Leaderboards and Top Public Opinions: A Study of Discourse Conflict in the Internet Public Opinion Field

Haoyi Shi
Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK
Corresponding author E-mail:506236826@qq.com

Abstract: In the era of new media, with the continuous development of Internet technology, social media and online public opinion fields have become an existence that cannot be ignored. Frisbee, as a niche sport in North America, has become popular on social platforms. This sport also breaking the circle to become a hot topic in the online public opinion field , and discourse conflicts around the "frisbee phenomenon" has unfolded. Based on the theoretical background of ranking effect, value accumulation theory and agenda setting, this paper innovatively combines the network fieldwork method with the interview method. We find that the topic leaderboard mechanism is the primary promoter of the "breaking circle" behavior of Frisbee, the platform topic hot search mechanism breaks the "echo wall", and the technology availability promotes the development of "re-tribalization". Due to their own differences in experience, all the discussants clash with each other, and irrational expression leads to the fermentation of online public opinion and discourse conflict.. Discussers from all sides have a conflict of views due to their own differences in experience, and irrational expressions lead to the fermentation of online public opinion and discourse conflicts. This paper also actively explores the impact and solutions of discourse conflict, and provides a reference for future related research.

Key words: Online public opinion, Discourse conflict, Breaking circle effect

1 Introduction

At the beginning of 2022, the epidemic in China continued to show a multi-point distribution trend, which continued to impact all sectors of society and the transmission channels were complicated, resulting in huge social impacts and economic losses. Affected by the new crown epidemic, on the basis of the continuous improvement of technological availability, people's daily life has gradually shifted from offline to online, and the Internet has further become people's life dependence and main pastime. While breaking and reconstructing the original order of life, the "online era" also deepens the existing gap between circles, and the differences between different circles increase accordingly. However, the existence of ranking lists and opinion leaders enables online public opinion events to have a "circle breaking effect", and on this basis, the re-tribalized netizens break through the barriers and accumulate a large number of netizens to participate in

public opinion expression. We have observed that when netizens participate in public opinion comments and retweets, netizens' comments often lead to scolding due to lack of understanding. Not all netizens are irrational. The two sides are angry because they are unable to persuade each other, and then they go into the category of irrational expression. The author is curious about this: what is the mechanism that allows netizens to "get out of the circle" and enter the common field of public opinion .Why do netizens have discourse conflicts in posts that normally express their opinions?

2 Research Summary

The phenomenon of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field has caused research from multiple perspectives in academia. Foreign scholars Marshall and Eric conducted an overall analysis of the online society from a sociological perspective. They proposed that the Balkanization of online communities means that with the development of social media , different netizens began to spontaneously form tribal small circles based on geographical, interesting, and academic relationships, and then shared information and gained a sense of belonging. However, the information cocoon effect and filter bubbles of social media make different circles "thicker", making communication and dialogue between different circles more difficult, and even cognition of the external world with inherent prejudice, forming a stereotype, which intensifies social disunity disintegration and discourse conflict. While the foreign scholar Smelser is from the perspective of social structure on the collective contradiction analysis, put forward the value accumulation theory. It points out that the reason for the emergence of online discourse conflicts is that participants have a common appeal that has not been realized, and this appeal has brought great psychological pressure to people. And this appeal and other groups or systems exist conflicts.

The domestic scholar Chen Wenxin combined the phenomenon of discourse conflict in our country with political science, and conducted a more detailed study from the perspective and entry point of discourse politics. It is the projection of social conflicts and many contradictions in social development on the Internet. The characteristics of Internet communication and the superiority of Internet political participation functions continue to attract people to express their voices and rights demands through Internet tools. Du Lingli, a domestic scholar, studies the process of the initiation, intensification and end of discourse conflict from the perspective of linguistics, using conversational analysis method from the perspective of discourse. His research shows that due to the anonymity and openness of cyberspace Bringing equality of discourse expression, unconstrained and free expression rights lead to frequent occurrence of discourse conflicts, and the speaker who adopts the desirable structure of disapproval behavior will take the initiative and even build power in the discourse conflict.

"Limited attention" is a concept in cognitive psychology. It was proposed by Kahneman in 1973. It believes that the cognitive ability of individuals is limited, and individuals need to allocate existing cognitive resources among different things. Too much allocation of attention will inevitably reduce the allocation of attention to another thing, that is, the phenomenon of limited attention. After the theory was put forward, it was highly concerned by scholars at home

and abroad, and many research results were obtained. The existence of the platform 's hot search mechanism and topic ranking, as a timely and low-cost source of information, will undoubtedly attract more netizens' attention.

However, the above research did not study the phenomenon of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field from the perspective of the ranking mechanism and the top public opinion, so it did not answer the reasons for the "out of circle" mechanism of netizens and the reason for the discourse conflict.

