The formation of discourse conflict mechanism in the network public opinion field from the perspective of media studies

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Abstract:With the advent of the information age, the Internet has gradually become an important medium for expressing public opinion, issuing emotions and guiding ideas, and the problem of uncontrolled discourse conflicts in the online public opinion field cannot be ignored. From the perspective of media studies, this paper will study the formation mechanism of discourse conflict mechanism of online public opinion field through questionnaire survey method and interview method, and deeply analyze the formation of online public opinion field, the motivation of online public opinion discourse conflict, and the active role of netizens in it. From the results of the research, there is a positive correlation between the moral level of netizens and the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field, the negative correlation between the netizens' understanding of the truth of the incident and the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field, and the development of network media technology will also make the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field stronger, and the official and other mass media can play an important guiding role in it.
Keywords:Internet public opinion field;Internet public opinion discourse conflict;Media Studies;Social motivation

1 Introduction

In the network society, technology empowerment makes the coupling and deep integration of major network communication media, and new media technology provides diversified channels for people's self-expression, changing the asymmetric relationship of discourse power between traditional media and audiences. The audience has changed from passive information recipients to active information prosumers, and online platforms have become the main battlefield for people's opinions to clash. People express their own opinions on topics related to public interest, and different opinion climates will be formed in different media fields, thereby influencing and restricting public opinion. The coupling of online public opinion and information technology can easily lead to the suppression of opinions and disorderly competition, and even the situation of offline protests and social movements. Therefore, facing up to the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field, reconstructing the spatial relationship structure of the network public opinion field, and responding to the legitimate demands of the network field space are conducive to realizing the effective recognition and social consensus of the core values of socialism. However,

in the process of participating in public opinion, netizens often have uncontrolled behaviors such as malicious abuse, cursing, coercion, and even direct harassment of the participants in the incident, resulting in the social death of the participants in the incident, serious obstruction of life and work, long-term high mental tension, and even suicide under pressure.

Once users have formed their own opinion climate, it is difficult to change their opinion online. Internet technology has given people the ability to influence public opinion, but at the same time, all kinds of open and diversified public opinion are placed in the same space, and their collision with each other will stimulate public opinion conflict. In the subcultural circle with a sense of common identity, the public opinion field shows a polite and harmonious group communication atmosphere; In the public space field, there will be fierce confrontation phenomena such as mutual abuse and forced staring in the public opinion field. We have questions about this: in the field of media public opinion, when will there be a conflict of public opinion and when will there be a consensus? What role does the media field play in this? Why do netizens make different remarks in different public opinion fields? What are their psychological mechanisms? We need further discussion and analysis.

2 Literature Review

2.1 A literature review of media studies

Regis Debray proposed the concept of "media studies" in his 1979 book "Intellectual Power in France", which was later refined in works such as "General Media Studies Course" and "Introduction to Media Studies". In Debray's view, media is " a collection of means of symbolic transmission and circulation under specific technical and social conditions", so it can be said that media studies are more concerned with the symbiotic relationship between media and ideology in a broad sense.

The Chinese scholar Hu Yiqing has sorted out media studies, arguing that media studies recognizes the importance of media forms, but at the same time emphasizes that this form and the related ideologies, social cultures and related organizations are a whole and cannot be separated. Zhu Zhenming and Fu Jiajie mentioned in the article "The "Material Turn" in Debray Media Studies that media studies is concerned with the interaction between culture and technology or symbolism and materiality in human society, that is, the message constructs a "grand" event through the mediation process of media studies. The role of intermediary is no longer simply one or several mass media, nor is it simply a group organization, but a "network of actors" device constructed through an ideology and communication technology.

These researchers argue that the intricate relationship between technology and ideology cannot be underestimated. However, the study did not discuss the relationship between irrational speech on the Internet and the media domain. Media studies may provide macroscopic analysis ideas for the chaos and irrationality of online public opinion, but media studies itself have less research on network communication, and do not focus on the formation and mechanism of digital public opinion, so further research is needed.

2.2 A review of research on the impact of "vector domain"

In order to clarify the microscopic mechanism of the influence of the media domain on individuals, it is necessary to use the "media situational theory" of the media environment scholar Joshua Merowitz to explain. Merowitz boldly combines McLuhan's "medium as message" view with the "mimesis theory" of sociologist Goffman, who argues that electronic media breaks the traditional definition of situation and brings about new situational changes, a system that blurs the boundary between private situations and public places, and changes people's social behaviors and roles accordingly.

