

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: With the development of We Media, the production, dissemination and interaction of social information have all changed rapidly. The generation of public opinion has reached a new stage of decentralisation, strong participation and wide dissemination. Therefore, the government has failed to regulate online public opinion effectively and regularly. The public opinion incident of "free cabbage picking" in Songshan District, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia, is the subject of this paper. Based on the course of this case, this paper will first introduce the general situation of public opinion on We Media, then analyze the deficiencies in rapid detection, accurate assessment, authoritative response and collaborative governance by the government, and finally put forward three types of improvement plans: building institutions and systems, streamlining procedures, and strengthening capacity.

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

Introduction

With the continuous development of information technology, the public's online public opinion has become a way for people to express their thoughts and opinions. Locally, the demand for online public opinion has become known, and many studies have begun. Guo You (2021) believes that the problems in the government's governance of online public opinion include low positive participation by subjects other than the government, a single mode for means and responses to public opinion governance, and insufficient capacity to warn, judge and analyse online public opinion. Wang Minghui (2024) put forward the construction of an effective legal guarantee system and all-round reforms in governance to raise the level of government information disclosure. Wang Xiao (2023) thinks that when there are sudden crises and incidents in online public opinion, the government should improve the information disclosure mechanism for responding to online public opinion by promptly releasing official information and properly disseminating routine government information, increase investment in network management, introduce professional talents and optimise the talent structure. The case of "Songshan Free Cabbage Picking" will be used in this paper to study how the government can better handle online public opinion. It is the foundation of an orderly society and the aim to be achieved in the construction of good governance. At the same time, it can improve the online moral education of the public and build a clean and ethical network environment.

1. Theoretical Foundation

With the development of digital platforms and their integration into society, the spread of public opinion has moved from being media-led to platform-led. With the development of the Government, so too has platform-based governance. Based on the concepts of platforms and other features of the organisational structure and effectiveness of platforms, reform the government's governance system in a particular area, enhance the capacity for government governance, and achieve platform-based transformation of government governance^[1].

The main parts of platform governance are:

1.1 Platform Rule Governance

Many restrictions have been placed on the production and dissemination of information by the platform in various ways, such as community guidelines, user agreements, posting limits, content review, etc. First of all, the functions are to set the standard for the distribution of content, build a system of fault correction and punishment, and cooperate with human operators to regulate the spread of harmful information. The construction of platform governance rules can improve the effectiveness of government network governance policies, promote more precise implementation of policies in cyberspace, help optimise network governance procedures fairly and reasonably, raise the level of network governance, and thus maintain the order of the network market. To make the parties in the dispute feel that their interests have been considered, the platform should be fair^[2].

1.2 Platform Algorithm Governance

It refers to the organisation of the information provided by technology for users on a platform and the algorithms for recommendation, traffic distribution, etc. The first attribute of this system is that it gives more importance to emotional, conflictual and very stimulating content; users can also adjust the weight of the algorithm, and at the platform level, there is amplification and acceleration of the communication structure. The actual reason for the production of negative discourse narratives on platforms is traffic. To deal with the spread of negative discourse on platforms in the era of intelligent communication, traffic rules for generating negative discourse narratives must be broken; disengagement from negative discourse narratives should be promoted through the synergy of humans and machines, and science communication can enhance the education and guidance of groups prone to being influenced by such negative narratives^[3].

1.3 Platform Structure Governance

It refers to the organisation of the structural order in the information ecology through interfaces, content entry points, interaction mechanisms, reporting systems, rumour-debunking systems and so on. It will be more convenient for the public to report false information and form a system of user participation and content correction. The Foundation of platform governance should be open, so it is possible to protect the rights and interests of the people, maintain social stability and promote the free and healthy development of all sectors of society. In the current era of platform governance, the two main ways to achieve this are self-regulation and government supervision; they are in a state of dialectical unity and development^[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, netizens named Huang (full name not disclosed) and his friend after the people driving through Dangpudi Village in Songshan District, Chifeng City. They saw that three middle-aged and older people were picking cabbages in the field. Learning that no one had stopped the people, they immediately picked three cabbages and took a picture. To boost the traffic of his personal account, Huang posted the video on an online platform at 15:00 the same day and then replied in the comment area with the specific location of the cabbage field. Wang (full name withheld) and Su (full name withheld) were among the first netizens to post the video, and some other netizens also spread it; thus, the information spread in a fission manner. Some media organisations have also published reports on this material, but they have not done so to a large extent yet. Although the level of attention had begun to rise at this time, its effect was still relatively small, and no large-scale social movement had occurred. "Free cabbage picking" is a low-cost, very attractive piece of information with a strong visual effect and no cost, so it has spread rapidly among the public and motivated them to participate.

