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The onslaught of "momo": a study of the mechanism of anonymity in the formation of the anti-silence spiral

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Abstract:
In recent years, the new media technology continues to develop, people use the network social platform to express their views, socializing, etc., and gradually completed the digital existence, the media ecology has undergone a great change. In order to maintain the order of the network, vigilance network fraud and other undesirable phenomena, network communication from the anonymity system gradually to the real-name system, at the same time, the development of big data makes netizens easier to be recognized by real-life acquaintances, and based on the post-truth era of the emotional front as well as the quality of the netizens of the varying, "cyber-violence" phenomena such as the phenomena of "cyber violence" and others are endless, data privacy leaks occur frequently, and group pressure completes the spread from offline to online, and many Internet users dare not express their views freely on the Internet, forming a spiral of silence. In this context, some network users began to spontaneously "secondary anonymity", to momo as a collective mask presented in the network foreground, by enhancing the account privacy to reduce the constraints of group pressure, to protect their own digital proximity rights.

Keywords:
momo groups, group pressure, anonymous communication, anti-silence spiral

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology and media technology, the physical limitations of communication in time and space have been broken, and cyberspace has become the primary way for people to obtain information, and users as nodes have built up a huge network of relationships in the network, and people will use various ways to satisfy their own needs for information acquisition and social communication, and one of the most common ways is embodied communication. Empowered by Internet technology, users have gained digital proximity, transforming from mere "audiences" to "producers and consumers", and Internet users can not only search for the information they need in cyberspace, but also freely express their opinions and interact with others, and at the same time, under the characteristic of anonymity of Internet communication, they can also use the Internet as a means of communication and communication. Meanwhile, under the anonymity of network communication, the identity of users tends to be more diversified. In the new media era, social media as a sharing platform provides netizens with a "carnival stage" with mobility

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and connectivity, and since 2020, a number of social platforms such as Red Book have appeared with “pink dinosaur” avatars and nicknames of “momo”. Since 2020, a group of users using “pink dinosaur” avatars and nicknamed “momo” have appeared on social media platforms such as Red Book, and the process of network dissemination has been characterized by “anonymity-privacy disclosure-secondary anonymity of the group”. In this regard, we were curious about why social media users would be anonymized twice. Why do they choose “momo” as the face of the group to appear in the foreground of the network?

2 Literature review

2.1 The phenomenon of group anonymity

Network group anonymity phenomenon has aroused the academic community multi-perspective research, foreign scholars Kang from the perspective of social identity to analyze the reasons for groups to choose anonymous social networking, that anonymous social software is more honesty, diversity and inclusiveness, and can avoid the phenomenon of non-anonymous social state of the scenario of collapse and image management errors and other phenomena [1]; Kasakowskij from the use and satisfy the theory of events Kasakowskij conducted a questionnaire survey on whether anonymity can influence user behavior [2].

While domestic scholars Liu Shanshan conducted a more detailed analysis of the phenomenon of online group anonymous socialization from the perspective of fanaticism, and his research shows that herd mentality is an important factor causing group anonymous socialization [3]; Jia Yucheng analyzed the phenomenon of group anonymity by using the theory of mimicry, and argued that the development of the Internet has made the boundaries between the front and backstage of social media environments blurred, and people chose to remain anonymous out of the protection of their personal privacy [4]. Zhang Xu starts from the algorithmic recommendation mechanism and argues that algorithms push users to people they may know by labeling them, so that users cannot express their opinions as they wish, and therefore they choose anonymity [5]. Li Qi analyzes the impact of anonymous communication, and believes that anonymous communication has a positive effect on reducing people's fear of isolation and exposing unfair events, breaking the boundaries of reality and venting psychological pressure, but it also provides a fertile ground for the emergence of network violence and false news [6]. Hu Xiaoan believes that anonymous communication has a certain vulnerability to moral constraints due to its anonymous attributes, and it is difficult for the law to regulate its speech, which is prone to cause moral misconduct. [7]

Although these scholars have discussed the reasons for the formation of anonymous groups on the Internet, there are fewer studies on the influence of factors such as users' gender, age, and personality on the formation of anonymous groups, and fewer discussions on the influence of anonymous groups on the network communication environment.

