Conflict-Cooperation: Police-Media Collaborative Governance of Social Panic Public Opinion under Major Epidemic Situation

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Abstract: The impact of a major epidemic disease on society can easily lead to negative social emotions, which will form a public opinion crisis in cyberspace and other spaces, thus affecting the normal operation of society. As the night watchman, the police organs and the increasingly developed media have a complex relationship of conflict and cooperation in their functions and roles in the face of related negative public opinions. Among them, the conflict between the calmness of the official notification and the shortness of public opinion of We-Media, as well as the conflict between the public opinion on major emergencies and the cognition of whether the facts of emergencies are true, is the most intense. Nevertheless, the existing research focuses on the conflict between the police and the media, but ignores the cooperative relationship model. The key to police-media collaboration lies in information transmission channels, interactive communication channels and cooperative handling mechanisms, while strengthening the advantages of media in the effective dissemination of information. Therefore, the effective integration of the operation mechanism of police-media relationship and the construction of the cooperation mechanism between police and media can scientifically discover and use the epidemic situation and the regularity of its public opinion transmission, and eliminate the psychological panic caused by the epidemic situation. In this paper, supported by social governance community theory, social role theory and structured theory, the research methods such as literature analysis, historical research, social network analysis and comparative analysis were adopted to clarify the relevant elements of the police-media relationship theory in the collaborative early warning process and clarify the relevant legal basis. Furthermore, a police-media interaction and coordination liaison platform was established, and the police-media coordination and early warning model was established from the aspects of the information extraction mechanism of epidemic emergencies, the agenda setting of the media for the transmission of emergency information, the joint verification of the police-media and the secondary transmission, etc., and the related mechanism of police-media coordination and management of social panic was constructed, so as to jointly deal with the epidemic major emergencies.

1. Introduction

Why did the public security organ, the government, the emergency management department and

so on miss the best opportunity to prevent the emergency in the early stage, and whether there was any defect in the functional coordination between the departments? How to deal with the suspicious emergencies in the early public opinion? How can the public security organs identify the false information related to emergencies in the public opinion control? What role should the police and the media play in the early stage of the emergency? With these questions, this paper analyzes them from the perspective of public opinion conflicts, and finds out the problems behind them from the phenomenon of public opinion conflicts existing in the initial stage of emergencies of the We-Media, the government, public security organs and emergency management departments. In this paper, the "media" refers to the media in the narrow sense, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet. The "police" refers to the police organization, which is also called the public security organ at the micro level. According to the different contexts of research issues, the police, the public security organ and the police are used instead.

Ralf Dahrendorf [1], a famous British sociologist, once pointed out that "the conflict in modern society is a confrontation between due rights and supply, politics and economy, civil rights and economic growth." Hence, the existence of conflict is the front driving force of social progress. The only way to promote social development is to discover, identify and straighten out the barriers behind conflicts in time.

2. Conflict: Multi-dimensional Analysis of Public Opinion Conflicts in the Context of Emergencies

According to the conflict theorist Coser [2], "Conflict and cooperation coexist in organizations. Conflict can reduce the occurrence of opposite polarization, enhance the adaptability of social organizations to risks and conflicts, promote the integration of resources, ensure the continuous development of society, and prevent the social system from becoming rigid and solidified."

2.1. "Conflict" Issues Related to Emergencies Focused by Public Opinion

The conflict between the calmness of official notification and the urgency of We-Media public opinion. The official notification tends to be conservative, sometimes with incomplete details and slow frequency of information release. Besides, there is often a long time window without any notification a few days before the emergency notification, resulting in poor public access to emergency information. In addition, the government usually takes a rather conservative attitude in the early stage of emergencies, and is too cautious about the wording of emergencies found when facing public concerns, and lacks the analysis and judgment process of emergencies, and lacks detailed argumentation and analysis on the judgment and prediction of emergency trends based on the facts of emergencies.

In contrast, the network spreads from the We-Media side to the internet. The doubts and panic of ordinary netizens in the face of unknown emergencies will trigger fierce discussions in WeChat and other We-Media, thus setting off a peak for the discussion of emergencies under the guidance of so-called professionals.