Xu Guiquan and Lei Lizhu mentioned in the article "Understanding the "Pan-media" Era: The Triple Perspective of Media Environment, Media Studies and Mediation Research" that the "digital domain" is a "world of two-dimensional codes, images and symbols", and the image domain that once dominated in the TV era contains cultural and social connotations such as individualism, worship of the present, emotions and illusions, efficiency, and economic domination, while the transition of the digital domain in the Internet era from mass media to self-media has pushed individualism, presentism and fragmentation to the extreme. A feature of the digital domain is the "de-institutionalization" of communication, that is, less and less institutional, more and more individual, and the weakening of institutional effectiveness will change power relations, not only between the state and citizens, but also between generations, " we are often in the present state, no memory, no plan, we nervously track the morning, midday and evening news, we experience a pressing, immediate and accelerated time". The study focuses on the relationship between macroscopic media domain and micro individualism, as well as the relationship between media technology empowerment and individual power, and takes steps from macro to micro research.

2.3 Review of conceptual research on "implosion"

Media scientist Marshall McLuhan introduced the concept of "implosion" into the field of media research, emphasizing the extension of electronic media to people, pointing out that ordinary people can break the spatial distance in geographical sense through electronic media, dissolve the original concept of time, and the boundary between time and space disappears, and the authoritative elite can no longer use the information asymmetry brought by time and space to control the ordinary people, and ultimately bring about the dissolution of authority. The scholar Jean Baudrillard extended the "implosion" to the trend of all boundaries and differences being eliminated, that is, a process of increasing social entropy that leads to the collapse of various boundaries, the first of which is the disappearance of the boundary between real and virtual, and electronic media has created a "hyper-real world" for people, and the public can only receive reconstructed or gratuitously constructed information, but cannot access objective reality.

Scholars Cui Jian and Li Sisi mentioned in the article "Reflection and Criticism of Baudrillard's "Hyperreal" Theory" that the "hyper-real world" fully absorbs the light and shadow

effects deduced by the "simulation" of modern media technology, and what people feel in it is no longer the real thing itself, but the imitation of the real landscape. A large number of images processed by the media have obliterated people's perception of reality, and people in psychedelic and trance-like states are more inclined to find and accept information from the flood of information in the perceptual world. Information is becoming richer, but meaning is becoming more and more monolithic.

2.4 Questions asked

Therefore, this article will start from Debray's theory of media and try to answer the following questions:

How is the network media field formed? What factors strengthen the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field? What role do netizens play in the arena of public opinion? In the storm of public opinion, do netizens have their own initiative?

3 Method

This paper adopts the research methods of questionnaire survey method and interview method to try to answer the above questions.

3.1 Questionnaire method

3.1.1 Hypothesis establishment

Based on the above questions, the relevant hypotheses are presented here:

H1: The higher the moral level of netizens, the stronger the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field.

To prove the hypothesis, this study used a questionnaire method to sample the population and produce a questionnaire.

3.1.2 Sampling method

The research objects corresponding to this hypothesis are the majority of netizens, mainly young people, and they were selected as the survey objects because in the 51st "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China" released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 2023, it was mentioned that young netizens accounted for more than 50.5% of the total number of Internet users, which is the main force of Internet use. A total of 202 questionnaires were collected in this survey, all of which were valid questionnaires, and the number of valid questionnaires was sufficient, and the results were statistically significant.

The data collection, collation and analysis process of this survey was completed on May 17, 2023. The survey is mainly open-ended and closed-ended questions, and the main contents are: (1) Basic information confirmation: including age and gender. (2) The dimensionality reduction

statement part of the independent variable X. (3) The dimensionality reduction statement part of the dependent variable Y. This questionnaire contains 16 questions, including 8 multiple-choice questions, 4 multiple-choice questions, 2 matrix questions and 4 fill-in-the-blank questions. Adopt online methods, through WeChat Moments, QQ Space and Questionnaire Star Sample Library.

3.2 In-depth interview method

3.2.1 Interview outline production

The interview questions are divided into three main parts.

The first part mainly involves the basic information of the interviewee, including his gender, age, education, and occupation.

In the second part, the research question is reduced to an interview question. Including his views and derivative behaviors based on the content of the "Hu Xinyu incident" reported in different periods.

