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# Study on hidden cyber violence and its legal governance in “Internet toilet”

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## Abstract
*“The ‘Internet Toilet’ is a platform designed for creating dedicated BOT accounts, Tieba groups, topics, and communities. It allows users to anonymously post content, send messages from afar, and receive and post satirical, malicious comments, curses, and insults directed at specific groups or individuals. The ‘Internet Toilet’ has become a hidden arena for public opinion among teenagers, breeding the seeds of online violence. Users of the ‘Internet Toilet’ are often younger, mostly from the post-00s and post-05 generations; they build walls with abbreviations and slang, circulating a ‘language currency’ specific to these topics. Within these walls, the threshold for violence is low, and differences in appearance or other aspects can easily become targets for attack. In recent years, behaviors such as ‘posting in the toilet’ and ‘opening boxes to post people’ have gained attention, but legal regulation faces risks of ineffectiveness. The violent behavior in the ‘Internet Toilet’ involves issues like ambiguous venue identification, difficulty in defining violent language, severe circumstances being hard to determine, high difficulty in attributing responsibility, and challenges in evidence collection. Moreover, the ‘Internet Toilet’ reflects the mindset and values of teenagers in cyberspace, thus it urgently requires thorough discussion from all sectors to find solutions.”*

## Keywords
*Internet violence, Internet toilet, legal governance research*

## 1 Introduction

From the cat abuse incident in 2006, the "first case of human flesh search" in 2008, to the recent cases of a woman in Shanghai who fell from a building after being harassed for tipping a food delivery rider, and the tragic suicide of Liu Xuezhou, a young man searching for his family, as well as the suicide of a girl with pink hair due to online harassment, cyberbullying has spread like a virus across cyberspace with the development of the internet. Academic research on cyberbullying has gradually become a prominent field; the governance of cyberbullying has also become clearer, with relevant laws, regulations, and policy documents being progressively improved, gradually revealing the contours of governance amidst the chaos.

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## *1.1 What is cyber violence?*

The definition of cyberbullying has always been a focal point of academic and industry attention. Firstly, the definition is vague, making it difficult to implement effective measures. Secondly, cyberbullying is highly variable; with the development of the internet, various forms have emerged, such as the "cyber toilet" discussed in this article, which increases the difficulty of defining it. This paper summarizes and reviews academic research on the concept of cyberbullying, its characteristics, mechanisms of formation, and trends in its development.

### *1.1.1 Definition of the concept of cyber violence*

The definition of cyberbullying was previously rather vague, and the academic community has yet to reach a consensus. Most studies tend to define "cyberbullying" through three approaches: descriptive definitions, nature definitions, and formal categorizations. For example, Zhou Libo describes cyberbullying as using verbal information in cyberspace [1]to defame, insult, attack, or harm others, or to arbitrarily handle personal information, thereby causing psychological coercion and mental pressure, with serious circumstances.[2] Nature definitions, such as Zhao Hong, distinguish cyberbullying from physical acts like beating, binding, injuring, or confining, viewing it as a [3]coordinated combination of attacks on targets through text, images, and videos via the internet. Formal categorization involves dividing cyberbullying into types based on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, including one-to-one, many-to-many, many-to-one, and one-to-many, with many-to-one cyberbullying being the most common.

In summary, cyberbullying can be defined from five elements: subject, means or channels, context, object, and consequences. Cyberbullying[4] is an act of uncertainty carried out through the internet, targeting specific events and individuals involved, using verbal defamation, doxxing, exposure of personal information, or entertainment to exert social, relational, or psychological pressure on them, thereby infringing upon their legitimate rights and interests, and sometimes extending offline into real-world violence. Notably, in recent years, the governance of cyberbullying has gradually improved, and the definition of cyberbullying has become clearer. In September 2023, the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public Security issued the "Guidelines for Punishing Cyberbullying Violations According to Law." According to these guidelines, "cyberbullying" is described as the act of arbitrarily posting abusive, defamatory, and private invasion information online, degrading others' dignity, damaging their reputation, and causing certain consequences, such as leading to "social death," mental disorders, or even suicide.

On June 14,2024, the Cyberspace Administration of China, in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the National Radio and Television Administration, released the "Regulations on the Governance of Online Bullying Information" (hereinafter referred to as the "Regulations"). This is China's first specialized legislation aimed at the governance of online bullying information, classified as a departmental regulation in terms of legal hierarchy. The Regulations clearly define online bullying as: "the concentrated posting of illegal and harmful information through the internet in the form of text, images, audio, or video, which includes insults, defamation, incitement to hatred, threats, coer-

1 Zhou Libo. Criminal Law Governance of Cyber Violence Crime [J]. Research on the Rule of Law, 2023(5):38-51.

2 Xu Hong: "The Connection between Civil, Administrative and Criminal Cases in Internet Violence", North Methodology, No.5, 2023, p. 3.

3 Yejingyi. Research on the Generation Mechanism of Internet Violence [D]. Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, 2024.DOI:10.27852/d.cnki.gzjcm.

4 Tang Rongjun, Sun Luyang. Analysis of the Governance Path of Preventing Online Public Opinion from Being Impacted by Internet Violence [J]. Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory Research, 2022(9):51-59.

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cion, invasion of privacy, and content that affects mental and physical health, such as accusations, ridicule, belittlement, discrimination, etc."

