# Research on Problems and Countermeasures of Government Response to Online Public Opinion in the Era of Self-Media

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**ABSTRACT.** With the advent of the era of self-media, the Internet has become the most important medium for citizens to share information and express their opinions. The continuous spread and fermentation of any social developments may form online public opinion, which may have a certain guiding effect on major social issues. Therefore, governments at all levels deepen online governance and attach importance to early warning and detection of online public opinion. A comprehensive central-local online public opinion response system needs to be built urgently. Based on the Life cycle theory, the main current situation of online public opinion at present is analyzed through the case study method and the comparative research method. It is possible to identify and summarize the shortcomings of government countermeasures for online public opinion in the era of self-media, such as the failure of early warning and monitoring mechanisms of local governments, the lack of coherence between central and local government departments and the lack of administrative work in the aftermath. Based on this, I attempt to construct an optimal path for government countermeasures for online public opinion, actively implement the central government's emphasis on public opinion governance at all levels and establish a perfect online public opinion response mechanism.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the age of self-media, the internet has become the most important medium for citizens to share information and express their opinions. The continuous spread and fermentation of any social developments may form online public opinion, forming new hotspots of online public opinion to impact on certain forms of existence. The shocking and uncontrollable nature of online public opinion leads to its role in guiding major social issues. Therefore, governments at all levels should respond to social concerns, resolve social conflicts in a timely manner, pay attention to early warning and detection of online public opinion, and a comprehensive central-local online public opinion response system needs to be built.Based on the life cycle theory, the case study method and the comparative study method are used to examine the basic forms of online public opinion in the age of self-media, so that the basic concepts of online public opinion can be clarified and the main current situation of online public opinion can be restored. It is possible to identify and summarize the shortcomings in the governmental countermeasures for online public opinion in the era of self-media. Relevant optimized paths are further discussed.

## 2 Basic concept and main status of online public opinion in the era of self-media

### 2.1 Definition of the basic concept

With the spread of mobile networks and the development of the internet infrastructure in China, citizens are able to actually participate in social interactions on online platforms and explore major social issues, forming a particular perception and identity that backfires on social issues, prompting a shift in government policy and social evaluation. This generally influential form of online mass opinion dissemination is known as online public opinion. The emergence of mobile terminals and personal social networking platforms has made online social networking more private, civilian, universal and autonomous. Individuals are able to convey normative and non-normative information to an unspecified majority or a specific single person, forming a lower threshold but freer self-media. [1] In the era of self-media, citizens are able to publish and disseminate information more autonomously and freely on the Internet by modern and electronic means, creating a more complex and instantly hidden online public opinion situation with a larger and uncontrollable influence, which plays a monitoring and even directional role on various social issues.

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## 2.2 Main status

The 49th Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China in 2022 shows that, as of December 2021, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.032 billion, the Internet penetration rate reached 73.0%, and the per capita length of Internet access continued to grow. [2] With the emergence and development of self-media platforms such as Weibo, TikTok and Crypto in recent years, the Internet has increasingly become an important way for people to express their demands. It is easy for any event to be quickly noticed and continuously fermented. The emotions of netizens continue to accumulate to form policy pressure, thus generating strong social influence. For example, in recent years, negative online public opinion has erupted frequently in China, enriching social discontent, increasing social pressure, affecting the building of public trust in society, enterprises and government departments, additionally to a certain extent, reducing social administrative efficiency. For example, the attack on a woman's barbecue restaurant in Tangshan on 10 June 2022 provoked social outrage in the internet community, channeling the disclosure of the case and urging supervision and oversight, while triggering alienated online public opinion, cyber violence against those involved, gender antagonism, regional discrimination and other biased information dissemination noise affected the focus of the case and struck a blow to the government's credibility. Timely resolution of the various issues reflected in public opinion in response to public demands is an administrative imperative for the government. At present, there are problems in the government's public opinion management work, such as inadequate early warning and monitoring mechanisms and insufficient responses, which greatly affect the effectiveness of the government's administrative management of society.

## 3 Problems of Government Response to Online Public Opinion in the Era of Self-Media

### 3.1 The failure of early warning and monitoring mechanisms of local governments

In the case of the Tangshan barbecue restaurant beating incident, during the arrest of the perpetrator, the Tangshan authorities did not disclose detailed information about the background of the perpetrator, nor did they accurately respond to netizens' suspicions about the umbrella behind him, which led to the weakening of the government's credibility. Rumours and statements such as that the women had been run over by a car and had died flooded the internet platform, causing anxiety and discontent among the public. After the primary public opinion matured, secondary public opinion began to ferment. While the Tangshan beating caused public outrage and fear, some accounts took the opportunity to maliciously publish gender antagonism, regional discrimination, further affecting the government's credibility, undermining

citizens' sense of security, and increasing social pressure. In the public relations of the incident, the early warning and monitoring mechanism of the local government in Tangshan, the network public opinion handling department was slow in control and failed in public relations. The situation of the four injured women was the focus of public attention, yet it took nearly 10 days after the incident for an official notification to be made. During the delay in notification, the noise of public opinion grew through unofficial information channels, and citizens' self-doubt affected the credibility of the final official notification, making it difficult to dissipate the widespread noise of public opinion. At the same time, the ability of the Tangshan local government affairs publishing platform to research and judge public opinion is insufficient, and the staff lacks professionalism, resulting in its failure to dynamically track public opinion information in the online environment and to effectively interact with netizens, making the information delivery rate low. The mismatch between the content of the briefing and the needs of social opinion also makes the monitoring and preliminary processing of public opinion irrelevant, leading to distorted information and undermining the authority of the department's discourse.

