



Research on Cyber Violence in the “Xiao Xiang Paradise” Community of Douban Group

Take the Cyber Violence Against “Wan Wan” as an Example

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Abstract. Basing on the frequent occurrence of cyber violence on social media platforms, this paper standing upon the foundations of “Theory of Reasoned Action” to explore the behavioral motivation of the “Xiao Xiang Paradise” community of the Douban group to implement cyber violence from two aspects of “attitudes” and “subjective norms”. The study found that the purpose of cyber violence bullies is not purely to attack the victim, but to meet their needs for self – presentation, social group identity and the common result of the homogenization of public opinion caused by the choice of subcultural groups.

Keywords: cyber violence · Douban group · Theory of Reasoned Action · self – presentation · subcultural groups

1 Introduction

1.1 Background Introduction

Cyber violence is undoubtedly a difficult problem of platform governance in the digital era, along with the overwhelming feature of “anti-panopticon” which is most people watch and control individuals [1]. However, the current platform governance roles are lagging and weak to some extent, on the one hand the governance means such as shutting down social media accounts and blocking sensitive words can merely remedy and repair after the occurrence of cyber violence. On the other hand, the various “green internet”, “ethics convention of netizens” and other guidance and initiatives carried out by the platform hadn’t achieved the expected dissemination effect.

Douban as a social media platform of user-generated content, has formed a large number of interest groups marked by “interest-related cultural identity” [2]. Douban group “Xiao Xiang Paradise” (hereinafter referred to as “Xiang group”) was founded in March 2017, it has nearly 400000 members as of January 2023. The discussion topics within “Xiang group” focused on online celebrities and influencers, and self-proclaimed as “female community”. They mostly discussed and criticized online influencers from the perspective of “feminism”, having a huge influence on the public opinion of Douban platform [3].

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1.2 Theoretical Basis

This research is basing on the “Theory of Reasoned Action, TRA”, “Representation”, “discourse theory of knowledge and power” and “Textual Poachers”. TRA believes that behaviors can be reasonably inferred from behavioral intention, which is determined by attitude (subjective feelings and value evaluations) and subjective norms (generally accepted rules and pressure to keep consistent with others’ opinions) [4]. Hall’s representation theory believes that media representation is the “non-mirrored” semiotic reconstruction, the artificial social significance is reprocessed in between [5]. Foucault’s “discourse theory of knowledge and power” reveals that discourse and narration are the representation and production mechanism of power [6]. At the same time, Jenkins’s “textual poacher” theory consider participatory culture to be a process of interpretation and reprocessing of the original material to produce new text [7].

1.3 Significance of the Study

Different from the previous judgments on the “easily being manipulated” and “irrational” of cyber violence bullies, the spontaneity of Douban groups’ members in terms of interest, group selection and content production is prominent. Therefore, for the phenomenon of cyber violence in the Douban group, this study hopes to pay attention to its internal subjectivity, organization and carnival, and explore the psychological motivation of bullies, so as to provide ideas for solving cyber violence from the root cause.

2 Literature Review

The previous studies based on cyber violence bullies, mainly used the “attribution” perspective to analyze three aspects of the causes of cyber violence bullies’ behaviors. First of all, from a social perspective: Jiang, combining with the theory of risk society, believes that cyber violence is the inevitable product of the disorderly release of risks in the process of the development and transformation of China’s social modernity [8]. Chen understands cyber violence as the populism of “grassroots network communication”, that the mentality of hating the rich brought by class differentiation was the important reason for cyber violence [9]. Secondly, from the perspective of the development of media technology and the governance of the Internet platform, Suler put forward the online disinhibition effect in 2004, believing that the anonymity of the Internet platform makes the bullies need to bear a weaker psychological burden when carrying out attacks [10]. Wang believes that the algorithmic hype of public opinion conspired by capital and platform has formed the agenda setting and filtering bubble effect, manipulating users to conduct irrational expression and cyber violence [11]. Finally, from the perspective of group psychology: Wu and Jiang believe that cyber violence is the process of users being coerced and learned in the process of participating in the interaction and opposition between sub-cultural groups [12]. Lin believes that cyber violence is the alienation of freedom of speech, and the concept which occupying moral hegemony has formed a “Spiral of Silence” effect, making netizens lose the ability to think and judge independently in the irrational wave [13]. Du believes that cyber violence is the result

of the deviation of cognition and public opinion which leads to blind conformity and the lack of heterogeneous concepts [14]. However, these three analysis perspectives, to some extent, regard the bullies of cyber violence as passive receivers manipulated by social reality and leading public opinions, but ignore the subjectivity of the bullies to complete self-presentation and self-identification between self and group through the implementation of cyber violence, so they have certain limitations.