2.2 Spiral of silence

The theory of the spiral of silence was proposed by German scholar Neumann in “Public Opinion: Our Social Skin” published in 1974, which theorizes that people have the fear of social isolation, and this fear will make people's expression of opinions affected. The theory has attracted much attention from scholars at home

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and abroad, and more experimental results have been achieved.

Foreign scholars Walther and Burgoon conducted long-term and repeated interpersonal questionnaires on 16 groups of face-to-face communication and CMC users, and found that group pressure still exists in cyberspace, and believed that the theory of "spiral of silence" is still applicable to cyberspace [8].

In the "spiral of silence" hypothesis, the herd mentality plays an important role. According to Chen Lidan, domestic scholars believe that the personalized features of the Internet will reduce the herd mentality, and due to the anonymity of the Internet, people are more willing to form interesting groups based on the same viewpoints, and tend to regard their own opinions as the opinions of others [9].

However, these studies do not explain the reasons for the formation of anonymous groups on the Internet, and therefore do not answer the question about what effect anonymous groups on the Internet have on the climate of opinions on the Internet.

2.3 The theory of mimesis

Irving Goffman proposed the theory of mimesis in his book Self-Presentation in Everyday Life, in which he argued that the social world makes a huge stage, and everyone plays different social roles and has different social interactions every day, and tries to present a perfect interpretation of the role through self-efforts. At the same time, Goffman also puts forward important concepts such as "foreground", "background" and "impression management" to elaborate the theory of mimesis.

The continuous development of Internet technology makes the social interaction of human beings extend continuously, and the "performance stage" in the theory of mimesis presents more complex and diversified characteristics. Scholars at home and abroad have discussed the applicability of the theory of mimesis in the new media environment, and the connotation of the theory of mimesis has been extended.

Bernadeta Lenny Setyowati, a foreign scholar, interviewed five people (two females and three males) who were born in the Y era (1980-2000) using qualitative research methods, and concluded that people tend to show their positive side on the Internet to make a good impression on others, thus realizing the need for self-expression.[10]

Domestic scholars believe that online gregarious behavior may lead to suppression of authentic self-expression and social burnout [11]. According to scholars Wang Changxia and Liu Ruiyi, the development of media technology has blurred the boundaries between the "foreground" and "background", and even caused the "foreground" to "background". The development of media technology has blurred the boundaries between "front stage" and "back stage" and even caused the erosion of "front stage" to "back stage". [12]

Although these scholars have discussed the application of mimesis theory in the development of new media, they have not explained the impact of mimesis theory on the formation of anonymous groups on the Internet.

2.4 Problems

This paper takes the emergence of "momo" groups on online social platforms as the starting point, and

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takes the “spiral of silence” as the theoretical basis to put forward the following questions:

H1: Why do users choose “momo” as a collective mask to present in the foreground of the network?

H2: What role does the emergence of “momo” play in the formation of the anti-silence spiral? Why does it play such a role?

3 Methods

With the rapid development of big data technology and Internet technology, the anonymity of online socialization is getting weaker and weaker, and the public disclosure of personal information, such as ID and IP, makes the connectivity between cyberspace and the real world increase, and the boundaries between the private space and the public space become more and more blurred. The theory of cybersilence spiral suggests that every cyberspace on the Internet has its own social relations, speaking records, etc., and thus cyberspace is a way for an individual to exist in a group. However, the vests that exist in the network group will make themselves feel “group pressure”, so individuals will still carry out quasi-sensory statistics, and thus be affected by the “spiral of silence” of social relations. The influence of the “spiral of silence” in the network causes users to rebel against group pressure by hiding themselves in the “momo” group through secondary anonymity. In order to investigate the reasons why users change their names to “momo” and the influence of “momo” on the spiral of silence, this paper adopts the questionnaire survey method. The questionnaire survey was carried out on the Questionnaire Star platform, where the designed questionnaires were entered into the online platform, coded and organized in a unified manner, and then sent to the respondents in the form of hyperlinks and QR codes.

3.1 Questionnaire method

3.1.1 Problem and Hypothesis Establishment

Based on the questions above, the corresponding hypotheses are proposed here:

H1: The more obvious the group pressure perception is in the process of using social media, the stronger the momo's willingness to change its name;

H2: The higher the perception of privacy of online accounts, the less binding the group pressure perception is on the expression of opinions;

H3: There is a significant difference in the willingness to increase account privacy across age groups;

In order to prove the hypotheses, this study used the questionnaire method to sample the overall population and create a questionnaire.

