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# A Study on the Pathways for Mainstream Media to Guide Online Public Opinion in a Cross-Platform Communication Context

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## Abstract
*As social media platforms diversify, online public opinion has gradually transcended the limitations of single-platform dissemination, exhibiting characteristics such as cross-platform coupling in dissemination pathways, platform-specific differentiation in issue coverage, fragmented and multimodal content, and layered, emotional expression of group opinions. These developments pose new demands on mainstream media's capacity to guide online public discourse. By analyzing the evolution of online public opinion within a cross-platform communication environment, this paper examines the functional roles and practical strategies of mainstream media in opinion guidance. Relying on their professional news production capabilities and public communication functions, mainstream media assume responsibilities including fact-checking controversial information, setting public agendas, and supervising social issues through public opinion oversight. In response to the complexity of cross-platform public opinion diffusion, mainstream media should strengthen cross-platform monitoring to accurately assess public opinion trends; enhance fact verification and authoritative information release to promptly clarify misinformation; leverage the advantages of integrated media networks to implement differentiated communication across platforms; and improve interactive response mechanisms to address public concerns in a timely manner-thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of online public opinion guidance in a cross-platform communication context.*

## Keywords
*Cross-platform Communication, Mainstream Media, Online Public Opinion, Public Opinion Guidance, Media convergence*

## 1 Introduction

With the development of mobile internet, social media, and intelligent communication technologies, the generation and dissemination of online public opinion have gradually transcended the spatial limitations of single platforms. Platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, and Kuaishou, with their distinct information distribution mechanisms, content presentation formats, and user relationship structures, have become key channels for the public to access information, express opinions, and participate in public affairs. A single pub-

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lic opinion event can continuously circulate across multiple platforms, evolving into new forms of content through user reposts, content editing, and comment-based discussions. The development of public opinion is also jointly influenced by platform algorithms, group interactions, and social sentiment. Existing research indicates that in the new media environment, online public opinion exhibits characteristics, such as diverse sources of dissemination, fragmented content, and cross-platform diffusion of events. As information exchange among different platforms becomes increasingly frequent, the evolution of public opinion topics, the expression of public emotions, and the formation of societal views have grown more complex.

Cross-platform communication has transformed the traditionally centralized information dissemination model of conventional news media, placing mainstream media in a more complex public opinion environment. Research on the evolution of public opinion across multiple platforms reveals significant differences among platforms in terms of issue attention, dissemination structures, and emotional expression. The ongoing interactions among social media users, opinion leaders, official institutions, and platform operators also influence the emergence and evolution of public discourse topics. Against the backdrop of deepening media convergence, mainstream media have gradually established a multi-platform news communication system by creating new media accounts, developing integrated media dissemination networks, and expanding interactive channels. However, a multi-platform presence does not necessarily lead to a proportional improvement in public opinion guidance effectiveness. Issues such as content duplication across platforms, misalignment in dissemination pacing, and insufficient coordination of public feedback continue to affect the effectiveness of mainstream media in guiding public opinion. In response to changing patterns of public opinion diffusion and audience engagement within cross-platform environments, mainstream media must further leverage their strengths in professional journalism, agenda-setting for public issues, and public oversight, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of online public opinion management through integrated media practices.

## 2 Main Characteristics of Online Public Opinion under the Perspective of Cross-Platform Communication

### *2.1 Cross-platform coupling of dissemination pathways*

Although social media platforms differ in technical rules and user relationship structures, users' cross-platform engagement enables public opinion information to transcend individual dissemination spaces and continue spreading. After a trending event occurs, related content may initially appear as short videos, online posts, or group messages, then be forwarded, cited, and remixed by users on other platforms, creating a cross-platform diffusion process. Public discussions on Weibo, algorithmic recommendations on short-video platforms, and social network-based sharing on WeChat are interconnected, linking originally fragmented communication networks through shared users, information reposting, and topic associations. The information diffusion processes across different platforms also influence each other: when an event garners significant attention on one platform, related content may enter the trending lists, recommendation feeds, or community discussions of other platforms, triggering renewed interest and further spread.