The third part, preparation, mainly deals with the possibility of digging deeper. In the course of interviews and research, researchers have tried to avoid the fourfold ethical issues and deviances highlighted by scholar Al-an Bryman: (1) causing damage to study participants; (2) do not use informed consent permission documents or materials; (3) violate the privacy of study participants; (4) Deceiving study participants. And if the interviewee has any questions or complaints that they are unwilling to answer during the interview, they can remain silent or withdraw halfway. Interviewee statements that they did not want to make public were not included and cited in this study.

3.1.2 Interview Selection Participants

In this study, 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted on 10 interviewers of different ages, occupations, and inconsistent levels of understanding of events. The interview began in April 2023 and ended in May 2023. Respondents first included close friends, and secondly recruited more research samples through social recruitment. According to the principle of maximum sampling of qualitative research methods, when the 10th respondent is recruited, all the interview content is sufficient to answer the research question, and the sample collection is closed. The respondents had differences in age, region, growth environment, etc., and the degree of homogenization was low. The interview was conducted in a one-on-one telephone interview, and the results of the interview were recorded and compiled into a verbatim script, with a total of 1,000 words. The process of processing the content of the interview is done by me. The basic information of the interviewees is shown in the table 1.

Table 1 Basic information about the respondent

	Gender	Age	Degree	Occupation
1	Female	20	Bachelor Degree	Student
2	Male	20	Bachelor Degree	Student
3	Female	35	Double Bachelor's Degree	Journalist
4	Female	48	Vocational School	Salesman
5	Male	46	Vocational School	Worker
6	Female	28	Postgraduate Students	Student
7	Female	20	Bachelor Degree	Student
8	Female	20	Bachelor Degree	Student
9	Male	25	Postgraduate Students	Teacher
10	Male	28	PhD Candidate	Student

4 Research findings and discussion points

4.1 The higher the moral level of netizens, the stronger the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field

In the questionnaire, 50.5% were women and 49.5% were men. In terms of age group, most of the samples were between 18-25 years old, with a total of 67 people, accounting for 33.17%. From the distribution of first education, most of the sample is "university/college", with a total of 120 people, accounting for 59.41%. From the frequency of participation in online topic discussions, most of the sample was "often involved", with a total of 75 people, accounting for 37.13%. From the distribution of causes of discourse conflict, most of the sample chose "verbal attack", with a total of 157 people, accounting for 77.72%. From the perspective of the choice of ways to reduce the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field, most of the sample was "strengthening public opinion guidance", with a total of 179 people, accounting for 88.61%.

The reliability and validity analysis of the scales used in this study yielded the following results. Regarding the moral level scale, the validity test showed that KMO=0.855, the Chi-square value of the Bartlett sphericity test was 401.857, and the P value was less than 0.05; the reliability test, using the Kronbach α reliability coefficient for analysis, showed that the scale coefficient was 0.854, and the reliability and validity of the scale was good. Regarding the discourse conflict scale in the network public opinion field, the validity test showed that KMO=0.899, the Chi-square value of the Bartlett sphericity test was 490.908, and the P value was less than 0.05; the reliability test, using Kronbach α reliability coefficient for analysis, showed that the scale coefficient was 0.868, and the reliability and validity of the scale was good.

The correlation analysis was used to study the relationship between the moral level of netizens

and the degree of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to express the strength of the correlation, and the two were obviously correlated, and the correlation coefficient was 0.402. Using regression analysis, the data shows that the independent variable has a significant linear relationship with the dependent variable, with a regression coefficient of 0.469 and a significance of 0.000. The study assumes that H1 is supported, that is, the higher the moral level of netizens, the stronger the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field.

Therefore, we can conclude that the higher the moral level of netizens, the more fierce the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field. Domestic scholars Wu Peng, Fan Jing, and Liu Huashan also proved in the article "The Impact of Moral Emotions on Online Helping Behavior-The Mediating Role of Moral Reasoning" that moral emotions and moral reasoning can stimulate individuals' online helper behavior, and demand themselves and others with high moral standards in the context of helping others. From this, we can infer that when netizens see remarks that do not meet their own moral standards, they will think that the other party is wrong, prompting the individual's helping plot to rise, so they want to "help" the other party to accept the concept they think is correct by refuting and exporting their own values, but due to the differences of individuals, netizens insist on their own ideas, which eventually leads to more intense discourse conflicts in the online public opinion field.