At the same time, in the previous studies based on the research of Douban group, the tendency of homogenization is obvious, and the “interaction ritual chains” is often used as the theoretical framework to analyze the Douban group from four aspects: the presence of multiple people, the restriction of outsiders, the same focus and interest, and the formation of community consciousness [15]. Wang believes that the high degree of privacy and sense of boundary of the Douban private group provides “cross-screen emotional energy” for the group members [16]. Sun studied the Douban “cotton doll” group and believed that through the common interests of “cotton doll”, the group members accumulated “emotional energy” and shared the self and group identity of “dolls’ mother” [17]. Xie believes that the aggregation effect formed by the “virtual presence” of the Douban feminist group “she said” provides expression space for the group members to gain recognition and affirmation [18]. However, these studies are only limited to the positive impacts of the Douban group community on the group members, and ignore the negative results such as cyber violence caused by the Douban group as a whole in the discussion and interaction with individuals outside the group.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Research Object

A large number of online violence and attacks against the Influencer “Wan Wan” (original name Wanying Lei, female, influencer, has over 100000 followers on the Douban platform) have been generated in the Xiang group, and Wan Wan’s past experience, viewpoint, intimate relationship, career development and other aspects have been discussed. On this basis, a large number of mocking content production such as memes, catchwords, secondary creation and long texts have been carried out to smear Wan Wan within the group chat of Xiang group.

Based on the theory of TRA, this study will explore the motivation of online bully behaviors in Xiang groups from two aspects: subjective expression (attitude) and intra-group interaction (subjective norms).

3.2 Research Design

First of all, the research method of content analysis is used to explore the subjective expression. Ten representative long texts of attacking Wan Wan are taken as the object of content analysis, and the coding table is made to conduct quantitative analysis of the data: Count the number of words (Chinese characters) and the proportion of two major categories of content that conducting cyber violence in the texts: “Reprocessing content production” and “Statements of Wan Wan’s previous events” (telling about the personal experience of Wan Wan).

Secondly, the research method of virtual ethnography is used to explore the intra-group interaction, and the development of public opinion in the group is observed in the field for 80 days, to study the intra-group norms and unique symbols, and to explore how the intra-group rules and public opinion environment affect the generation of cyber violence (Fig. 1).

Category I :	Category II :	Specific topics:	Total number of Category II (Chinese characters):	The proportion of Category II of the Overall texts :
Reprocessing content production Total number of Category I (Chinese characters): 20998 words The proportion of Category I of the overall texts: 75.50%	Content production based on the author's actual experience in real life.	1) Self-experience of being gender discriminated in the workplace (gender discrimination in employment, strict dress requirements for women in the workplace, and different pay for the same job for men and women). 2) Author's mother's misogyny: son preference, distrust of the author. 3) Personal bad experience at a hospital: doctors insisted on letting male relatives to sign the medical contract, author's thought of "not to have children in the future" was criticized by the surroundings in the hospital. 4) The excessive "dedication" of the author's mother who has been disciplined by the patriarchal society (trying her best to help her brother, giving up property inheritance, not willing to spend money for herself even though mastering family finances). 5) Author's parents hinder her personal freedom and development because the author is a female (unwilling to invest in buying a house for her, believing that it is unnecessary for a woman to study for a doctor degree, urging her to get married and hoping that she can find a stable job). 6) Author was scolded for her behaviors that did not conform to the traditional femininity (she was scolded for crossing her legs). 7) The author's experienced and reading comprehension (women in romantic novels are often portrayed as weak, and when the author attending a wedding, she found that the toast containing the birth control of the bride). 8) How the author's words inspire women in real life.	4175 words	15.14%
	Concept output based on author's value judgment.	1) The current beauty standard is the construction of male gaze (thin and skinny is to separate women from strong and powerful). 2) Self-discipline of women for the "second sex" identity (excessive undertake housework, giving up property inheritance and the right of letting children to name after the mothers, taking marriage as the only goal of life, distrust and hostility between women, and being educated as gentle and obedience rather than ambitious and enterprising). 3) Men enjoy more privileges in a patriarchal society (family investment is biased towards men; father is absent in family affairs). 4) The stigmatization of women in the patriarchal society (there are many words that humiliate women, the false label of "female driver"). 5) The patriarchal society objectifies women into the property of men. 6) Advocate women to love themselves, actively strive for family resources, get rid of the "shelter" of the hypocrisy of patriarchy, and work hard in their academic career.	16723 words	60.65%
Statements of Wan Wan's previous events Total number of Category I (Chinese characters): 6673 words The proportion of Category I of the Overall texts: 24.20%		1) Wan wan is not progressive on her career, dependent on men. 2) Wan wan enjoys male gaze, pay too much attention to her appearance and please men. 3) The requirement of wan wan's husband being portrayed as a "good man" is too low. 4) Wan wan tries hard to create the illusion of "being loved", in fact, she undertakes more family affairs than her husband. 5) Wan wan's mother asked her daughter to learn art in order to marry into a rich family. 6) Wan wan's jealousy and hostility towards the women around her. 7) Wan wan's family is not willing to invest too much money in her education and development. 8) Wan wan's father is absent from her education and growth process.	6673 words	24.20%

