

An Analysis of the Governance Path of Government Online Public Opinion in the Era of We Media: A Case Study of the "Songshan Free Cabbage Picking" Incident

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Abstract: The rapid development of We Media has reshaped the ways in which social information is produced, disseminated, and interacted with. The generation of public opinion has entered a new stage characterized by decentralization, strong interactivity, and high diffusion. As a result, government governance of online public opinion faces heightened uncertainty and complexity. This paper takes the public opinion incident of "free cabbage picking" in Songshan District, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia as a case study. On the basis of sorting out the propagation chain of the incident, it summarizes the typical characteristics of We Media public opinion, analyzes the government's shortcomings in rapid detection, precise assessment, authoritative response, and collaborative governance, and proposes improvement strategies from three dimensions: mechanism construction, process optimization, and capacity enhancement.

Keywords: We Media era, government, online public opinion, public opinion governance

Introduction

With the continuous development of information technology, online public opinion has become an important channel for the public to express their opinions and viewpoints. Local governments have gradually realized its importance and actively explored and studied online public opinion. Regarding the problems in government governance of online public opinion, Guo You (2021) believes that the positive participation of subjects other than the government is low, the means and response methods of public opinion governance are singular, and the ability to warn, judge, and analyze online public opinion is insufficient; Wang Minghui (2024) proposes to build an effective legal guarantee system, to innovate diversified governance approaches, and to strengthen the intensity of government information disclosure; Wang Xiao (2023) proposes that in the face of sudden crisis public opinion incidents, the government should improve the information disclosure mechanism for responding to online public opinion, namely, to promptly release official information and to properly disclose routine government information, and should increase investment in network management, namely, to introduce professional talents and optimize the talent structure. This paper selects the "Songshan Free Cabbage Picking" incident for analysis and proposes countermeasures for the government to better govern online public opinion. This is not only a basic requirement for building a harmonious society but also an objective need for strengthening social governance. At the same time, it can enhance citizens' online moral literacy and form a clean and upright network security environment.

1. Theoretical Basis

With the deep embedding of digital platforms into social life, the public opinion communication environment has shifted from media-centered to platform-centered. Platform-based governance refers to the process in which, in order to cope with increasingly complex governance contexts, the government absorbs platform concepts, applies the organizational structural characteristics of platforms and the principles of platform effectiveness to governance practices, reshapes the government governance system within a certain scope, enhances government governance capacity, and realizes the platform-based transformation of government governance^[1].

Platform governance generally includes three core components:

1.1 Platform Rule Governance

It refers to the platform's imposition of constraints on information production and dissemination through means such as community guidelines, user agreements, posting thresholds, and content review processes. Its core functions include setting content access standards, establishing mechanisms for error correction, punishment, and credit evaluation, and suppressing risk information through the coordination of manual and machine review. The construction of platform governance rules can enhance the effectiveness of government network governance policies, promote the precision of policy implementation in cyberspace, and objectively help optimize network governance procedures, improve the level of network governance, and thereby stabilize the order of the network market. To achieve a balance of interests among subjects, one must adhere to the neutrality principle of platform governance^[2].

1.2 Platform Algorithm Governance

It refers to the platform's shaping of information visibility through technical mechanisms such as algorithmic recommendation, traffic distribution, and popularity ranking. Its key characteristics include: algorithmic preference for emotional, conflict-driven, and highly stimulating content; user behavior in turn influencing algorithmic weights; and the platform having amplification and acceleration effects on the communication structure. The internal driving force behind the production of negative discourse narratives on platforms is the traffic logic. Only by cracking the traffic code of negative discourse narrative generation on platforms through algorithmic governance, by promoting the disenchantment of negative discourse narratives through human-machine complementarity, and by strengthening the cultivation and guidance of groups susceptible to negative discourse narratives through scientific communication, can the spread of negative discourse narratives on platforms be effectively governed in the era of intelligent communication^[3].