Cross-platform coupling has also altered the rhythm of online public opinion dissemination. After discussions about an event decline on one platform, renewed attention may emerge due to new visual materi-

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als, responses from involved parties, or controversial comments appearing on other platforms. As certain public opinion information spreads across platforms, original reports are often condensed into headlines, screenshots, or video clips, generating different interpretations in new dissemination environments. Due to differences in dissemination speed and information update frequency among platforms, public opinion development may exhibit alternating peaks, while the impact of an event continues to expand through the flow of information between platforms.

### *2.2 Platform differences in public opinion issues*

Different social media platforms vary in content production methods, user demographics, and information recommendation mechanisms, leading to distinct discussion focuses when the same public event spreads across platforms. Weibo aggregates large numbers of users through trending lists, hashtags, and open comments, making it easier for the public to discuss issues such as responsibility, progress in handling, and social impact. Short-video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou primarily present events through visual content, with on-site footage, personal stories, and emotional expressions more likely to capture user attention. WeChat official accounts, relying on long-form articles and social sharing, facilitate the dissemination of detailed information, providing space for in-depth explanations of background context, policy regulations, and professional topics. The varying ways platforms select and present content allow a single event to generate multiple interconnected public issues.

During cross-platform dissemination, issue fragmentation is also influenced by user engagement behaviors. The public often selects content to follow based on personal experiences, interests, and value judgments, while opinion leaders and self-media accounts attract participation through different interpretive perspectives. For instance, public events involving new technologies may spark discussions primarily about technical safety on news platforms, but when moving to short-video platforms, they could trigger debates over job displacement, convenience in daily life, and individual rights. As different issues spread across platforms, some originally secondary topics may emerge as new focal points of public discourse, and public attention can shift dynamically as the event evolves.

### *2.3 Fragmentation and multimodality of disseminated content*

In the mobile internet environment, the public's information consumption has gradually become integrated into fragmented moments of daily life. Short videos, brief texts, images, and live-stream clips have emerged as key formats for online public opinion dissemination. Clips from hot events—such as isolated scenes, statements by involved parties, or event details—can be extracted and edited to circulate independently from their original reports. Compared to comprehensive news coverage that includes full contextual background, fragmented information spreads faster and requires lower reading effort. However, the chronological sequence of events, underlying causes and consequences, and complete accounts of relevant parties are often omitted during dissemination. Particularly in controversial incidents, single screenshots or short video clips may lead the public to form initial judgments before they fully understand the complete facts.

Meanwhile, the combination of images, audio, text, and dynamic videos has transformed the way public opinion information is conveyed. Short videos enhance sensory appeal through on-site footage, subtitles, voiceovers, and editing rhythms; live streaming provides real-time updates on events; and infographics convert

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complex data into intuitive visual content. These different modalities collectively contribute to the dissemination of public opinion, enabling the public to understand events through multiple sensory channels, while also increasing the complexity of verifying information authenticity. Particularly with the involvement of generative artificial intelligence in content creation, synthesized, dubbed, or altered images and videos may be disseminated as authentic event materials, making it difficult for the public to judge the truthfulness of information based solely on immediate perception.

### *2.4 The layering and emotional nature of group opinion expression*

Social media platforms organize information dissemination based on users' interests, social connections, and interactive behaviors, making it easier for users with similar experiences, shared interests, or aligned perspectives to encounter the same public opinion content. User groups formed through WeChat groups, interest-based communities, and platform recommendations often engage in sustained discussions around specific issues, with differing focuses and evaluation criteria among various groups regarding the same event. Users are more likely to find agreement within familiar social networks, and similar opinions become reinforced through repeated sharing and interaction, leading to relatively concentrated discussion circles and limited cross-group communication on certain public issues. When these group viewpoints enter open social platforms, direct exposure between different positions may further trigger debates.

Emotional expressions in online public opinion are also influenced by platform dissemination mechanisms. Events involving public safety, social equity, and individual rights tend to trigger public anger, sympathy, or anxiety, and emotionally charged content often receives more comments and shares. In short videos, on-site footage, background music, and personal narratives can intensify users' emotional experiences, while open commenting and topic aggregation on platforms like Weibo provide space for clashes of differing opinions. While emotional expression can drive public attention to social issues, when group discussions persist primarily around identity alignment and emotional release, factual details, professional explanations, and concrete solutions may be overlooked, thereby affecting the public's rational judgment of public events.