2.2 The Period of Public Opinion Outbreak

At 21:00 on November 4, Liu of the Red Mountain Evening News contacted the netizens surnamed Wang and Su for more information on the circumstances. Without verifying the truth at the time, the reporter posted a video titled "New Surprise after Free Potato Picking: Free Cabbage Cutting Available

in One Place in Chifeng" on the official account at 10:00 AM on November 5, and as a result, more people went to pick up cabbages. On November 6, the grower surnamed Li asked the people who picked up cabbages in his own field, and found out that they had come after seeing the video released by the Red Mountain Evening News. Then he sent a private message to the Red Mountain Evening News to ask where they got the information and requested a reply, but the Red Mountain Evening News did not respond. At 16:00, Li posted his personal grievance on the Internet and released a video claiming that "in the past two days, 400 mu of land have been cleared" and "the loss has reached one million yuan", thus drawing the attention of many netizens. Li did not inform the public security organs of the crime. When the public security authorities first contacted him to ask why, he said that he would not hold anyone legally responsible for picking up the cabbages, but he still demanded an explanation from the Red Mountain Evening News. Starting on November 7, some online media platforms have repeatedly shared the video released by grower Li, and this case has attracted the attention of the public. Most of the people who came to the site for cabbage picking did not think it was free. Some people joined in for fun, and most of the people said that no one had discouraged them at the site. At the same time, some forwarders and self-media enterprises had also revised the content again, and local residents were also commenting on and spreading the information. The spread of information by the public has shifted to emotional expression and mobilisation; it is now a public cause.

2.3 The Recession Period of Public Opinion

As the situation worsened, on November 11, the Joint Investigation Team of Songshan District and Chifeng City released a situation report, announced the establishment of a joint investigation team to carry out investigation and handling work, and promised to inform the public of any further developments in a timely manner. Finally, on November 17, the authorities released a report that presented the basic facts of the case and the results of the investigation and handling. According to the report, the reasons for this case include the spread of false information by users of online platforms, the dissemination of such information by some netizens, the reporting of it by local media without verification, misleading some members of the public, and exaggerated statements released by self-media outlets. Based on the above investigation results, the Songshan District Office and other departments have held meetings with the relevant media, sponsoring units and other responsible parties to ask them to take corrective action in accordance with their management powers and laws. The authorities will strengthen the management of their affiliated media, improve public legal education and dissemination, and increase the capacity of officials to respond to incidents and handle them. The government told the people to be reasonable, strengthen their sense of right and wrong, and work together to build a fair and orderly society. After the release of the official report, accountability has been taken seriously; thus, compensation has been offered, and in cooperation with the media, a public apology has been issued to win back some of the people's trust. The popularity of the cause dropped rapidly. "Free Cabbage Picking" was no longer popular on the Internet, and as a result, there were few cases.

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

3.1 No Enforcement of Platform Rules: A Low Threshold for Information Disclosure and a Weak Review Mechanism

The main reason for the long fermentation period of public opinion is that the platform rules have not been effectively implemented, and as a result, false information has spread rapidly. The Release Threshold of the content is low. The first netizen to post a video based only on filming several people bending over to pick cabbages believed that "no one is watching, and anyone can take the cabbages", and then released a video of "free cabbage picking". The platform had not found any abnormal data or suspected fake news in the publication previously, and no risk alert had been issued at the beginning of the spread of the video. The platform will not pre-publish the works. Only about an hour after the video was posted, it had already been shared several times, so it did not fall under the platform's risk-control review and the poster did not need to add a source. It does not have error correction or feedback. Interactive discussions such as "Where is the location?" and "Is it true?" have already appeared in the user comment area of the platform, but the platform has not guided users to verify the information, nor has it reminded the poster to make corrections or promoted information correction. Therefore, the false information continued to spread widely and provided an opportunity for the spread of rumours.