### *1.1.2 Characteristics of cyber violence*

When discussing the characteristics of cyberbullying, scholars analyze from various perspectives. This article summarizes several core features: First, language is the vehicle of cyberbullying. As the core of cyberbullying, language not only serves as an important medium but also a key aspect in studying it. The variants of violent language in online spaces, through their subtle, vivid expression and frequent[1] use, facilitate the widespread dissemination of violent discourse, fostering a mutually reinforcing relationship with the popularity of new meme-based discourse. Second, cyberbullying represents a new form of power oppression. From the perspective of power relations, cyberbullying is essentially a practice based on these relationships, containing a micro-power structure formed by netizens 'self-empowerment, which is legitimized through the production of moral discourse, thus creating an unequal power structure. Luo (2020) points out in "The Micro-Power Structure of Cyberbullying and Individuals:' Digital Death'" that the digital death of those subjected to cyberbullying[2] is due to the inequality of power among interactive subjects in cyberspace. Third, cyberbullying is a product of the digital space. In the new digital space, groups quickly form "violent" public opinion spheres. In cyberspace[3], despite the lack of physical presence, the virtual co-presence across different times and spaces, through the completion of interactive rituals, outputs ritual outcomes such as "emotional energy" and "moral standards," forming the dynamic logic of cyberbullying. Fourth, emotional intensity and aggression are another significant characteristic of cyberbullying. In the absence of rationality, netizens often vent their emotions in extreme ways, such as using abusive language to replace rational discussion and substituting personal attacks for peaceful dialogue. This behavior is particularly prominent in "fan circle culture." Fifth, the group nature and widespread participation make cyberbullying a social phenomenon that cannot be ignored. In recent years, cyberbullying has escalated, becoming a "viral" presence that spreads to every corner of cyberspace.

### *1.1.3 The formation mechanism of cyber violence*

In recent years, cyberbullying has become increasingly rampant in China. A survey by the China Youth Daily shows that 65.3% of the young respondents reported experiencing or witnessing[4] cyberbullying, and 71.9% felt that such incidents are becoming more frequent. At the same time, cyberbullying is also evolving towards extremes, manifesting as a series of extreme events caused by online rumors and information reversals. While past cyberbullying often centered around a single incident and continued to escalate, today's cyberbullying exhibits a new trend characterized by constant, unprovoked, and endless occurrences. Analyzing the mechanisms behind cyberbullying can help advance the issue of its governance. Many scholars have explored the causes from perspectives such as communication studies, psychology, and law. This paper finds that current analyses of the causes can be divided into several directions:

1 Wang Jing. Research on the Generation Mechanism and Evolution of Internet Violence Language under the Theory of Meme [J]. Huainan Vocational and Technical College

2 Li Shuhui, Liu Chaopu. Violent Situations, Psychological Compensation and Inter-spatial Empathy: The Logic of Cyber Violence in the Process of Deep Mediaization [J/OL]. Yujian Journal, 1-9[2024-11-14].https://doi.org/10.13878/j.cnki.yjxk.20241014.002.

3 Gu Zhiyu. The erosion of "fan culture" on the values of contemporary college students and strategies for education and guidance [J]. International Public Relations, 2024,(14):38-40.DOI:10.16645/j.cnki.cn11-5281/c.2024.14.023.

4 WuXingyu, Wang Pinzhi, Yang Wanshu et al.: "65.3% of the surveyed young people said that they or their surroundings had experienced cyber violence"

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（1）Communication Perspective. The strong interactivity, high convenience, immediacy, and openness of the Internet create a powerful public opinion arena. (Hu Deping and Liang Sisi: "The Dissolution and Reconstruction of College Students' Meaningful World in the Era of All-Media," *Ideological and Theoretical Education* 2019, Issue 9.) The push mechanism that prioritizes traffic has exacerbated the spread of online violence. Research by William Bradbury (William Brady), a social psychologist at New York University, shows that emotional content, especially moral judgments that provoke anger, is most likely to be shared. He found that on Twitter, every emotionally charged or morally judgmental word increases the retweet count of the post by 20%.

（2）From a political science perspective, the act of speaking in mass incidents is essentially a form of "discourse participation." In cyberspace, the internet fully unleashes public discourse, providing an opportunity to compensate for the lack of real-world voice. For unresolved social conflicts, the extreme expression of public opinion serves as a starting point for the struggle for power in cyberspace.

（3）Sociological perspective. From the perspective of a risk society, young people bear multiple pressures in society, such as academic studies, career, interpersonal relationships, and fierce competition. However, due to the limited channels [1]for stress release, the open online world has become the main outlet for young people to vent their frustrations, forming a negative "social hostility".

（4）From a psychological perspective, some scholars have pointed out that cyberbullying is a form of group psychological compensation. According to Scheler's phenomenological [2]analysis, "resentment" is an emotional experience characterized by the immediate retaliation against those who inflict harm on one, yet filled with a sense of revenge. It arises from "revenge impulse" and "incompetence awareness," with the "revenge impulse" being the fundamental starting point of resentment.

In summary, as a byproduct of the Internet era, cyberbullying has become increasingly complex, variable, and harmful, not only eroding the healthy ecosystem of cyberspace but also having profound impacts on individuals and society. After thoroughly analyzing the definition, characteristics, and mechanisms of cyberbullying, it is evident that addressing cyberbullying has become an urgent major issue. Among these, "cyber toilets," as a new form of cyberbullying, have garnered significant public attention due to their unique characteristics and modes of spread. In the following, this article will further explore the concept, features, and underlying social psychological mechanisms of "cyber toilets," aiming to provide more concrete ideas and strategies for the comprehensive governance of cyberbullying.

