

Study on the Classified Management of Network Group Incidents

Wei Zhang

Information research department
Beijing Science and Technology Information Institute
Beijing, China
m_s_p@sohu.com

Yujuan Zhang

Information research department
Beijing Science and Technology Information Institute
Beijing, China
zhangyujuan2406@gmail.com

Abstract—In this paper, the author defines the network group incidents and analyses their characteristics in a forward-looking vision, and accordingly studies the classification of such events from multiple perspectives and recommends classified control countermeasures for the government against four types of network group incidents, including those with opaque information, those concerning legal system development, those related to entertainment and those concerning government management.

Keywords- Network group incidents, classification, control countermeasures

I. INTRODUCTION

On January 15, 2013, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 31st China Internet Development Statistics Report in Beijing. The Report shows that as of the end of December 2012, China's Internet users amounted to 564 million, with an Internet penetration rate of 42.1%, maintaining a slow growth. In contrast, the growth rate of the mobile phone network in terms of all indicators has surpassed that of the traditional network, and the application of mobile phone in micro-blogging and e-commerce is also experiencing a fast growth. In the information society, the Internet's role in social governance has become increasingly prominent. At the same time, as the country is undergoing a transition period with major changes and at a critical juncture of transforming from a rural society to an urban one, the rapid development of Internet technology has imposed many new problems and conflicts to the government in the social management. For example, while anti-corruption, exposing dark sides of the society and democratic supervision through Internet have played a certain role in the social management, the network mob, human flesh search and online rumors will also lead to certain social problems. These pose brand new challenges to the government's public and social management in new situations.

In recent years, the network group incidents mainly based on Internet have emerged explosively, and such events have become the social problems of key concern to the government and academia. It is undoubtedly important to consider how to regulate the dissemination of information through Internet and allow the Internet to play a positive role while avoiding disadvantages. This paper focuses on the analysis of the characteristics and classification of network group incidents according to their occurrence and development, and on this basis recommends that the government should adopt measures

of classified management according to the categories of the network group incidents to effectively deal with such incidents.

II. DEFINITION OF NETWORK GROUP INCIDENTS

Network group incidents are with cutting-edge features and complexity as they involve multiple research fields such as information science, political science, management, sociology, communication studies, law, etc. As the study on such events in China is just emerging, scholars have not formed a consensus on the definition on network group incidents as a unique phenomenon in China, and most of them define such events from the perspective of their own fields of study. For example, Du Junfei [1] believes that: "The network group incidents are in nature a process of communication where groups of Internet users make public opinion and promote social action through network gathering around a theme based on different purposes. Such a process may be either spontaneous or organized, and it can be orderly and healthy or disordered, unhealthy and even illegal." Guo Weihao [2] believes that network group incidents refer to the events which occur on the Internet and are participated in by many users to achieve the common aspiration of a certain interest group by making public opinions through network gathering and thus attracting social attention and gaining real interests. Jie Ping and Xiong Meibao believe [3] that: "Network group incidents refer to the group incidents formed in a certain social context where the groups in the network overtly disturb the order in and outside the network and the normal operation of the network for their common interests, resulting in adverse social impact and even endangering social stability."

At present, most scholars regard network group incidents as disordered or even illegal network events. This paper argues that with the development of society, the improvement of law and the accumulation of the experience of governance, we should see the network group incidents in a forward-looking vision. The definition of such events can be generalized to cover all events on the Internet that cause major earthquakes in public opinion, no matter they are organized or not and legal or not, and that such events are not necessarily antisocial but are the social activities conducted by gathering online a group of uncertain people who are highly passionate based on a specific or non-specific event or target.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF NETWORK GROUP INCIDENTS

A. *Fast Spread and Broad Influence.*

With the rapid development of electronic information technology, Internet users break the boundaries between countries by posting articles, pictures and videos. This facilitates the interpersonal connection and allows information to be spread to every corner of the world in a moment. In addition, the improvement of smart phone technology and the surge in the number of mobile Internet users have further speeded up the information dissemination. For example, with mobile phones and tablet computers one can release posts and micro-blogging at anytime and anywhere, breaking the previous constraints for the use of Internet. It enables network participants to get millions of responses for one call in this relatively boundless and free space only through sharing the relevant information, regardless of their geographic locations, nationality and social status. For example, in the "study tour abroad" incident in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province in 2008, there was a lost bill for a study tour abroad of some public officials. While it is difficult for the traditional media to report it before everything is verified, the bill was posted in many online forums. There were at least one million clicks on the Internet concerning this incident. The webpage of an article about the incident on Sina.com alone received 8,089 pieces of comments within just a few days.