1.3 Platform Structure Governance

It refers to the platform's shaping of the structural order of the information ecology through elements such as interface layout, content entry points, interaction mechanisms, reporting systems, and rumor-debunking mechanisms. Its functions include establishing convenient fact-checking pathways, providing authoritative information access points, and constructing mechanisms for user participation and content correction. Platform governance must take publicness as its core value orientation, aiming to protect citizens' rights and interests, maintain public order, and realize the free and comprehensive development of human beings. In the current environment of platform governance, the main pathways of platform governance include self-regulation and government supervision, which maintain a dialectical relationship of mutual adjustment and mutual promotion^[4].

2. Case Analysis: Overview of the "Songshan Free Cabbage Picking" Incident

2.1 The Fermentation Period of Public Opinion

At 14:00 on November 3, 2025, a netizen surnamed Huang (full name undisclosed) and his friend drove through Dangpudi Village, Songshan District, Chifeng City. They noticed three middle-aged and elderly people picking up cabbages in the said plot. After learning that no one had stopped these people, they immediately picked three cabbages and shot a video. In order to increase the traffic of his personal account, Huang posted the video on an online platform at 15:00 the same day and replied with the specific location of the cabbage field in the comment section. The video was then forwarded by some netizens including Wang (full name undisclosed) and Su (full name undisclosed), and some netizens spread the video further, causing the information to proliferate in a fission-like manner. Some We Media outlets also took notice of this content, but they had not yet intervened on a large scale. Although the level of attention began to rise at this stage, the impact remained relatively limited, and no large-scale social action had taken place. The low-cost, highly attractive information of "free cabbage picking," through its visual impact, free inducement, and location tagging, planted the seeds for subsequent rapid public opinion diffusion and public participation.

2.2 The Outbreak Period of Public Opinion

At 21:00 on November 4, a reporter surnamed Liu from the Red Mountain Evening News contacted the netizens surnamed Wang and Su to learn about the situation. Without verifying the facts on site, the reporter posted a video titled "New Surprise after Free Potato Picking: Free Cabbage Cutting Available in One Place in Chifeng" through the official account at 10:00 on the morning of November 5, which attracted more people to go and pick up cabbages. On November 6, the grower surnamed Li asked the people who were picking up cabbages in his own field, and learned that they had come after seeing the video released by the Red Mountain Evening News. He then sent a private message to the Red Mountain Evening News inquiring about its source of information and requesting a reply, but the Red Mountain Evening News did not respond. At 16:00, Li expressed his personal grievance through the internet, posting a video claiming that "within two days, 400 mu of land have been swept clean" and that "the loss has reached one million yuan," which attracted even more attention from netizens. Li never reported the incident to the public security authorities. When the public security authorities proactively contacted him to inquire about the situation, he explicitly stated that he would not pursue the legal responsibility of the people who had picked up the cabbages, but he demanded an explanation from the Red Mountain Evening News. From November 7 onward, some online media outlets successively reposted the video released by the grower Li, which rapidly escalated the incident. The people who came to the site to pick up cabbages generally believed that the cabbages were free. Some people joined in for fun, and most of the people reported that no one had discouraged them on site. At the same time, some forwarders and self-media outlets that re-edited the content, as well as local residents, also participated in commenting and spreading the information. Public opinion evolved from simple information diffusion into emotional and mobilizing social attention and a public issue.

2.3 The Recession Period of Public Opinion

As the incident escalated, the Joint Investigation Team of Songshan District, Chifeng City issued a situation report on November 11, announcing the establishment of a joint investigation team to carry out investigation and handling work, and promising that subsequent developments would be released to the public in a timely manner. Finally, the authorities issued a report on November 17, which included the basic facts of the incident and the results of the investigation and handling. The report explicitly pointed out that this incident was caused by multiple factors, including the release of false information by users of online platforms, the forwarding of such information by some netizens, the reporting by local media without verification, the misleading of some members of the public, and the exaggerated statements made by self-media outlets. Based on the verified investigation results, the Songshan District and relevant authorities, in accordance with their management authority and laws and regulations, held the involved media, the sponsoring units, and relevant responsible persons accountable respectively. The authorities also pledged to strengthen the management of their affiliated media, to enhance public legal education and publicity, and to improve officials' capacity for incident response and handling. The authorities called on netizens to remain rational, to strengthen their ability to discern information, and to work together to create a fair and orderly social order. With the release of the authoritative report, the implementation of accountability, the completion of compensation, and the public apology from the media, public attention and confidence in the incident gradually recovered. The heat of public opinion declined rapidly. The topic of "free cabbage picking" ceased to be an online hotspot, and the incident gradually subsided.

