

Research on Public Sentiment Dissemination and Countermeasures in a New Media Environment

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Abstract. On the basis of researching literature on new media environment and public sentiment dissemination, this essay points to the characteristics of public sentiment dissemination in a new media environment: liberalization, diversification, tendentiousness, an inclination to arouse associations, population effect and extreme emotions, etc. It also represents various features in the cycle of public sentiment dissemination: single-line propagation in the initial period; booming dissemination in the gestation period; interactive communication in the fermentation period; a network of diffusion in the explosive period; and calmness in the recessive period. In light of this, the essay proposes that the government and the enterprise should take different emergency actions in each stage of public sentiment dissemination and strengthen scientific prediction and effective prevention of public sentiment dissemination.

Keywords: *new media, public sentiment management, internet public sentiment*

1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet from the 1.0 era to the 3.0 era, social media has developed vigorously and ushered in the new media era. Weibo, WeChat, online community and many other new media platforms emerged as the era required. According to the *Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* released by China Internet Network Information Center in July 2018, China had 802 million internet users, of which 788 million were mobile phone users, accounting for 98.3% of totality. Among netizens, 663 million people followed online news; and the number of netizens with a junior high school degree or above was 63%; students were the main force of internet using in our country; there are 19,868 government websites in China, and government departments and organizations at all levels have established new media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo[1]. It can be seen that the number of Internet users in China is growing, and students are in the majority. Based on the internet environment, new media dissemination has the characteristics of immediacy, fast transmission speed, hyperspace, wide coverage, and fragmentation. And the dissemination direction alters from one-way transmission to two-way communication. However, information distortion has become a major pain spot in new media dissemination. The Internet has changed the media environment and the traditional way of communication, so the dissemination of information and public sentiment has become the focus of the government and the enterprise as well as a hot issue in academic research. Combined with Communication Theory, many scholars have studied it from the perspective of the characteristics of public sentiment dissemination, the relationship between audience and transmitter in public sentiment dissemination, the judgment of public sentiment, the monitoring and guidance of public sentiment, the prevention of public sentiment, and the public relation crisis, hoping to play a supportive role in the theory of monitoring and management of public sentiment. Public sentiment management has become a realistic problem faced by the government and the enterprise in this era. The new media integrates the functions of collecting, reporting, tracking and responding to public sentiment information among the government, the enterprise and the public. These three parties influence and restrict each other, playing an critical role in the management of public sentiment.

Using the literature method, this essay starts with the characteristics of public sentiment dissemination in a new media environment, analyzes the relevant strategies and preventive measures of the government and the enterprise to deal with the development of public sentiment, and puts forward relevant suggestions. For one thing, a good mechanism for disclosing social

information can be set up to enhance the transparency of information and play a better role in managing and monitoring the dissemination and development of public sentiment. For another thing, it can effectively promote the interaction and feedback between the public, the government and the enterprise, establish a favorable mechanism for information dissemination and feedback, prevent the large-scale spread of public sentiment, and spare no effort to eliminate the negative impact and consequences of public sentiment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of New Media and Characteristics of its Dissemination

The word “new media” first appeared in the United States which was then taken into China. In domestic research, definitions of the new media have not formed a completely unified opinion and standards. Some scholars have defined it in terms of media, form and characteristics. This essay holds the view that the new media is a communication channels in essence with a low requirement for admittance and at low cost. The new media focuses on the digital display by the media based on internet technology. With deep interactivity and wide dissemination, the new media is a new kind of media for multiple and comprehensive communication[2]. Therefore, compared with the traditional media, the new media has its own uniqueness in dissemination: (1) Information sources vary. While dissemination of the traditional media mainly relies on the government and other official bodies, the transmitter of the new media can be either an individual or an organization; (2) The dissemination of information is more interactive and flexible. The public is no longer the receiver of information but the transmitter as well. The dissemination direction alters from one-way transmission to two-way communication which isn’t limited by time or space. Moreover, new media can customize news or infomercials according to individual preference; (3) Compared with the transmission path of the traditional media, the new media disseminates information via a network of wide coverage at higher speed and with diverse contents ranging from daily life to international trends. (4) The new media has strong autonomy. In a new media environment, the public can freely express their opinions or emotions. In general, these new characteristics have made the new media become a double-edged sword of public sentiment dissemination.