## *1.2 The “Internet toilet” as a new field of cyber violence and its research significance*

### *1.2.1 The concept of "Internet toilet"*

"Online toilets" are a specific type of anonymous social space that allows users to send private messages to designated accounts for submissions. The account owners then publish these submissions anonymously to the public. Content in "online toilets" often has a certain level of controversy and is widely found in subcultures such as otaku, fandoms, and gaming circles. They create communication barriers through the use of

1 Liang Sisi and Cao Dongbo. "Social death": A New Trend of Youth Cyber Violence and Its Governance Path [J]. Social Sciences Frontiers, 2022, (04): 234-240.

2 [Marx Scheler: The Subversion of Value, translated by Rottel, Link and Cao Weidong, Sanlian Bookstore, 1997, pp. 7, 16 and 27.

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unique language systems, crafting distinctive spaces for interaction to avoid being observed by outsiders. In these closed environments, they generate resonance and revelry within the group on specific topics, while also intensifying the disconnect from external values.

#### *1.2.2 The significance of "Internet toilet" research*

"The 'internet toilet' is a product of the development of social media, representing a niche subculture. Due to the exposure of some malicious incidents, this 'hidden corner' has gradually come to public attention, such as the case of an 18-year-old girl named Yina on Hong Kong, China who committed suicide after being subjected to vicious attacks on the internet, and the incident where a UP user on B station was hung from a box. In November 2023, the Cyberspace Administration launched a special operation called 'Clear and Bright-Internet Malice Rectification,' with 'internet toilets' and 'hanging from boxes' being targeted for crackdowns. This indirectly reflects that the harm caused by 'internet toilets' has caught the attention of official authorities. However, most academic research in China focuses on the mechanisms of online violence, governance, and legal regulation, leaving almost no room for studies on 'internet toilets.'"

Online toilets are gathering places for teenagers, where their anonymity, seclusion, and social attributes can both provide an outlet for expression and become breeding grounds for cyberbullying and the spread of negative emotions. The "Report on the Mental Health Development of Chinese Citizens (2021-2022)" shows that about 14.8% of teenagers have varying degrees of depression risk, higher than in adult populations, requiring effective intervention and timely adjustment. Among them, 4.0% of teenagers are at high risk of severe depression, while 10.8% are at low risk of mild depression. Girls score higher on depression and loneliness compared to boys.

The emotional outbursts of "toilet buddies" and "toilet sisters" reflect deeper social issues. Studying the phenomenon of "online toilets" helps understand the behavioral patterns and psychological needs of this group in cyberspace, providing a basis for optimizing the online environment and protecting the mental health of young people. Moreover, compared to traditional cyberbullying, "online toilets" have a distinct personality. Their unique language system and sarcastic expression build a high wall for teenagers. Furthermore, they exhibit a resilience that is "unquenchable like wild fire, and sprouts again with the spring breeze." This makes the mechanisms for addressing cyberbullying lagging and ineffective when targeting "online toilets." Therefore, research on the dissemination patterns and legal regulations of "online toilets" is of great significance. This study will leverage existing research on cyberbullying, questionnaires, interviews, and other forms to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, causes, and legal regulations of "online toilets," aiming to provide theoretical support for the governance of cyberbullying and promote the establishment of more precise and efficient governance models.

### *1.3 Research ideas and methods*

The core research object of this study is the legal governance issues related to cyberbullying in "online toilets." To address this, the study will be divided into several steps, each employing different research methods to tackle distinct problems (as shown in the figure below): 1. Problem Statement: As a new phenomenon that has emerged in recent years, "online toilets" exhibit unique formation mechanisms and

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characteristics. Strict governance of cyberspace has become one of the key tasks for national governance. Therefore, whether there is a problem of legal governance failure in “online toilets,” where negative comments are concentrated, is a research direction with practical significance. 2. Theoretical Research: Using literature review methods, this step involves reading, organizing, refining, and summarizing a large number of academic works, journal articles, scholarly suggestions, laws, regulations, and related cases concerning cyberbullying. This will lay the theoretical foundation for the study. At the same time, by integrating existing research findings, it aims to identify gaps and innovation points. 3. Case Analysis: Through case analysis, this step will summarize the concept and definition of “online toilets,” their formation mechanisms and characteristics, and highlight the challenges and difficulties in legal governance. It will also explore the difficulties and challenges of legal regulation, such as ambiguous venue identification, language recognition issues, attribution difficulties, and evidence collection problems. 4. Paper Writing: This step involves organizing data on cyberbullying and “online toilets” from recent years and proposing targeted solutions and recommendations.

In this study, literature research and case analysis were used to comprehensively explore the phenomenon, characteristics, causes and legal regulation of "online toilets".

（1）Literature research method: Through systematic sorting out the relevant literature on cyber violence and adolescent network behavior, the theoretical basis of the study is laid.

（2）Case analysis: Select classic cases of "Internet toilet" and traditional cyber violence to discuss the operation mechanism, characteristics, causes and governance of "Internet toilet".

Through the combination of various research methods, we try to reveal the complexity of "network toilet" phenomenon from multiple dimensions and levels, so as to provide comprehensive research support for theoretical deepening and practical innovation.

At the same time, through literature review, there is almost no discussion on "network toilet" by domestic scholars at present. Therefore, this study has the following value and innovation:

Theoretical value: It fills the gap in the current academic research on hidden cyber violence in "network toilets" and enriches the theoretical system of cyber violence research.

