

# Research on the Prevention and Resolution Mechanism of False Public Opinion in Major Emergencies ——Taking COVID-19 Pandemic as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

Major emergencies often become the focus of public attention, forming a huge amount of relevant public opinion, and a large number of false public opinions take advantage of the opportunity to instigate public sentiment, guide bad guidance, and cause serious obstacles to the handling of major emergencies. This article takes the recent outbreak of new crown pneumonia as an entry point, analyzes the characteristics and causes of false public opinion in current major emergencies, and proposes to establish a "one center, three-party coordination" major emergency false public opinion joint defense Joint control mechanism.

**Keywords:** Major emergencies, False public opinion, COVID-19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Major emergencies refer to public emergencies that are sudden, have a wide impact, have a long duration, and seriously endanger the safety of people's lives and properties. The outbreak of a major emergency is a severe impact on the ability of a country's emergency response system and governance. Tests and great challenges <sup>[1]</sup>. The recent outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is a typical major public health emergency. Since the outbreak, General Secretary Xi Jinping has personally deployed and scientifically guided prevention and control work, and has repeatedly emphasized the need to "do a good job in publicity, education and public opinion guidance, and strengthen the network. Media control, strengthen the publicity and interpretation of policy measures, promote the implementation of main responsibility, supervisor responsibility and supervision responsibility, continue to boost social confidence, and provide strong public opinion support for winning the battle against epidemic prevention and control" <sup>[2]</sup>. This article takes the false public opinion phenomenon during COVID-19 pandemic as an example, analyzes the characteristics and causes of false public opinion in current major emergencies, and

then explores the prevention and resolution mechanism of false public opinion in major emergencies.

## 2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE PUBLIC OPINION UNDER COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### 2.1. Strong seditiousness

During COVID-19 pandemic, all kinds of false public opinions were rampant, especially in the early stages of the epidemic. Makers of false public opinions took advantage of people's panic and fragile psychology to post highly infectious and sensitive topics, and attracted a large number of them through continuous forwarding. Supporters of "Unknown Truth". A large number of false public opinions forcibly associate the epidemic information with "ism", "system", "nation", etc., directing the spearhead directly at the socialist system, the government's ability to govern and restrict human rights, etc. <sup>[3]</sup>, such as the initial period of Wuhan's lockdown, "Wuhan will be fully taken over by the People's Liberation Army", "China conceals real epidemic information, monitors network traffic, and deletes any epidemic information that does not match

official data." This information discredited the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government as an "authoritarian" ruling class, and described Wuhan as a purgatory without "human rights" and "freedom", greatly undermining the credibility of the Chinese government and inciting all people to stand on the opposite side of the government. The government's professional anti-epidemic measures have been seriously misunderstood.

### ***2.2 "Internet opinion leader" effect***

As American artist Andy Warhol said: "In modern society, everyone has 15 minutes to become famous" [4]. Various "Weibo big V", "web anchors", well-known public accounts, etc. are active on WeChat, Weibo, Zhihu, Douyin, Kuaishou and other platforms, pushing massive amounts of information every day, forming a "Internet opinion leader" effect [5], that is, well-known Internet celebrities who gain the right to speak in a certain field after sending more accurate or valuable information to netizens on the Internet. During COVID-19 pandemic, many well-known self-media and Internet celebrities used their traffic advantages to over-interpret the difficulties faced by the medical and nursing groups and the situation of Wuhan residents, etc., and uploaded the information they released without confirming them. The pictures and texts do not match. The phenomenon is endless.

### ***2.3. The game of international public opinion is becoming increasingly fierce***

China has made great sacrifices to fight the epidemic, and has also bought two months for other countries in the world to fight the epidemic, and will provide other countries with anti-epidemic experience and materials in the later stage. However, the governments, leaders, and media of a few Western countries have stigmatized China's anti-epidemic facts and tried to guide international public opinion to criticize the Chinese government and international system. The White House has repeatedly asked the State Department and other national departments to strengthen public opinion offensives against China. US President Trump has repeatedly referred to the new crown pneumonia virus as a "Chinese virus" in public. The British mainstream media "The Times" is fighting the epidemic in China. Related reports are also full of prejudice and smear [6]. These countries and media have spared no effort to manipulate international public opinion, trying to create a negative image of "darkness," "undemocratic," and "unfreedom" for the Chinese camp.