B. *Strong Interaction Between Cyber and Real Worlds*

The major difference that distinguishes network group incidents from the traditional social incidents is that the network group incidents can not only occur in the network but also be most likely to spread beyond network to the real world and give rise to a group incident with a large scale and great social impacts. In the group incidents that occur simultaneously on the Internet and the real world, such as the strike of the taxi drivers in Chongqing and Sanya, both the online discussions on the topics of taxi drivers and the strike of taxi driver in the society aroused, and the interaction between these two incidents further excavated the hostility between the two sides.

C. *The Increasingly Prominent Role of the INTERNET.*

In today's easily accessible public cyberspace, various online platforms such as media, forums and communities are playing a very important role as an intermediary platform through which users can express their aspirations for democracy, and the users' desire for participating in politics is also growing. For example, the Sun Zhigang incident in 2003 finally led to the abolishment of the Measures for Housing and Deportation of Urban Vagrants and Beggars issued in May 1982; the dam break incident in Xiangfen, Shanxi in 2008 aroused strong response on the Internet, which soon evolved into an accountability storm, involving more than 100 officials at all levels; and others, such as the PX incident in Xiamen in 2007 and the waste incineration incident in Panyu in 2009, eventually led to the revision of resolution by the local government because of the strong reaction from the online public opinions. This fully reflects the increasing political awareness and sense of participation of the citizens in China

and highlights the role of various online platforms in the network group incidents.

IV. CLASSIFICATION OF NETWORK GROUP INCIDENTS

The wavy rise of China's major incidents in online opinions is related to the constant development of the social conflicts reflected in such incidents as well as the rapid development of new media, in particular the micro-blogging. In addition, the process from the formation and development to the peak and then fall back of the network media incidents also tests the network media management of the government authorities. Therefore it is of particular importance to deeply probe into the reasons for the occurrence of network group incidents and accordingly conduct classified management on the incidents.

By the focus of the incidents they can be mainly classified as: (1) political incidents; (2) public health incidents; (3) social security incidents; (4) emergencies; (5) conflicts; and (6) entertainment incidents.

By the form of them they can be classified as: (1) The group incidents existing simultaneously in the real and virtual worlds; (2) the network group incidents triggered by the reality, for example, the incident about the bureau head who smiled on the scene of a tragic traffic accident; and (3) the mutant online and offline group incidents triggered by the reality, for example, the incident that a Chinese student studying abroad from Qingdao was bitterly blamed by the Internet users for holding high the Tibetan secessionist banner during the Olympic torch relay abroad.

By the orientation and impact they can be classified as: (1) The incidents related to opaque information. In such incidents, the main demands of the Internet users are to know the information on the truth, but for various reasons, the relevant departments fail to accurately disclose the truth in a timely manner or actively respond to the challenges from the Internet users, thus escalating the incidents. An example is the incident about "Guo Meimei showing off her wealth". (2) The incidents related to the development of the legal system. Such incidents are triggered by the inadequacy or absence of the existing laws, systems and social ethics. Although the incident is not directly related to the interests of the Internet users, the situation of the one involved in it can be encounter by any Internet user, and therefore it attracts great attention and active participation of them. But generally speaking, the behaviors of the Internet users are constructive. For example, in 2010 when the "Sexy Diary" of the Director of the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau of Laibin, Guangxi was exposed online, the network media was in an uproar, and that "sexy bureau head" was sent to prison after criminal investigation. (3) The incidents related to public entertainment. In such incidents the Internet is purely a platform and a tool for communication. They include some incidents for public entertainment arising from the words and deeds of stars. For example, the "heart-shaped stone" incident of Li Chen, a star, became sensational with the hyping of the outside world, and various rumors constantly emerged. (4) The incidents related to government management, which are triggered by the inaction of the government. For example, in the doctor-patient conflict in Nanping, Fujian in 2009 the government was accused of irrational action and the police inaction.

