

Analysis on the Influence of Water Army on Public Opinion on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

Water army is a kind of employed netizens which appear most in some hot-trend topics to oriented other netizens' opinion to these specific topics. Therefore, it has also gradually led to the uncertainty of people's orientation to public opinion. Weibo, as one of the most commonly used new media among Chinese netizens, and a new public opinion-making tool. The "Cyber Water Army" has been lurking around people, deliberately guiding people's views on hot-button events. Such actions of the Water army may cover up the fact of some social events due to the capital power taken by some entertainment companies and also prevent Weibo's communication of freedom as a social media. Therefore, many "The Spiral of Silence" phenomenon appear on Weibo and lead to the unbalanced social contact power between normal netizens and Water army. This paper discussed the influence of people from "network water army" and took the "network water army" which appeared on Weibo as the main research object. According to the research on the data of Chinese netizens structure and the real examples of some cases and social events caused by water army, basically concluded how the water army brings negative influence to the network society and how to use the spiral of silence to achieve its purpose.

Keywords: *Social media, water army, public opinion, theory of The Spiral of Silence*

1. INTRODUCTION

Network water army means that some organizations employ netizens on the Internet to make uniform and oriented statements about specific events to achieve certain purposes.

The Internet is a product of modern electronic computers and a great embodiment of information thinking. Up to now, the world is constantly updated in the network transmission speed, which also benefited from the development of the Internet. The transmission of information was further expanded after the birth of the Internet, which consolidated the thinking of information. In the age of the new media, information spreads more rapidly. Weibo, as an important channel for Chinese netizens to get news on current affairs and express their personal attitude ideas, can influence people's opinions. As of June 2020, the use of Weibo by Chinese netizens was about 40.4% [4]. These data represent a great radiation power and influence on network society. There are also a lot of people involved in hot topics. Many businesses, entertainment companies, artists public relations departments take

advantage of the large number of users of Weibo, freedom of expression characteristics, the use of "network water army" deliberately guide the masses of ideas, and public opinion-oriented [1]. As a new kin of netizen, some researchers believe that network water army often disguises business topics as social life topics to attract attention [2, 3]. In this way, the deliberately created public opinions of others are mixed in the camp of public opinion, expressing the involuntary public opinion and concealing the naturally formed public opinion.

2. WATER ARMY'S BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTIC

According to some trending topics in February, water army appeared frequently under the trending topics' tags. For example, under the same trending topic, water army used similar language to defend the topic main character. Water army often use the expressions like "I support XXX, and I think this event should listen to his own response"; "A clean hand wants no washing. (which meant the wise man can judge correctly instead of being misguiding by incorrect fact)". These kinds of

language had strong subjective information and clear supported objects. A large amount of these languages appeared at the same time may cause the suspect from other netizens. Furthermore, in their personal home pages, every microblog posted carried a hot search topic tag and made many similar or repeated statements.

Moreover, the group of water army even tweeted the same content aimed at one trending topic. From the language they used, the characters are completely copied. From this point of view, it was more reflected that these people were acting as "water army" on the network.

On the other hand, compared with an index trend of Weibo with the example of the topic about Chinese artist "Liu Haocun studio response". It did reach its topic discussion peak on the same day when these water army post the relevant microblogs which showed the positive tendency to this artist of this event.

Network marketing refers to enterprises, businesses in addition to the use of traditional media and ways to promote products, etc., in the network to carry out a means of promotion. First of all, the cost of promoting on the network is low. Secondly, the number of netizens is very large. Of China's 1.4 billion people, about 940 million had Internet users as of 2020.6 [4]. A large audience is a great opportunity for businesses. Whether it is an artist or a product, they are a must for a company or a business to survive. And artists and products on the word-of-mouth on a large part of the impact on the company's corporate brand image. And it directly affects the company and enterprise's income and economy. Therefore, when faced with controversial star topics, such as negative, brokerage company's network public relations department had to buy "network water army" for the star "clarify." To ensure that those "bad reviews" of the public awareness are minimized. If it is a positive topic, it is good for the company itself. That public relations department and propaganda department will also buy water army to carry forward, spread the star's excellent deeds to refresh the public's understanding of the star's positive image. In addition, when promoting commercial products, such as a snack, in the numerous network water army retweeted related tweets, praise its products. Even on buying platforms such as Taobao, the merchants will ask the water army to do the "brush list" behavior. (A "brush list" means that a merchant hires a specific group of people to buy the product, which is reviewed online with beautiful videos and praise comments to give customers the illusion that the product is very useful or delicious.) Merchants are deliberately spending money to create positive reviews and over-forwarding to attract customers and promote their products. The benefit behind it must be that the merchant has made a considerable profit. It also creates the characteristics of hot sales and high evaluation of this product. Inevitably,

though, poor reviews of the product were published after real customers were "induced". Complaints are not as good as comments or businesses say. However, a certain number of times will be the merchant once again with the "water army" cover. Judging from the above "water army" behavior, the employment of "water army" for commercial profits will produce an oriented evaluation of public opinion.

