

Research on the Prevention and Resolution of Online Public Opinion Crises Among Postgraduates from the Perspective of Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract

In the era of all-media communication, postgraduates, as the core target group of ideological work in universities, exhibit online public opinion crises characterized by strong academic sensitivity, high social relevance, and prominent secondary risks. These crises pose real challenges to ideological security and talent cultivation in higher education. From the perspective of ideological and political education, this paper systematically analyzes the formation logic and harmful manifestations of online public opinion among postgraduates. It constructs a three-dimensional governance framework of “individual literacy cultivation – organizational innovation – deepened collaborative governance” and demonstrates practical paths through real cases. This study provides theoretical support and operational models for effectively preventing and resolving online public opinion crises in universities and enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political education in the new era.

Keywords

Postgraduates; Online Public Opinion; Ideological and Political Education; Secondary Crisis; Collaborative Governance.

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the central government has prioritized education as a key driver of national development and firmly upheld the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. In this context, ideological and political education (IPE) for university students has received increasing attention. Rooted in students' psychological and ideological characteristics, China's IPE system continues to deepen theoretical innovation. As higher education enters a stage of massification, with a gross enrollment rate reaching 57.8% by 2021, a substantial proportion of students are pursuing postgraduate studies. Graduate education, as the highest level of talent cultivation in China's higher education system, views ideological and political education as an essential component. Universities serve as the “frontline strongholds” of ideological construction. As the highest-level talent group in higher education, postgraduates' value orientations and online behaviors not only affect their individual development but also directly impact national ideological security and social stability. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly stated the need to “strengthen and improve ideological and political work, and improve the comprehensive governance system of cyberspace,” providing clear guidance for the governance of online public opinion in universities.

In recent years, with the rapid advancement of new media technologies, the postgraduate community has become increasingly active on academic forums and social platforms. Topics such as academic disputes, campus governance, and social hot issues frequently trigger waves of online public opinion. Some incidents have escalated into secondary crises due to delayed or

inappropriate responses, leading to a crisis of trust in school management and even undermining mainstream ideological positions.

Current research tends to focus primarily on undergraduate students, with insufficient attention paid to the distinctive characteristics of postgraduates—namely their high intellectual sensitivity and dual identities as both scholars and social participants. Against this backdrop, this paper systematically explores the prevention and resolution of online public opinion crises among postgraduates from the perspective of ideological and political education, providing both theoretical value and practical significance.

2. Core Characteristics and Potential Harms of Online Public Opinion Among Postgraduates

2.1. Three Core Behavioral Characteristics

2.1.1. Inherent Sensitivity of Academic Topics

Postgraduates pay close attention to academic issues such as blind reviews of theses, supervision practices, and lab resource distribution. Due to their direct stake in these matters, even minor disputes can easily spark online discussions. For instance, in January 2024, eleven graduate students from the Department of Animal Nutrition at Huazhong Agricultural University publicly accused their advisor of academic misconduct on Zhihu. The topics—ranging from the authenticity of experimental data to authorship norms—received over 500,000 views within 24 hours, with the discussion quickly spreading from campus forums to the broader academic community online.

2.1.2. Deep Engagement in Social Issues

Equipped with solid knowledge reserves and a strong sense of social responsibility, postgraduates often take on the role of "professional commentators" in public discourse. Their analyses—using data modeling or case comparisons—are frequently perceived by the public as authoritative, thus amplifying the societal impact of online opinion.

2.1.3. High Frequency of Secondary Public Opinion Crises

Postgraduates' strong logical reasoning skills often lead them to critically deconstruct initial public opinion events. If institutions fail to respond adequately to core concerns, it may trigger secondary debates involving issues like procedural justice or accountability. According to the 2023 Report on the Development of University Online Public Opinion by China Education Online, the average spread cycle of postgraduate-related secondary public opinion events (7.2 days) is 60% longer than that of undergraduate events (4.5 days), with 43% of incidents involving topics related to academic integrity and administrative procedures.

2.2. Dual-Dimensional Harms

From an individual development perspective, prolonged involvement in online controversy may lead to cognitive disorientation among postgraduates—manifesting in weakened trust in academic communities, increased resistance to institutional management, and even irrational behaviors (e.g., spreading extreme views or organizing offline protests). In a survey conducted by our research team at five universities that experienced online public opinion incidents, 28% of affected postgraduates reported a "decline in trust toward official school announcements," while 15% admitted to "a significant loss of academic motivation."

From the perspective of institutional governance, ongoing online controversies damage a university's reputation, influence the quality of admissions, and affect its societal image. For example, during the 2023 incident involving changes to postgraduate subsidies at Hunan University of Technology, the negative search rate for the university on Baidu soared to 58%,

which subsequently led to a 12% decline in first-choice postgraduate applications in 2024—highlighting the long-term impact of online public opinion on institutional branding.

