system can aggregate data from different sources, including social media, student feedback, media outlets, and public forums, to create a comprehensive view of public opinion. It can identify patterns of negative sentiment or dissatisfaction, triggering alerts when certain thresholds are reached. Early warning systems can also provide universities with actionable insights, allowing them to respond proactively with effective communication strategies or interventions to prevent further escalation.

By having these monitoring and early warning mechanisms in place, universities can act swiftly and strategically, addressing concerns and preventing reputational damage. This proactive approach ensures that the institution is well-prepared to maintain a positive relationship with the public and resolve any issues before they lead to more significant disruptions. Higher education institutions must adopt effective public opinion management strategies, leveraging social media insights to maintain positive engagement (Wang and Zhao, 2022).

4.3 Building Diverse Communication Channels

Establishing multiple communication channels between students and university management is essential to fostering a transparent, responsive, and inclusive academic environment. By diversifying communication methods, universities can ensure that student concerns and feedback are effectively heard and addressed, reducing the likelihood of dissatisfaction being expressed solely through online platforms.

Traditional channels such as face-to-face meetings, town hall sessions, and suggestion boxes provide students with opportunities to engage directly with university administration. These methods allow for personal interaction, enabling administrators to gauge the nuances of student concerns and build trust within the campus community.

Digital platforms also play a crucial role in modern communication strategies. Utilizing emails, learning management systems (LMS), and social media groups facilitates timely dissemination of information and provides students with convenient avenues to voice their opinions. For instance, the use of LMS forums and instant messaging can enhance engagement and feedback collection. However, it's important to note that reliance on digital channels should be balanced with traditional methods to ensure inclusivity, as not all students may have equal access to technology or feel comfortable using online platforms.

Incorporating diverse communication channels acknowledges the varied preferences and needs of the student body. It allows students to choose the medium they are most comfortable with, whether digital or in-person, thereby increasing the likelihood of meaningful engagement. Moreover, this approach demonstrates the university's commitment to transparency and responsiveness, as students can see tangible actions taken based on

their feedback.

By proactively establishing and maintaining multiple communication avenues, universities can prevent the monopolization of student discourse on online platforms, where information can be easily misinterpreted or sensationalized. This strategy not only enhances student satisfaction but also strengthens the overall reputation and effectiveness of the institution.

5. CONCLUSION

In the new media environment, university network public opinion has characteristics such as fast dissemination speed, emotional expression, and group polarization. To address these characteristics, universities should strengthen ideological and political education, improve public opinion monitoring and early warning systems, create diversified communication channels, cultivate network opinion leaders, and enhance emergency response capabilities. Through comprehensive measures, universities can actively guide network public opinion, maintain campus harmony and stability, and create a healthy online environment for students' growth.

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