**Insight into the phenomenon of “riding on the hot spots” in the new media public opinion field**

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Core Tip: In the information age, citizens use new media platforms to express their opinions, show their personal emotions, attitudes and cognition, enrich the connotation of public opinion information, and promote the construction of discourse democracy. However, some new media, in order to seek profits, have no bottom line to take advantage of hot topics and use unsightly content to gain clicks. New media is also a media and must be subject to moral, legal and other behavioral rules.

[Abstract] In the information age, citizens use new media platforms to express their opinions, show their personal emotions, attitudes and cognition, enrich the connotation of public opinion information, and promote the construction of discourse democracy. However, in order to gain profits, some new media have no bottom line to take advantage of hot topics and use unsightly content to gain clicks. New media is also a media and must be subject to moral, legal and other behavioral rules.

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The connotation and boundaries of freedom have always been a topic that has been discussed frequently in the history of news development. In the field of new media communication, the full freedom of media organizations and the public to collect and obtain information, publish and disseminate opinions is regarded as a real and extensive democratic right granted by digital technology. However, the misunderstanding and abuse of freedom has also led to the loss of communication practice. Phenomena such as false information, online rumors, emotional polarization, and online violence often appear on online media, social media, and mobile platforms, all of which lead to the paradox of freedom that the open empowerment of technology leads to freedom. How to grasp the scale of speech and find the best path for free expression has become an important topic that cannot be avoided in the new media public opinion field.

**"Riding on the hot spots" breaks the scale of authenticity of speech**

Truth is the life of news. This is the most basic professional bottom line requirement of information media, and it is also the standard that new media speech cannot break. For example, on July 4, 2019, the case of a nine-year-old girl named Zhang in Hangzhou who was taken away by a tenant and disappeared attracted strong attention. On the 13th, the police found the body of the girl. When her identity had not yet been determined, an official account on Baidu named "Zhang Zixin's father" posted a eulogy, which instantly swept the screen and was immediately questioned by netizens. So on the WeChat platform, netizens started to ask "what's your problem" in a "building" way. Under accountability, Baidu responded urgently. It turned out that the account was indeed "opened after the person authorized it to confirm", but the editor on duty posted a dynamic without receiving a confirmation reply from Zhang's father. Based on this, it was decided to "delete this dynamic, and immediately expel the editor in charge, and at the same time, Baidu's news management mechanism will be fully reviewed." Although the truth was revealed, the anger of netizens did not subside immediately. The platform's fabrication of sensational topics made people feel "incredible, unforgivable, and almost crazy", and the public's emotions were fooled. The direct cause of this public opinion crisis is the violation of the authenticity standard of speech by "riding on the hot topic", and behind it lies the potential utilitarian motive.

In recent years, the "hot topic" speech in the new media public opinion field has manifested itself in the following three situations. First, by participating in the topic to "brush up the sense of presence" or "seek to stand out", attract the attention of the public or relevant departments. Second, by publishing information through social platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Tieba, regardless of authenticity, pursuing hot spots, and earning clicks and forwarding. Third, blindly pursuing speed and timeliness, lacking investigation and verification, and eager to express opinions, resulting in false information and repeated views. For some self-media platforms, "hot topic" has irresistible risk dividends, and public opinion attention, reputation and benefits can all be improved. The emergence of this utilitarian motivation, as Michaelh Goahber revealed in the book "Attention Buyer", "In the Internet age, information is not a scarce resource, but rather an excess. Compared with the excess information, only people's attention is a scarce resource." Faced with the vast amount of information, attention, as an "extremely limited commercial resource", has become the focus of fierce competition among all parties.

In fact, the practice of completely fabricating information and opinions to mislead public opinion is not the majority. What is more worthy of attention is the manifestation of utilitarian motivation obscuring the authenticity of speech. As Baidu said when resolving the above crisis, the platform was motivated by the purpose of "gathering the power of the majority of netizens to help the family find Zixin as soon as possible." Of course, we have no sufficient reason to doubt the good intention of expressing "humanistic care", but we cannot use this as a rational coat to justify the platform's fabrication of speech. Because from the results of media behavior, no matter how well-intentioned the lie is, it cannot be a real good for the information consumers it serves. In the field of information dissemination, truth is the foundation of goodness, and the public's demand for information is meaningful only when it falls into the real world. The scale of authenticity, first, points to the ethical truth within the human heart, conveying the sincerity of the communicator to the public and society; second, it points to the epistemological truth based on objectivity, excluding the public's thinking and judgment from going astray. Ignoring the arbitrary fabrication and tampering of authenticity reflects the deceptive transmission of false information, which not only lacks the value of goodness, but also violates the professional standards of journalism, and will shake the social moral foundation for the existence of the information profession.

