

The Generation and Avoidance Path of Emotional Turn in College Online Public Opinion in the Post Truth Era

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Abstract

On November 16, 2016, the Oxford Dictionary first defined the term "post truth" as the "annual vocabulary" of 2016, which refers to emotions and personal beliefs being more influential than objective facts in influencing public opinion. Since then, the "post truth" has also been increasingly concerned and discussed by the academic community. This article takes the "post truth era" as the theoretical background to explore the reasons and manifestations of the emotional shift in online public opinion in universities, and proposes corresponding response strategies.

Keywords

Online Public Opinion; Post Truth; Emotional Turn.

1. Introduction

The post truth era is a subversion of the information system and order of the original society, and the premise of the post truth era is to make providing facts as difficult and meaningless as possible. Specifically, the truth definers and methods defined by the original social order are being questioned by the public as never before. The previously stable contractual relationship between the public and truth providers has become unpredictable, and the public only needs the "truth" that matches their speculation. The public's sincerity towards the disseminator is more important than the truth. In the special environment of university campuses, most college students are inexperienced in the world and their values are yet to be established. They often find it difficult to distinguish the authenticity of various public opinion information that comes from the internet, especially under the influence of special diagnosis in the post truth era. College students tend to lean towards emotions in their choices of public opinion, and lack the ability to argue rationally.

2. Feature Induction: The Manifestation of Online Public Opinion in Universities in the Post Truth Era

2.1. Diversified and Fragmented Presentation of Viewpoints

The rapid development of internet technology has provided a free ride for people to hear and see their opinions, especially with the rapid popularization of new media represented by mobile phones, every individual has become a source of information. Nowadays, college students can fully guarantee that each person can move their smartphones step by step. The expression desire of college students has been unleashed unprecedentedly in the online environment.

Whenever a network event initiates on the internet, it will quickly ferment into a public opinion event through the convergence of opinions from various netizens. In the presentation of diverse and fragmented perspectives, college students, as a young group, are enthusiastic about paying

attention to online hot topics, expressing their own opinions, actively participating in online rights protection, and liking to act as spokespersons for justice in public opinion events. Taking the case of "sexual assault by former Peking University professor in Shenyang" as an example, once the incident was exposed on the internet, it immediately sparked heated public discussion among college students. Within less than an hour of the incident being made public, keywords such as "Shenyang sexual assault" have already topped the list of major search engines, and Weibo topics have sparked heated discussions. Relevant tweets on WeChat Moments continue to be launched. For a moment, public opinion on the "Shenyang sexual assault case" flooded the online space. Some university netizens pointed their fingers at the university where the parties were located, some university netizens demanded that the parties be searched for human flesh, and some university netizens demanded that the law impose the death penalty. The online public opinion contains a strong sense of condemnation, and these opinions, like wind, spread through the big network of the internet and scattered in the online public opinion environment.

2.2. Seeking Goodness Without Seeking Truth, Prejudices Above Facts

Walter Lippmann said, "When seeking more impartial insights, we often adhere to our prejudices." In the post truth era of online public opinion, evidence, facts, and truth can no longer influence people's views on something. What people care about is not accuracy, but whether the statement is in line with human nature. The truth is forced to give way to emotions, feelings, and those that cater to public positions and viewpoints. This leads to a logical paradox of seeking goodness over truth. The most concerning issue for students in the university environment is closely related to their own interests, such as dormitory relocation, cafeteria safety, academic reform, award contests, and other issues related to their own learning and life. So, once any of the above issues trigger campus controversy, the student community can quickly form online public opinion on online platforms, and such online public opinion is almost one-sided against the school. At this time, the student community only focuses on whether their emotions and needs can be responded to, and does not care about the truth or falsehood of the problem, which leads to a logical paradox of seeking goodness rather than truth.

2.3. Normalization of Public Opinion Reversal Caused by the Matthew Effect on the Internet

The reversal of online public opinion is another major feature of online public opinion in the post truth era, and even now this trend of public opinion reversal has become normalized. For some university public opinion events, there will always be a group of keyboard warriors waiting for public opinion to reverse on the internet. Because in the post truth era, audiences tend to express their opinions based on unfounded information, moral and emotional judgments always precede factual judgments. At the same time, the Matthew effect is further strengthened in the online environment, and university netizens have taken sides with their advantageous opinions, leading to the concentration of a certain type of public opinion, forming a public opinion environment similar to an "information cocoon". As more details of the incident are exposed, the opinions of college netizens will once again experience an avalanche phenomenon, where they will change their flag and stand in line again. This phenomenon of public opinion reversal is repeated in the post truth era. The reversal of public opinion occurred during the "collective bargaining for teacher salaries" incident in a certain area of Anhui. At the beginning, information circulating on the internet was that the government's arrears of teacher salaries caused conflicts between the police and the public. As the incident continued to evolve, arrears of salaries evolved into arrears of one-time rewards. The spearhead of public opinion shifted from the police to the government, and as the core of the case facts continued to update, public opinion has also been in a dynamic state of change, facing the possibility of reversal at any time.