3. Analysis of the Causes of the Incident from the Perspective of Platform Governance

3.1 Lack of Platform Rule Implementation: Low Threshold for Information Release and Weakened Review Mechanism

From the perspective of the fermentation period of public opinion, the most critical cause is the insufficient implementation of platform rules, which enabled false information to form a basis for dissemination in a short period of time. The threshold for content release is extremely low. The first netizen who posted the video, based solely on filming several people bending over to pick up cabbages, concluded that "no one is watching, and anyone can take the cabbages," and then released the video of "free cabbage picking." The platform did not set up a pre-publication review procedure for abnormal value or suspected misleading content, nor did it provide a risk warning in the early stage of the video's dissemination. The platform's pre-publication review capability is weak. Only about one hour passed

from the video's release to its massive forwarding, during which the video was not subjected to the platform's risk control review, nor was the poster required to supplement the source. The error correction and feedback mechanism is absent. In the user comment section of the platform, interactive discussions such as "Where is the location?" and "Is it true?" had already appeared, but the platform did not guide users to verify the information, nor did it remind the poster to make corrections or promote information correction. As a result, the false information continued to accumulate exposure, creating a window period for rumor diffusion.

3.2 Platform Algorithm Amplification of Information: Attention-Driven Logic Fuels the Spread of Public Opinion

In the process of the incident evolving from the fermentation stage to the outbreak stage, the algorithm becomes the core driver of the rapid spread of public opinion. The recommendation algorithms of self-media platforms prefer conflict-driven, emotional, and surprising content. Labels such as "free," "surprise," and "take at will" easily trigger the algorithm's attention incentive mode, causing the platform to automatically push the content to more users with similar browsing habits. The exposure rate of the relevant videos does not rely on natural diffusion but accumulates rapidly through the algorithm's precise distribution. The algorithm amplifies the conflict narrative, as elements such as "farmer's loss," "crowds of people flocking," and "media exposure" continuously accumulate, gradually endowing the content with a sense of conflict and drama, which further aligns with the platform model's preference for highly emotional content, thereby expanding the scale of public opinion. The algorithm prolongs the dissemination cycle. Under normal circumstances, a misleading local minor event would hardly remain on the main page for a long time. However, once the algorithm identifies a combination of high interactivity and conflict, it continues to provide recommendations, reinforcing the initial misinterpretation and breaking through geographical constraints, thus generating a nationwide discussion volume.

3.3 Imbalance of Media Authority: Platformization Leads to Distortion of Authoritative Information

During the outbreak period of public opinion, the intervention of authoritative media became a turning point in the incident and also the most typical platformization risk from the perspective of platform governance. The media weakened its due gatekeeping function in the process of competing for traffic. The reporter from the Red Mountain Evening News, without going to the scene, released a video titled "Free Cabbage Cutting Available in a Certain Place in Chifeng" based solely on the accounts of two netizens. The dissemination power of this video far exceeded that of ordinary users, drawing a large number of offline pickers to the site. The media's content production was squeezed by the logic of the platform. The reporting language clearly catered to the platform's hotspot model, such as the headline expression "New Surprise after Free Potato Picking," which represents a typical platform-friendly narrative. This approach strengthened the content's appeal for dissemination but sacrificed journalistic authenticity. The media lacked a correction mechanism. When the grower contacted the media to request verification of the information, the media did not respond, allowing the misleading report to continue spreading and to be further repurposed by other self-media outlets. After becoming platformized, authoritative media gradually deviated from their role as suppliers of authoritative information, thereby amplifying secondary public opinion. This constituted the key juncture at which the incident rapidly escalated from online to offline.

