

Internet Public Opinion Governance Dilemmas and Countermeasures under the Background of the Internet

ZheXi Zhou

China Jiliang University+College of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310018

ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of information technology, the Internet has also developed rapidly. The Internet has changed the way people obtain information and communicate, changed the formation and dissemination mechanism of social public opinion, and reshaped people's daily lives. Now, the Internet has become the core platform for social communication and information dissemination, and it is also the birthplace and main battlefield for all kinds of public opinions, playing an extraordinary role in group events. This paper summarizes the existing problems in Internet public opinion governance into two aspects: thinking and action, namely, the rigidity of the concept of Internet public opinion governance and the delay between Internet public opinion information collection and decision-making. It also proposes two countermeasures: establishing a phased governance and multi-stakeholder governance awareness, and strengthening the cultivation and construction of professional talent teams, hoping to provide certain help to the government and relevant departments in the process of governing public opinion.

KEYWORDS

New Media; Public Opinion Governance; Dilemmas; Countermeasures

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of information technology, the Internet has also developed rapidly. The Internet has changed the way people obtain information and communicate, changed the formation and dissemination mechanism of social public opinion, and reshaped people's daily lives. Now, the Internet has become the core platform for social communication and information dissemination, and it is also the birthplace and main battlefield for all kinds of public opinions, playing an extraordinary role in group events. However, its role is dual-edged - it can resolve public opinion crises and solve social problems, but it can also exacerbate social problems and affect the smooth operation of society - making the use of Internet technology to govern public opinion an important and complex issue, which has a profound impact on the decision-making and actions of the government and relevant departments in public opinion events.

At present, the Chinese government still faces many challenges in the governance of Internet public opinion. Although the government has taken some measures to strengthen public opinion management, compared with the rapid development of the Internet, these measures seem to be difficult to keep up. The Internet, as a fast channel for information dissemination, its openness, interactivity, and anonymity make public opinion governance extremely complex. In dealing with public opinion events, the government needs to face not only the rapid spread of a large amount of information but also needs to invest a lot of energy in distinguishing the authenticity of information, guiding public emotions, and controlling the direction of public opinion.

This paper classifies and summarizes the existing problems in Internet public opinion governance and proposes corresponding countermeasures and suggestions, hoping to provide certain help to the government and relevant departments in the process of governing public opinion.

2 Governance Dilemmas of Public Opinion under the Background of the Internet

The Internet is a gathering place for public opinion, providing an unprecedented platform for the government to understand public opinion. The government can hear the voice of the people more directly through this platform, which reflects the art of governance. However, merely understanding public opinion is far from enough. Internet public opinion cannot be left unchecked. Effective governance of Internet public opinion to ensure that it does not have a negative impact on social order is more important.

In the Internet era, the interaction between the government and citizens will be based on mutual respect and equal dialogue, becoming more direct and equal. If the government continues to control according to the traditional model, it may backfire. In fact, all parties at the center of public opinion may need a coordinator to calm the storm, and the government is the best candidate for this role. Its role in Internet public opinion governance needs to change from a single authoritative controller to a coordinator and communicator.

In the face of public opinion events, the government's response speed is crucial. The government needs to release information quickly and maintain transparency to win the trust and support of the public. However, some departments still use outdated strategies when dealing with Internet public opinion, such as concealing information, delaying or evading issues, or even taking simple blocking strategies, leading to public opinion events not being properly resolved, and even becoming more and more intense.

This paper analyzes the problems faced by China's public opinion governance from two aspects: thinking and action.

2.1 Thinking: The Rigidity of the Concept of Internet Public Opinion Governance

Under the background of the digital age, the Internet, as an important medium for information dissemination, has a fundamental impact on the formation and dissemination of public opinion. Compared with traditional public opinion, Internet public opinion has significant characteristics of suddenness, wide dissemination range, and clear life cycle. Therefore, Internet public opinion governance urgently needs to update its concepts and adopt adaptive strategies, otherwise, Internet public opinion will inevitably appear repeatedly.