Practical value: It provides effective legal governance strategies and suggestions for the government, platforms and all sectors of society, which helps to improve the network ecological environment and protect the mental health of teenagers.

On the basis of a full understanding of the current research, this paper focuses on the legal governance of “network toilets” for further discussion. However, different from previous studies, this paper has the following innovations:

First of all, from the perspective of group polarization, characteristics of young people and “identity bubble”, this paper examines the influencing factors of the generation of “online toilets” and tries to solve the problems that the research results of the generation of current online violence are relatively scattered, lack

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of global systematic theoretical framework support, focus on a single field, and the complex reasons behind it cannot be presented in an orderly manner.

Secondly, this study attempts to propose solutions for addressing the governance of “online toilets.” The emergence of online violence is influenced by multiple factors and cannot be separated from the combined effects at different levels. It involves various condition variables influencing each other to collectively impact the outcome variable. Therefore, this study, based on the main policies and law enforcement actions currently in place to combat online violence in China, summarizes the challenges and difficulties in governance. With this, managers can refer to the results of different configuration scenarios according to actual social conditions to achieve the goal of preventing, mitigating, and governing online violence incidents, providing a powerful tool for risk mitigation.

## 2 The operation mechanism, characteristics and causes of “network toilet”

"Online toilets" have become a significant gathering place for young people in recent years, due to their anonymity and secrecy, they pose high risks of cyberbullying and privacy breaches. Despite increased regulatory efforts and platform governance, "online toilets," as an underground black market for teenagers, maintain their own vitality. Behind "online toilets" lies a complex issue of social governance, more intricate and sensitive than traditional cyberbullying, making it a challenge in cyberspace management and the protection of young people.

This paper will combine the questionnaire, interview, investigation and observation of "online toilet", as well as literature research, to analyze the operation mechanism, characteristics and causes of "online toilet".

### *2.1 The operation mechanism of "network toilet"*

The operation mechanism of "online toilets" can be seen as a phenomenon of the alienation of online social interaction. While it provides users with a space to express emotions and opinions, it also distorts the essence and purpose of online social interaction to some extent. As an emerging online phenomenon, the operation mechanism of "online toilets" involves multiple aspects, including account creation and management, as well as information reception and dissemination.

The first step involves the creation and management of accounts. The establishment of “online toilets” typically relies on social media platforms such as BOT accounts, Tieba, topics, and groups. These accounts or groups often exist in an anonymous or semi-anonymous form, providing users with a relatively[1] hidden space to express opinions and emotions. The operators of these accounts, known as “sub-accounts,” are responsible for reviewing and publishing user submissions. The second step is the reception and publication of information. Information reception mainly occurs through anonymous submissions and remote calls. Users can submit content to “online toilets” without revealing their real identities, expressing ridicule, malicious comments, curses, and insults towards specific groups or individuals. After being reviewed by

1 MATE Column | Observation of "Internet Toilet": Emotional carnival under the anonymous mechanism

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the “sub-account,” this information is anonymously published in corresponding accounts, Tieba, topics, or groups for other users to browse and comment on. This emotional carnival under the anonymous mechanism makes “online toilets” a controversial and topical online space.

From the perspective of "toilet" targets, they can be roughly divided into three categories: "2D toilets" mainly discuss fictional characters in various works, "2.5D toilets" focus on celebrities and other public figures,[1] while "3D toilets" concentrate on ordinary people in daily life, such as classmates, colleagues, and neighbors. In terms of toilet types, they are primarily concentrated in 2D, fan culture, and gaming circles. These subcultures further give rise to more specialized toilets, such as CP fan toilets, solo fan toilets, otaku game toilets, and specific game toilets. For example, Yina mentioned above was "opened and hung" in a toilet from a niche game called *COMPASS (Compass) Combat Talent Analysis System*. Additionally, in recent years, there have been many "internet toilets" related to family background and current social issues, such as LeopardCat Toilet (Leopard refers to dad, Cat refers to mom) and "Poor Man's Toilet."

Overall, the operational mechanism of “online toilets” is built on the foundation of anonymity and seclusion. Users can post and express their opinions without revealing their true identities, which makes it easier for them to release their inner emotions and pressures. On this basis, through diversified and segmented targets and types, the needs of different user groups are met, enhancing the appeal and influence of “online toilets.” The emotional carnival under the anonymous system turns “online toilets” into a controversial and topic-rich online space, but it also easily triggers the spread of cyberbullying and negative emotions.

### *2.2 The characteristics of "network toilets"*

The author, through observations of "online toilets," questionnaire surveys, and in-depth interviews, has summarized the characteristics of "online toilets": First, "online toilets" are a specific public sphere. As a subculture within subcultures, "online toilets" create an "underground black market" for teenagers, where a unique "language currency" circulates around their own topics. Based on Durkheim's research on religious rituals and Goffman's observations of crowd interactions in daily life, Collins systematically[2] expounds on the mechanisms of ritual. Through rituals, individuals momentarily share emotions, activating their bodies and nervous systems, and further stimulating "emotional energy" in the form of a sense of belonging. In "online toilets," participants, as "toilet friends," form barriers against outsiders, creating elements such as "mutual focus" and "shared emotional states." These interactions generate group excitement, leading to the desired ritual interaction outcomes.