3. HOW DOES "WATER ARMY" AFFECT PUBLIC OPINION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

3.1. Negative

As a factor that disturbs the social order, the network water army maliciously kidnaps public opinion and confuses the truth. There are restrictions on allowing microblogging, a place where everyone can speak freely and disrupted the original network order. Earlier, a piece of related news said that Sinopec was exposed to ask employees as water army to support the oil price increase as ordinary Internet users. When the results were made public, they aroused serious dissatisfaction and ridicule from netizens and the official media of the relevant society. And this kind of "support the oil price increases" talk is not in the public mind and ultimately fails to achieve its purpose. This example reflects that not only the water army will affect the public but also those who appoint water army to add comments will also be negatively affected. This act of "acting as public opinion" is extremely undesirable and will be caused by the cyber water army. In the network society affects the netizens' normal Internet access, misleading the masses. The educational background and age of netizens may affect whether they are easily influenced by the opinions of the navy. According to Figure1, this pie chart represents the percentage distribution of netizens' job structure. Most netizens were students in such 24% which was the highest, and the education in junior high school was the most which were about nearly a half showed in figure 2 [4]. The comparatively low-level education background and age reveal there are no relatively complete values for students who are still in school, or for a high percentage of 20-29-year-old young people in Figure3 who just entered. The ability to distinguish between right and wrong events is still weak. Often in the face of the "network water army" guided speech, one cannot make a better judgment. This affects their ability to think and judge right from wrong. And in this network-developed society, the phenomenon of internet users young and these misleading, distorted values of the water army speech collision, for the growth of young people is very unfavorable. In addition, the network water army controls the public opinion to reverses right and wrong. The trend of mono public opinion and the statement of improper values are the

negative influence of network water army on public opinion.

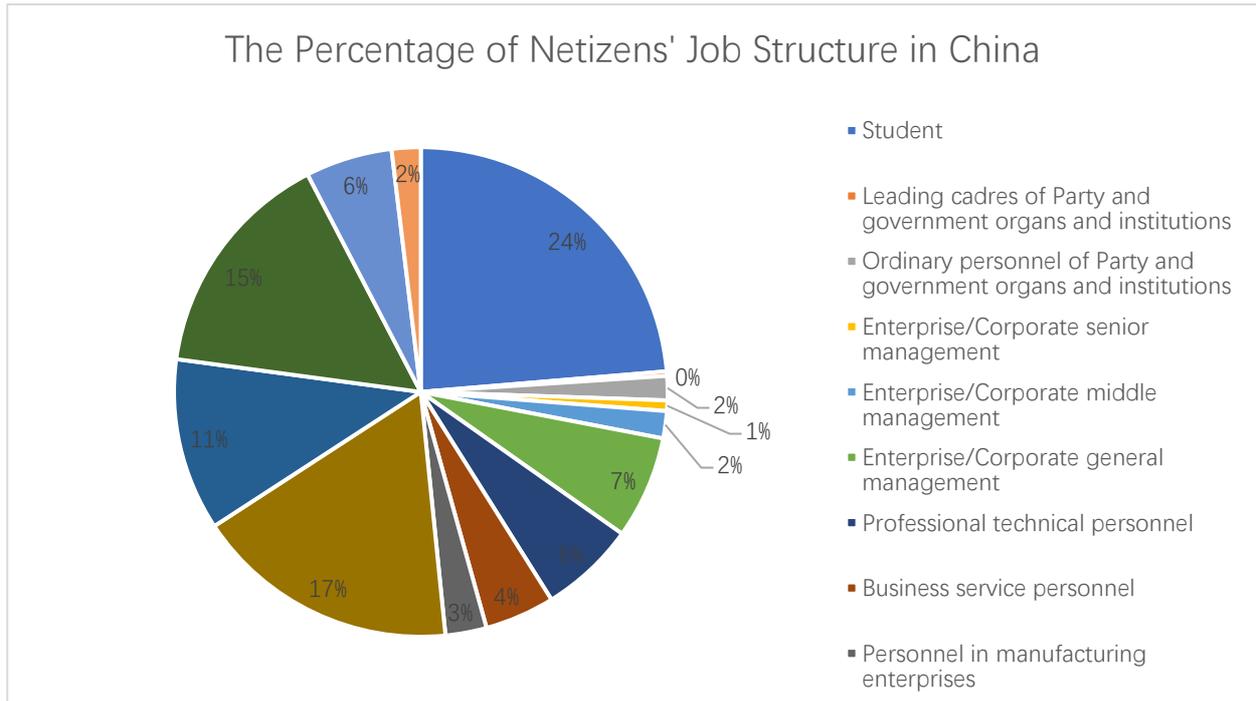


Figure1. The Percentage of Netizens' Job Structure in China.