Life cycle theory provides an analytical framework to describe the entire process from the emergence to the demise of Internet public opinion: the full life cycle of Internet public opinion includes four stages: latency period, germination period, diffusion period, and decline period. Life cycle theory emphasizes that things have different manifestations at different stages, which means that governance strategies should also adapt to specific stages of Internet public opinion development, avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" governance model. In actual Internet public opinion events, public opinion often quickly transitions from the germination stage to the diffusion stage and gradually eases after government intervention. Although the government's methods in governance seem to be phased, the focus of governance still concentrates on solving public events rather than Internet public opinion itself. The disadvantage of this governance method is that government managers ignore the power of Internet public opinion and do not have a direct understanding of its changes, which may lead to the loss of credibility. The reason is that many

managers lack a deep understanding of the life cycle of Internet public opinion and lack professional capabilities to deal with Internet public opinion.

Polycentric governance theory reveals the possibility of multiple stakeholders participating in Internet public opinion governance. Internet public opinion governance can be jointly participated in by multiple stakeholders such as the government, enterprises, public figures, and social organizations. However, current governance practices still regard the government as a single entity, lacking awareness of multi-stakeholder participation. Although a multi-party governance model is considered the development direction of Internet public opinion governance, in reality, multi-stakeholder participation is insufficient, and governance is still government-centric, which does not conform to the connotation of polycentric governance theory.

There are two reasons why Internet public opinion governance is limited to the government as the main participant: first, Internet public opinion is related to the government itself, and its governance cannot be separated from the government's guidance and governance; second, the institutional and technical conditions required for polycentric governance are not yet mature. Enterprises, social organizations, and the public often respond passively when participating, rather than actively participating in governance.

This passive response, although helpful in promoting the scientific and effective governance of the government, is not sufficient to give full play to the role of various stakeholders in Internet public opinion governance.

2.2 Action: The Delay between Internet Public Opinion Information Collection and Decision-making

The variability and instability of public opinion make the development trend of public opinion difficult to predict. The generation and evolution of Internet public opinion are more complex and changeable than traditional public opinion, which undoubtedly brings great challenges to governance work. Especially in the Internet environment, the level of activity and participation of the public has obviously increased. Once a hot event occurs, it can quickly attract widespread public attention and form a strong public opinion field. This rapid generation and evolution of Internet public opinion pose a huge challenge to the monitoring, analysis, and prediction of Internet public opinion.

The complexity and variability of Internet public opinion are manifested in the diversity of information sources and the variability of communication channels. Different information sources may have different interpretations and positions on the same event, which increases the complexity of Internet public opinion analysis. At the same time, the spread of Internet public opinion is no longer limited to traditional linear paths but is carried out through various channels such as social Internet, forums, and blogs, forming a complex Internet structure. This structure makes the spread and evolution of public opinion more difficult to track and control.

The rise of self-media further exacerbates this challenge. The diversity and convenience of self-media platforms make the spread of information more rapid and widespread, but it also brings problems with the authenticity and reliability of information. The spread of false information and rumors not only increases the difficulty of public opinion management but also may lead to public misunderstanding and panic, further complicating the changes in Internet public opinion.

In practice, staff need to quickly identify and collect Internet public opinion information related to specific events from a large amount of Internet information. This information needs to be accurately and comprehensively fed back to the leadership for in-depth analysis. However, after receiving the information, the leadership needs to go through a series of analysis, discussion, and decision-making processes, which often take a long time, while the speed of change of Internet

public opinion far exceeds this decision cycle. Therefore, the decisions made by the leadership may already be lagging behind the latest developments in public opinion before they are implemented, which weakens the timeliness and effectiveness of decision-making.

3 Countermeasures for Public Opinion Governance under the Background of the Internet

Based on the above two existing problems, this paper proposes the following two countermeasures:

3.1 Establishing Phased Governance and Multi-Stakeholder Governance Awareness

Internet public opinion governance should conform to the objective laws of the development of Internet public opinion and be governed according to the life cycle of Internet public opinion, guiding Internet public opinion from the latency period, germination period, and diffusion period to the decline period. The four stages of the life cycle of Internet public opinion are closely connected and have a profound impact on the trend of public opinion. Ignoring the management of any stage and only taking action when the result appears will increase the uncertainty and complexity of governance. Therefore, based on a profound understanding of the life cycle of Internet public opinion, refined governance strategies should be adopted.