3.1.2 Data collection method

The research object corresponding to this hypothesis is momo users of the red book APP. The researcher conducted representative sampling of this group and selects momo users distributed on the Red Book APP as the study population. A questionnaire was distributed to these groups and finally 163 valid filled responses

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were collected.

This survey was launched on July 21, 2024, and on August 7, 2024, the data collection and collation was completed. The questionnaire was based on closed-ended questions, this questionnaire contained 16 questions, including 9 single choice questions and 7 matrix multiple choice questions. The questionnaire was distributed by sending a link to the questionnaire through the Red Book momo group.

3.1.3 Analysis of Red Book APP usage of momo groups

After the data statistics, in the age distribution, people under 30 years old occupied 78.73% of the total number of investigators, which indicates that the Red Book momo group is mostly a young group, and the older people have a lower perception of account privacy, which belongs to a very small number of people in the momo group.

In the statistics on the number of years of use of Red Book, more than 67% of momo have used Red Book for more than one year, and even 33.74% of momo have used Red Book for more than three years. At the same time, there are also 32.52% of momo who have only come into contact with Red Book software within one year, which shows that the momo group is expanding.

From the results of the survey on the length of daily use, update frequency and purpose of use of Red Book, the number of momo with a length of daily use of more than 3 hours is the largest, accounting for 38.04% of the number of people surveyed; the number of people who have published only a few times or who have not published any work is the smallest, accounting for only 6.75%; in the significance test for the purpose of use, the mean value of all the purposes of use is over 3.49 (which indicates that the respondents). (indicating that the survey respondents have a high degree of recognition for each purpose of use). The above data indicate that the Red Book momo group is more active in the use of Red Book APP.

Table 1 Descriptive statistical analysis of the sample

Project	Sort	Sample Size	Sample Proportion	Project	Sort	Sample Size	Sample Proportion
Sex	male	66	40.49%	Hours of daily use	Over 3 hours	62	38.04%
	female	97	59.51%	Update Frequency	One update a day or more	14	8.59%
Age	Under 18	48	29.45%		Multiple updates a week	37	22.70%
	18-22	34	20.86%		Multiple updates a month	60	36.81%
	22-30	61	37.42%		Multiple updates a year	41	25.15%
	30-50	17	10.43%		Only a few or no releases	11	6.75%
	Over 50	3	1.84%	**Project**	**Sort**	**Averages**	**standard error**

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Time of use of Red Book	Under 1 year	53	32.52%	purpose of use	leisure	3.80	1.35
	1-3 years	55	33.74%		Searching for needed knowledge	3.67	1.40
	Over 3 years	55	33.74%		Getting information on clothing, food, housing and transportation	3.49	1.43
Hours of daily use	Under 1 hour	57	34.97%		Communicating with others	3.59	1.34
	1-2 hours	44	26.99%		Sharing Life	3.49	1.57

N=163,100%

4 Findings

4.1 The Anti-Silence Spiral - Group Pressure Prompts the Emergence of "Momo"

In traditional mass communication, media organizations occupy a monopoly in communication, but with the rapid development of media technology, the monopoly of traditional media has been broken, and the public has gained the right of digital proximity. At the same time, the in-depth development of network messaging technology, so that the messages posted on the network, browsing records, liking records and other online behaviors have become people's digital embodiment, people gradually realize the digital existence, so that the traditional social space is broken, "foreground" and "background" boundaries dissolved, and the "foreground" and "background" boundaries dissolved. As a result, the traditional social space has been broken down, and the boundaries between "front office" and "back office" have been dissolved, thus threatening people's digital privacy. With the continuous improvement of the real-name system on the Internet, group pressure has also spread from offline to online, causing people's freedom of expression to be violated to a certain extent. In order to counter online group pressure, momo groups have emerged.