Secondly, there is a conflict between the cognition of public opinion of major emergencies and whether the facts of emergencies are true. Judging from the current situation, the unexpected events already existed at that time, but the information could not be reasonably transmitted due to the blockage of channels. In the face of emergency information, there are conflicts on how to transmit the information and who will verify it. The key is to determine the nature of the emergency in a timely manner from the factual level, and to give early warning from the cognitive level of emergency information.

2.2. Analysis on the Background of All Parties Involved in the "Conflict" of Public Opinion in Emergencies

Professor Jing Jipeng [3] believed that "information ecosystem is an artificial (human, information, and environment) system with certain self-regulation ability". According to this theory, similar to the ecosystem existing in nature, there are different interest groups in the ecosystem formed by cyberspace and real space. All kinds of "conflicts" are the result of stakeholders expressing their own interests and demands through actions and public opinion, whether online or offline.

First of all, Internet users and We-Media. The largest group in the information ecosystem is the We-Media group representing the vast number of Internet users. In 2009, according to the definition of "We-Media" in the *Research on Social Events and the Influence of Network Media* published by China Internet Network Information Center: "The new media that are personalized, civilian and independent and use modern and electronic means such as email, mobile phone and blog to deliver information to the majority or specific individuals are called We-Media." [4] According to the statistics of China Internet Network Information Center in 2019, the number of Internet users reached 829 million, among which those using mobile phones reached 810 million. [5]

Internet users and the information they generate are characterized by diversity, emotionality, limited rationality, grassroots, etc. [6] During the transition period, under the mutual game of multiple interests, there is a tense situation. The dominant power of public opinion of traditional media is gradually divided by new media, and the official public opinion field and the folk public opinion field present different discourse forms [7].

Secondly, the "gatekeeper" of public opinion and the official public opinion field. Faced with the surging tide of the We-media, the public security organs and the official notification play two roles of public opinion control and positive guidance, respectively. The departments represented by the public security organs are the so-called "gatekeepers" in the whole information ecological space. According to the "gatekeeper" theory of American social psychologist Lewin [8], "Information always flows along certain channels containing doorways, and a decision is made on whether information is allowed to enter the channels according to the personal opinions of the 'gatekeeper'."

Withal, the official public opinion field. After the establishment of the concept of media public relations, the government spokesman system and press conferences have become important means of government crisis public relations and the main channels for the government to release information when major emergencies occur. It should be noted, however, that it is inevitable that the official control will, based on ideology, tries to reverse, adjust and re-establish the relationship between these different information objects, and conflicts with the folk value expectations [9].

Besides, the market-oriented operating media outside the official public opinion. In the face of emergencies, some market-oriented media use their own resources and media communication channels to wander between official reports and We-Media, and play a necessary role in preventing emergencies and warning information of major emergencies through their keen sense of smell, neutral attitude and sufficient viewpoint basis. Due to the poor access to the source information of emergency events and the blocked information transmission, many mainstream media have limited information channels, and the pace and amount of real-time follow-up need to be improved.

Clearly, the conflict reflected by public opinion under the background of unexpected events is the conflict between "unblocked and blocked" information transmission in the social governance structure, which is essentially the conflict between the impact of information generation and transmission diversity and the maintenance of the overall value of social order, and the conflict between the tolerance degree of social governance order to diversified information. As Huntington [10] said, "both the traditional society and the modern society are actually relatively stable societies, while the modernization in the transition from the traditional to the modern is breeding turmoil". If

the discovery of emergency information can break through the barriers of information transmission, the fragmented emergency information can be effectively extracted and transmitted in a controllable state, and become effective information for early warning after information screening.

Therefore, the public security organ, as the gatekeeper of public opinion, connects the key nodes of social public opinion and social management in series, and plays a role not only in erecting "barriers" of false information, but also in sifting out effective clues of emergency information from the profusion and complexity of public opinion information. In other words, social management not only subtracts the so-called negative information reversely, but also makes positive addition in a reasonable range. As a gatekeeper of social management, the public security organ acts as a "valve" and is the junction of information transmission and distribution, which should play a role in stabilizing the source of information, screening and transmitting information in a positive direction.