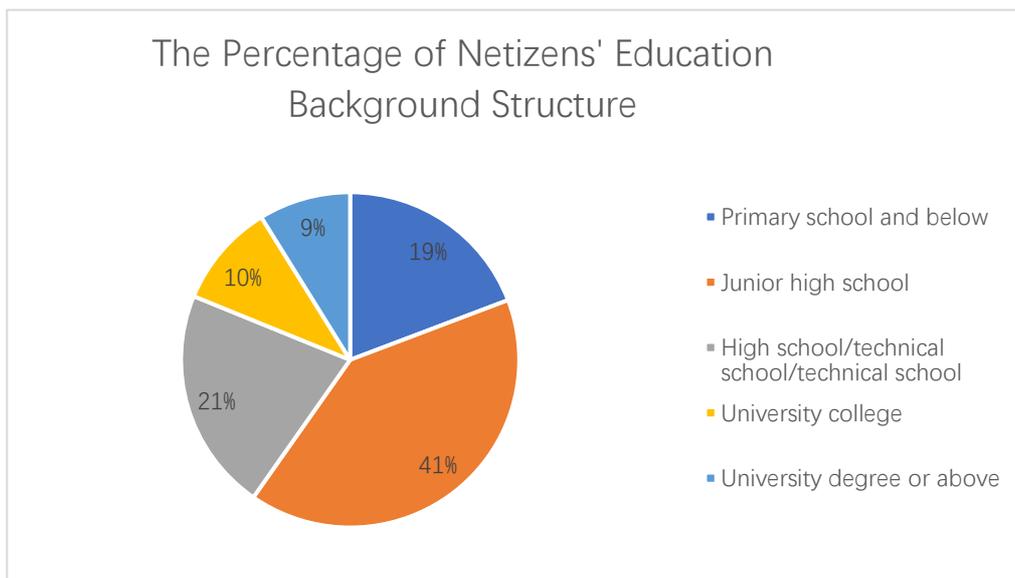


Figure2. The Percentage of Netizens' Education Background Structure

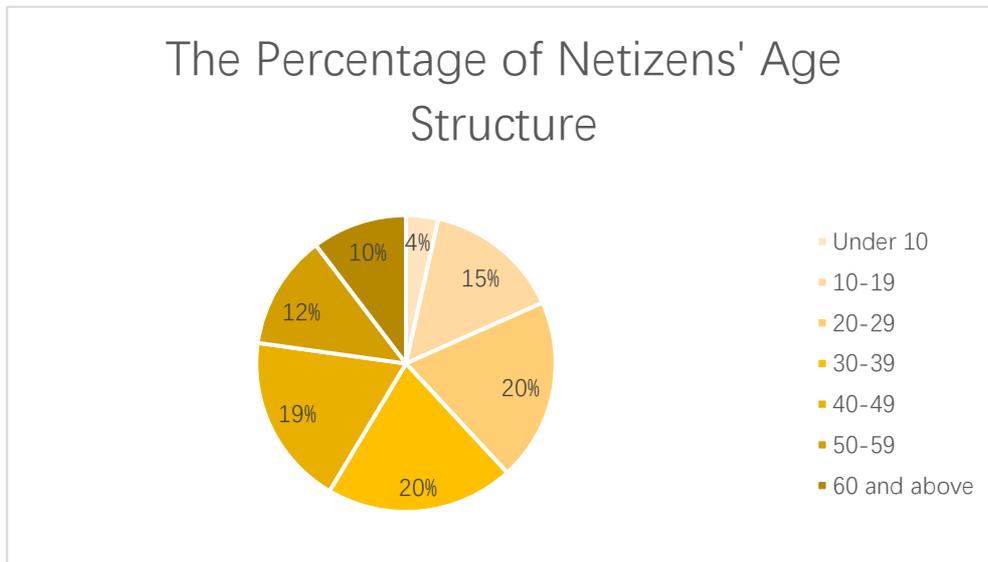


Figure3. The Percentage of Netizens' Age Structure (Data resources come from 2020.6 CNNIC China Internet Development Survey [4])

3.2. Positive

The communication scholar E. Katz once proposed the theory of the uses and gratifications approach [5]. This theory means the satisfaction of the mass media with the psychological needs of the audience. Especially when some hot topics have just come out, network water army for its promoter make this topic appear in front of the public eye, and arouse the strong resonance of masses. It eventually becomes a fact hotspot or internet buzzword. It cannot be denied that if there is no behind the "network water army" and "pusher" hype, spread, these topics are difficult to have such a violent upward trend. To some extent, such means of propaganda have not harmed society. Instead, it mobilizes the enthusiasm of netizens and enhances the entertainment of the network society. When netizens receive such topics, the joy generated also represents the existence of the "network water army" to meet the needs of the contemporary social and cultural netizens. It brings joy to people. From this point of view, the network water army has a positive impact on the development of society. The use of this positive impact level also represents the trend of public opinion and the development trend will be affected by the network water army.