During the latency period, the governance strategy should focus on prevention. On the one hand, the government should strengthen the construction of the Internet monitoring system, focus on safety events that may trigger public opinion, and reduce the possibility of public opinion emergencies. On the other hand, the government should give full play to the role of the Internet in guiding public opinion and reflecting public opinion, actively guide the public to fully express opinions through letters and visits, "mayor's mailbox," and other democratic methods, allowing the people to participate in social governance, and further alleviate social contradictions. However, given the limitations of traditional channels in terms of processing efficiency and response speed, the public is more inclined to use instant and widespread self-media to make their voices heard in the hope of quickly solving problems. In response to this issue, while focusing on public opinion governance, the government should improve relevant systems and mechanisms, expand channels for expressing public opinion and feedback, actively understand and analyze social contradictions through the Internet, and grasp the initiative in guiding public opinion.

During the germination stage, with the occurrence of public events, public discussions in the Internet public opinion field gradually form. At this stage, on the one hand, authoritative media need to intervene and report accurately, and the government should also actively respond and make event handling open and transparent, which are key measures to reduce public misunderstanding of the event and stabilize public opinion. On the other hand, the government should make good use of Internet big data technology to monitor Internet public opinion, master the development trend of Internet public opinion through quantitative analysis of the speed of topic dissemination and reading volume, and respond to Internet public opinion in an orderly manner.

During the diffusion period, Internet public opinion has not yet formed a unified voice, and the role of opinion leaders is particularly crucial. Well-known public figures have strong information dissemination capabilities and can guide public opinion to a certain extent. Therefore, cultivating opinion leaders in line with mainstream values and encouraging opinion leaders to spread objective information through Internet platforms is of great significance for stabilizing and guiding public

opinion. Cultivating opinion leaders can start from the following two aspects: one is to cultivate Internet "big Vs" into positive opinion leaders; the other is to encourage experts and scholars to actively participate in the Internet space, guide mainstream values, objectively interpret facts, and strengthen public opinion guidance at critical moments to prevent the spread of negative public opinion.

In summary, Internet public opinion governance should follow its life cycle, take guiding measures at different stages, implement targeted strategies, guide public opinion to smoothly transition from the latency period, germination period, and diffusion period to the decline period, and complete the task of public opinion guidance.

From the perspective of polycentric collaborative governance, effective management of Internet public opinion requires the construction of a governance system jointly participated in by multiple stakeholders such as the party and government, enterprises, social organizations, and citizens. The system aims to maximize governance effectiveness through the independent role and mutual cooperation of various stakeholders. The party and government lead policy formulation and public opinion supervision, enterprises and social organizations bear social responsibility, citizens improve legal and moral literacy, and jointly promote the healthy development of the network environment. By clarifying the responsibilities and collaboration mechanisms of various stakeholders, synergistic effects can be stimulated, governance efforts can be formed, and the complexity of Internet public opinion can be effectively addressed.

3.2 Strengthening the Cultivation and Construction of Professional Talent Teams

As a new branch of public management, Internet public opinion governance's professional requirements and risk management complexity are increasingly highlighted. Government staff, as the front-line force in dealing with public opinion events, play a crucial role in the effective response and governance of public opinion. Therefore, it is urgent to cultivate a high-quality and high-level talent team. This team should have a deep understanding of the laws of public opinion development, be proficient in Internet information technology, and have forward-looking risk management awareness.

To improve the professional level of Internet public opinion governance, it is necessary to build and strengthen talent teams from two dimensions: soft power and hard power. The improvement of soft power focuses on improving the professional quality and comprehensive ability of existing staff, including but not limited to in-depth analysis ability of Internet information, risk assessment and management ability, timely and effective response ability to public opinion, and cultivation of legal thinking. This requires continuous strengthening of staff's theoretical foundation and practical ability through regular professional training, case analysis, and simulation exercises.

The improvement of hard power focuses on the expansion and structure optimization of the talent team, absorbing fresh blood, introducing young talents with innovative thinking and professional background, and enhancing the vitality and creativity of the entire team. In addition, establishing a close cooperative relationship with colleges and universities and jointly formulating talent training programs not only helps attract and cultivate potential professional talents but also brings dual support of academic research and practical innovation to public opinion governance.

