

Review of Online Public Opinions on Military Affairs and Guidance

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ABSTRACT

The development of network has profoundly shaped public opinion and functions as a channel of propaganda. The guidance of online military-related public opinion has become one of the important tasks of military and political work in the new era. It is necessary to dominate online information dissemination, strengthen the regulation and management of online military-related information, effectively carry out guidance of online public opinion, and strive to master the initiative and leading power of network ideology. Therefore, how to create an ideal environment for public opinion and strengthen the guidance of online public opinion on military-related affairs is a hot topic that urgently needs in-depth study to enhance the army and national security for the party.

Keywords: *public opinion; online public opinion on military affairs; guidance*

1. Public Opinion and Online Public Opinion

Studies on public opinion started earlier in western countries with a history of nearly 200 years from its beginning to maturity. At present, a complete theoretical and application system has been formed. In foreign literatures, "public comments", "will of the people" and "public sentiment" can be traced back to the phrase "public opinion". The development of western studies on public opinion witnessed a transition from philosophy to sociology from the mid-19th century to the beginning of the 20th century before it turned to social psychology in the middle of last century. Since then, it shifted focus to studies on public opinion and combined researches on collective behavior with social psychology, people's attitude with their opinion, and political behavior with mass communication.[1] Among these researches, survey of public opinion, which collects people's opinions on government and related issues in the public domain via a systematic, scientific and quantitative approach to investigate and analyze the trend of public opinion, has become a hot field. It is also called public opinion poll, which provides references based on the tendency of public opinion for governments and NGOs in the formulation, revision and implementation of public policies or related decisions.[2] The results of researches on public opinion serve not only the government, political parties, but also enterprises and non-profit organizations. By investigating the public's views on social issues, market research, government decision-making and other issues, it is possible to gain an accurate understanding of the public's acceptance and response to related issues.

Domestic researches on public opinion began at the end of the 20th century. However, due to the differences in social forms, the focus of researches in China is slightly different from that of foreign countries. The expression "public opinion" was formed in the Chinese context. Before 2000, there was no such concept in China as domestic scholars were focusing on public comments and the will of people in the modern world. At present, the boundary between public opinion and public comment has gradually blurred due to the change of media environment and social context. Wang Laihua, director of the Institute of Public Opinion of Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, gave the modern definition of public opinion in his work: in a narrow sense, public opinion refers to the social and political attitude of the public towards the officials of the state based on the occurrence, development and change of intermediary social events in a certain social space.

Wang Laihu's research pointed out a drastic difference between public opinion and official and media opinion. Public opinion emphasizes and highlights the public's social and political attitude, that is to say, there are "two different sources of opinions"[3]. With more and more scholars devoted to researches on public opinion, a number of papers and works have been published one after another. The definition of public opinion has more to do with the will of people, which have been widely recognized. Professor Ding Baiquan, a well-known scholar on public opinion researches from the Department of Journalism and Communication of Nanjing University, emphasized that public opinion includes both the will of people and their responses to hot issues and internal emotional reactions. "It is the natural expression and embodiment of social tendency and public emotions." [4] In recent years, researches on public opinion emphasizes direct interest and mutual influence among the public, the ruling party

and the government. Researches on public opinion must highlight itself as a “discipline that serves policy making” from the beginning, so as to adapt itself to specific conditions of China. We believe that public opinion, or “the trend of public opinion”, refers to the general public attitudes, opinions and emotions aroused by specific social events and changes in their occurrence and development in social space.

Online public opinion came into being with the rapid development of Internet information technology and the formation of massive Internet users. Since 2000, researches on “online public opinion” and “Internet public opinion” have emerged in domestic academic journals. In recent years, with the popularization of the Internet and smart terminals as well as the rapid development of self-media relying on them, “the collapse of the central discourse right, the change of communication mode and the extension of the virtual world provide fertile soil for the formation of online public opinion” [5], which makes “online public opinion” a hot topic in academic researches that focus on “people’s social and political attitude”, “people’s opinions, attitudes and emotions” and “social conditions and public opinion” [6]. Based on discussions among scholars, the definition of online public opinion is mainly given from two perspectives. First, for the media, it is believed that the online public opinion is spread in cyberspace, which is a reflection of public emotions, wishes, attitudes and opinions that have a certain influence and a certain tendency on social events. Second, based on the social and psychological characteristics of netizens, it is believed that online public opinion, open or anonymous, is the public’s response and attitudes to social phenomena and problems in cyberspace. These factors, based on the social and psychological structure of cyberspace, have a constant impact on the outside world through interaction until all parties reach a general agreement. There are obvious differences between the two definitions. The first viewpoint stressed the technical background of online public opinion, but ignored the significant differences between people’s minds in virtual space and real world. As a result, it tends to control public opinion simply by deleting and sealing posts, which in fact, has great limitations. At a deeper level, online public opinion is a social phenomenon that reflects specific social and psychological characteristics. Research on it has both theoretical value and profound social significance. Researches on monitoring and guiding online public opinion, in particular, should focus on exerting positive social effects and improving the government’s social governance.

2. Online Public Opinions on Military Affairs and Guidance

In China, online public opinion on military affairs is a key part of online public opinion, which bears similarity to online public opinion on general affairs but also has its particularity. Its distinction comes from the core elements

of online public opinion, namely, the subject, object, social affairs, space-time and the ontology of public opinion. [6] From the perspective of subject and space-time factors, online public opinion on military affairs is basically consistent with that concerning general affairs. Online public opinion on military affairs is formed in cyberspace where 24-h cross-regional information dissemination becomes the norm, and the subjects usually includes netizens or self-media. With the vigorous development of new media and technologies, self-media is gaining momentum and playing an increasingly influential role on the Internet. Online public opinion on military affairs, unlike opinion on general affairs, has more to do with the military or army. It is even believed that whatever has to do with the army will surely become a hot topic online. Social affairs involved in online public opinion on military affairs are usually intermediary affairs or events related to the “military”. According to PLA Daily, online public opinions on military affairs also includes contents shown in Table 1 in addition to fake news in the name of soldiers and army.