Secondly, young internet users have become the primary participants in "online toilets" and are also [3]the main focus group for addressing cyberbullying. Studies show that teenagers are more likely to exhibit violent behavior during online hot events, leading to group polarization. This may be related to their psychological characteristics, lack of social experience, and the anonymity [4]of the online environment. Users of "online toilets" are often younger, mostly minors born after 2005, commonly referred to as "toilet friends" or "toilet girls," and affectionately called "baby." Some respondents mentioned that with the widespread use

1 Zhong Yuxin and Zhou Ying. 21st Century Business Herald Secret Corner: "Internet Toilet" Noise and Dissolution November 27,202318:22

2 Li Shuhui and Liu Chaopu. Violent Situation, Psychological Compensation and Inter-spatial Empathy: The Logic of Cyber Violence in the Process of Deep Mediaization [J/OL]. Yujian Journal

3 Liu Yuwen, Zhang Chu et al.: "A Study on the Portrait of Internet Users' Violent Behavior in Social Hot Events", Intelligence Exploration, No.8, 2023.

4 Zhong Yuxin and Zhou Ying. 21st Century Business Herald Secret Corner: "Internet Toilet" Noise and Dissolution November 27,202318:22

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of the internet, more and more minors are active in these spaces, and due to their less mature views, their comments tend to be more extreme. On the other hand, "online toilets" are filled with numerous abbreviations, slang, and internet jargon, which respondents noted they understand after seeing them enough, indicating that this is a new form of communication that young people find easier to grasp and accept.

The third type is "internet toilet," which represents conscious cyberbullying. Scholars such as Pan Yunmeng (2017) categorize cyberbullying into conscious and unconscious forms. In "internet toilets," violent behavior often exhibits conscious characteristics, meaning the perpetrator initiates attacks intentionally, deliberately, or with intent. The author has noticed in many "toilet" posts that there are "requests for provocation" tutorials in the comments below. In some celebrity "toilets," it is common for xx fans to open boxes and cyberbully another celebrity fan.

Fourth, online violence initially had the attribute of public opinion supervision, with perpetrators motivated by a simple sense of justice and malicious intent to impose sanctions. However, it has gradually evolved into a means for venting anger alone. Yang Qizhen and Wu Zhixiao (2024) pointed out that while [1]"online public opinion trials" possess the attribute of public opinion supervision, they can also introduce instability into society, disrupt normal production and living order, and infringe upon the legitimate rights and interests of the parties involved. In "online toilets," such trials often turn into baseless accusations and attacks against individuals, losing the original purpose of public opinion supervision.

The fifth point is that violent behavior in "internet toilets" often has a low ignition threshold, meaning that even minor incidents or comments can trigger large-scale violent reactions. Scholars have found that while past online violence typically began with a core time frame, today's "social [2]death" online violence exhibits a new trend of being constant and omnipresent, with no reason and unlimited scope.

In the "internet toilet," perpetrators often use methods such as physical concealment, location concealment, and environmental [3]concealment to complete information exchange through special linguistic symbols. Victims, on the other hand, often find it difficult to effectively refute or appeal due to the ambiguity of this language. Take a certain online forum dedicated to otaku culture as an example; users have developed a unique set of internet slang and jargon. For instance, they refer to a classic character in otaku culture as a "big boss," fans of a popular work as "fans," and specific memes as "memes." These slang terms are not only used in daily communication but also serve as markers of identity. Only those who understand these slang terms can be considered true "insiders." Various homophonic memes, abbreviations[4], and other internet slang can build high walls, keeping outsiders out, using these rules to screen so-called insiders and achieve a certain level of group unity. At the same time, they evade the platform's keyword filtering mechanisms. In such scenarios, conflicts and contradictions are easily magnified and escalated, gradually eroding group rationality.

1 Yang Qizhen and Wu Zhixiao. Research on the Governance Dilemma and Countermeasures of "Internet Public Opinion Trial" [J]. Journal of Shanxi Police College, 2024,32(04):42-48.

2 LiangSisi, Cao Dongbo. "Social death": A new trend of youth cyber violence and its governance path [J]. Social Science Front, 2022, (04): 234-

3 Yejingyi, A Study on the Generation Mechanism of Online Violence [D]. Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, 2024.

4 Zhong Yuxin and Zhou Ying. 21st Century Business Herald Secret Corner: "Internet Toilet" Noise and Dissolution November 27,202318:22

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## *2.3 The causes of "Internet toilets"*

### *2.3.1 Group polarization*

In his book The Republic of the Internet, American jurist Stephen Sontan describes "group polarization" as "the extreme of opinions and the brutality of emotions". That is, once certain biases begin to appear among group members[1], people will continue to move toward the bias after group communication and discussion, and finally form very extreme opinions.

Especially in today's communication environment, more and more life experiences are completed through the flickering and ethereal symbols on computer and mobile screens. People seem to be gradually losing their ability to perceive complex emotions and pay attention to others' [2]situations, leading to emptiness and shallowness that are inevitable. Along with this emptiness and shallowness comes extreme viewpoints and brutal emotions. In "internet toilets," people often label others, rejecting anything that does not align with their own understanding. Once the first person to "set the tone" appears, due to human cognitive habits and biases that are hard to overcome, a vortex of public opinion quickly forms in the "internet toilet," causing significant harm to those involved.