2.2 Characteristics of Public Sentiment Dissemination

In China, public sentiment is regarded as an expression of the will of the people, concerning the public attitude to the cause, progress and result of an emergency. The combination of the new media and public sentiment forms online public sentiment as a result. The dissemination of online public sentiment has the following characteristics: (1) The contents are divergent and transmitted fast in various forms, which makes it extremely easy to spread public sentiment but hard to monitor and guide the tendency as well as to check the sources of dissemination, bringing great challenges to guidance and supervision of public sentiment. On the other hand, it’s also conducive to the openness of information and the transparent execution of power, which sheds light on the behavior of the enterprise; (2) Assumptions and associations are easily generated in the process of public sentiment dissemination. The exposure of an event or a person in social circles is likely to trigger many conjectures of netizens. As shown in figure 1, the occurrence of an event of “the Pangolin Incident” tends to trigger other events and even to raise larger-scale public sentiment and strong sympathy. Such conjectures can lead to sudden bursts of public sentiment[3]; (3) The liberal dissemination of online public sentiment is apt to cause distortion and deviation of contents. As a result of the relative freedom of the network's speech, the convenient and quick operation, and the release of the emotion, the public use of the new media is prone to exaggeration, fabrication, and distortion of facts, exerting the forces of public sentiment on individuals, the government and the enterprise. (4) The viewpoints of public sentiment are diversified and tendentious, generating extreme opinions or emotions at the same time which will lead to extreme collective behaviors. The dissemination of public sentiment is a collective process of aggregating social opinions which vary from person to person. However, when people can see the viewpoints of others, there will be a

tendency of public sentiment in a short period which is transmitted based on multiples. Extreme views or emotions in the process of dissemination will also have a negative impact on the monitoring and guidance of public sentiment. Besides, in the dissemination of online public sentiment, public sentiment subject, public sentiment object and public sentiment entity are three core elements. In a new media environment, the subject of public sentiment may be a person, an enterprise or a government department. These three factors can interact or communicate with respect to an object and also can use various means on their own such as video, image and recording to release information. Therefore, such interactive and diverse means between subjects can provide a better way of guiding public sentiment.

The new characteristics of online public sentiment make the guidance and the supervision of public sentiment increasingly imperative, indirectly promote the development of public sentiment analysis and supervision technology, and also become a key issue in the daily work of the enterprise and government departments.

2.3 Life Cycle Theory of Public Sentiment Dissemination

The occurrence of online public sentiment is unexpected and unpredictable, so it is a test of an enterprise or a government's response to emergency and ability of handling the crisis. Meanwhile, because public sentiment is a process of regular occurrence, domestic scholars put forward the Life Cycle Theory of Public Sentiment Dissemination combining the Life Cycle theory and public sentiment dissemination. It is divided into several stages: In the initial period, it has the characteristics of single-line propagation; in the gestation period, the dissemination of information speeds up; in the fermentation period, there is interactive communication between subjects and object of public sentiment; in the explosive period, there is a network of aggregation and fusion; in the recessive period, public sentiment and emergencies gradually calm down and withdraw from public horizon. In terms of empirical evidence, domestic scholars also summarized the regular pattern, characteristics and evolution of public sentiment dissemination based on the analysis of special cases. As shown in figure 1, Hu Dongdong (2018) simulated the evolution of public sentiment in the course of an unexpected medical event[4]. Zeng Runxi (2010) selected the news that "A Director of Public Security Bureau abuses his power for personal gain" as a sample and found that the online dissemination of public sentiment is positively correlated with its source area, the media and time distribution on account of these factors[5]. Wang Xu (2017) took "Wei Zexi Event" as an example, dissected the key points of public sentiment dissemination by combining the Life Cycle Theory and analysis of social network, and put forward countermeasures in each stage of the life cycle[6]. There are also scholars such as Jin Xin (2012)[7] and Wang Guohua (2019)[8] who focus on the change of netizens' emotions in the process of online public sentiment dissemination. Lan Yuexin (2018) constructed a logistic model of online public sentiment dissemination through a qualitative analysis of its periodicity, concludes four key time points of online public sentiment dissemination as well as five transmission stages from a model analysis, studied the degree of three parameters on influencing online public sentiment dissemination based on the analog simulation of matlab and then verified it by instance[9]. Pawel Sobkowice (2012), a foreign scholar, deemed that stages of online public sentiment dissemination are closely connected by analyzing the changeable situation of netizens in the whole process of online public sentiment dissemination[10]. Chen F et al.(2011) did a social network analysis of the regular pattern of online public sentiment dissemination[11]. In addition, Daley DJ (2002) used the virus transmission model to divide transmitters into sources of infection, susceptible population and immune population, analyzed the regular pattern and characteristics of online public sentiment dissemination, and brought forward respective measures to shield different groups of transmitters and to enhance their immunity[12].