Therefore, starting from the theory of ranking effect, this paper attempts to answer the following questions: What mechanism is used to prompt netizens to break through the "circle tribe" and enter the common field of public opinion. Why do netizens have discourse conflicts in the normal behavior of comment?

3 Research methods and sample selection

3.1 Research methods

This study tries to answer the above questions by using the research method of network field investigation and interview.

The scientific field investigation method was proposed and established by Bronisław Kasper Malinowski, a representative of the British functional school, and Fei Xiaotong, a famous social scientist in China, conducted more in-depth research and carried it forward. Fieldwork method takes participating observation as one of the main research methods. Since the birth of "ARPANET", Internet technology has developed rapidly and gradually built an information society in the digital era. Various cultural forms and contents have been upgraded and re-entered the public's vision with the help of the Internet and convenient media means. The unique expansion, interaction and real- time nature of the Internet make the "field" of natural anthropology not limited to a certain place, and move with the Internet technology. In 2000, Hein published the book "Virtual Ethnography", which systematically expounded the possibility and methodological principles of using the Internet for ethnographic research. Castor also proposed that fieldwork should get rid of the shackles of physical conditions to fieldwork and turn to network fieldwork for research breakthrough. In accordance with the corresponding steps, this paper will establish concepts, categories and assumptions in the original data, conduct an overall analysis of the event, and conduct a qualitative analysis of the recovered case data.

3.2 Sample selection

The research object of this hypothesis is the frisbee phenomenon widely discussed on Weibo. The Internet has provided us with a new kind of "field" in "fieldwork", instead of the empirical research place with typical research value.

Firstly, we make representative selection of the media and choose the Weibo platform. The reason for choosing Weibo is that it is one of the most influential social media platforms in China,

where nearly 523 million monthly active users share their lives and participate in discussion. Moreover, its unique real-time, anonymous, interactive, low threshold, more forwarding levels and more efficient exposure efficiency spread the coverage and influence of public opinion information to the maximum, so it has strong representativeness.

Secondly, the method of network field survey is adopted to make an overall observation of the content of "Frisbee phenomenon" on the weibo platform during a period from January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022.

3.3 Making interview outline

The interview questions are divided into three parts.

The first part mainly involves the basic information of the respondents, including their age and gender, location and occupation, family composition and personal growth experience.

The second part reduces the dimension of research questions to interview questions.. Including his views on Frisbee itself, Frisbee becoming a "social currency" and the overlap of Frisbee sports venues with football venues, specific strategies for dealing with Frisbee sports venues occupying football green fields, and the way of viewing the "frisbee phenomenon" that socialization is greater than sports.

The third part deals mainly with issues that may be dug deep.

In the process of interviews and research, researchers tried to avoid the four ethical issues and deviant behaviors emphasized by scholar Al-An Bryman: harm to study participants; Do not use informed consent license documents or materials; The privacy of study participants was violated; Deceiving study participants. In addition, if the interviewees have any questions or dissatisfaction during the interview, they can keep silent or quit during the interview. The interview materials that the interviewees declared they did not want to make public were not included and cited in this study.

3.4 Selection of interviewees

In this study, six people who support frisbee, six people who support football and six passers-by, a total of 18 interviewees with different ages and different regions, were interviewed in semi-structured depth for 10 minutes respectively. The interviews began in May 2022 and ended in July 2022. The interviewees first included college students and then collected more research samples through the wechat public platform. According to the maximum sampling principle of qualitative research method, when the 18th respondent is recruited, all the interview content is enough to answer the research questions, and the sample collection is due. The respondents were different in age, occupation, education level, region and other aspects, with low degree of homogeneity. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The interview results were compiled into a verbatim draft with a total of 9,862 words. The processing process of the interview content was completed by the author. Basic information of the interviewees is shown in the table.

Table 1 List of basic information of interviews

Respondent's identity	Number of respondents/person	Interview format	Interview content
Frisbee sports fan	6	network	Basic information, why you love frisbee and your thoughts on the frisbee field
football fan	6	network	Basic information, views on frisbee sports and views on the playing field of frisbee
passerby	6	network	Basic information, views on frisbee and frisbee playing fields

4 Analysis and discussion of results

4.1 Technology availability leads to re-tribalization

The Development of the Internet has experienced the infrastructure construction and improvement of software services in the Web1.0 era, the transfer and popularization of users in the Web2.0 era, and the aggregation of all elements in the Web3.0 era. Now, the Internet has stepped into the Web4.0 era focusing on the Internet ecosystem with unlimited channels, unlimited content all the time. Under the "4C trend" of media technology and its future development proposed by Newman, the Internet gradually eliminates more distance and creates more convenience for users.