3.2 Platform Algorithm Amplification of Information: Attention-driven Logic Drives the Spread of Public Opinion

As the case progressed from the fermentation stage to the outbreak stage, the algorithm has helped spread the public's attention to it to some extent. Recommendation algorithms of self-media platforms favour conflict-driven, emotional and surprising content. Labels such as "free", "surprise" and "take it as you please" are likely to attract the attention of the algorithm's incentive mode and thus are favourable to the platform in increasing the number of users with similar browsing habits. The diffusion speed of the corresponding videos will not be slow diffusion; rather, it will increase rapidly due to the organisation of the algorithm. The algorithm will add all kinds of elements to strengthen the narrative of conflict, such as "the farmer's loss", "crowds of people flocking", and "media coverage", repeatedly creating a sense of conflict and drama in the content; thus, it is more likely to go viral on the platform and attract the attention of more people. Extend the Period of the Algorithm. Normally, a misleading local minor event would not be displayed on the front page for an extended time. However, once the algorithm finds that there is a combination of high interactivity and conflict, it will continue to give recommendations; thus, the original misconception will be reinforced and spread across the country to generate discussion.

3.3 Imbalance in Media Authority: Platformisation has changed the source of official information

At the beginning of the public opinion movement, the intervention of official media changed the course of the case, and it is also a typical case of platform governance risk. The media hoped to increase their own traffic and thus reduce the number of gatekeepers. The reporter for Red Mountain Evening News did not go to the scene and published a video titled "Free Cabbage Cutting Available in a Certain Place in Chifeng" based only on the posts of two netizens. The spread of this video was much wider than that of the regular users, and as a result, many offline pickers came to the site. The Production of media content was limited by the logic of the platform. The language of the report is in line with the hotspot model of the platform; for example, "New Surprise After Free Potato Picking" is a typical type of platform-friendly story. It will be popular with the public, but that may not be the case. The Media did not address it. When the grower contacted the media to ask for confirmation of the information, the media did not reply, and thus the false report continued to spread and was further circulated by other self-media channels. After being platformised, the traditional media have lost their original function of spreading reliable information and begun to spread secondary public opinion. At that time, the case had spread rapidly on the Internet and then went viral.

3.4 User Behaviour Disorder: Lack of Digital Literacy and Amplification of Offline Actions

Given the high level of user participation in the era of We Media, these users are now forces that should not be ignored in the spread and development of the case. From November 4 to 6, there was a cycle of online spread, offline activities and then online spread. Some members of the public had a "playful" attitude. Motivated by the desire for "freedom" and "joining the fun", the local people quickly gathered at the place to pick cabbages. It is a typical low-cost, experience-oriented form of participation that is even more prominent in the platform economy. The people do not know whether the information is correct or not. Most of the attendees said that they "saw it online" or "the video said so", so they have a strong herd mentality and did not perform basic verification. Changes in people's behaviour will change the spread of public opinion. The people at the site took new videos, posted them on the platform, provided new dissemination materials for the misleading content, and offered more reinforcement signals to the algorithm to further increase the heat of public opinion.

3.5 Lagging Government Intervention: Lack of Platform Governance Ability and Delayed Response

Before the public opinion cooled down, the main reason for the spread of the rumor was that the government did not govern well. The government did not monitor in the early days. The spread of the false information lasted for almost a day, but there was no prompt notification from the platform or the authorities; thus, the grassroots cyberspace administration and monitoring system did not have the capacity to detect the cross-platform dissemination of this information in time. The Government did not do so promptly. The media published the fake video and it was then spread among the public. Although the grower pointed out the problem on November 6, by then the official investigation and authoritative report had not been released, so the public did not know of the situation. The government lacked interdepartmental coordination. After the appearance of the public opinion, there was no rapid

dissemination and coordination among the agriculture and rural affairs department, the publicity department and the cyberspace administration department to spread the government's voice in time; as a result, it failed to reach the public at a crucial moment and thus weakened the impact of early public opinion guidance. Finally, the government fully responded only after the public's attention had waned; thus, it can be concluded that the government does not have strong proactive management power over public opinion.

4. Optimisation of the Government's Governance Path for Online Public Opinion in the Era of WeMedia

4.1 Strengthen Enforcement of Platform Rules: Raise the Barrier to Entry and Centralise the Review Function

Limit the readers of the published works. Increase the release threshold for unverified accounts, start risk verification of keywords that may lead to offline gatherings, and take measures such as delayed release, secondary confirmation and risk warnings on unverified accounts or those with low credit ratings to reduce the spread of fabricated content in the public. Platforms should publish special reports on related information about sensitive livelihood issues, promptly verify the source of this content, assess its offline feasibility and the intentions of the business owner, etc. Platforms need to add prompts for labelling, strengthen public clarification and credit deduction, etc., to solve the problem of errors in time and prevent the spread of false information. Raise the disclosure threshold, strengthen the audit system and increase the punishment; thus, there will be fewer cases of the spread of false livelihood information.