### *2.3.2 Adolescents' resistance and marginality*

The perspective of emotion has always been a crucial angle in the study of social movements and collective action in Western societies. Psychological factors such as social resentment and relative[3] deprivation are significant conditions that lead to collective action. Previously, the academic community referred to this group of young people as "45° youth." The emergence of this youth group is due to the increased uncertainty they face in rapidly changing environments, which leads to a shift in values, placing greater emphasis on personal experiences and feelings. At the same time, this group often exhibits conflicting attitudes when confronted with the gap between reality and ideals. To alleviate inner pressure, they frequently seek validation through social media platforms, thus forming a unique subcultural phenomenon.

"The 'internet toilet' has become a hub for subcultures, a place for young people to express and vent their emotions. They submit content to resist the pressures of real life, seeking social connections by finding like-minded groups on the 'internet toilet.' Algorithms also contribute to the marginalization of young people. As algorithmic culture becomes a new cultural authority shaped by computational logic, it leads to the 'datafication' of young people's social mentality, making their expressions more explicit and fixed. At the same time, algorithms also create cognitive biases in individuals, exacerbating the spread of extreme social mindsets and leading to certain social barriers."

### *2.3.3 Identity bubble*

The "online toilet" as a unique social platform can be interpreted from the perspective of identity cognition using the Identity Bubble Theory: The Identity Bubble Theory refers to the self-centered information cocoons or bubbles formed by individuals through self-presentation and social interactions in the context of

1 See [US] Keith S. Stein: The Republic of the Internet —— Democracy in the Network Society, translated by Huang Weiming, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2003, pp. 67-68.

2 Xu Hong. Civil, Administrative and Criminal Liability in Internet Violence Cases and Its Integration [J]. North Methodology, 2023,17(05):5-20.DOI:10.13893/j.cnki.bffx.2023.05.011.

3 Xing Tingting. "45° Youth": The Situation of Young People and Their Social Mindset under Tension [J]. Exploration and Debate, 2023, (02): 32-44+177-178+182.

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social media. Within these bubbles, individuals primarily engage with and receive information that aligns with their views, interests, and behaviors, leading to the information bubble effect, which restricts exposure to different perspectives and information from the outside world. The model of how the "online toilet" is generated can be reconstructed using the Identity Bubble Theory: In social media, first, due to the expansion of social networks, users begin to seek spaces with common topics. Individuals participate in specific social groups or communities (such as Weibo shoutbots), choosing people who can share and verify their identities for interaction, thus forming an identification with online social networks. This process reinforces the identity bubble, further enhancing users' information acquisition and self-identity recognition, making individuals more inclined to follow, forward, and comment on information consistent with their own views.

## 3 The difficulties and challenges of legal regulation of “Internet toilet”

Regarding the legal regulation of cyberbullying, it has been continuously improved in recent years, establishing a system of civil, administrative, and criminal liabilities; relevant judicial interpretations and departmental regulations have gradually been perfected; law enforcement actions by the Cyberspace Administration and other departments, as well as platform governance, have[1] also been steadily advancing. Some scholars have noted that "in the legal provisions on cyberbullying, China has woven a legal net targeting such cases from civil law to administrative law and then to criminal law, from self-regulation by platforms to external supervision by the state." The Criminal Law, Civil Code, Cybersecurity Law, and Personal Information Protection Law all contain content related to cyberbullying.

In addition to legal provisions, in 2022, the Cyberspace Administration of China issued the "Notice on Effectively Strengthening the Governance of Online Violence," which further regulates issues related to online violence through four sections: recommending an early warning mechanism for online violence, strengthening protection for victims of online violence, preventing the spread of online violent information, and imposing stricter penalties. On June 26,2024, the State Internet Information Office, the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, and the National Radio and Television Administration jointly released the "Regulations on the Governance of Online Violent Information," outlining a multi-party collaborative action plan for the governance of online violence.

At the same time, the authorities have taken multiple law enforcement actions to address "internet toilets." In April 2022, the Cyberspace Administration of China launched the "Clean and Bright-Special Governance Action Against Online Violence," focusing on 18 websites and platforms with high incidence of online violence and significant social impact, including Sina Weibo, TikTok, Baidu Tieba, and Zhihu. The action aims to establish and improve measures for monitoring, real-time protection, intervention, accountability, and public exposure, ensuring comprehensive governance throughout the entire chain. In November 2023, the Cyberspace Administration of China decided to launch a one-month "Clean and Bright-Special Governance Action Against Online Hostility," with the first priority being the rectification of "internet toilets" and "opening boxes to post people." For this special action, the task force has decided to take strong measures,

1 Yao Yuhan, Cheng Yixin, Wen Yihan. Legal Remedies for Personality Rights Infringement in Online Public Opinion Supervision: Dilemmas and Solutions [J]. Law, 2024,12(2):1428-1435. https://doi.org/10.12677/OJLS.2024.122205

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strictly investigating and punishing non-compliant accounts, groups, and Tiebas. Specific actions include: thoroughly investigating high-risk accounts and groups, firmly shutting down accounts and groups themed around "internet toilets," "opening boxes to post people," and "provoking conflicts," severely punishing live-streaming accounts that organize fierce PKs and challenge matches, and rigorously punishing "self-media" accounts that publish sensational content to deliberately incite online hostility. A batch of circles, super topics, and Tiebas named with derogatory terms and filled with online hostility will be shut down, and stores providing paid services such as proxy will be closed.

Despite the fact that our country has established a comprehensive network of governance for online harassment, issues such as poor coordination among various levels of legislation, difficulties in practical application, challenges in identifying and holding accountable those responsible for online harassment still exist. "Online toilet," as a new form of online harassment, faces both the challenges of traditional online harassment and the unique characteristics of "online toilets." To some extent, I believe that the legal regulation of "online toilets" carries the risk of being ineffective.