Under the background of Internet technology affordability theory, the characteristics of social media, such as platformization, decentralization, interactivity, real-time and anonymity, facilitate communication for users, promote users to express their views in the online public opinion field, and give users the maximum freedom of speech. The continuous strengthening and upgrading of the availability of Internet technology makes human beings more capable of breaking through the limitations of "material individuals", eliminating the distance between people, and breaking through the limitations of time, space, society and body. The iteration of media technology gives people the possibility of horizontal connection from micro to medium and macro social relations. Promote the progress of "tribalization" - "de-tribalization" - "re-tribalization" of media.

4.2 The topic ranking mechanism breaks the echo chamber effect

The Frisbee movement originated in the United States in the 19th century . It was first spread by the American William Frisby's Pie Company. It started with the activity of workers throwing pie boxes to each other after dinner, and attracted many college students to participate in it . It was not until 1937 that Walter Morrison , inspired by the post-World War II period, improved the Frisbee from an aerodynamic point of view, and the sport gradually entered the market. At the beginning of the development of this sport, to the rapid expansion and dissemination in North

America, it exists as a small North American sport , rather than a popular sport. Although it was introduced to China as early as the 1980s, this niche sport has not been widely promoted and developed in China due to the unsatisfactory size of the athletes and the market.

Ultimate Frisbee is a fairly niche sport until 2021. Under the background of the epidemic, the public's demand for outdoor sports is growing rapidly as people spend more time at home and limit normal life and social recreation. "Low sports threshold, strong social attributes, low sports cost and no venue restrictions" enable frisbee to grow rapidly and barbarously among urban young people in the epidemic era and become the new favorite of young people. According to the data of Little Red Book, since September, the content search volume and release volume of Little Red book Frisbee-related topics increased by 17 times year-on-year from January to March, and the year-on-year growth of frisbee-related topics expanded to 62 times in May compared with that of 21st year. The topic "Ultimate Frisbee" frequently appeared on the list of top searches, thanks to a surge in search volume and social media platforms such as Tiktok, Weibo and Xiaohongshu.

The existence of hot search mechanism and topic ranking mechanism on weibo platform makes users' personal agenda turn into public agenda. Driven by the topic ranking mechanism, personal issues published by users are paid attention and discussed by other users and mass media, gradually forming a space for public opinion. The discussion and topic list of mass media creates a "mimicry environment" for users. In this "mimicry environment", media can effectively control the order of topics discussed by netizens and even the cognition and opinions of netizens about events by providing information and arranging related topics. In the new media atmosphere, with the help of bloggers as "opinion leaders", frisbee has completed a two-level communication process from mass media to "opinion leaders", and then from "opinion leaders" to the general audience. In the context of the continuous outbreak of COVID-19, Frisbee, as a hot topic, continues to be amplified by the emotional dissemination of the public, and becomes the leading topic to trigger and dominate public opinion. The existence of the ranking mechanism breaks the "information cocoon" constructed by user portraits and accurate push, and users break through the "echo wall" and enter the public opinion field for discussion according to the ranking of hot topics. Frisbee thus "broke the circle", no longer as a niche hobbyist sport, formally known by more public.

4.3 Combining their own experience to generate a clash of opinions

When we conducted further in-depth interviews and tried to obtain answers on topics such as Frisbee itself, Frisbee becoming a "social currency", and the overlap between the Frisbee sports field and the football field. We were pleasantly surprised to find that when the top public opinion and the respondents themselves idea is not at the same time, the respondents will be according to their own experiences, tend to present their views and opinions. At the same time, when there are differences in views, the interviewees tend to persuade each other and produce irrational expressions. Regarding this attitude, the interviewees' answers support my thoughts:

"Compared to surfing and skiing, frisbee has no technical barriers, is low cost and is not physically demanding. After staying indoors for a while, it is good for your health. It is easy to manage and relatively friendly for girls."

"Frisbee has a very social nature. In my industry, there are fewer members of the opposite sex, so I can meet more members of the opposite sex and broaden my social circle and friends through frisbee."

"When I take my son to a football club, I find that the football field is occupied by frisbee players, which leads to the reduction of the football training field of my child. Please find another place for frisbee players, and do not occupy the football field for this meaningless sport."

"Frisbee has simple rules and is thrown around. Most of the participants take photos instead of really loving sports. Activities that are more social than sports cannot be regarded as sports.

"Why do you choose a football field to play frisbee? Why do you wear tights and leggings to be photographed? It's a frisbee girl hanging out."