The openness and high interactivity of cyberspace make the scope of online groups expand infinitely, and group pressure spreads from offline to online, and is even greater than offline group pressure. In this context, secondary anonymity can hide individual personality traits, reduce group constraints, reduce group pressure, and do not need to fear "cyber violence" and "human flesh search" due to conflicting views and leakage of personal information, etc. Instead, they can freely post their views according to their own will. Instead, they can freely publish their opinions according to their own will. By weakening the individual's personality traits, "secondary anonymity" can help individuals to reduce the pressure of the group, thus promoting the free expression of opinions and forming an anti-silence spiral on the Internet. According to the research data, the perception of account privacy is positively correlated with strong disconnection and free publication of information, which means that anonymity can increase people's motivation to express their opinions freely, i.e.,

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people will be more sensitive to privacy after feeling group pressure, and tend to use momo as a collective vest, which is conducive to the formation of the anti-silence spiral.

The huge scale of network communication, the rapid development of digital technology and algorithmic technology make the individual's network use behavior exposed to the surveillance of more netizens, forming a panoramic prison and restricting people's actions. The panoramic prison creates pressure on the network group, and the netizens, prompted by the pressure, find that the secondary anonymity is more capable of hiding their traces on the Internet, which makes them feel safer, and the momo group comes into being, and the whole course of development of the network communication presents “anonymity - real name --The whole development of online communication shows the characteristic of “anonymity - real name - secondary anonymity”. The members of the “momo” group have great similarity in their avatars and screen names, and the users are hidden in the momo group, which is not easy to be detected. This “impersonal” feature of the momo group greatly reduces the pressure of the group faced by the netizens, and promotes the formation of the anti-silence spiral. This “impersonal” feature of the momo group greatly reduces the group pressure faced by Internet users and promotes the formation of the anti-silence spiral.

As shown in Table 2, in the significance test for the motivation of name change, we set up four options in the questionnaire, namely, the hidden use of dynamics, herd mentality, free speech, and free release of works, and the mean values of the questionnaire results were 3.63, 3.45, 3.67, and 3.60 respectively after importing the questionnaire results into spss, which indicated that the survey respondents' recognition of the hidden use of motivation, free speech, and free release of works was high, i.e., the survey respondents' recognition of the hidden use of motivation, free speech, and free release of works was high. works are highly recognized, i.e., changing the name momo can enhance the freedom of Red Book users.

Table 2 Significance test for motivation to change name

Project	Sort	Averages	Standard error	significance
Motivation for renaming momo	Hide usage dynamics	3.63	1.41	***
	herd mentality	3.45	1.47	***
	Freedom of expression	3.67	1.35	***
	Free distribution of works	3.60	1.58	***

Meanwhile, in order to prove the correlation between group pressure and the emergence of momo groups, this study conducted a correlation analysis between the positivity of usage behavior and the willingness to enhance privacy. Specifically, the following analysis is made: the more positive the usage behavior is, the more likely to be exposed to privacy, i.e., the greater the group pressure, and the higher the degree of willingness to enhance privacy proves that netizens are more willing to become a member of momo. This study uses pearson correlation coefficient to express the correlation between the use behavior positivity and the willingness to enhance privacy. As shown in Table 3, there is a significant positive correlation between positive usage behavior and willingness to enhance privacy, with a correlation coefficient of 0.57. This indicates that the stronger the positive usage behavior, the more inclined to enhance account privacy.

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Table 3 Correlation analysis between positive use behavior and willingness to enhance privacy

Project	Averages	Standard error	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Use of behavioral positivity	3.21	1.23	0.57***
Enhancement of the will to privacy	3.56	1.41	

The emergence and expansion of momo groups represents a change in users' willingness to enhance privacy, and active expression in the network is also a reflection of positive usage behavior. From this, it is easy to see that the emergence of momo groups can promote the formation of a pluralistic opinion space in the network. By changing their name to momo, users protect their privacy and make a further distinction between the "front stage" and "back stage" of their personal performances, while effectively avoiding social burnout, and on the other hand, the existence of such collective masks greatly reduces users' perception of group pressure, making them more vulnerable to the influence of the Internet. On the other hand, the existence of this collective mask greatly reduces the user's perception of group pressure, so that the user's fear of isolation is lowered, and do not have to follow the network opinion climate for fear of not fitting in, but rather the courage to express their own ideas, and the courage to break the spiral of silence, regaining the right to freely express their opinions.

4.2 Mechanisms of the anti-silence spiral-strong privacy perception leads to lower group pressure

In the above study, we proved that group pressure leads to the emergence of "momo" groups. In this subsection, we will discuss how the anti-silence spiral works in online communication, i.e., how the emergence of momo groups affects the online opinion climate.