4.2 Traceability of public opinion development: technology, dynamic audiences and official media

The responses of interviewees to people's attitudes before and after learning the truth of the incident support my thinking:

"I will learn about this incident through the official announcement on Weibo, and I will also look at the attitude of others when quoting this topic, or search for this incident on other platforms to see if there will be more information, and then talk to friends about it on WeChat."(S1)

"I saw that at the beginning of the Internet, many people said that Hu Xinyu was killed, and even involved conspiracy theories such as human organ smuggling, offending people who should not be offended, and being killed by schools, I also felt that this matter was not simple, and later the official actually said that he committed suicide, I actually don't believe it."(S2)

"Later, the police gradually released the entire chain of evidence of this incident, and after I read it, I found that it could be connected, I believe in the ability of the police to handle cases, and China is also a country ruled by law, there will be no such appalling things happening, I believe the official factual conclusions."(S3)

When we conducted further in-depth interviews on how the interviewees viewed the "Hu Xinyu incident" and whether they would participate in the online public opinion field, and tried to obtain answers, we were pleasantly surprised to find that people's attitudes towards the incident would change little by little as the truth emerged.

4.2.1 Mass incidents in cyberspace are easier to ferment

At the macro level of social structure, technology is the main reason for promoting social historical changes, such as the "information society" theory proposed by scholars such as Bell and Yoneji Masuda, which believes that the development of information technology will change the social structure. At the micro level of the daily application of media, technology is the main cause of subtle but profound psychosocial changes, such as McLuhan's "medium is message" view, which believes that media technology is the shaping and extension of human psychology and senses. The development of the Internet has promoted the transformation of traditional media to integrated media, and self-media has also become popular. Nowadays, after major incidents, major social platforms will issue relevant reports, and self-operated public accounts can also publish the specific content and opinions of relevant events to form multi-media reports. Netizens can also use the Internet as the carrier, take events as the core, ignore the limitations of time and space, express their views, emotions, attitudes, and opinions in the public domain, and interact with other strange netizens to form an opinion climate with a certain tendency and influence.

From the perspective of Debray's media studies, the reasons for the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field are inextricably linked with the characteristics of network media technology, which mainly include: platformization, decentralization, interactivity, fragmentation, immediacy, and double-edgedness. Liu Haiyan mentioned in " The Generation Mechanism, Dissemination Mode and Guidance Strategy of Online Public Opinion" that the Internet is open and anonymous, and the opinions of netizens can be expressed more freely, which makes online public opinion have a distinct grassroots nature. It is precisely because of the randomness of public opinion on the Internet and the arbitrariness of speech expression that some self-operated public accounts and marketing accounts ignore the principle of news truth in order to make profits, and only publish content that can attract people's attention, confusing the public in the public domain; It is difficult for netizens to distinguish the authenticity of the received information, and the moral literacy of some people is not high, resulting in the mud and sand of online public opinion, and positive and healthy public opinion that helps to reflect public opinion coexist with low-grade fun and vulgar obscene public opinion, making online public opinion may become the fuse for the sudden outbreak of social mass incidents.

4.2.2 Users in network discourse conflicts

In the open and shared cyberspace, the audience is not the target of "shot and fall", but the node-based survival of users, which plays a vital role in the development of online public opinion. "Digital domain" is a new media domain concept proposed by Debray based on his observation of the Internet era, he observed that the digital domain of the Internet era transitioned from mass media to self-media, in this process accompanied by the "de-institutionalized" communication characteristics, that is, less and less institutionalized, more and more individual, autonomy, authority is gradually dissolved, compared with unfamiliar "authoritative experts", netizens are more willing to trust their familiar or more grounded self-media bloggers. The problem brought by the "digital domain" is to push individualism, presentism, fragmentation to the extreme, and some people with bad intentions will use this to spread false information, and these lie spreaders will fabricate and distort the facts according to the attraction and conflict of the mother book of the

event itself, provoke the negative emotions of netizens, and then more or less add some "labeled" entries that attract the public's attention to cater to the stereotypes of the public and the inertia of thinking that extracts information in fragments, so that lies become "chiseled words".