The ontology of online public opinion is the collection of emotions, wishes, attitudes, opinions and behavioral tendencies of participants. Online public opinion on military affairs reflects political, cultural and sociopsychological motivations as a reflection of political and social problems. Therefore, scientific and effective supervision and guidance are urgently needed to monitor online public opinion.

Table 1 Contents Involved in Online Public Opinion on Military Affairs

No.	Online Public Opinion on Military Affairs
1	Major reforms of national defense mechanisms and military forces
2	Major military maneuver and other non-war military operations
3	Defense and Security Analysis
4	R&D and assembly of new weapons and equipment
5	Promulgation and implementation of major military laws and regulations
6	Changes of senior military officials
7	Visits by (or to) high-level military officials
8	Negative news such as violations of laws and regulations by soldiers
9	Joint construction activities by the military and local government
10	Distinctive model of the country and the whole army

At present, most of the research results believe that online public opinion on military affairs refers to people’s

opinions, attitudes, feelings online to the occurrence, development and changes of military information or events. We believe that public opinion on military affairs is a very significant part of online public opinion, which bears similarity to public opinion on general affairs but also has its particularity. Its distinction refers to the attitudes, emotions, wishes, opinions and behavioral tendencies gradually produced among netizens on issues related to national defense and the military, which are influenced by online interactions to form online public opinion with obvious bias and considerable social influence.

Online public opinion on military affairs has its own particularity because unlike general affairs, military affairs have distinct political features (namely politics determines military action while military action serves politics), usually with hostile forces behind it. The army led by CCP is a revolutionary armed group. Activities concerning national defense and army building are prone to be interpreted politically by the outside forces, thereby being used as a political weapon against the party and government by hostile forces. Out of concern about politics and the future development of the country, Chinese netizens tend to overreact to such phenomenon. With continuous accumulation of attention online, the “Domino” effect would come into play and trigger a chain reaction, extending the issue in question to other problems and contradictions in national defense and army building, and leading people to question or even deny China’s social system, economic development and ideology in many aspects, thus arousing social conflicts at a deeper level and inducing mass disturbances. Second, the “bystander effect” and remarkable social sensitivity. In the new era of national defense and army building, the military has continuously expanded its functional missions and tasks, with an increasing number of non-war military operations and network exposure. The ever-faster information dissemination helps attract more attention from the outside world. In this situation, military-related news has become the focus of netizens’ attention, which could be disseminated to various groups at an exponential speed after a short period of interactive evolution, thus spreading the event in a blowout way and finally inducing a storm of public opinion. Third, there are a number of interest groups involved, which makes it more difficult to control public opinion. Because national defense and army construction are related to the stability of the whole country, the development of the Chinese nation, the geopolitical balance and the international pattern, public opinion on military affairs, especially online public opinion on military affairs, is prone to become a hot spot in China and arouse attention from the international world, which could lead to different interpretations and multiple linkages between different interest groups at home and abroad, thus further complicating the situation. In particular, hostile forces at home and abroad often induce negative reactions with the help of public opinion on military affairs to further complicate the situation, making the control of public opinion more difficult.

The guidance of online public opinion on military affairs could be compared to crisis management aiming at

minimizing negative effects and guiding the positive development of public opinion through monitoring, early warning, prevention, control and trend analysis, thus effectively resolving conflicts and crisis. The monitoring of online public opinion on military affairs refers to the supervision and prediction of online public remarks and opinions on the military. These remarks are mainly targeted at hot issues in army building and reform, which have strong influence and inclination. The early warning of online public opinion on military affairs mainly refers to the necessary and effective actions taken to deal with and resolve the influence of public opinion when the public opinion starts to emerge until perceptible losses are caused by such opinion. The prevention of online public opinion on military affairs is mainly accomplished via monitoring of the trend of public opinion, including positive communication with concerned groups, improvement of online environment of public opinion, and deletion of information which could have negative impact in time. The control of online public opinion on military affairs is mainly carried out by information control based on laws and regulations and utilization of technical means, thus blocking and filtering negative information online.

The national information security of China is facing a serious threat. For example, in recent years, overseas intelligence agencies have used the Internet to launch large-scale cyber espionage and attacks to key departments and industries in China, with intensified surveillance and attacks to China's industrial Internet, Internet of Things, blockchain and greater infiltration and counterespionage of personnel working at China's national defense scientific research institutions and military enterprises. Infiltration and counterespionage has been one of the most important and hidden approach, which utilizes online forces and professional spies to discredit the image of army, heroes and the leadership of the ruling party over the army so as to compromise the faith and belief of personnel in key departments and fields to the ruling party and induce them to leak and sell secret information to the hostile forces. Therefore, it is urgent and necessary to enhance guidance of online public opinion on military affairs and establish a perfect monitoring system of Internet security of public opinion perception to effectively monitor and regulate the guidance of online military-related information and improve Internet security, thus maintaining national information security.

3. Conclusion

Generally, online public opinion refers to the sum of social hot issues and related information and processes occurring and developing on the Internet. The occurrence and development of online public opinion feature synchronous and interrelated transmission on traditional and new media online and offline, with high-profile micro-bloggers playing a guiding role to lead social reactions to public events. Online public opinion is not a self-generated novel creature, but an expansion of attitudes, opinions and emotions flowing from traditional media to a new media.

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