4.2 Optimisation of Algorithmic Distribution Logic: Decrease emotional arousal and favour trusted sources

Change the Logic of the recommendation algorithm to be based on public security, not popularity. Algorithms should be employed by the platform to reduce the spread of unverified livelihood welfare information that has gone viral due to high interaction. At the same time, it will also be a good reference. Among similar pieces of information, the content released by government-affiliated accounts and official media should be published first, and then the content from ordinary users should be released. Platforms should collect and process the large amount of data on the Internet through data mining and text analysis to find out about important information and events, determine how they affect people's emotions, issue early warnings, and provide feedback to local governments. Therefore, it will not be possible to spread the news widely among the people.

4.3 Raise the Standards for Media Professionals and Stabilise Sources of Authoritative Information

The local media office should verify the accuracy of the information and then publish it promptly. They need to carry out an on-site inspection and confirmation with the local government office, and should not release it in a hurry. They should promptly issue short, clear and verified reports; reduce the public's confusion caused by ambiguous statements; and have authoritative figures lead the discussion instead of disorderly self-media. At the same time, the official media should be aware of the fermentation period of public opinion and promptly release clear and verifiable information in line with what has been issued by government departments to stabilise the framework of public opinion. In addition, the local media should work with the government to establish a regularised coordination mechanism, reduce information noise, unify the message released by the government, and allow authoritative channels to be the main sources of public information once again.

4.4 Motivating Rational Participation through Increased Self-Awareness and Reduction of the Herding Effect

The reasons for the spread of this case are that it is low-cost to obtain information and people have herd behaviour. Reduce the risk of rash behaviour and strengthen the early warning system at the government and platform levels. Platforms can automatically show warnings for dangerous content, such as "This information has not been verified; please be careful before taking offline action" or "Be wary of welfare-promoting content and do not be easily fooled", and use technology to limit the herd behaviour of users. The government and the community can periodically organise activities to promote

digital literacy and provide training on how to recognise fake online information at the local level. Short-video case studies, supermarket-based rumour-debunking demonstrations, etc., can be employed to teach the public how to recognise free-inducing false information. At the same time, the government can also motivate users to voluntarily post the official verification links or business owner statements in the comment area; thus, a correction mechanism will be spontaneously formed through community cooperation, and the problem of online-to-offline-to-online feedback loops caused by herd behaviour can be alleviated.

4.5 Improve the Efficiency of Government Operations: Early Warning and Rapid Response, Accurate Information Provision

In the era of We Media, the life cycle of public opinion is very short. If the government continues to use offline feedback and manual observation, it will likely miss the important two-hour window. The government should start leading the people more proactively. Set up data interfaces with platforms and give more weight to the long-tail dissemination of short videos about local events and indicators of offline gatherings so that they can be discovered, recognised and dealt with in a timely manner. Strengthen the correction of distorted information and supervision by the government in the early days of the epidemic to prevent the spread of fake news. The government should speak up quickly at the level of response to avoid giving rise to rumours. The government should directly address the main problems faced by the people. Government-affiliated accounts, media organisations and communities should spread the same information to avoid secondary misunderstandings caused by various sources of information. The government needs to strengthen coordination among all departments and platforms of governance, issue timely online explanations, maintain order offline, implement platform traffic restrictions, etc., to ensure an orderly end to the recession of public opinion and prevent emotional backlash and secondary rumors caused by delays.

5. Conclusion

With the rise of new media in recent years, the way the public has formed and disseminated information about events has changed significantly. The "Songshan Free Cabbage Picking" case shows that with the help of algorithmic logic, platform amplification, user emotional participation and media competition, information can lead to offline gatherings and public safety risks in a very short time. According to the theory of platform governance and the systematic analysis of the Songshan case, due to the reasons for this incident, the following five directions of governance optimisation will be pursued: strengthen rules, improve algorithms, unify professional standards for media, enhance the digital literacy of users, and promote proactive government governance. The purpose of the above is not to find out who is to blame after the fact, but rather to strengthen the governance system of the entire chain, make platforms more standardised, enhance the professionalism of media, allow users to behave reasonably, and increase the responsiveness of the government; thus, any similar risks that may occur in the future can be identified early, controlled at the source, and dealt with during development. Only through the joint efforts of the government, platforms, media and the public to strengthen their governance capacity can a trustworthy, open and well-ordered public information space be created in the new media era.

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