

# *The Dilemma and Outlet of the Government's Governance of Network Public Opinion in Emergencies*

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**Abstract:** With the development of Internet technology, the influence of online public opinion has gradually increased and has become one of the important factors influencing public opinion in society. The spread of online public opinion in emergencies is characterized by high outbreaks, high attention, complex and uncontrollable information, which to a certain extent affects the government's guidance and governance of online public opinion. In the process of managing online public opinion on emergencies, the government is faced with various difficulties such as delayed and passive responses, low participation of social governance subjects, and delayed and imperfect legislation. Only by establishing a comprehensive system of government-society online public opinion monitoring, improving the government's online public opinion response and disposal mechanism, scientifically monitoring information sources and improving data network dynamic monitoring technology, and improving the construction of the rule of law for government online public opinion governance, can the government improve its ability to govern and guide online public opinion during emergencies.

## **1. Introduction**

The management of public opinion on the Internet during emergencies has become an important part of the government's governance work. On the one hand, online public opinion has opened up a whole new area for government management, further improving the means and channels for citizen participation and enhancing the breadth and depth of citizen participation in government management activities, while at the same time, the government's ability to innovate in the process of responding to online public opinion on emergencies has been greatly promoted. On the other hand, it is difficult to distinguish the authenticity of online speech when it is posted anonymously, and the government's control over the hidden, invisible and uncontrollable objects has weakened the government's ability to distinguish the true extent of online public opinion, greatly increasing the government's difficulty in managing society.

At the same time, the coexistence of diverse and acute public opinion in emergencies has further amplified social conflicts and contradictions in cyberspace, easily causing a crisis of trust. If the government manages it effectively and guides it rationally, it will contribute to the improvement of its governance capacity while resolving crises. If it does not handle it properly, the government will

face a passive situation and fall into a new dilemma brought about by online public opinion.2.  
Methodology

## **2. The Dilemma of Government Online Public Opinion Governance in Emergencies**

### **2.1 The development of public opinion is dominated by a wave-like trend and is uncontrollable**

Most of today's online public opinions show a wave-like trend, meaning that there are many contradictions in public opinion events, and the uncontrollable disturbing factors of the events lead to the diversity of the groups involved, so the focus of the corresponding guidance and disposal work needs to be constantly adjusted to adapt to the changes in the public opinion field. The public facing emergencies today has different degrees of information acceptance and different abilities to extract and analyse information. When they act as exporters of information, they tend to focus their output on different aspects of the emergencies. It increases the number of uncontrollable interfering factors. In the development of online public opinion, the outcome of its development is closely related to the intervening factors at any one stage, and since it is impossible to measure the types of intervening factors and the timing of their intervention, the "butterfly effect" on online public opinion is also more unpredictable.

### **2.2 Self-media are negligent in their authenticity and it is difficult to distinguish between true and false news**

Due to the large number of Internet users in China, the daily volume of information released is counted in the billions, so it is difficult for the information reviewers of major Internet platforms to review the authenticity of each piece of information, resulting in the dissemination of information full of arbitrariness and tendencies. After an emergency event, the public is often in a state of information sensitivity due to untimely official responses and information asymmetry, and they accept and export all the information they receive. In order to seize the huge number of clicks and user traffic brought by the "first-hand news", some media outlets spread the news indiscriminately without considering its authenticity. The public and the media, hidden in the Internet, disregard moral values and sense of responsibility, and the reckless output of information impacts the truth, making the government's management of online public opinion on emergencies even more complicated.

### **2.3 The level of public quality varies, and behaviour is prone to disorder**

The Internet has become an important part of national life, and the ever-changing concepts are impacting the public's thoughts and behaviours. The "Statistical Report on the State of the Internet in China" released by the China Internet Information Center points out that the number of online users has shown a steady upward trend in recent years, reaching 989 million as of December 2020, of which the proportion of users who have received university education or above only accounts for 19.8% overall showing a low level of education. [Everyone is an independent individual on the Internet platform. Based on the hidden nature of the Internet, the public is free to express their opinions, demands and even their personal emotions in the virtual space. In the face of politically charged topics, the public subconsciously divides itself into two opposing camps in the process of debate, and in rejecting the views and content of the opposing camps in a tit-for-tat manner, it is easy to cause disorderly speech. The phenomenon of "Internet disturbance of politics".