## *3.1 It is difficult to identify*

### *3.1.1 It is difficult to determine the seriousness of the circumstances*

Cyberbullying primarily manifests in three forms: online defamation, online insults, and doxxing. The first two fall under verbal violence, representing the online manifestations of the criminal acts of insult and defamation as stipulated in Article 246 of the Criminal Law. The objective elements of the crime of insult include violent assault, verbal insults, and written insults. Such acts must be carried out publicly, either in front of a third party or even an audience, or through means that can be heard or seen by unspecified individuals or a large number of people, thereby insulting others. The crime of defamation is objectively characterized by fabricating facts and publicly disseminating false information, which is sufficient to damage another person's reputation and cause serious harm. This requires the perpetrator to first fabricate some false facts and then spread these false facts to an unspecified large number of people or specific individuals through various means (such as speech, writing, etc.).

Article 2, Item (1) of the "Interpretation on Several Issues Concerning the Application of Law in Handling Criminal Cases Involving Defamation and Other Acts Committed through Information Networks" stipulates that if "the same defamatory information is actually clicked or viewed more than five thousand times, or forwarded more than five hundred times," it should be deemed as constituting a "serious circumstance" of defamation. However, in the case of "online toilets," which occur in relatively enclosed spaces, the related reading volume may not necessarily meet the quantitative standards for a "serious circumstance," yet they can still cause significant harm.

Taking the Yina incident as an example, this 18-year-old Hong Kong girl was subjected to malicious attacks and defamation by some netizens due to using the nickname "I will commit suicide if I can't get the golden head" in online games. These attacks and defamations mainly occurred on anonymous submission platforms (i.e., "internet toilets") and related QQ groups. Although the user base and information dissemination scope of these platforms may be relatively limited, Yina suffered a shocking online exposure and ultimately chose to take her own life.

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#### *3.1.2 Ambiguous site identification*

"The 'online toilet' is a specific domain. Some scholars have pointed out that certain closed or semi-closed online spaces (such as private meetings, communication[1] groups, etc.) should not be considered as domains for cyberbullying crimes. Therefore, when an individual intrudes into these online spaces and engages in malicious defamation or insults, it does not constitute cyberbullying. Accompanying the 'online toilet' behavior is 'opening boxes and hanging people,' where criminals maliciously disclose others' names, ID numbers, phone numbers, home addresses, social media accounts, and other personal privacy information to incite netizens to attack and insult them."

Indeed, the aforementioned scholars' views reflect the principle of restraint in criminal law. In the relatively "narrow" cyberspace, it should not be considered as a domain of online violence. However, if acts such as "opening boxes and hanging people" occur in "online toilets," even though they do not spread across the broader cyberspace, they can still cause serious harm. The Yina incident serves as another example.

#### *3.1.3 Language recognition is difficult*

In the "internet toilet," perpetrators often use special linguistic symbols to facilitate information exchange, building high walls with various internet slang terms like "homophones" and "abbreviations." For situations where abbreviations, homophones, and meme-like expressions do not directly violate laws and regulations, it is difficult for the law to make a determination. The linguistic carnival in "internet toilets" often leaves victims unable to effectively file complaints due to the ambiguity of this language style, while perpetrators also evade platform keyword filters and censorship mechanisms. How can we determine what constitutes abusive[2] content? In recent years, Germany has seen cases where the use of emojis (Emojis) has been used to commit offenses. For example, combinations of monkey emojis such as "b l o d e r" or "A r s c h," or combinations of goat emojis like "B l o d e," "a l t e," and "a u s g e m o l k e n e" may all constitute criminal offenses under the law.

### *3.2 The difficulty of attribution*

#### *3.2.1 The results are difficult to determine*

Cyberbullying involving human flesh search falls under the category of public disclosure of others 'information or privacy through information networks, which can be regulated under Article 253-1 of the Criminal Law for infringing on citizens' personal information. The "unboxing and hanging" in online forums may fall within this legal framework. For example, in 2023, bilibili (Station B) reported a case of "human flesh unboxing." According to the police investigation, this cyberbullying incident involved 18 provinces and cities, affecting over 40 people. The main suspects were minors L and C. Among them, L was administratively detained for 10 days due to serious illegal acts. Additionally, this violation will be permanently recorded in his personal file. C, accompanied by his guardian, received severe criticism and education from the police based on relevant provisions of the Public Security Administration Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China.

1 Xu Shulin. Criminal Law Limits of Internet Speech under Actual Malice —— Analysis Based on the "Internet Course Explosion" Event [J]. Journal of Fujian Police College, 2023,37(2):53-62.

2 https://de.haiwainet.cn/n/2016/0819/c456991-30232526.html. Rules for the use of German social emojis (Emoji)

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However, many behaviors in online toilets are difficult to identify, such as posting nude images. Although the images are posted, due to the small size of the community, it is often possible to locate the relevant individuals. For example, when a netizen mentioned that if there was a group activity like a comic convention on a given day, participants would often post pictures of the event in the toilet "hanging people." Other participants who joined the group would choose to forward or like these posts, allowing the information about those who were "unveiled" to spread within a non-distant social circle. This way, even without revealing names or clear photos, all related individuals can be located. It is challenging to regulate whether this constitutes an invasion of privacy.