## **3. REASONS FOR FALSE PUBLIC OPINION**

### ***3.1. The inequality between information demand and information release***

Allport pointed out that the dissemination of rumors or inappropriate information needs to meet the following two conditions: one is that most people are interested or concerned about something, and the other is the lack of information [7]. In the face of such a highly contagious new virus, some government departments and professional institutions used professional jargon or lengthy speeches when releasing information, which created a gap between information demand and information supply, and made it difficult for the public to grasp the truth of the matter. At this time, the producers of false public opinion also took advantage of the emptiness, through one-sided or excessive interpretation of relevant real information and spread false public opinion through popular, popular, and diversified languages, pictures or videos. For these false public opinions, most people's opinions The mentality is to be more trustworthy than what is untrustworthy, and to be skeptical of the information and data disclosed by relevant government departments, especially false public opinion with a small part of the real information, which makes it difficult for the public to distinguish, believe in, and exaggerate, which exacerbates people. Panic.

### ***3.2. Profit-driven, attracting attention***

In modern society, information is resources, hotspots are business opportunities, and traffic is money. The progress of major emergencies is often the focus of public attention. Any false public opinion related to major emergencies may harvest huge traffic and thus obtain huge amounts of illegal benefits. Some criminals are just taking advantage of people's panic and attention. Create false public opinions on the Internet that are of interest to people and are closely related to major emergencies, and gain the attention of a large number of fans to increase their popularity and influence in a short period of time. A small number of online opinion leaders use their influence in certain areas to actively collude with unscrupulous manufacturers and enterprises to help them falsely propagate, launch unfair market competition and release to disrupt the supply and demand relationship of some products in the market, and achieve the purpose of grabbing huge profits. For example, in the early stage of COVID-19 pandemic, the price of masks in some areas soared, the prices of food and daily supplies in some areas soared, and some medicines were snapped up.

### ***3.3. Participation of foreign forces***

In the face of COVID-19 pandemic this time, China's timely response, strong prevention and control, and the

“collective fallout” of Western countries have formed a clear correspondence, making it difficult for some countries that think they have institutional advantages to accept. As a result, the whole country has made efforts to create and publish false public opinions and topics, and present the characteristics of strategic, organizational, and manipulative nature. With the help of the government, officials, and influential media, false public opinions that damage China's image are released wantonly. Max Blumenthal, the founder of the US "Gray Zone" website, summarized the US public opinion war against China from "official release" to media processing, and then to politicians responding and cooperating with each other to dominate international public opinion that is detrimental to China. To promote the international community's cognitive biases and collective assumptions about China's fight against the epidemic. The penetration of false public opinion in Western countries not only relies on their domestic media, but in China they have also "funded" a group of information publishing platforms and individuals manipulated by them for their services. They have driven netizens to hate the government on various domestic social network platforms and incited extreme dissatisfaction, mood.

### ***3.4. Unprofessional response by the government***

After major emergencies, the appearance of false public opinion is a normal matter. In the process of response, individual governments blindly block, monopolize the right to speak online, and frequently use methods such as concealment, deletion of posts, and admonitions to control public opinion. In a modern society where information is so developed, only "blocking" and not "restricting" will only lead to antagonism between the government and the public, between the government and various media platforms, and ultimately lead to widespread dissemination of negative emotions in the society. For example, in the case of Dr. Li Wenliang, he was reprimanded for "publishing false statements" for releasing relevant information on the epidemic in the early stage based on his own practice experience, but finally died of infection with the new crown pneumonia virus, although Dr. Li Wenliang was not precise enough in his statement. But it does not affect people's basic judgments about the epidemic, but the relevant government departments will punish them without screening, causing extremely bad effects, destroying the government's image in people's minds, and becoming a false public opinion that provokes public sentiment. The breakthrough point.