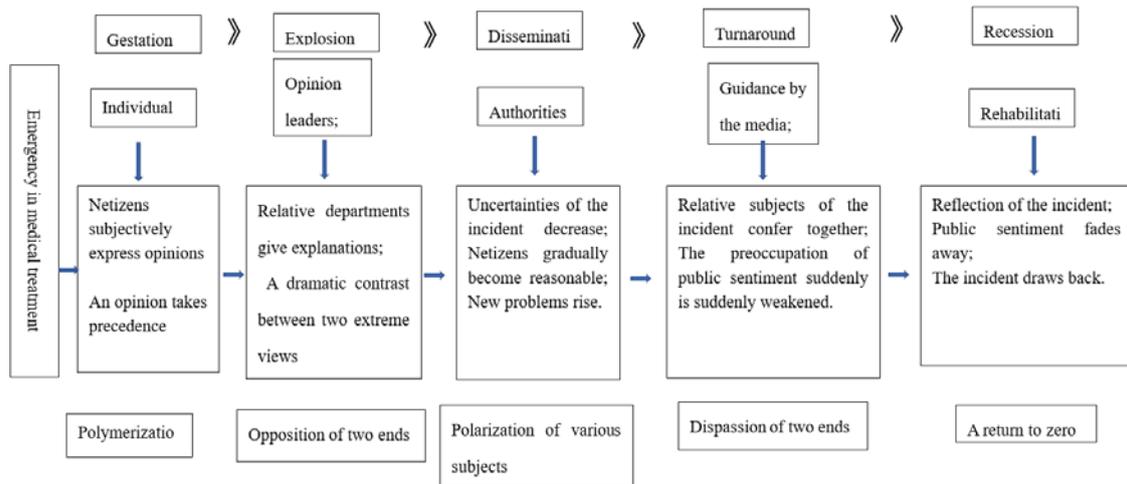


Fig. 1 Simulation of evolutionary stages of the public sentiment

3. Countermeasures of the Government and the Enterprise

This essay argues that any enterprises or government agencies in the public sentiment guidance need to follow the rules of public sentiment dissemination, and to adopt different strategies according to the characteristics of each stage. Thus, when processing public sentiment, the enterprise or the government must follow these principles: timeliness, accuracy, authenticity, openness and fairness, and should set up a responsibility system afterwards. Timeliness refers to the fact that the enterprise or the government can find out the situation of public sentiment primarily, give corresponding feedback so as to take the initiative in time and release relevant information to the public timely according to the progress of events. Accuracy refers to the accurate expression of professional or authoritative issues in emergencies, which means the statement of public sentiment subjects, especially the use of numbers and words, should be standardized and precise. Authenticity indicates the process of explaining events without concealing, omitting, or covering up the truth, and treating the dissemination of public sentiment. Fairness and openness means to disclose materials and information involved in public sentiment objects, and to treat emergencies fairly without favoritism. The responsibility system means that in the process of dealing with public sentiment, the responsibility should be divided clearly so that the relevant personnel can assume the responsibility and the injured people can get compensation. Following these principles can effectively reduce the negative impact of public sentiment and restore or improve the reputation of the enterprise as well as the credibility of government departments.