## 3 The Functional Role of Mainstream Media in Guiding Online Public Opinion

### *3.1 Fact-checker of disputed information*

The emergence of online public opinion often involves a concentrated appearance of information from diverse sources. The public can learn about events through self-media accounts, social media comments, and on-site footage. However, the diversity of information sources also increases the difficulty of verifying facts. Particularly in sudden public incidents, there may be time delays between statements by involved parties, online disclosures, and official announcements. Some content, after being forwarded or edited, loses its original context, making it difficult for the public to judge the true situation. Mainstream media, with their long-established professional editorial systems, journalistic verification standards, and extensive interview resources, provide crucial conditions for confirming facts in complex public opinion environments. Through on-site investigations, interviews with multiple parties, comparisons of original materials, and verification from author-

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itative sources, mainstream media can transform unverified online information into news reports grounded in clear factual evidence.

Fact-checking in a cross-platform communication environment also requires attention to content changes that occur during information dissemination. Text descriptions, video clips, and screenshots of the same event may appear across different platforms, undergoing repeated editing and resulting in multiple versions. Mainstream media must not only verify the facts of the event itself but also trace the original sources of disputed information, identifying whether circulating online content has been taken out of context, misdated, or manipulated through image splicing. For facts that have not yet been confirmed, continuous investigation and reporting updates are essential to ensure the public receives relatively complete and reliable information. Professional fact-checking capabilities thus become a crucial condition for mainstream media to effectively guide online public opinion.

### *3.2 Agenda-Setting actors in online public issues*

The development of social media has made the process of forming public issues more open, enabling ordinary users, online opinion leaders, and various self-media accounts to participate in agenda-setting through information sharing and interactive discussions. Platform trending lists, recommendation algorithms, and user reposts further influence the visibility of different topics, causing the focus of online public opinion to shift continuously. Mainstream media, with their professional resources in topic planning, news reporting, and commentary analysis, can identify issues of public significance from scattered public opinion data and guide public attention toward key facts and social impacts through news coverage, special features, and editorial commentary.

Agenda-setting in online public opinion also involves in-depth interpretation of discussion topics. When facing complex events involving public policy, people's livelihoods, and social governance, the public's initial attention may focus on a single controversial detail, gradually expanding to issues such as institutional implementation, accountability, and public interest. Mainstream media can provide additional information to help the public understand complex issues by offering expert insights, interviewing various stakeholders, and clarifying the background context. Cross-platform dissemination broadens the channels for agenda-setting, allowing the same public issue to continuously attract attention through news briefs, short video reports, in-depth articles, and interactive discussions, enabling audiences across different platforms to engage in dialogue around issues grounded in shared factual foundations.

### *3.3 Public opinion supervisors in social issue tracking*

A large volume of public discussion on the internet is closely related to real-world social issues, especially events involving public services, consumer rights, environmental protection, and administrative management. The public often uses online platforms to voice concerns and track how these issues are being addressed. Social media provides a more convenient channel for exposing social problems, but increased online attention does not necessarily lead to effective resolution. Mainstream media, with their professional roles in news investigation, social oversight, and sustained reporting, can verify facts and interview relevant responsible parties around issues that attract widespread public concern, thereby promoting information about event handling into the public discourse.

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In a cross-platform communication environment, clues to social issues may emerge from user submissions, comments, and short video reports across different platforms. Mainstream media filter out news leads of public significance, transforming individual concerns into public issues suitable for investigation and discussion, while continuously monitoring responses from relevant authorities and responsible parties. For controversial incidents involving multiple stakeholders, it is essential to fully present diverse perspectives, verify the basis for assigning responsibility and related procedures, and prevent unsubstantiated online accusations from interfering with proper investigations. Public opinion oversight also extends to ongoing observation after incident resolution—assessing whether corrective measures have been implemented, whether public concerns have been addressed, and whether similar problems recur—thereby enhancing the practical role of journalism in engaging with public affairs.