The mechanism of group pressure comes from the individual's fear of isolation, i.e., the fear of being abandoned by the group. Based on this concept, this paper argues that reducing group pressure starts with reducing an individual's group participation, which means enhancing the privacy of one's account. The stronger an individual's perception of account privacy is, the more willing he or she is to enhance account privacy, and the less risk of personal information being exposed on the Internet, which achieves the separation of the "foreground" and the "background" in the theory of mimetic theater. The separation of "foreground" and "background" helps Internet users to separate the "group" from the "individual". This helps Internet users to reduce the perception of group pressure, which in turn reduces the influence of dominant opinions and the spiral of silence on their views, freely expresses their views, promotes the formation of the anti-silence spiral, and makes the cyberspace more diversified and open.

In order to prove the above point, this study sets two parameters of strong relationship disconnection and free release of information to reflect the sense of constraints (shown in Table 4), and uses Pearson correlation coefficients to indicate the strength of the relationship between the perception of privacy and strong relationship disconnection and free release of information. Specific analysis shows that the perception of privacy shows a significant positive correlation with strong relationship disconnection and free release of information, with correlation coefficients of 0.62 and 0.61, respectively, which suggests that the stronger the perception of privacy, the greater the group pressure, the more the group pressure is, the more the group would like to disconnect from the strong relationship, the more it would improve the privacy of the account, and the more

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it would be able to get rid of the group pressure and free release of information. That is, the stronger the perception of privacy, the less binding the perception of group pressure is on the expression of opinions.

Table 4 Correlation analysis between perception of privacy and perception of use constraints

Project	Averages	Standard error	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Perception of privacy	3.63	1.14	0.62***
Intense Relationship Disconnect	3.65	1.48	
Perception of privacy	3.63	1.14	0.61***
Freedom of expression	3.55	1.55	

As shown in Table 4, the stronger the perception of privacy, the more it will promote strong relationship disconnection and free release of information. Then we can infer that the stronger the perception of privacy, the more people will disconnect from strong relationships and release information freely, i.e., the expansion of the momo group is conducive to the further reduction of group pressure, which makes more people participate in the anti-silence spiral.

4.3 The effect of young people on the formation of the anti-silence spiral

According to the results of the survey in Table 1, we found that the momo groups in Red Book are mostly young people under 30 years old, of which, momos under 18 years old accounted for 29.45% of the sample proportion, momos between 18-22 years old accounted for 20.68% of the sample proportion, and momos between 22-30 years old accounted for 37.42% of the sample proportion. Young people's software use behavior shows more active, they post works and comments more frequently, and display more personal information on the software, in the post-truth era of emotional front facts lagging behind, and in this context of people gradually completing their digital existence, they suffer from a greater risk of privacy leakage, so they are more concerned about the security of their accounts, have a higher perception of account privacy, and are more willing to improve their account They are more willing to enhance the privacy of their accounts to make strong relationship disconnection and keep themselves away from group pressure. Therefore, we believe that the younger group plays a greater role in the formation of the anti-silence spiral, and with the growth of the teenage group, more young people will join the momo camp, and the momo group will continue to grow and play a greater role in the formation of the anti-silence spiral.

To prove this speculation, this study uses spearman correlation coefficient to study the monotonic relationship between age and privacy perception and willingness to enhance privacy, as can be seen from the table, the values of spearman correlation coefficient are -0.286, -0.208, which indicates that the younger the age of the Internet user, the stronger the perception of account privacy and the more willing to enhance account privacy.

Table 5 Independence test of age and perceived privacy and willingness to enhance privacy

Project	chi-square	degrees of freedom	significance level	Spearman's correlation coefficient
Age Perception of privacy	28.53	16	**	-0.286

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Age Enhancement of the will to privacy	48.60	16	***	-0.208

5 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Wisdom of momo groups

In this era of gradual transparency of online socialization, based on the development of big data technology, the traces of individual browsing on the Internet are recorded in the database, and people gradually complete data-based existence. While the development of new media technology facilitates our life, it also brings the hidden worries of data leakage, network violence, and open-box hangers. momo groups are born in the scenario of real-name online socialization, which makes people with different life backgrounds, experiences, ages, genders, etc. hidden under their similar momo vests, which protects the privacy of the individuals to a certain extent and realizes secondary anonymity.