### **3. Existing problems in the governance of government online public opinion in emergencies**

#### **3.1 The government's online public opinion management behaviour is old-fashioned, with a single model and means**

The Internet has given the public the right to participate in social management and exercise public opinion supervision, and while online public opinion is spreading rapidly, negative public opinion is also flooding it, disrupting the normal functioning of online public opinion. Government leaders lack experience in the management of online public opinion in the Internet era and do not have a comprehensive understanding of the laws of public opinion evolution, pursuing the policy of "natural extinction of public opinion". The governance of online public opinion today is very different from that of traditional public opinion, but the mode and means of governance of online public opinion are unable to keep up with the times and still follow the traditional methods of "surrounding", "blocking" and "deleting" public opinion. "This process ignores the "long-tail effect" in the development of public opinion, which may lead to a higher degree of public discussion and secondary public opinion. In addition, the development pattern of each public opinion is different, and a unified emergency plan cannot accurately respond to all types of public opinion models. Therefore, the traditional governance model and the single means of governance cannot meet the needs of online public opinion governance in the current Internet era.

#### **3.2 The government reacts passively to online public opinion in a passive and reactive manner**

The effectiveness of online public opinion management depends to a large extent on the government's response style and attitude. Due to the government's lack of experience in managing public opinion on the Internet, the response to emergency plans for public opinion on the Internet often lags behind the development of public opinion. On the one hand, in order to quell the development of public opinion as soon as possible, the government mostly responds by "surrounding", "blocking" and "deleting" to control public opinion on the Internet. This approach is passive and ignores the possibility of public opinion rebound. However, according to the characteristics of the law of wave-shaped public opinion development, excessive use of coercive measures to suppress public opinion will often lead to secondary outbreaks or even secondary public opinion. On the other hand, the government's passive attitude in responding and its inability to respond positively to society at the first sign of public opinion has provided room for the spread of public opinion. The lagging response of the government and relevant departments, and their inability to grasp all the branches of public opinion, allow the fermentation of online public opinion to take advantage of the situation.

#### **3.3 Poor government regulation and the commercialisation of online public opinion**

Based on the characteristics of sudden events, rapid transmission and high social concern that sudden events possess, and their tendency to spread, the difficulty of regulating government online public opinion has greatly increased. Some government leaders pursue a government-centered public opinion governance system, ignoring the role played by public and media supervision in the process of government public opinion regulation. At the same time, the government lacks a special department for regulating online public opinion, and it is difficult to form a supervisory synergy due to the scattered public opinion supervision forces of various government departments and the unsystematic workflow. The ineffective supervision of online public opinion in sudden events makes the discussion of the event soar, and behind the super high discussion is not only public concern but also an opportunity for some business operators to take advantage of it. A marketing tactic used by some companies in their marketing activities is called breaking news marketing, which refers to

companies that seize the heat of breaking news and bring it into their products and services when conducting marketing activities, using the heat of breaking news to promote their businesses.

### **3.4 The legislation on Internet public opinion is lagging behind, and relevant laws and regulations need to be improved**

Based on the virtual and hidden nature of the Internet, the current governance of online public opinion poses new challenges to the government in terms of the rule of law. Firstly, the relevant legislation is lagging behind the rapid development of the Internet, and the extension of existing laws and regulations is limited in the face of the new field, resulting in legal loopholes in the relevant fields. Secondly, the level of laws and regulations on the governance of online public opinion is not high. So far, no special laws on the governance of online public opinion have been introduced in China, and most of them remain at the level of administrative regulations and departmental rules, and the validity of various laws and regulations crosses over, resulting in mutual conflicts and conflicts in the process of administrative enforcement, resulting in limitations in the strength of restraint and scope of adjustment. Finally, the punishment for rumor pushers and malicious manipulation of public opinion is far from adequate, and the low cost of crime has led to a lack of coercive restraint for some media and some members of the public, with manipulators only bearing civil and administrative responsibilities and very few cases of criminal liability.

## **4. The path to improving the government's online public opinion management capacity in emergencies.**

### **4.1 Establish a government-led-socially coordinated comprehensive system for the regulation of online public opinion**

The government is the absolute protagonist in the governance of public opinion on the Internet. It intervenes purposefully during the formation period of public opinion, values the public's main role, restrains disorderly behaviour of internet users and popularises the legal consequences of malicious dissemination of negative public opinion. Users who maliciously spread public opinion should be blocked and managed to disrupt the trend of public opinion before it brings actual negative effects. During the spread of public opinion, the government should take charge of the overall situation and coordinate all parties, promote authoritative reporting by major news websites, various media and information and government platforms, and use official statements to guide the direction of public opinion and break the trend of public opinion gathering and outbreak. At the same time, the government should play the role of guiding the influence of opinion leaders to steer public opinion in a positive and controllable direction, and use their influence to guide their fans to respond positively. After the public opinion has reached the outbreak stage, legal measures are used to crack down on the malicious dissemination of public opinion, hold the relevant media and the public accountable for their illegal actions, and use state coercive power to thoroughly clean up the cyberspace and stop the "long tail effect" of public opinion dissemination.