In summary, we have found that in the post truth era, online public opinion in universities has undergone an emotional shift. The performance of college students in online public opinion is always emotional rather than factual. The so-called "moral judgment" and "moral kidnapping" are subjective judgments made by netizens using their personal emotions. The truth is always at a disadvantage in public opinion, and emotions and positions often precede rationality and objectivity.

3. Source Tracing: The Causes of the Emotional Shift in Online Public Opinion in Universities in the Post Truth Era

3.1. "Information" is an Endogenous Cause of Emotional Shift

One of the most important reasons for the emotional shift of online public opinion in universities is attributed to the essential characteristics of information in the post truth era. Firstly, the fragmented presentation of information has caused contemporary college students to lose the value standards for judging the truth. In the face of muddy information, many college students can only make value judgments that meet their emotional needs based on personal prejudices; Secondly, in the post truth era, the authority of information has collapsed, and college students no longer rely on public opinion leaders to obtain the truth of the facts, or in other words, they do not care about the truth of the facts. On the contrary, the presentation of various grassroots information in the online environment provides them with ample opportunities to display and express their desires. Finally, information from the post truth era is not easy to foster consensus. In the post truth era, online public opinion has become a very special concept: it is public opinion, but not consensus. It is just a collection of multiple community consensus rather than a fusion. Objective facts are no longer dominated by public opinion but depend on the likes and dislikes of dispersed small groups and individuals towards information. Information no longer facilitates consensus, making public opinion an uncertain existence.

The three essential characteristics of information in the post truth era are the endogenous causes of emotional shift in college online public opinion. When information itself becomes an elusive object, the objective and just rational power loses its nourishing soil, and as a representative of emotional power, individual emotions naturally rise to a new value standard.

3.2. "Socialization of Media Platforms" is an External Driving Force for the Emotional Shift of Public Opinion

With the continuous updating and upgrading of technology, the right to use media is constantly being delegated, evolving from a niche to a mass audience, as well as the rapid rise of self media in the current technological trend. In today's media environment, "socialization" is increasingly becoming the pursuit point of major media platforms, because "socialization" can attract a large number of users to maintain the platform's traffic output. Under such survival logic, media platforms spontaneously aim to satisfy the public's "emotional consumption", and the media deviates from the objective standard framework and is guided by the needs of the audience; Even some mainstream media have abandoned their commitment to journalistic professionalism, as the public has lost their ability to judge news in the post truth era and may even be disinterested in it. For news professionals, traffic is more attractive than responsibility. In order to survive, they adhere to a traffic oriented approach and have the suspicion of promoting or following public emotions when selectively reporting; At the same time, media platforms ignore the "gatekeeper" aspect, and in the post truth era, many media platforms have become a space for free expression. The media's scrutiny of the authenticity of information is even non-existent.

When the main media platforms are oriented towards satisfying the emotional consumption of the public, the emotional shift in the ecological environment of online public opinion in universities is inevitable.

3.3. "Student Media Literacy" is a Catalyst for the Emotional Shift of Public Opinion

The public is the main body of online public opinion production, and the media literacy of the public is related to the level and level of public opinion discussion. The online environment provides a new space for expression and discussion in the formation of public opinion. The public has transformed from a relatively passive receiver in the past to a more active consumer, and its role has gradually shifted from a simple "negative audience" to a "positive audience" that both accepts and produces information. Some scholars believe that research on online public opinion in China is undergoing a crucial turn, which can be essentially called a "human turn". The emotional structure of online public opinion subjects is becoming an intermediary force connecting discourse types and various structural variables. It can be seen that the current direction of research on online public opinion has shifted from the "ontology" of public opinion to the "subject" of public opinion, and the public's public opinion literacy has increasingly become a key indicator affecting the public opinion environment.

As a heterogeneous group, college students' emotional resonance in the online environment is the node connecting this group. Emotion is an indescribable experience in the realm of human perception. Regardless of whether conscious consciousness is achieved or not, emotional states and reactions are the individual's sensory experiences of the living environment. People's daily emotions can be summarized into two types of imagination, background affective phenomenon: it is a long-term emotional temperament that exists in our daily lives, and at that time it is usually difficult for us to realize its influence; Acute affective phenomenon: It is a temporary and concentrated emergency response to a situation, including fear, anger, anxiety, and panic, and we are often more likely to perceive its effects. The emotional expression of college students in online public opinion is mainly constrained by these two emotional phenomena. The campus environment in which college students live for a long time, namely their background affective phenomenon, is also the basis for college students to make value judgments. The learning and beneficial collective formed in the campus environment, namely acute affective phenomenon), is also a key factor for them to change their stance under the influence of online public opinion environment, Because "the public's consumption of information is more concerned about the social emotions and emotional massage needs brought by the information itself", the emotional and emotional expression of college students in online public opinion has become an important factor in the emotional turn of college online public opinion.