3.4 User Behavior Disorder: Insufficient Digital Literacy and Amplification of Offline Actions

The high level of user participation in the era of We Media makes users a force that cannot be ignored during the fermentation and outbreak of the incident. In particular, from November 4 to 6, a cycle of online dissemination, offline gathering, and then online re-dissemination gradually formed. Some members of the public participated with a "playful" mentality. Driven by the psychology of "free" and "joining the fun," local residents quickly arrived at the site to pick cabbages. This behavior is a typical low-cost, experiential participation behavior, which is even more prominent in the platformized environment. Users lack the ability to judge the authenticity of information. Most of the attendees said, "I saw it online" or "The video said you can pick," reflecting the fact that users have a strong herd mentality and did not take basic verification actions. User behavior in turn drives the re-dissemination of public opinion. People at the site shot new videos and uploaded them to the platform, thereby providing new dissemination materials for the misleading content and supplying more reinforcement signals to the algorithm, which further increases the heat of public opinion.

3.5 Lagging Government Intervention: Insufficient Platform Governance Capability and Delayed Response

Before the public opinion subsided, the delay in government governance was the key reason why the rumor could achieve large-scale dissemination. The government lacked sufficient monitoring in the early stage. The widespread dissemination of misleading content lasted for nearly a day, but it did not trigger a timely warning from the platform or the regulatory authorities, indicating that the grassroots cyberspace administration monitoring system had insufficient capability to perceive cross-platform information dissemination. The government did not respond quickly enough. After the misleading video was released by the media, the false information continued to ferment. Although the grower raised questions on November 6, the official investigation and authoritative report failed to intervene in a timely manner, resulting in a clear information vacuum in the public opinion arena. The government lacked interdepartmental coordination. After the public opinion emerged, it failed to promptly form a rapid circulation and collaboration mechanism among the agriculture and rural affairs department, the publicity department, and the cyberspace administration department, which caused the government's voice to be absent during the peak period of public opinion and undermined the effect of early public opinion guidance. Ultimately, the government's comprehensive response was only released after the public opinion had entered the recession period, exposing the fact that the government's capacity for proactive public opinion governance remains insufficient.

4. Optimization of the Government's Governance Path for Online Public Opinion in the Era of We Media

4.1 Strengthening the Implementation of Platform Rules: Raising Access Standards and Consolidating Review Responsibilities

Platforms should implement stricter content release access. They should raise the release threshold for unverified accounts, initiate risk verification procedures for keywords that are likely to trigger offline gatherings, and apply processes such as delayed release, secondary confirmation, and risk warnings to unverified accounts or those with low credit ratings, thereby reducing the likelihood of fabricated content entering the public sphere. In terms of review, platforms should incorporate relevant information into special reviews for sensitive livelihood issues, and verify content sources, offline feasibility, and business owners' intentions in real time. In terms of error correction, platforms should establish mechanisms for rapid labeling, public clarification, and credit deduction, and should complete the handling of misleading content before public opinion ferments. By raising access standards, strengthening review, and enhancing sanctions, platforms can reduce the possibility of false livelihood information entering the public space.

4.2 Optimizing Algorithmic Distribution Logic: Reducing Emotional Stimuli and Prioritizing Trusted Sources

Recommendation algorithms need to be adjusted from an attention-driven logic to a public security logic. Platforms should automatically downgrade unverified livelihood welfare information to prevent it from being massively pushed by algorithms due to high interactivity. At the same time, platforms should establish a trusted-source priority mechanism. Among similar pieces of information, content from government-affiliated accounts and authoritative media should be prioritized for distribution, while content from ordinary users should be displayed later. Furthermore, platforms should utilize data mining and text analysis technologies to mine and analyze big data on the internet, thereby identifying key information and events, determining their impact on public opinion, triggering timely alerts, and providing feedback to local authorities. This approach achieves active braking of public opinion diffusion from the technical side^[5].