## **4. ESTABLISH A "ONE CENTER, THREE-PARTY COORDINATION" MECHANISM FOR JOINT PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF FALSE PUBLIC OPINION IN MAJOR EMERGENCIES**

False public opinion under major emergencies is based on major emergencies with a wide range of influence and strong destructive power. The main responsibility of the emergency management department established in 2018 is to guide all regions and departments in responding to emergencies. Establish a disaster report system and publish the disaster situation uniformly. Therefore, the emergency management department is placed at the center of handling major emergencies, comprehensively coordinating human and material resources, and launching timely and professional disaster relief work. False public opinion involves a wide range of areas, is difficult to verify, and is easy to cause secondary public crises. Therefore, based on the Emergency Management Department as the center, actively play the role of local government departments, social organizations and key individuals to jointly prevent and resolve false public opinions. Establish a joint prevention and control mechanism for false public opinion in major emergencies centered on the Emergency Management Department, local government departments, social organizations and key individuals. In specific responses, different departments and organizations work together to undertake different functions.

### ***4.1. Emergency Management Department***

As the command center for handling major emergencies, the Emergency Management Department has the most comprehensive information on major emergencies. Therefore, an official major emergency information release platform has been established under the Emergency Management Department. This platform is responsible for the release of major emergencies at home and abroad. The latest development of the function, the use of the Internet, TV, radio, newspapers, in the form of text, pictures, short videos, etc., publish official news in an all-round and three-dimensional manner to correctly guide the direction of public opinion. We also designate relevant local government WeChat public accounts, Weibo, video accounts and mainstream media as platforms to dispel rumors, to detect false public opinions in a timely manner, quickly dispel rumors, and control the influence of false public opinions to a minimum. In addition, always pay attention to foreign public opinion offensives, strengthen organizational capabilities and skills in response to international public opinion wars, especially in collaboration with multiple departments, establish an integrated public opinion propaganda capability of a major event release platform-government-media, and follow up on relevant false

public opinions. Advance and in-depth interpretation, and publish on online social platforms and mainstream media in various countries in a reporting method that is willing to accept by international audiences to improve the effectiveness and continuity of public opinion counterattacks.

#### **4.2. Local government departments**

When responding to false public opinions in major emergencies, the local government must find a balance between "law enforcement and punishment" and "public opinion classification guidance." Ability to deal with false public opinions in emergencies. On the one hand, after the occurrence of major emergencies, strengthen the legal management and special rectification of false public opinion, increase the enforcement and punishment of false public opinion producers, and promptly report relevant models to form a deterrent to false public opinion disseminators. A clean and vigorous network ecological environment. On the other hand, to distinguish false public opinion, it can be divided into insinuating political public opinion, exploratory public opinion, cognitive error public opinion, etc.<sup>[8]</sup>, according to different types of false public opinion, adopt different strategies and methods to conduct differentiated management of false public opinion guidance.

Giving play to the active role of grassroots party building organizations and community organizations is fundamental and strategic in preventing and resolving false public opinions in major emergencies. By building a pattern of preventing and resolving false public opinion with party committee leadership, grassroots responsibility, and participation of the masses, the masses' centripetal force towards the party and the country is strengthened. Advocacy for the prevention and resolution of multiple social conflicts and disputes to promote the modernization of grassroots social governance. First, improve the emergency response mechanism of the grass-roots party committees. When major emergencies occur, establish a command system with efficient linkage, up and down, and flexible operation to deploy specific tasks to the grassroots organizations; secondly, to the township (street) and village committees. And other grassroots organizations are empowered to give full play to their advantages in close contact with the people, guide the general public to trust the designated official release platform, not to be a booster for the spread of false public opinion, and finally take the initiative to let the masses participate in the false public opinion. In the work of dispelling rumors, the masses with strong discriminating ability are mobilized to dispel rumors and guide the masses who have fallen into false public opinion.