# 4 Practical Pathways for Mainstream Media in Guiding Online Public Opinion across Platforms

## *4.1 Strengthen cross-platform public opinion monitoring and accurately assess the direction of public opinion*

Online public opinion continues to spread across different platforms, making traditional information monitoring—reliant on single websites or fixed keywords—ineffective in fully capturing the development of events. Weibo's trending topics highlight issues that attract concentrated public attention within short periods, while comments and shares on short-video platforms reflect emotional responses triggered by events. In-depth professional analyses and interest-based demands may also emerge in WeChat official accounts and community discussions. Public opinion data from various platforms differ in terms of dissemination speed, content format, and user engagement methods. Mainstream media should leverage integrated multimedia editorial systems to broaden their scope of public opinion collection, continuously monitoring hot topics, related news, user comments, and event developments across major social platforms. For events attracting significant public attention, a unified method for recording public opinion data should be established, organizing relevant information by release time, source platform, key issues, and dissemination dynamics to promptly identify emerging trends across platforms.

Relying solely on metrics such as reading volume, comment count, and shares to assess the development of public opinion can easily overlook shifts in public focus and changes in the nature of controversy. Public opinion analysis should also delve into discussions across different platforms and examine the reasons behind their evolution. For instance, after an event sparks concentrated debate on Weibo about accountability, new on-site footage may emerge on short-video platforms, shifting public attention toward the authenticity of facts. Once relevant authorities respond, discussions might further extend to procedural handling and implementation of responsibilities. Mainstream media can leverage technologies such as text analysis, topic clustering, and sentiment recognition to help organize public opinion data, while combining them with journalistic reporting and human judgment to distinguish factual disputes, emotional expressions, and specific interest demands. For recurring issues in online discussions, it is essential to trace their original sources, primary dissemination platforms, and cross-platform spread patterns, enabling timely adjustments to news coverage

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and interview planning to prevent public opinion monitoring from remaining merely a superficial aggregation of trending information.

### *4.2 Strengthen fact-checking and authoritative releases to promptly clarify false information*

After a sudden incident occurs, the public's demand for information typically arises before a complete investigation is completed. Photos, videos, and personal accounts from the scene can quickly go viral. When authoritative information is lacking, unverified speculation and false reports easily fill the gap and spread widely across platforms. Mainstream media should fully leverage their professional strengths in news gathering and editing to establish fact-checking and information release mechanisms that keep pace with online dissemination. For public events drawing significant social attention, media should promptly contact relevant departments, involved parties, and other informed sources to verify key details such as time, location, individuals involved, and basic circumstances, then issue timely reports based on reliable facts. For matters still under investigation, media should clearly present confirmed facts and the latest developments, continuously updating information as the investigation progresses, thereby minimizing public speculation caused by information gaps.

Misinformation across platforms often appears in multiple forms, with the same rumor circulating on different platforms as text messages, chat screenshots, voice-over videos, or edited clips. When mainstream media conduct fact-checking reports, they should provide concrete evidence addressing specific controversies, clarify discrepancies between images, videos, or claims and actual events, and respond to public inquiries using original footage, authoritative documents, interviews with involved parties, and expert explanations. For widely disseminated false information, concise fact-checking graphics and short videos can be produced and simultaneously released on major platforms to ensure consistency in key facts and reasoning. At the same time, accessible channels for follow-up reporting and corrections should be maintained across platforms so that the public can track updates and changes over time. Regarding rumors involving public safety and social welfare, beyond clarifying false information, it is also essential to address the underlying real-world concerns that the public commonly raises, preventing lingering doubts from continuing to spread on other platforms after the initial clarification.

### *4.3 Leverage the advantages of the integrated media matrix to implement differentiated communication across platforms*

As mainstream media establish distribution accounts on platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, Kuaishou, and other online channels, the avenues for news dissemination continue to expand. However, content formats and audience consumption habits vary significantly across different platforms. Some mainstream media still rely on republishing identical content across multiple platforms, failing to fully leverage the unique strengths of each medium. Effective cross-platform public opinion guidance requires tailored content curation based on platform functionalities and public information needs. Weibo is well-suited for rapid event dissemination through real-time posting, hashtags, and open interaction; short-video platforms can vividly present events via on-site footage, reporter appearances, and text overlays; WeChat official accounts excel at explaining complex issues through in-depth articles, data visualizations, and expert analysis; video commu-

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nities like Bilibili can produce comprehensive, high-value content offering deep insights into public topics with strong professional and discussion potential. In reporting major public events, live streaming, expert interviews, and special features can continuously provide updated information, ensuring that each platform delivers distinct yet complementary coverage.