With the continuous iteration and improvement of Internet technology, users, as Toffler's "prosumers", participate in online public opinion discussions. In the context of new media, users' access rights continue to increase. On the basis that users are paying more and more attention to personal rights such as participation rights, discussion rights, privacy rights, and supervision rights. We found in the process of interviewing users that when the top public opinion is different from the interviewee's own opinion, the user's opinion is different. Media issues generate confrontational interpretations, and users will state their own views based on their own experiences, break through the "silent spiral", and have a clash of views in the online public opinion field. The content of the interviews strongly supports this hypothesis.

4.4 Irrational expressions tend to persuade rather than coexist

On the one hand, the Internet has broken the original territory of traditional media and activated numerous individual information nodes to participate in content and production and distribution. On the other hand, Internet connectivity makes countless information nodes interconnect, forming a huge information network.At this point, a "particulate society" that could not bear the integration of logic and socialization was born. Irrational elements are heavily loaded in the fragmented content and become the value core of these micro-resources. At the same time, according to Neil Postman's theory, the current emergence of emotional media makes Internet users more emotional and emotional. The development of media technology provides a technological hotbed for irrational communication. From the perspective of meme communication, irrationality is an expression and replication mechanism of homogeneity. Under the action of irrationality, memes such as "Frisbee Girl" and "Frisbee rolling off the football field" are constantly replicated and their scope of representation is expanded.

Compared with the objectivity and authenticity of content production under the logic of journalistic professionalism, the emerging productivity unleashed by the Internet pays more attention to the subjectivity, agitation, emotion and experience of content. Nowadays, the position is superior to the fact, the emotion suppresses the reason, and the speech attitude of "spewing before speaking" has become the emotional normal of the post-truth era. Based on the complete field investigation of the "Frisbee event" and the content analysis of relevant statements on Weibo platform, we find that users tend to persuade each other rather than understand and coexist in the expression of opposing positions. In the process of persuasion, discourse conflict occurs.

5 Summary and reflection

During the 6-month online field investigation and interviews with people on the "frisbee incident", we observed that the frisbee sport has gradually developed from a niche sport in North America to a popular sport among young people today. As a sport, Frisbee "breaks the circle" and enters the online public opinion field, triggering civic discussions and discourse conflicts. The operation of the hot search topic ranking mechanism is the primary promoter of Frisbee's "circle breaking" behavior. The development of technology affordability has drawn different audiences into the same public opinion field , promoting the development of "re-tribalization" , the platform topic search mechanism breaks the "echo inner wall", and the discussion of various parties has a clash of views due to their own differences in experience. In this process, all parties tend to persuade rather than coexist, and irrational expression leads to the fermentation of online public opinion and discourse conflict.

The online discourse conflict epitomizes the competition of culture, ideological leadership and values. On the one hand, it can force social development. Improper handling may also lead to public cognitive biases and conflicts in social relations. Therefore, it is not possible to allow discourse conflict to spread wantonly in the field of online public opinion. The mainstream media actively set the agenda, take the initiative to guide the field of online public opinion, and ease the discourse conflict is the most important to deal with the network discourse conflict. Social media and the public as "producers and sellers" should also actively strengthen network literacy, identify network information, and jointly create a "clean" network environment.

References

[1] Han xuedi.(2022). Why public opinion is "out of focus" : Rumor propagation governance on online media platforms. News and Communication, (07),20-22. (in Chinese)

[2] He Wenbo.(2021). Research on the characteristics of network public opinion communication mechanism in post-truth era. Journal of Journalism and Communication , (15),48-50. (in Chinese)

[3] Weng Jie.(2016). Discourse Conflict in Online communities -- A qualitative study of discourse conflict in a Post bar on Baidu. Journal of Xinjiang Institute of Education, (03),103-111. (in Chinese)

[4] Wang xiaojun & Huang Pei.(2015). Topic differentiation and discourse conflict in Online news comments. Chongqing and the World (Academic Edition),(03),56-60 (in Chinese)

[5] LAN yaoying.(2022). The influence of social media hot search on the generation and development of public opinion. News Research Guide, (01),46-48. (in Chinese)

[6] Liu Jiaqi & Qi Jiayin.(2022).Online Public Rumor Engagement Model and Intervention Strategy in Major Public Health Emergencies: From the Perspective of Social Psychological Stress. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,(4),1.

[7] Hanyue Li.(2022).Irrational Expression and Channelling of Public Opinion on the Internet in the New Media Era. International Journal of Social Science and Education

Research,(7).

[8] Guoqing Liu & Weihong Li.(2022).Topic Characteristics of Large-Scale Online Public Opinion Based on Coword Networks and Event-Driven Methods. Social Sciences,(3).

[9] Li Xiaojie.(2021).Research on the emotional tendency of web texts based on long short-term memory network. Journal of Intelligent Systems,(1),10.

[10] Liang Chen,Jingyuan Shi,Yu Guo... & Yiwei Li.(2019).Agenda-setting on traditional vs social media. Internet Research,(4),16.