#### **4.3. Social organization**

Major emergencies include natural disasters, major public health incidents, and large-scale pollution of hazardous chemicals. These incidents involve a wide range of fields and are highly professional. In the face of these major emergencies, it is difficult for non-professional personnel to distinguish public opinion. True or false, this is also an important reason why governments at all levels improperly deal with false public opinions in response to major emergencies. Therefore, the establishment of expert think tanks in the public health system, natural disaster system, hazardous chemical system and other industries. In the face of major emergencies, the emergency management department will select expert think tank members to assist local governments in timely research and judgment of suspected false public opinions monitored. Respond with professionals to improve disposal efficiency.

The network platform is open and virtual, and has weak binding force on network actors. Therefore, some people regard the network platform as a free place to vent their self and release their instincts, or even a "grey area" of legal supervision. When disseminating the message, make assumptions and "add oil and vinegar" to gain attention and gain a sense of self-satisfaction. The online platform is not only a medium of communication, but also has the obligation to conduct self-regulation and value guidance on the content displayed on the platform. When major emergencies occur, pay attention to the hot public opinion on the platform in a timely manner, set up relevant review channels to limit the release of false public opinion, and assist the government in monitoring and penalizing related false public opinion accounts. In addition, establish a professional and systematic normative value guidance mechanism to guide users on the platform to resist false public opinions and believe in mainstream reports.

#### **4.4. Key individuals**

Information transmission in mass communication is carried out according to the "media-opinion leader-audience" model. Network opinion leaders are the central node of two-level communication. Grasping those network opinion leaders who dominate negative public opinion can effectively prevent the spread of negative public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the supervision of the "critical minority" in the process of dissemination of false public opinion. In the network opinion leader group, there is also a top-down relationship between influence and being influenced. The network opinion leaders are also hierarchical, and the low-level network opinion leaders are deeply influenced by the high-level network opinion leaders. Whether it is rumors or negative public opinion, the online actors with absolute control are often just a few high-level online

opinion leaders. If the network opinion leaders who dominate negative public opinion are the key, then the few high-level network opinion leaders who influence the opinions and attitudes of these opinion leaders are the key. Since high-level Internet opinion leaders are often associated with certain interest groups or reactionary forces, stricter control measures must be taken for their anomie behaviors.

Strengthening the public opinion guidance of mainstream opinion leaders is an effective means to effectively curb the negative effects of public opinion and eliminate the harm of anomie behaviors of online opinion leaders. Actively cultivate online opinion leaders with correct values and many fans, use their influence and appeal to educate and guide online audiences on correct values when major emergencies occur, and use the power of online supporters to keep mainstream voices occupied. The height of public opinion. At the same time, let mainstream Internet opinion leaders actively debate with those who hold false opinions, use the power of facts to break their false public opinion, and use rational and objective voices to refute their radical remarks, so that the refutation of rumors will be more convincing.

The cultivation of internet opinion leaders mainly includes the cultivation of government internet opinion leaders and ordinary netizen opinion leaders. Among them, government network opinion leaders on behalf of the government announce the development of information in a timely manner, interpret the country's policies and guidelines for responding to emergencies; cultivate expert-type network opinion leaders, carry out relevant science education to the public, and provide constructive suggestions for the development of specific work. Ordinary netizen opinion leaders collect online public opinion and appeals to understand the basic living conditions of netizens. Internet public opinion governance is an indispensable work content for dealing with major emergencies, and the key to governance lies in Internet opinion leaders. Establishing and cultivating different types of Internet opinion leaders in all fields will enhance mainstream opinions in the Internet field. Influence and direction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After major emergencies, due to information asymmetry and unprofessional government response, driven by some forces and groups, the risk of false public opinion generation and spread has increased. These false public opinions are highly provocative and are important venues for international public opinion games. At the same time, a small number of "Internet opinion leaders" play a non-negligible role in them. In order to prevent and resolve the spread of false public opinion, the emergency management department, local government departments, social organizations and key individuals should play their respective roles to build a central and three coordinated

major emergency false public opinion joint prevention and control mechanism, so as to deal with emergencies more efficiently and maintain social stability.

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