**Exploring the Public Value of New Media Speech**

Jürgen Habermas's "theory of communicative action" calls the process of citizens engaging in free and equal debate, dialogue, consultation and ultimately reaching a consensus on public affairs discourse democracy. He believes that the public sphere is the premise for democracy, and the realization of discourse democracy requires necessary conditions, namely, "every subject with language and behavioral ability, on the premise of consciously giving up the use of power and violence, freely and equally participates in the argumentation of dialogue" and "in this process, people must have the motivation and desire to pursue and obey the truth... The rules established through discourse consensus must be followed by everyone, and everyone must bear responsibility for the consequences of the implementation of such rules." This theory is inspiring for understanding public sphere speech democracy.

In the era of rapid development of informatization, new media has been given the role of spreading opinions in the public sphere, and its freedom and openness of speech have become an important indicator of social democracy. With the help of new media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and clients, citizens participate in expressing opinions, showing their personal emotions, attitudes, and cognition. Personalized voices are discovered, listened to, and seen, and they have an impact through interactive communication, enriching the connotation of public opinion information and promoting the construction of discourse democracy. However, due to the diversification of participating subjects, new media public opinion contains more interference from rational and irrational factors, and the conflict between will and ideas, and the contest between stupidity and wisdom are more complicated. The formation of democratic consensus requires the collective exploration of the public value of speech.

For example, on January 29, 2019, an article titled "The Death of a College Entrance Examination Champion from a Poor Family" was widely circulated on WeChat Moments, but it soon sparked a lot of doubts. In this public opinion event, through group dialogue, questioning, reflection, and exploration in the public domain, a public opinion atmosphere of discourse democracy was formed, which stimulated the positive energy of speech. The public value exploration of netizens' speech is reflected in three aspects. First, the continuous exploration of the issues and conditions of the incident. Second, the interaction, dialogue, supplementation and debate of various different views formed doubts and interpretations of details. Third, the opening of multiple channels enables the public to obtain and summarize information, which promotes the achievement of rational consensus. In the reversal of public opinion in this incident, the public value standards of truthfulness, legitimacy, sincerity and non-harmfulness of speech stand out and are unanimously recognized by netizens.

**Freedom of speech is manifested in the legal and ethical normative standards**

The formation of new media public opinion is a process of joint participation and co-construction by multiple subjects. In this process, no individual or institution can serve as the standard of speech in the public domain. Instead, they must be constrained by normative standards such as legal ethics. If any individual speech participates in public discussions in an original and casual way without consideration, it will inevitably lead to the phenomenon of each doing their own thing. The implementation of strategies based on this will inevitably hinder and delay the formation of consensus, or intensify the friction and collision of opinions, and even lead to anarchism in behavior. Therefore, the respect, recognition and conscious compliance of multiple subjects for rules are the prerequisites for the existence and smooth progress of free communication activities in the public domain. When personal space enters the public space of the public opinion field, the unique behavioral norms of individuals must be changed and adjusted accordingly according to social norms.

In the new media environment, effective norms in the public sphere are manifested in the compliance with laws and regulations, the conscious maintenance of social ethics, and the connotation that the subject of speech complies with the civilized requirements of the group, such as criticism based on legitimacy and moderation. If speech is not conducted within the framework of rules, it will be difficult to effectively govern and control such evil speech behaviors as public opinion violence, verbal abuse and fighting. This is not only a violation of the good will and public interest of the public, but also runs counter to the value orientation of freedom of speech - the logic and direction of promoting social progress and development.

Freedom of speech needs to be demonstrated in the normative scale of legal ethics. Based on this, on the one hand, we should strengthen the supervision of laws and regulations to seek benefits and avoid harm; on the other hand, we should improve citizens' network literacy through various means, and cultivate and enhance citizens' awareness of rules. This kind of rule awareness in the Marxist view of civilization is intended to establish "the subjective reaction of all members of society to the reality of rules", which is to internalize the institutionalized concept into the behavioral norms and values ​​of all members of society. In terms of enhancing netizens' awareness of responsibility and rule awareness, the media can also do a lot.

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