#### *3.2.2 It is difficult to attribute responsibility*

In "internet toilets," most targets of online abuse fall into two categories: celebrities and ordinary people. The criminal liability for insulting or defaming public figures may be higher than that for ordinary individuals. However, it is important to note that if the unlawful online statements target individuals without internet access (nonliner) or those lacking internet resources and skills, it cannot be assumed that the perpetrators have not infringed upon legal interests, thus lowering the threshold for criminal liability. For ordinary people who lack resources, however, attributing responsibility is relatively more challenging.

#### *3.2.3 Difficult to obtain evidence*

Cyberbullying evidence collection primarily faces two challenges: one is that the infringer may delete the infringing information before or during litigation, and the other is that it is difficult to identify the specific infringer. Although parties can promptly secure relevant infringement information through notarization, online information updates rapidly. For new cyberbullying content generated after notarization, "it's impossible to repeatedly visit the notary office; we can only obtain evidence by recording screens ourselves." Taking the case of the Hangzhou woman who was defamed while picking up her package as an example, reports indicate that even with the involvement of judicial authorities, the process is fraught with difficulties. When notifying netizens to cooperate with the statement, some mistakenly believe they are being scammed and hang up, while others think, "the internet has already made it a big deal, there's no need to make another statement." The task force deeply understands that if victims rely solely on themselves to gather evidence, the difficulty is immense. It took nearly one and a half months for over a dozen members of the task force to collect evidence, which is almost impossible for ordinary people to accomplish.

## 4 The future direction of “Internet toilet” governance

The "internet toilet" phenomenon is not just about cyberbullying; it also reflects the mindset and values of young people in cyberspace. A combination of guidance and prevention is needed: prioritize guidance to focus on the mental health and emotional needs of young people, with schools, families, and society providing positive channels for expression; use prevention as a supplement to severely crack down on malicious acts such as "hanging" and rumor-mongering, creating legal deterrence. At the same time, platforms must take responsibility by enhancing content regulation through technical means, providing convenient reporting channels, and actively cooperating with law enforcement and evidence collection. Combining source

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prevention, comprehensive control, addressing both symptoms and root causes, and collaborative governance can create a clean and healthy cyberspace.

（1）It is necessary to soothe the negative emotions of teenagers. Cyberbullying is a complex social issue, and "cyber toilets" reflect the emotional problems of contemporary youth. In "cyber toilets," verbal violence thrives, yet they also serve as a space for young people to express themselves. Simply blocking it would have the opposite effect.

（2）Regulatory measures of varying degrees should be applied in different situations to establish a balanced regulatory system that combines leniency with strictness. For malicious acts like "hanging people," which are extremely harmful, it is recommended to introduce a rapid response mechanism and increase legal penalties for those involved, creating a deterrent effect. For example: establishing a blacklist system; joint law enforcement to pursue criminal responsibility for defamation, insult, and privacy breaches. For minor violent incidents on "internet toilets," a comprehensive assessment should be made based on intent and the severity of harm.

（3）The ability to identify cyberbullying information should be strengthened. Given the difficulty in detecting cyberbullying language, when determining whether online expressions constitute cyberbullying information, a comprehensive judgment principle should be adopted. This includes factors such as the content, form, scope of dissemination, influence, and impact on victims. The analysis should consider how violent language is used in context, whether its spread is extensive, if its influence is significant, and the degree of psychological and mental harm it causes to victims. All these should serve as important criteria for judgment.

（4）Regarding platform responsibility, in recent years, with the implementation of regulations and departmental rules, the provisions have become relatively comprehensive. With the continuous development of big data and artificial intelligence technologies[1], algorithm models trained on datasets can now achieve intelligent text semantic recognition, sentiment analysis, and other complex tasks, providing new technical support for monitoring and early warning of online violence. This is also mentioned in Article 12 of the Regulations, which states that network information service providers should use a combination of artificial intelligence and manual review methods to strengthen the governance of online violence. Network information service providers need to establish professional teams for online violence governance, organize professionals to use technical means to collect clues about online violence, identify online violent behavior, and build standards for identifying and classifying online violence information according to policy requirements. At the same time, network information service providers should accumulate rich case samples based on management practices, enhance their basic capabilities in identifying online violence information to adapt to new forms of online violence. Additionally, relevant entities can extract characteristics such as event categories, subject features, number of participants, and content from the database, combine these with historical data from the backend (such as reporting records of information publishers), to build technical identification and early warning models suitable for specific network service scenarios, which helps in more in-depth analysis and assessment of online violence information. According to the Regulations, plat-

1 Li Mingde and Kuang Yan. Internet Public Opinion Governance under the Background of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence: Functions, Risks and Paths [J]. Journal of Beijing University of Technology (Social Sciences Edition), 2021,21(6):1-10

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forms should establish and improve user account credit management systems, record violations involving online violence in users' credit records, and legally reduce account credit ratings or blacklist accounts as required by law and contract. In addition, the platform should actively implement relevant responsibilities. At the same time, it should not only do "shut down" actions, but also start from the positive side to create a positive, healthy and green network culture, and give appropriate traffic inclination to positive online content.

（5）To address the issue of difficult evidence collection, establish a fast-track for evidence gathering in cyberbullying cases to reduce the difficulty and cost. At the same time, introduce an electronic evidence preservation mechanism to ensure the authenticity and validity of electronic evidence. In addition, clarify the connection between private prosecution and public prosecution in cyberbullying cases to ensure that victims can promptly receive judicial relief. For cyberbullying cases that severely impact social order and national interests, the public prosecution procedure should be initiated according to law.

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