The role of a integrated media matrix is also reflected in cross-platform content integration and coordination of dissemination timing. Mainstream media should strengthen communication among editorial teams across different platforms, establishing unified factual materials and reporting plans for the same public opinion event, then producing news products in various formats tailored to each platform's characteristics. In the early stages of an emergency, verified, concise information can be released first to meet the public's need for timely updates; as investigations deepen, follow-up coverage—such as in-depth reports, explanatory videos, and commentaries—can provide contextual background and guide public attention toward underlying public issues. For complex or highly specialized stories, key facts can be distilled into short videos with links to full reports, while text-and-image reports can incorporate video clips and related interviews, enabling users across platforms to access more comprehensive information. At the same time, content production must maintain factual accuracy and consistent reporting tone, avoiding exaggerated headlines, emotionally charged editing, or visually misleading presentations driven solely by traffic goals. Evaluation of platform performance should focus on audience comprehension, quality of public discussion, and sustained cross-platform reach, reducing overreliance on single traffic metrics.

### *4.4 Improve the mechanism for public opinion interaction and response, and promptly address public concerns*

The interactive features of social media have transformed traditional news reporting, which was primarily one-way in nature, by enabling the public to directly express opinions through comments, private messages, reposts, and live interactions, as well as to question news content published by mainstream media. In cross-platform public opinion dissemination, some users focus on factual aspects of an event, while others are more concerned with accountability, compensation, and follow-up outcomes. Different types of demands may be scattered across multiple platforms. If mainstream media only emphasize the volume of information released and the breadth of content distribution, the actual issues raised by the public will struggle to be promptly addressed in subsequent coverage. Mainstream media should pay greater attention to interactive channels on social platforms, systematically organize recurring concerns from comment sections, topic discussions, and user messages, identify newsworthy leads supported by facts and public relevance, and respond accordingly through interviews and investigations. For inquiries involving policy regulations, specialized knowledge, or public services, explanations can be provided via journalist Q&A sessions, expert interpretations, and special feature interviews, helping the public better understand relevant facts and decision-making bases.

Public opinion surrounding public incidents is often closely tied to the progress of addressing underlying issues. Ongoing public attention may stem from disputes over information authenticity or from unmet demands that have yet to receive clear responses. Mainstream media can conduct follow-up interviews focusing on issues receiving widespread public concern, proactively reaching out to involved parties, relevant authorities, and experts to promptly report investigation findings and handling updates. For trending events spanning

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multiple platforms, response strategies should be adapted according to the primary points of contention on each platform—providing timely clarifications of key facts on open discussion platforms like Weibo, using on-site interviews and visual reporting on short-video platforms to address intuitive questions, and publishing comprehensive investigative reports and policy analyses through channels such as WeChat official accounts. In cases where repeated doubts arise about the same incident across different platforms, continuous thematic coverage can consolidate relevant information, enabling the public to easily access event details and latest developments. Throughout this engagement, mainstream media should also value reasonable public expression, correct factual inaccuracies promptly, provide necessary space for diverse viewpoints, and transform feedback with journalistic significance into further interview leads, ensuring that public opinion guidance evolves in tandem with changing information needs and the ongoing resolution of real-world issues.

## 5 Conclusion

Cross-platform dissemination has led to characteristics of online public opinion, including interconnected dissemination pathways, differing issue focuses, diverse forms of information expression, and ongoing interactive group opinions. Traditional methods of information release relying on single channels can no longer adapt to the complex media environment. As key players in professional news production and public information dissemination, mainstream media must fully leverage their functions in fact verification, agenda setting, and public oversight. By utilizing integrated multimedia editorial systems, they should strengthen cross-platform monitoring of public opinion, promptly provide credible information, deliver differentiated reporting tailored to each platform's communication features, and respond to public concerns through continuous engagement. With further integration among news gathering, content distribution, and audience feedback, mainstream media can more timely grasp shifts in online public opinion and promote rational discussions on public issues through objective, accurate, and in-depth journalism.

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