Fig. 1. Coding result

4 Research Findings

4.1 Data Analysis

The coding results show that in the long text production which was implementing cyber violence against Wan Wan, “Reprocessing content production” accounts for most of the space (75.80%, 20898 words), of which “Content production based on the author’s actual experience in real life” accounts for 15.14% (4175 words) of the total space, and “Concept output based on author’s value judgment” accounts for 60.65% (16723 words) of the total space; However, “Statements of Wan Wan’s previous events” only accounted for 24.20% (6673 words).

4.2 Subjective Expression: Online Violence as the Construction Channel of Self-presentation

By exploring the representation of “reprocessing” and the construction of discourse power in the long texts, this study believes that the members of the Xiang group actually added self-reference and self-projection into the image construction of Wan Wan, symbolizing and alienating her to be “the evil other”, providing the contrast of “objective ego (ME)” [19], and realizing the self-presentation of value orientation by implementing cyber attacks and violence against “the other”.

Fiske believes that the masses are “excessive readers” and can reproduce the original text in line with their expectations through “collage” [20]. In the long texts of Xiang group’s attack and criticism on Wan Wan, most of the space focuses on the reprocessing and production of self-representation, which also includes a large number of personal life experiences of the author herself which was unrelated to Wan Wan, while statements of various events purely based on Wan Wan only account for a small number. The texts adopt the structure of “criticism - reasoning - appeal”, and the criticism and attack against Wan Wan is used as an example to elicit the subsequent expression of self-experience and value identification. For example, an article first strongly criticized Wan Wan for not working hard in school, but relying on men to live a better life, and then associated with the author’s self-experience of pursuing a doctor degree but being dissuaded halfway by her family to explain that the patriarchal society represses women’s self-development. Finally, it called on women to be independent and work hard in their career and study, and not to become a dependent woman like Wan Wan. The “uses and gratifications approach” theory believes that audiences’ media activities are based on specific needs that motivate them using media to meet the needs. Among them, “self-confirmation” is considered as one of the motivations for using media [21]. Members of the Xiang group collaged public figures who are at the center of discourse power, thus constructing an imaginary “dissident” and “other” which with corresponding values, and carry out cyber violence and attacks on her, thus highlighting and expressing their own value identity, and completing “self-confirmation”.

Therefore, compared with the previous conclusion of passive manipulation of cyber violence bullies, this study believes that the behavioral motivation of cyber violence bullies in the Douban group is more active in subjective expression, and the purpose of bullying through cyber violence against individuals is to meet the subjective needs of self-identification and self-presentation.