3. Collaboration-Feasibility Analysis of Police and Media Collaborative Governance under Public Opinion Conflicts in Emergencies

The argument that "gossip spreading is a process of seeking explanation" has been accepted by the general public " [11]. Against the background of possible major emergencies, netizens armed with We-Media give full play to the characteristics of We-Media and rely on online networks to take advantage of the rapidity, anonymity and clustering of network resources under the condition that their own social resources are not sufficient. With fragmented information resources or unverified offline experiences as the starting point, they huddle together to keep warm and "build momentum by volume" in exchange for venting or confronting strong resource owners. On the other hand, the gatekeeper of public opinion also has the desire for truth and the need to transfer law enforcement risks. The public security organs at the grass-roots level are unable to cope with some disputes involving professional fields or jurisdiction. Moreover, under the pressure-type system [12], they often rush to deal with the objection cases under various pressures with poor results, thus playing the role of "scapegoat".

How can managers not only supervise the Internet in an orderly way, but also feed back the massive emergency information of the We-Media in an orderly way and deliver it in real time, so as to pass on the risk of law enforcement? Cesare Lombroso [13] pointed out: "The police must make systematic use of the news media, which is a tool of civilization. What we need to do is to use it to protect our society."

The cooperative governance theory, as a new achievement of the development of social governance, is a new understanding of the subjects of social governance. The collaborative governance of multiple subjects in social governance is a trend of future social management. There is not an unbridgeable gap between the subjects of public opinion "information ecosystem", and the conflicting parties of public opinion share common values, which constitute the cornerstone of collaborative governance.

The government is responsible for social control and resource allocation. The key words that dominate its behavior are order, authority and caution. The majority of netizens pay more attention to the real-time and transparency of social management information and the authenticity of emergencies. A bridge must be built between them, so that their value pursuit can be integrated. That is to say, the public security organs need to break the barriers of information based on the pursuit of the facts of emergencies and the demands of the transmission of law enforcement risks so as to make the law enforcement ecology more rational. "The establishment of closer cooperation between the police and the mass media based on exchange is beneficial to both sides [14]". In case of possible emergencies, the media can play an early warning role by extracting, transmitting and disseminating information from the public security and media cooperation, so that the "Tacitus Trap" brought by

the information flow blockage can be solved openly and cooperatively by constructing an information interconnection platform, and the management model of epidemic emergencies can be promoted by expanding the cooperation model of the police-media relationship.

4. Construction of Collaborative Governance Model between Police and Media

Social governance community is the product of the increasing awareness of social governance methods and subjects. In essence, it is to find the greatest common denominator of social governance departments, and to connect the key links in series so that each department can work together to play a role, which is also the inevitable requirement of modern society for the division of labor and cooperation among social departments. Marty, a scholar, pointed out [15]: "The important task of conflict, one of the social interactions, is not to discriminate and completely eliminate conflicts, but to discover the interest disputes behind conflicts and create and maintain a mechanism that can make conflicts beneficial to society.

4.1. Construction of Police-media Collaborative Path under the Background of Major Emergencies

Scholar Zheng Ligong believed that "government officials have usurped their due role and monopolized information, ... and when the crisis is out of control, they must maintain the authoritative image by strengthening information control, ... most officials often shift the responsibility of information disclosure to their superiors ..." [16]. Therefore, in order to break the barriers of information transmission, the public security organs should seek cooperation and establish a new path of information transmission, so as to solve the crux of information transmission through collaborative governance thinking.

Among the elements involved in the new model of police-media relationship, the media, police, law enforcement targets and the public interact with each other. The role of media and police is reasonably positioned as a new model of "embedded" relationship between police and media, in which the police take the lead and the media take on certain responsibilities. [17] Such a real-time law enforcement mode in which police and media are embedded provides a reference for us to prevent major emergencies. Therefore, based on the traditional path of information transmission, for better early warning of emergencies, a new path is constructed from the perspective of police-media collaboration, namely:

When the epidemic information is discovered (We-Media), the public security organ and the media platform shall conduct interactive communication and establish a cooperative handling mechanism, which shall be submitted by the public security organ to the relevant emergency department of the government, while the media shall appropriately disseminate the information. The two sides of the police and the media communicate and interact with each other, which is beneficial to the elimination of estrangement and also makes it possible to integrate the interests of both sides. Dialogue can try to explore the real interests behind different propositions, compatible interests behind different propositions, and new solutions through cooperation to achieve a win-win situation [18].