Following the above principles, the enterprise or the government need to take specific measures to guide the spread of public sentiment and prevent the spread on a larger scale. Taking government departments as an example, firstly, it is necessary to effectively classify public sentiment and use big data and other public sentiment monitoring methods to supervise and control the spread of public sentiment as a whole. Secondly, they should find the key nodes of public sentiment dissemination, give effective feedback to public sentiment and grasp the opportunity. Thirdly, it's necessary to find an opinion leaders in the public sentiment through large data analysis, such as the person who receives the most comments or the new media platform which releases large amount of information, and then communicate with them quickly, respect the idea of the opinion leaders. Through communication and feedback, the opinion leaders can become reliable information generators, play their roles in guidance and communication in order to nudge the public sentiment on the track. Fourthly, administrative agencies need to release official information timely and use the mainstream news media to report events so that the public can focus on the mainstream official media which can reduce the generation and spread of rumors. Fifthly, as for events which are closely related to the personal and property security of people and daily life, the government should hold press conferences timely, and then clearly show the governmental attitude. At the same time, the government should tell the public something meaningful, take responsibility actively, and

release the whole event including the responsibility and results timely. On top of that, the government should reflect on the loopholes in administration and propose effective solutions to avoid the occurrence of such things based on the previous incidents. The government, as a service platform, should put itself in others' shoes in dealing with public sentiment. It should not only be fair and open but also be dedicated and always put the interests of people in the first place. Therefore, in the guidance of public sentiment, the government requires the support of big data at the technical level and professional staff at the managerial level.

The enterprise, as a part of business community, is aimed at making profits by nature. The public sentiment environment faced by the enterprise may be more complicated than that faced by government departments. In particular, the emergence of new media makes the enterprise more likely to encounter risks of public sentiment. Thus, in addition to measures above, the enterprise needs to pay more attention to the handling of entities in the guidance of public sentiment[13]. They should not only accelerate the disclosure of information, but also look highly of the substance and quality of the contents. With regard to the root problems, they should lay more stress on final results and effects of disposition, and immediately take relevant actions instead of indulging in empty talk or blind emotions. Besides, interaction and feedback with the public is are of vital importance. When dealing with crisis, the enterprise can propagate the brand image, give a favourable impression to the public, promote the popularity of the brand and take a turn for the opportunity out of danger by interacting well with the public. The enterprise can also request the help of authorities[14], detection institutions or the mainstream media to report the facts timely in public.

For the enterprise, the government or the society, the dissemination of public sentiment in a new media environment can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it not only makes the government and the enterprise strengthen governance and provide best services, but also enables people to better exercise the right of supervision. On the other hand, it is likely to confuse the public and distort the facts. Although the side-effect is inevitable, effective guidance can nudge public sentiment in the right direction and turn the corner.

4. Conclusion

This essay combines public sentiment dissemination with the characteristics of new media and puts forward effective measures for the enterprise and the government to guide public sentiment. In daily life, the prevention of public sentiment is equally important so the enterprise and the government need to improve their sensitivity to public sentiment and attach importance to the prevention of public sentiment. In order to avoid the risk of public sentiment, when carrying out marketing activities, the enterprise should uphold the principle of moderation rather than exaggerate too much or deceive the public. Meanwhile, customer service should be attached great importance. As the front-line personnel in contact with customers, customer service staff can best perceive the degree of satisfaction or emotional changes of customers, which requires them to be sensitive about public sentiment and give adequate feedback. The managements should have ability to judge and analyze public sentiment. They shall strengthen corporate governance, constantly improve the quality of products and services, and strictly control the occurrence of public sentiment. When public sentiment emerges, they should face it and take the initiative to get to the entities instead of dealing with superficial problems. As for the government, the effective measures to manage public sentiment is to face up to the impact of new media, establish an effective monitoring mechanism based on big data through technology implementation, improve the openness of government information, and promote the nurture of talents in the field of new media.

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