4.3 Intra-group Interaction: Subcultural Identity as Connection and Group Polarization

Through virtual ethnography on the interaction within the Xiang group, this study found that the theoretical foundations of “Interaction Ritual Chains” and “Spiral of Silence” of previous studies on the Douban group are still applicable in the study of cyber violence in the Xiang group, but the sequence of the logical chain is slightly different: users based on the same identity spontaneously enter the virtual subcultural group, group psychology, rules and norms in between produce and aggravate the cyber violence, rather than the previous researches’ conclusion that after the “overwhelming” cyber violence happened, users passively being coerced and lost their rational judgment, thus becoming a member of the cyber violence bully group.

The medium is the message, social media can span physical distances and gather atomized and fragmented individuals to form a new community [22], thus forming a subcultural circle with obvious cultural boundaries and identity [23]. First, in terms of common identity, the view of “Popular Feminism” holds that “feminism” has become a symbol of identity and expression on today’s social media platform [24]. The Xiang group has a clear “feminist” subcultural identity, self-positioning as a “female community”, and self-portrait of its members as “girls with wide-ranged interests in life”. Second, in terms of cultural boundaries, there is a clear distinction between members inside and outside the Xiang group in terms of discourse and expression power in the group discussion: members of the Xiang group can actively post and leave comments in the group chat, but the non-members can only browse and give likes. The Xiang group has very strict conditions on the recruiting standard. One needs to be fully identified with the values of the Xiang group, and comply with a series of rules within the group before one is approved to join the group. If being rejected, one needs to enrich his/her own Douban account homepage by writing posts, actively comments, marking books, movies and music that one has read before and etc. [25]. Finally, when the members of the Xiang group attack against Wan Wan, they produced unique symbolic creations, which forms a unique identity recognition system that is different from the people outside the group. To sum up, the initiative of the Xiang group is prominent in the effect of group aggregation: on the one hand, it is based on the spontaneous accumulation of the shared subcultural identity, and on the other hand, it sets restrictions on outsiders, with the characteristics of “interaction ritual chains”.

Therefore, on the one hand, the implementation of cyber violence in the Xiang group is due to the sense of community belonging brought by the common identity and the need to maintain the social approval of the group. After individuals have group identity, they will transform the superiority and high social recognition of the group compared with other groups into affirmation of their self-worth [26]. At this level, the Xiang group’s attack on Wan Wan is a kind of differential perception and contrast based on group identity, which distinguishes the high and low of “we” and “the other”, thus highlighting the superiority of the group. “The group’s accumulation on the cognitive level has brought about stronger conceptual confidence, making them more daring to express their attitudes and positions in online actions, and more inclined to argue fiercely with different views” [27]. The conceptual confidence brought by the sense of community identity makes the members of the Xiang group tend to attack the opposite “other” (Wan

Wan) by implementing cyber violence. On the other hand, the cognitive consistency within the Xiang group community is also the source and booster of the occurrence of online violence. Specific value orientations will form within the subculture group and become the mainstream collective consensus [27], the value orientation within the Xiang group has already been set on the recruiting standard and cultural boundary to a certain extent: The Xiang group is famous for its criticism of Wan Wan on the Douban platform, so the members of the Xiang group identify already brought with the value orientation in terms of group selection. At the same time, the “semi-closed” communication mode of the Xiang group (users outside the group are not allowed to comment, post and other content expressions), and the opinion leaders such as the founder of the group have the power of public opinion monitoring such as “delete posts” and “expel members out of the group”, which makes the value discussion within the Xiang group presents the “cocoon room” effect, the lack of heterogeneous expression, thus forming the “Spiral of Silence” effect, finally forming the overwhelming cyber violence of Wan Wan.

Therefore, at the level of intra-group interaction, this study believes that the motivation of online violence of the Xiang group is not passive infection and coercion, but the common result of the homogenization of ideas caused by individuals seeking social approval as a group and cultural boundary selection.

5 Conclusion

Based on the “Theory of Reasoned Action”, this study believes that the behavioral motivation of cyber violence in the “Xiao Xiang Paradise” community of the Douban Group is the construction channel to meet the needs of self-representation in terms of attitude, and is the common result of the psychological needs of social recognition and the homogenization of public opinion formed by the choice of subcultural boundaries in terms of subjective norms. Therefore, this study believes that in the study of cyber violence in the era of social media, it is necessary to abandon the view of “passive audience” and pay more attention to the spontaneous psychological motivation of bullies, so as to provide ideas for solving the phenomenon of online violence from the root.

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