4.2. The Elements of Police-Media Collaborative Governance Model

"According to the symbiosis theory of American scientist Margulies, the police-media relationship in the all-media era should be an ecological partnership based on balance, coordination, interaction and integration" [19]. From the perspective of cooperative symbiosis ecology, the basis and elements of the police and media collaborative early warning model in the cooperative innovation of governance structure are as follows:

First, the legal basis for police-media collaboration. The police and the media work together to supervise each other, cooperate with each other, and perform their duties respectively, with the purpose of verifying unexpected events suspected of spreading on the Internet. The basis of law enforcement includes: individual responsibility of internet users as stipulated in Article 12, the responsibilities of the network operators and the reporting obligations as stipulated in Article 47 of the *Cyber-Safety Act*; In addition, the *Criminal Law*, the *Law on Administrative Penalties for Public Security*, the *Administrative Measures for Internet Information Services* and judicial interpretations all stipulate the responsibilities for the fabrication and dissemination of false information.

In addition, the duties of the disease prevention and control institutions to actively collect, analyze, investigate and verify the emergency information of emergency diseases are also clearly stipulated in the *Law of People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Prevention and Control of Emergency Diseases*. In order to give full play to the role of the media in the early warning of health emergencies, the National People's Congress Standing Committee has relaxed the responsibilities of the media to "release" emergency information in the *Emergency Handling Law*. Furthermore, from the perspective of confidentiality, according to the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Guarding State Secrets* and the *Provisions on the Disclosure of Government Information*, emergency information is not a state secret and should be disclosed by the government on its own initiative.

Second, establish an interactive and collaborative liaison platform between the police and the media. The public security organ and the media shall establish a long-term communication and coordination mechanism by way of agreement or law enforcement assistance, with information as the medium, rational thinking as the guide, and openness and transparency as the guide, to establish a controllable, powerful and well-directed emergency cooperation platform.

The media have unique advantages in promoting the construction of the government ruled by law and guiding netizens to think rationally, and share the common value of cooperation with the police in the search for truth, the construction of the rule of law and the innovation of social management. For example, "fact.qq.com" and "www.dxy.com" of Tencent can try to cooperate with the public security organs to establish a cooperation platform, or mainstream media and the public security organs can share clues in real time in the form of on-site cooperation, cross-dispatching, two-way information transmission mechanism, etc.

Thirdly, the relevant mechanism in the early warning mode of police-media collaboration. The mechanism in the police-media cooperative early warning mode includes three contents, which are the emergency information extraction mechanism, the agenda setting of the media for the emergency information transmission, and the police-media joint verification and secondary dissemination.

First, in the police-media collaboration early warning mechanism, information about suspected emergencies is explored through police-media collaboration in law enforcement. The police-media collaboration mechanism explores the source of information about suspected emergencies, which is fed back by offline netizens in the form of We-Media. Internet users, like the roots of plants, can sense the abnormal information of the whole world by relying on their huge number of antennae and nerve endings. The development of We-Media has promoted the blood flow speed of this big tree, making the massive information generated by these endings transmit to all directions and branches. In the process of transmission, the information is screened with marginal utility or submerged in many information flows, or become the fruit of information tree after further processing and fermentation.

Public security organs will apply "big data" to the public opinion detection, change topics in a timely manner, to achieve the combination of daily supervision and special tracking [20]. The suspected emergency information of the network is screened and extracted by big data, which is jointly investigated by a coordinated mechanism. Similarly, under the police-media collaboration mechanism, the information acquired by the media in the first place should be transmitted to the public authorities in a timely manner, and both parties should carry out relevant investigations under

the guidance of the public security authorities. The media will complete the real-time dissemination of the investigation process and results without violating the relevant laws and public security management systems.