3. A Three-Dimensional Governance Model from the Perspective of Ideological and Political Education

Based on the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and the requirements of online ideological and political work, this paper constructs a three-dimensional governance model encompassing “individual literacy cultivation – organizational management innovation – deepened collaborative governance.” The aim is to establish a comprehensive governance system that integrates educational prevention, institutional guarantees, and multi-stakeholder co-governance.

3.1. Strengthening Individual Network Literacy: Building the Cognitive Foundation for Crisis Prevention

The proactive role of ideological and political education should be embedded throughout the entire postgraduate cultivation process.

3.1.1. Integrating Curriculum-Based Ideological Education with Network Ethics Training

Network literacy education should be incorporated into ideological and political courses at the postgraduate level. This includes cultivating students' awareness of legal responsibility, enhancing their sense of online rule of law, and tailoring educational content based on disciplinary differences—for instance, engineering students may focus on academic platforms, while humanities students often engage with public discourse. At the same time, instructors should lead by example, regulating their own online behavior during teaching activities and becoming role models for students, thereby realizing the deep integration of curriculum-based IPE and online literacy development.

3.1.2. Infusing Network Literacy into Everyday Education

Universities should leverage party branches and academic societies to organize activities such as “Clean and Honest Academic Networks” and “Academic Rumor Recognition.” The establishment of a “Postgraduate Network Literacy Growth File” is recommended, documenting students' performance in areas such as disseminating positive energy and reporting harmful content. These records should be incorporated into moral evaluation indicators, institutionalizing behavioral guidance.

3.2. Innovating Organizational Management: Constructing a Full-Cycle Crisis Response System

Universities should establish a closed-loop management mechanism involving prevention, monitoring, response, and post-crisis repair.

3.2.1. A Tiered and Categorized Monitoring System

A three-level monitoring network—university, college, and advisor level—should be built. At the university level, big data tools can be used to capture sensitive content on academic and social platforms. At the college level, counselors can serve as “public opinion liaisons” and monitor postgraduate discussions during sensitive periods. Advisors should detect students' emotional fluctuations through group meetings and one-on-one conversations. Intelligent monitoring systems can employ AI-based semantic analysis to identify coded academic language and metaphors, thereby improving the accuracy of crisis detection.

3.2.2. Standardizing Crisis Management Procedures

Universities should establish joint working groups to swiftly investigate sources of public opinion, verify facts, identify core demands, and publicly respond with proposed solutions. Responses must adhere to the principles of timeliness, accuracy, and consistency. A regular simulation mechanism—such as “postgraduate public opinion handling drills”—should be implemented to help staff and student leaders gain real-time experience in crisis management.

3.2.3. Establishing a Long-Term Reputation Repair Mechanism

After public opinion events subside, universities should continue monitoring for latent issues. Even after immediate crises are resolved, new topics or sentiments may resurface. Effectiveness assessments must be conducted, evaluating response timeliness, accuracy, and the actual impact of countermeasures. Follow-up actions and reform commitments must be implemented. Internal communication and training should be strengthened, sharing lessons learned and clearly defining responsibilities in similar future events. Root causes must be analyzed, and long-term mechanisms established at the institutional and procedural levels. Through active efforts and positive communication, the damaged reputation can gradually be repaired.

3.3. Deepening Collaborative Governance: Breaking Through the Limits of “Top-Down Management”

The collaborative governance model emphasizes shared responsibility among all stakeholders. Advisors are the primary persons responsible for graduate education and should intervene in academic disputes within their research groups. For students under high academic pressure and active online, individualized guidance plans should be formulated.

Counselors should monitor students’ mental health and work with parents to provide emotional support. Network security training sessions can be held to enhance students’ ability to identify manipulative or agenda-driven online content.

Student autonomy should also be encouraged. Politically aware and academically capable postgraduates may be selected as “public opinion guides” to engage in subtle guidance on forums and group chats—such as refuting extreme views with academic data and promoting rational discussion—thereby leveraging the “students-manage-students” approach to governance.

4. Conclusion and Future Prospects

The prevention and resolution of online public opinion crises among postgraduates is, at its core, a concentrated test of the effectiveness of ideological and political education in higher education. The three-dimensional governance model proposed in this paper—comprising “value guidance + capacity development” at the individual level, “institutional constraints + technological empowerment” at the organizational level, and “multi-party participation + shared responsibility” at the collaborative level—forms an interconnected chain of governance mechanisms.

To truly cultivate high-level talents with both academic innovation capability and digital literacy, universities must integrate online public opinion governance into the entire process of postgraduate ideological and political education. Only by doing so can we provide solid ideological support and strategic talent assurance for national development and the maintenance of ideological security in universities.

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