On social platforms such as Red Book and Jieyin, based on algorithmic technology, functions such as people who may know each other and contact recommendations often appear, and these functions are convenient for linking up the relationship network and improving the stickiness of users, but they also make the “backstage” space in the theory of mimicry squeezed, which tends to expand the scope of group pressure, and the users can't realize the true “backstage” space on line. Users can't realize the real “backstage” performance, which is easy to cause social burnout. The emergence of “momo” makes it less likely for online users to be recognized by acquaintances, and thus more capable of distinguishing between “frontstage” and “backstage,” thus giving full play to the entertainment function of online communication, and better demonstrating citizens' digital proximity. In this way, the entertainment function of online communication can be fully utilized, and the citizens' right to digital access can be better demonstrated.

At the same time, the emergence of the online spiral of silence will hinder the free expression of opinions, making the opinions on the Internet always skewed to one side. In the era of fragmented communication, such network opinion bias is not conducive to people's all-round understanding of the truth, and is not conducive to people's correct understanding and judgment of things. The emergence of momo makes the netizens become an impersonal group, so that they do not fear the fear of isolation, which reduces the group pressure and dares to boldly express their opinions, forming the anti-silence spiral, making the opinions in the network open and diversified.

5.2 Myths of the momo community

Although the emergence of momo groups has contributed to the formation of an online anti-silence spiral and helped forge a free and open cyberspace, we should also be wary of some of the media dilemmas that may be brought about by momo groups. While anonymity reduces the influence of group pressure on opinion expression, it also puts the regulation of opinion expression on the self-discipline of Internet users, which may contribute to the emergence of online violence.

The media literacy of Internet users varies, and the quality of the content they publish also varies, which

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can easily lead to the spread of false information. In the post-truth era, anonymous communication caters to the emotional output of network users, which is prone to promote network hostility, people's neglect of reality, and the dissolution of journalistic professionalism.

Therefore, when we make full use of the wisdom of the momo group and reduce the impact of group pressure, we should also be alert to the myths of the momo group, and focus on preventing and controlling the phenomena of cyberviolence and the spreading of false information while safeguarding the data privacy and digital proximity of network users, and focus on the enhancement of the media literacy of Internet users in the digital era, so as to create a clear sky and an open and diversified cyberspace.

5.3 Rethinking the relationship between momo and the anti-silence spiral

The emergence of momo makes it possible for individuals to hide better under the mask of impersonality in the real name system of the Internet, which in turn reduces the pressure of the group and promotes the formation of the anti-silence spiral to promote the expression of pluralistic opinions on the Internet. The online spiral of silence is an extension of the offline spiral of silence, formed in the context of the huge scope of interaction, the post-truth era of emotional foregrounding, and the digitization of human existence, and promoted by such undesirable events as the “Internet toilet” and the “open-box hangman.” Momo is a collective mask presented by network users to protect their personal privacy and digital proximity rights from being infringed upon. If you want to network anti-silence spiral continue to play a role, the relevant departments also need to implement network governance methods, on the one hand, to protect the privacy of Internet users, reduce the excessive involvement of algorithms, big data and other technologies; on the other hand, for maliciously guiding the confrontation, leading to the network violence to increase the punishment of people, only the frequency of network incidents to reduce the frequency of bad things, the Internet users to be isolated from the fear of the gradual dissipation of in order to anti-silence spiral to play a greater role. The anti-silence spiral can play a greater role.

But at the same time, the anti-silence spiral improperly played will also lead to network hostility, group polarization, conflict and confrontation and other phenomena, more likely to breed network violence and other undesirable events. Therefore, while the anti-silence spiral plays a positive role, platforms should do a good job of gatekeeping, deleting the bad comments and works of momo groups, and eliminating the dissemination of bad comments from the source of dissemination; banning accounts that have maliciously disseminated bad comments for many times or have caused a large impact; and the relevant legal departments should further regulate the dissemination of rumors, to prevent people from cloaking themselves in the freedom of momo and doing things that infringe on the freedom of others and stimulate emotions. The relevant legal departments should also further control the spreading of rumors to prevent people from doing things that infringe on other people's freedom and stimulate emotions.

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