From Debray's media perspective, the ideological differences among netizens will also form a situation of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field. Ideology refers to a collection of ideas, can also be understood as the understanding and cognition of things, it is not inherent in the human brain, but originates from society and exists, affected by thinking ability, environment, information, value orientation and other factors, different ideologies, the same thing understanding, cognition is also different. The ideological construction of netizens is closely related to factors such as personal growth environment, education level, cultural literacy, moral accomplishment, and way of thinking, which together determine netizens' views and attitudes towards events. Domestic scholars Liu Yongzhi and Qi Min mentioned in "The Ideological Security Risks and Governance of the "Post-truth" of Online Public Opinion" that the ideology of cyberspace has multiple expressions and is highly hidden. At present, the circle and interactive coupling of the Internet space has formed a "post-truth", and people are more willing to accept the expression of emotions and value beliefs revealed by detaching from the truth than stating the objective truth, and individuals usually choose those views or theories that are roughly similar to their own beliefs or positions to maintain. "Post-truth" will one-sidedly amplify the power of beliefs, resulting in solidification of homogeneous group thinking, information blockage, and the choice of "shielding" in the face of constantly reversing social public opinion, which eventually leads to the cocooning of beliefs. In the face of constantly reversing news and public opinion, heterogeneous groups often detach themselves from the event itself and engage in a "scolding war" with each other, eliminating the truth of the incident and giving birth to secondary public opinion, so that the topic changes from an argument of objective facts to a struggle of subjective beliefs.

It is worth noting that the public receives information that has been reconstructed or constructed for no reason, and cannot access the objective reality, and can only be immersed in the "hyper-real world". Shi Lina mentioned in her article "New Media Literary Criticism in the Era Transformation of the "Hyperreal" World" that the "hyperreal" world will bring subversive changes to people's entire social life. From economic and material food, clothing, housing and transportation to spiritual and cultural needs, people's lives have been deeply integrated with network media and information technology. This informationized material culture and social form will inevitably bring great changes to literary creation and literary criticism.

Obviously, when netizens browse the information of various events, the information they receive is also true and false, and they cannot distinguish between real and unreal. Netizens are easily provoked emotions in such a hyper-real world, rational thinking is replaced by emotional venting, the information received is very rich, the meaning of the content is very single, and eventually it moves towards extreme thinking, unwilling to accept heterogeneous views, and the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field is more intense.

4.2.3 The major role of mass media in the conflict of online public opinion

Mass media refers to large-scale media that have a large audience, are controlled by official institutions such as newspapers or television stations, and use certain technical means to reproduce and disseminate information. Nicholas Luhmann defines mass media in The Reality of Mass Media[13] as "the concept of mass media encompassing all social settings that use reproduction techniques to disseminate communication". In the past, the mass media were responsible for publishing newspapers, magazines, books, and publishing the latest news, and people could not directly contact and interact with each other, forming a closed nature of the operation of the mass media and isolating people outside the circle. In the information age, the network has broken the isolation of time and space, and people can directly communicate and communicate on the network platform, and the monopoly position of mass media has been shaken. However, it should be noted that because of its proximity to the people, a large audience, and the support of official institutions, the mass media still holds a certain right to speak and influence in the field of digital public opinion, and the reports and comments issued can greatly affect the orientation of public opinion.

5. Summary and reflection

This study conducts media theorization on the phenomenon of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field through questionnaire survey method and interview method, and attempts to answer the question of the formation mechanism of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field. Through research, it is found that the higher the moral level of netizens, the stronger the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field. The more netizens receive the truth, the weaker the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field. And "the more frequently netizens participate in topic discussions, the stronger the discourse conflict in the online public opinion field" is not true. This is mainly because moral emotions and moral reasoning can stimulate individuals' online helping, hoping to persuade other netizens to agree with their "correct views" through discourse conflicts. People are more inclined to speak in their familiar circles, and the development and application of electronic media have created opportunities for netizens to speak in multiple circles, expanding the scope of the digital public opinion field, and making discourse conflicts in the online public opinion field more likely to occur.

This study proposes to study the formation mechanism of discourse conflict in the online public opinion field from the perspective of media studies, which reflects the development of media science of the phenomenon of discourse conflict in online public opinion. On the other hand, it also provides a theoretical basis for the development of the discourse conflict mechanism of the online public opinion field in the context of everything is media in modern China.

However, it is worth noting that this study also finds that the phenomenon of online public opinion discourse conflict will bring negative effects such as authority dissolution, post-truthization, and implosion, which is worthy of vigilance and reflection.

Due to theoretical reasons, this study also has the inadequacy of ignoring the phenomenon of uncontrolled online public opinion and governance methods, and in future research, researchers in the field of network communication and information public opinion may need to pay more

attention to the phenomenon of uncontrolled online public opinion, and expand the research and practice of online public opinion governance.

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