V. CLASSIFIED MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF NETWORK GROUP INCIDENTS

A. *In Terms of the Incidents Related to Opaque Information, the Government Information Disclosure System Should be Improved.*

The failure to release information in a timely and transparent manner is often a main cause for the network group incidents, and therefore the control of such incidents should be targeted. Because most Internet users pay great attention to the incident though they did not participated in or personally experienced it, they will rapidly spread the information they get from various sources and thus dramatically raise the social concern on the incident, posing great difficulties to the management of the government. To address such incidents, it is necessary to focus on prevention and establish a government information disclosure system to respond the comments and demands of the Internet users as soon as possible by timely communication with them through hotlines, online interaction and spokes persons, so as to obtain the understanding and support of the Internet users, eliminate the extremist tendency of the online information-disseminating groups and avoid the expansion of the incidents.

B. *For the Incidents Related to the Development of Legal System, it is Necessary to Set Up an Equal and Effective Mechanism for Online Dialogues.*

The network group incidents in this category are most likely to cause adverse impact on the social order, and can even evolve into street conflicts. Therefore they are the trickiest ones for the local government to cope with in recent years. When deal with such incidents, the government should be deeply involved in the whole process: It should work actively to eliminate the source for the incidents before they occur; listen to the opinions of experts, actively communicate with the public and establish a channel for effective communication between the government and the public when the incidents occur. It is also necessary to effectively guide the online public opinion and avoid the intensification of network group incidents. From the perspective of the generation of the public opinion, the government should intervene as early as the Internet users gather on such topics, absorb expert advices and make proactive response.

C. *For the Incidents Related to Entertainment, a Mechanism for Online Public Opinion Monitoring and Early warning Should be Established.*

Such network group incidents are unlikely to make devastations, so the management of them should be based on prevention and attention should be paid to monitoring and prevention of extreme remarks and behaviors. The management on the “moderators” of major websites and forums should be enhanced by requiring real-name registration

and asking them to serve well as a network supervisor, browse the opinions of the Internet users, closely watch the trends online and promptly give feedbacks and make an early warning to the relevant authorities when finding signals of incidents.

D. *For the Incidents Related to Government Management, it is Necessary to Seek the Right to Speak on the Internet.*

That is to say, in dealing with such incidents the government should make efforts in obtaining the right to speak on the Internet to curb the spread of bad information through positive and authoritative information release. In particular, it is needed to prevent individuals or organizations from inciting vicious incidents through the Internet. Only by strengthening positive guidance and effective control of the online public opinion can the government create a favorable environment online for handling the network group incidents and allow the public to tell right from wrong, understand the government action and form a positive interaction with the government.

VI. CONCLUSION

Network group incidents are with great practicality and complexity. Today, as the Internet users have become a powerful social force and network group incidents have gradually intertwined with other social issues, the causes and the process of such incidents are becoming increasingly complex and volatile. In this context, when studying and discussing such incidents it is necessary to strictly follow the changes in the practice, analyze the laws and characteristics of their occurrence, development and changes and make prospective judgments and early warning on the online public opinions, thus firmly grasp the right to monitor the online information dissemination, control the direction of online public opinion and resist the invasion of the bad information in the web society, so as to achieve positive interaction between the government and the Internet users. In addition, a variety of theoretical approaches should be used to sum up the laws and deepen the understanding concerning the management and control of the network group incidents.

REFERENCES

- [1] Du Junfei, “Analysis on the Categories of Network Group Incidents” JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION, Issue No.7, 2009
- [2] Guo Weihao, Zhang Xiaohui, Wang Tiefu, “On the Strategies Responding to the Mechanism of the Occurrence of Network Group Incidents” ACADEMY: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH 2011 (21)
- [3] Jie Ping, Xiong Meibao, “Network Group Incidents and Their Prevention”, JIANGXI SOCIAL SCIENCES, Issue No. 9, 2007.
- [4] Wang Wanjun, Cui Jianliang: “Exploration in Responding Network Group Incidents”, FORWARD POSITION, Issue No,10,2012
- [5] Xiao Guanqiao, You Yanling: “Mechanism of Occurrence and Coping Strategies of Network Group Incidents”, , MANAGEMENT OBSERVER, Issue 1 August