The public security organ shall assess the accuracy of the information immediately after obtaining the suspected rumor information, and cooperate with relevant media personnel to obtain evidence for online and offline clues. While the public security is responsible for on-the-spot verification, the media is responsible for real-time broadcasting, cooperating with and urging each other, and taking on and transferring risks to each other.

Synchronous cooperation and information complementarity between public security and media can transfer the potential pressure that may exist, and timely transfer the law enforcement risk when the administrative power may affect the public security organs' transmission channels of information. As the journalist Wilbur Schramm [21] said, "the mass media have great influence on our organization of space and time, and may have the effect of inhibiting social change".

Second, the media set the agenda and spread information about suspected emergencies. As the media is one of the best supervisors of public power, it is a better choice to supervise through the media when the administrative power may be abused. Besides, the media can play a supervisory and conductive role in the process of communication. The public relations authority exercises the right of investigation for verification. In view of the consideration of order and authority, the investigation process and possible emergency information processing and distribution channels are relatively general, and the media precisely have such functions and channels. The role of the uncrowned king of the media can make some "grey area" information appear openly in front of the public, which also makes the government more transparent and cautious in handling suspected information. If the whole process from information generation to investigation is so transparent, the barriers to information transmission will be broken and the risks and responsibilities will be greatly reduced.

Third, the police and media cooperate to verify and disseminate the identification process of emergency information for the second time.

If the public security organ finds that the authenticity of the emergency information cannot be judged based on its own knowledge and expertise, the media shall assist the public security organ in transmitting the suspected emergency information to the emergency functional department and broadcast the whole process of professional investigation organized by the emergency functional departments subsequently. The results of the survey should be broadcasted in real time and disseminated twice on the Internet, and interacted with netizens through the media. It should be fully explained in the face of public doubts.

Finally, the intervention timing of police-media collaboration. In 1947, American psychologist Gordon Willard Allport [21] took the lead in putting forward a rumor spreading formula: "R=i×a", where R is rumor, i is importance, and a is ambiguity. Obviously, during the incubation period of public opinion in emergencies, that is, the early stage of possible emergencies, the police should first assist the media to fully disclose the relevant information of emergencies in a timely manner, verify in a timely manner to reduce the existence of ambiguous information, and conduct investigations to screen out invalid information.

If the public opinion is on the rise, when the high-probability emergencies have already developed or people have a high demand for the disclosure of emergency information, attention should be paid to media and government public relations to get more information, so as to simultaneously lead to a rational thinking in a neutral stance through increased technical support of dissemination through print media, television, and web media.

Judging from all previous health emergencies, the golden early warning period ranged from more than ten days to a few days or even hours, so police and media must work together to secure the best opportunity. In each period of public opinion in emergencies, the results of disciplinary sanctions

against rumors and false information should be released in time, and the false public opinion of fishing in troubled waters should be clarified in time.

In short, under the existing system, these elements should establish a good coordination, supervision and coordination mechanism under the background of social management innovation, so as to not only discover the effective transmission of emergency information, but also perform their duties reasonably.

5. Conclusions

Early warning of major emergencies requires social governance to be refined, there should be various early warning of major social crisis events. From the perspective of emergency information early warning, the curtain of the We-Media era has already opened quietly for a long time, and a huge group of netizens is the root of the tree of social governance, which is implanted in all levels and fields, and sends early warning information before possible crises break out.

As the gatekeeper of public opinion, the public security organ is responsible for obtaining and investigating public opinion on the internet. The media plays an auxiliary role in the verification and dissemination of information with its special verification right and influence, and the media's supervision and restriction function also enables the public power to run in accordance with the established track. Therefore, the cooperation between the police and the media is also a trend in the early warning of major emergencies, which can not only play the role of public security management, but also establish a joint verification mode to timely transmit and verify the information of emergencies and give early warning by means of media supervision and dissemination of positive information.

Of course, the establishment of the police-media collaborative governance system and model requires the support and cooperation of all parties, the police to fully understand the functions of the media, the public authorities and the media to transfer and tolerate the necessary power, and more importantly, to have the sense of responsibility and mission to dare to try and make mistakes.

Acknowledgement

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