### **4.2 Improve the mechanism for responding to and dealing with public opinion on government networks**

Firstly, it should establish a sharp early warning response mechanism for online public opinion, conduct accurate monitoring amidst overwhelming online public opinion, quickly find information that may turn into negative public opinion and curb it in a timely manner, and at the same time accurately collect and grasp online public opinion information to provide a basis and guarantee for

the handling of online public opinion; secondly, on the premise of ensuring openness and transparency, it should widely collect and understand the opinion tendencies of public opinion audiences and opinion leaders. The government should conduct comprehensive and detailed investigation and dynamic tracking of the outbreak of online public opinion. In addition, a reasonable responsibility mechanism should be established and perfected, with specific details of online public opinion management work being split up and put into practice for specific public officials, with responsibilities being evaluated based on management results, and with accountability systems being implemented to promote effective implementation of all work responsibilities. Finally, the official press spokesperson system should be improved. As the subject of authoritative statements made by the government to the outside world, it should accurately grasp the characteristics of online public opinion in the Internet era and master the skills of responding to online public opinion, so as to positively guide public opinion while also providing sufficient time for the government to dispose of online public opinion.

#### **4.3 Optimise big data analysis techniques in the regulatory sector to improve regulatory capabilities**

Firstly, it should improve the online public opinion supervision department, upgrade the monitoring software based on big data, establish a data model of public opinion development, make attribution analysis of public opinion data, export real-time monitoring data and analysis results of development trends in stages, and visualize the analysis reports to help the government make effective decisions to coordinate the overall situation. Secondly, the public opinion supervision department should monitor and collect the direction of public opinion development on various media platforms in real time, flexibly apply big data detection technology to monitor public opinion by analyzing and comparing users' operating habits, locating IP addresses, judging speech tendencies, searching access records and other aspects, quantify and manage the speech of major media, opinion leaders and users, accurately make network opinion tendency research and analysis, and intervene in the first instance when negative guidance appears. We can intervene in a timely manner at the first sign of negative guidance. Based on the above big data monitoring and analysis results, authoritative analysis reports are regularly released to positively and positively guide the development of online public opinion. Thirdly, while special departments are responsible for public opinion regulation, the government should build a unified leadership and collaborative governance mechanism within the government, promote the sharing of online public opinion among various departments, and establish a platform for sharing online public opinion information and data within the government.

#### **4.4 Improve the construction of the rule of law for online public opinion and sound institutional safeguards**

Firstly, governments at all levels should pay attention to the issue of special legislation on the governance of online public opinion, and urge subjects qualified to propose bills to promote the legislative process of special laws and solve the problem of lagging legislation. Secondly, in view of the fact that there is currently no special law on the governance of online public opinion in China and the low level of existing regulations, the legislature in China should draw on the advanced experience of foreign countries in the governance of online public opinion in view of the new situation and new problems arising from the governance of online public opinion. In addition, the governance of virtual space on the Internet should be incorporated into the national legal system, and laws, regulations and rules should be used to regulate the system of rights and responsibilities of governance subjects and the access system of media. On the one hand, the allocation of responsibilities of government personnel in various aspects of online public opinion governance should be clearly implemented, and

supporting regulations on accountability should be introduced in order to effectively restrain government public power. On the other hand, it should regulate the access conditions of online media platforms, review content release and technology use, and clarify the "red line" of legal regulation. For public opinion that triggers the red line of the law, not only should the disseminator of public opinion be punished, but also the media should be punished for incompetent regulation, so as to exert pressure on the information review department of the media. Finally, the punishment of those who manipulate public opinion on the Internet and those who push rumours should be increased. Define the legal responsibilities and punishment standards according to the negative effects and harmful forms of online public opinion.

## 5. Conclusion

The flat and decentralized structure of the Internet and the ever-advancing information technology have brought about great changes in the way information is disseminated, driving the rapid development of the platform economy and the online society. As the influence of online public opinion has increased in the past two years, it has made it difficult to efficiently promote governance and guidance when public opinion on the Internet breaks out. Based on the characteristics of online public opinion in emergencies and the dilemma faced by the government in the process of public opinion management, the Chinese government should work together with the society to play the role of multiple governance subjects, improve the response and disposal mechanism of governmental online public opinion, and improve relevant laws and regulations to solve the problem of lagging legislation, so as to promote standardized, scientific, efficient and legal governmental online public opinion management work.

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