3.3. Relationship and influence of “The Spiral of Silence” and water army

The "spiral of silence" theory was first based on the assumption of the German sociologist Professor Elizabeth Nell Newman that most individuals would try to avoid isolation by holding certain attitudes and beliefs alone. For fear of isolation, he was reluctant to speak his own opinion.

It can be understood in the online community that when people discuss an event or hot topic, they become silent when they see that their views do not agree with the general public's so that they no longer express their views. And when the views you support are in the majority, then actively participate in them.

The Marines used the spiral of silence to exacerbate the state of silence on one side. Because the cyber water army is hired by one party to make a specified statement. Often overwhelming comments are powerfully aggressive. The Marines used the flood to silence their views to the contrary. In addition, the water army will attack those people, scolding, personal attacks and so on. This has led to a growing silence on the relatively vulnerable side. This is also the goal the water army need to achieve. Furthermore, the silent spiral theory is a good argument for this. Because in the network society, itself exists such a phenomenon. The presence of the Marines has made the majority opinion more welcome. At the same time, the "minority opinion" gradually silenced, and finally disappeared into the

public's view. Even if some people express "minority opinions" because of the frequency of the marines, the number of large, keyword control is more precise. Usually, parts of people's online opinions will be covered. Eventually, no one cares. The water army takes advantage of the characteristics of contemporary society, that is, people are afraid of being isolated. After being suppressed by the opinions of the water army, people no longer willing to continue to insist on voice, to express their views.

At the same time, such a phenomenon guides the network public opinion towards the expected development, so that it forms a majority opinion. The skeptical side will become increasingly silent. It also achieves what some entertainment companies want to achieve: to make the trend of mono public opinion of the star or the hotly debated attitude. Questions and criticism of the artist on the Internet will be attacked by the Marines, deleting posts and other acts. In order to cover up certain facts, for artists to establish a positive image. To achieve the entertainment company, brokerage company public relations department purposes. Because in contemporary society, the value of artists is very high for entertainment companies. Negative reviews of the artist on the Internet can affect the commercial value of the artist's advertising. In the public society is not loved, appreciated and sought after by the masses, advertisers will not cooperate with the artist to a certain extent. The endorsement, advertising product sales will also cause a certain decline. Hence, at this point, the water army aggravates the silent spiral theory for business and the economy, from the point of view of hiring the water military, it has a positive impact. On the contrary, for the "silent" party, such behavior limits the freedom of Internet users to speak.

3.4. No effect

The existence of water army somehow does not hinder people from expressing their views and opinions on the Internet. Because with the gradual development of the network society, people have a certain ability to judge who is the water army that disrupts social order. As in the previous example, people could distinguish the water army by their language and some specific expressions. In addition, there are a lot of ads on the Internet for recruiting the water army. Water army is also a more transparent and well-known industry. Recruitment information of this kind is readily available on the Internet. Therefore, now the netizens on the Internet or relatively conscious to know the existence of the water army will also try to be their language around the idea. Not only that, the water army incident at

Sinopec has also led to deep public discontent, causing an outcry from the community. From this matter can be reflected, netizens for the water army behavior are disgusted. Netizens' prevention and awareness of the water army are also gradually improving. Hence, the meaning of the existence of the water army for the contemporary people, also becomes insignificant. People are also becoming more and more willing to voice, protest and so on.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the above research, the impact of the water army on the current network social order is inevitable and serious. Basically, depriving others of the right to speak, covering up the fact and other behavior has a bad impact on society. Also, by using and exacerbating the spiral of silence to achieve the desired goals of the underlying economic or entertainment companies. In addition, the improvement of water army's words and how to distinguish those is also worth continuing to explore. This study only identified and discussed the common style of water army. However, with the development of society and the need of entertainment companies for some public opinion, they will hire the water army who are more flexible in using words. Therefore, in further research, we can use the way of participating in the water army team and observe the operation of them and use the questionnaire to investigate the netizens' recognition degree of this kind of water army and their further thinking on the influence brought by them.

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