In summary, the effectiveness of Internet public opinion governance depends on the comprehensive development of professional talent teams, which requires us to plan and continue to invest in talent training, ability improvement, and structure optimization. By constructing a talent training system that combines theory and practice, innovation and experience, to provide a solid talent support for Internet public opinion governance, and further enhance the scientific, effective, and forward-looking nature of public opinion response.

4 Summary and Outlook

With the continuous rise of China's comprehensive national strength, the Internet public opinion environment is becoming more and more changeable and complex. Improper handling of Internet public opinion will affect the government's credibility and even cause social unrest. Therefore, governing Internet public opinion is an important task of the Chinese government. This paper deeply analyzes the dilemmas of current Internet public opinion governance from two aspects: thinking and action, namely, the rigidity of the concept of Internet public opinion governance and the delay between Internet public opinion information collection and decision-making. In response to these two problems, the paper proposes two corresponding suggestions: establishing phased governance and multi-stakeholder governance awareness, and strengthening the cultivation and construction of professional talent teams. It is hoped that this paper can provide certain help to the government and relevant departments in the process of governing Internet public opinion and contribute to the harmonious and stable development of China's society.

References

- [1] Song Shiping, Jiang Yingyue. The Real Dilemma and Strategy Selection of University Public Opinion Ecology Governance [J]. *Journal of China Three Gorges University: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2023, 45(4):6-10.
- [2] Li Lei, Yan Lianfu. The Real Dilemma and Countermeasures of University Public Opinion Ecology Governance [J]. *Public Relations World*, 2024(7):63-65.
- [3] Lu Xiaolong. Analysis of the Development Trend of Public Opinion in Public Events and Countermeasures [J]. *Legal Review*, 2018(26):1.
- [4] Shang Jihao. Research on Network Public Opinion Governance Countermeasures from a Multidimensional Collaborative Perspective [J]. *News Research Guide*, 2023, 14(22):90-92.
- [5] He Yu, Chen Lijun. On the Formation Mechanism of Online Rumors and Their Governance Countermeasures [J]. *Journal of Nanjing University of Technology: Social Science Edition*, 2012, 11(3):5.
- [6] Liu Fan. Four Types of Thinking in Public Opinion Governance in a Mediatized Society [J]. *Young Journalist*, 2021(14):2.
- [7] Yan Sijia. A Brief Analysis of the Game and Governance in the Online Public Opinion Field [J]. *Today's Media*, 2015, 23(6):2.
- [8] Zhang Qian, Journalism and Communication. Research on the Formation Mechanism of Online Public Opinion Hotspots from the Perspective of Four All Media [D]. [2024-12-02].
- [9] Gao Peizhen. Research on the Dilemma and Resolution Path of Online Public Opinion Governance [D]. Inner Mongolia University, 2023.
- [10] Niu Yue, Gong Xiaorun. The Generation, Development, and Governance Countermeasures of Group Polarization in Online Public Opinion [J]. 2021(2019-3):82-85.
- [11] Sheng Mingke, Yang Yulan. Research on the Generation and Governance Mechanism of Public Opinion Violence in the Weibo Era [J]. *Journal of Jishou University (Social Science Edition)*, 2013, 34(3):73-78.
- [12] Liu Lusha. Research on the Dilemma and Countermeasures of Online Public Opinion Governance in the New Media Era [D]. Central South University, 2022.
- [13] Wang Weicai. Analysis of the Current Situation of Online New Media in the New Era and Research on Its Governance [J]. *Journal of Nanyang Institute of Technology*, 2022, 14(3):77-81.
- [14] Chen Yixian. Research on the Formation Mechanism of Online Public Opinion under the Metaverse Perspective [J]. *Southeast Communication*, 2022(5):53-55.
- [15] Ma Chunying. The Real Dilemma and Optimization Path of Government's Public Opinion Guidance Work in Emergency Events [J]. *Journal of Anhui University of Science and Technology: Social Science Edition*, 2022, 24(6): 94-98.
- [16] Yu Hua Yue. The Formation Mechanism of Public Opinion in Major Emergency Events and Its Guidance Principles and Paths [J]. *Journal of Jishou University: Social Science Edition*, 2020, 41(6):8.