4. Path Improvement: the Correct Guidance Strategy for Online Public Opinion in Universities in the Post Truth Era

In the post truth era, the emotional shift of college online public opinion poses a threat to the healthy campus public opinion ecosystem to a certain extent. Excessive accumulation of emotions and emotions can transform the campus online public opinion space into a platform that carries the resentment and anger of student groups, making it difficult to form high-quality public opinion discussions. Therefore, establishing a healthy online public opinion environment for universities in the post truth era is an urgent task.

4.1. Universities Participate in Guiding and Building a Healthy Online Public Opinion Environment

In the online public opinion environment of universities, what and how the school controls are the key to building a healthy campus network public opinion environment and whether it is effective. If the school manages too much, it will damage the freedom of public opinion, and if it manages too little, it will lead to more online chaos. Both extreme control practices have proven that universities play an indispensable role in controlling online public opinion, but they cannot be completely controlled. Online public opinion is also an important channel for schools to understand the reality and emotional needs of students. By intervening in the campus online public opinion environment as a "participant guide", students can not only understand the overall trend of online public opinion, but also provide timely guidance to avoid the outbreak of centralized online emotional violence.

The relevant departments of universities should actively grasp the general development law of the emotions of college students in the online public opinion environment. In the early stage of the outbreak of public opinion events, the emotions of the student group are relatively excited and extreme; With the continuous progress of events and the increase in the amount of public opinion information, the emotional characteristics of public opinion information appear relatively calm and implicit. Only when it develops to a suitable stage can there be corresponding external manifestations. Grasping the emotional characteristics of students is an important basis for evaluating the thoughts and behaviors of student groups, and also an important basis for universities to build a healthy online public opinion environment.

4.2. Media Promotes a Sense of Social Responsibility and Purifies the Online Information Environment

In the online public opinion environment, many of our media not only fail to play a positive role, but also help to mobilize and incite the collective emotions of the public. In the post truth era, the media has become a tool for providing information flow, increasingly weakening its role as a public tool for maintaining social fairness, justice, and morality.

In today's highly developed media technology, the media has become a window for people to watch this society, but Gaye Tuchman helplessly wrote in his book "Making News" that "this window itself is problematic.". At the same time, under the market-oriented operating mechanism, profit is both a survival pressure and a driving force for major media. Stimulated by the pursuit of profit, media catering to the emotional consumption of the masses is also an inevitable result of marketization.

Therefore, in addition to the issue of mechanism operation, the media should re-examine their own sense of social responsibility, not release unverified information arbitrarily, not mislead the public, and not blindly disregard media responsibility for the sake of competing for voluntary audience participation. In addition to regulating their own sense of responsibility, the media should also increase the education of professional ethics for practitioners, establish beliefs, and become media professionals with conscience and morality.

4.3. Cultivate Media Literacy among Students and Remove the Crooked Hat of the "Mob"

All students are the main body of online public opinion in universities, and the public opinion literacy mastered by the student group is related to the quality of public opinion. Gustave Le Bon used the French Revolution as the writing background in "The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind" and reflected on the relationship between individuals and groups. Through the analysis of various behaviors in the revolution, he found that, "Even if a person has their own independent opinions, once they join a group of people worshipped by ideology, they become a member of the mob. They become a group of crazy and evil people like a chemical reaction,

and under the influence of a 'sense of historical mission', they have no awareness of crime." Today, many scholars use the term "rabble" to describe irrational netizens in the online space. In fact, it is debatable to describe all netizens as a "mob" because netizens are not a completely homogeneous group, and their media literacy is uneven. So, removing the crooked hat of the "mob" requires the joint efforts of all netizens.

As a group of college student netizens, first of all, we should start from ourselves, learn about online media knowledge, recognize the role of media, and use media instead of being used by media; Secondly, the student community should actively cultivate a sense of self-awareness, grasp the facts before speaking, and not let emotions influence their behavior; Finally, the student community should avoid a herd mentality, refuse to be followers of campus online violence, and establish a sense of responsibility for their words and actions.

5. Conclusion

In the post truth era, the group of college students has gained unprecedented media participation rights. They actively participate in the emotional production and consumption of virtual society, and achieve interpersonal communication by sharing personal life events and emotional events, thereby obtaining a certain identity and emotional satisfaction. The demand of students to please themselves is becoming increasingly strong, and emotional experiences are gradually moving beyond rational cognition towards the forefront, becoming a direct driving force for people's communication. The emotional shift has spread throughout the online environment of universities, and the public opinion environment is only one corner of it. What new challenges and new thoughts this shift brings to the governance of the current network ecological environment in universities are worth further exploration.

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