4.3 Strengthening Media Professional Standards: Reinforcing Verification Procedures and Stabilizing Authoritative Information Sources

Local media organizations need to adhere more firmly to verification requirements in the competition for traffic. They must implement procedures such as on-site verification and confirmation with local authorities, and must avoid rushing to publish. They should proactively produce concise, clear, and verified reports, reduce public misunderstanding of ambiguous statements, and let

authoritative voices rather than disorderly self-media dominate the narrative framework. At the same time, authoritative media need to proactively speak out in advance during the fermentation period of public opinion, quickly provide clear, verifiable information that is consistent with government departments, and stabilize the public opinion framework. Furthermore, local media should establish a normalized coordination mechanism with the government, reduce information noise through coordinated release and unified messaging, and let authoritative channels once again become the dominant providers of public information.

4.4 Promoting Rational User Participation: Enhancing Identification Capability and Reducing Herd Behavior

Users' credulity toward low-cost information and their herd behavior are important drivers of the spread of the incident. The government and platforms should reduce risks by both curbing impulsive actions and enhancing identification capabilities. Platforms can automatically pop up warnings for risky content, such as "This information has not been verified; exercise caution before taking offline action" or "Do not fall for welfare-inducing content," thereby using technical means to suppress users' herd impulses. At the government and community levels, authorities can regularly carry out activities such as digital literacy campaigns and tutorials on identifying false online information. Through short video case studies, supermarket-based rumor-debunking demonstrations, and other methods, these efforts can enhance the public's ability to identify free-inducing false information. At the same time, the government should encourage users to actively cite official verification channels in comment sections, such as government verification links or business owner statements, thereby spontaneously forming a correction mechanism through community collaboration and reducing the online-to-offline-to-online feedback loop caused by herd diffusion.

4.5 Enhancing Government Governance Efficiency: Proactive Monitoring and Early Warning, Precise Response and Clarification

In the era of We Media, the life cycle of public opinion is extremely short. If the government still relies on offline feedback and manual monitoring, it can easily miss the golden two-hour window. The government needs to strengthen its proactive public opinion governance thinking. By establishing data interfaces with platforms, the government should pay attention to the long-tail dissemination of local event-related short videos and offline gathering-indicative content, thereby achieving early detection, early identification, and early warning. The government should also strengthen the rectification and supervision of distorted information^[6] to prevent misleading information from achieving large-scale diffusion before an outbreak. At the response level, the government should speak out at the first opportunity to avoid a window period for rumors. The government should directly address the core questions of the public. Government-affiliated accounts, media outlets, and communities should maintain a consistent message to avoid secondary misunderstandings caused by multiple sources of information. The government should also strengthen cross-departmental and platform-coordinated governance, conduct timely online clarifications, maintain offline order, and implement platform traffic restrictions, thereby achieving a smooth conclusion during the recession period of public opinion and avoiding emotional backlash and secondary rumors caused by delays.

5. Conclusion

The public opinion arena in the era of We Media has profoundly changed the generation mechanism and dissemination dynamics of public events. The "Songsshan Free Cabbage Picking" incident shows that under the combined effects of algorithm-driven logic, platform amplification, user emotional participation, and media competition, information can trigger offline gatherings and public risks in an extremely short period of time. From the perspective of platform governance theory, and on the basis of a systematic analysis of the Songsshan incident, this paper proposes five governance optimization paths corresponding to the causes: strengthening rules, optimizing algorithms, consolidating media professional standards, enhancing users' digital literacy, and reinforcing proactive government governance. The intention of this approach is not to assign blame after the fact, but to improve the entire governance chain so that platforms become more standardized, media more professional, users more rational, and government more agile, thereby enabling similar risks that may arise in the future to be identified at the source, controlled at an early stage, and resolved during development. Only when the government, platforms, media, and the public jointly enhance their governance capabilities can a

credible, clear, and orderly public information space be rebuilt in the era of We Media.

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