### 3.2 The lack of coherence between central and local government departments

In the face of new changes and challenges brought about by the development of the Internet, the Party Central Committee attaches great importance to network governance, requiring governments at all levels to establish a sound comprehensive network governance system and comprehensively improve network governance capabilities. However, in terms of actual construction, the degree of completion of the online public opinion governance mechanism shows great differences between horizontal (i.e. inter-regional) and vertical (and between upper and lower level departments), with some regions not having complete emergency response plans for online public opinion, not having developed refined and localized means of responding to online public opinion, and lacking consistency in information and systems between upper and lower level government departments and between regional governments of the same level, making The lack of consistency in information and systems among government departments at the upper and lower levels, as well as among governments at the same level in the region, has prevented the relevant departments from taking correct measures in a macroscopic manner when sudden negative online public opinion emerges in a specific small area, reducing the efficiency of handling mature online public opinion that has fermented. In China today, although the central government attaches importance to the governance of online public opinion, there is a lack of relevant documents with local governance characteristics under the guidance of macro policies, and the process of monitoring the online governance work of local governments is inappropriate, reflecting the lack of consistency between the central and local governments in their online governance work.

### 3.3 The lack of administrative work in the aftermath

On 6 July 2022, China National Theatre released on its official website the "*Announcement of Proposed Recruits for the Recruitment of Fresh Graduates of China National Theatre 2022*", in which 3 film star examiners appeared in the public announcement. The National Theatre's recruitment of actors for this position without a written test and whether the three stars met the hiring requirements were of concern to a wide range of netizens and sparked heated debate. Public have great doubts about the fairness of the recruitment process and its assessment criteria. On 16 July, the National Theatre responded to the above situation, compared to the National People's Congress [4] and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [5] which are organizations of state power. Both of them gave specific criteria and processes for participation in this year's online recruitment process, yet the National Theatre's criteria were vague.

Although the heat of the incident has decreased, it still has not waited for direct answers from the National Theatre on the cancellation of the written exam, the qualification of the exam, the failure to pass the interview and the fairness of the admission process, and its response has not convinced the public and has affected the credibility of the national government. The lack of administrative work in the aftermath of the NCPA reflects the utilitarian orientation of the department dealing with online public opinion and its inability to consistently assist in resolving the series of issues.

## 4 Countermeasures of Government Response to Online Public Opinion in the Era of Self-Media

### 4.1 Strengthening early warning and monitoring mechanisms for local government online public opinion

The first step should be to identify the main department at the local level to respond to online public opinion and to clarify its duties and functions. In this process, attention should be paid to the composition of its personnel. As online public opinion is diverse, rapid and complex in the era of self-media, selecting personnel with professional knowledge and skills is the key to effectively responding to online public opinion. At the same time, we should continue to improve the advanced nature of the team through study and training, establish a strong working team, help build a more perfect public opinion early warning system, and refine the responsibilities of public opinion early warning work. [6] Secondly, it should give full play to the role of tools such as network opinion monitoring software, rely on relevant science and technology, improve sensitivity to the emergence of network public opinion and prevent problems before they arise.

### 4.2 Central and local governments work together to improve online public opinion handling plans

The central government should formulate a detailed and comprehensive guiding document on online governance to clarify the specific responsibilities of local governments at all levels in their online governance work. Local governments at all levels should clarify their own tasks in the event of online public opinion in accordance with the central government's guiding documents, and continue to lay out and help implement the online governance work of the county-level governments. In this relationship, it is very important for the higher-level governments to supervise and manage the lower-level governments. Strong leadership and supervision can help the lower-level governments to formulate scientific and reasonable plans for handling online public opinion that are in line with the actual development of the local area, so that they can better cope with the outbreak of sudden online public opinion.

### 4.3 Supervisory and regulatory authorities to strengthen the performance of regulatory functions and improve administrative work in the aftermath

Many negative online public opinions are triggered by social conflicts or public problems, and the problems may include reasons such as inaction and disorderly actions by the relevant administrative departments and the failure of the staff concerned to actively perform their functions, requiring positive responses and timely rectification by the relevant departments. At this point, the supervisory and management departments should perform their duties in accordance with the law, supervise the follow-up work of the relevant departments and provide timely feedback on the results to the general public. [7] The dissemination of public opinion on the Internet not only broadens the channels for reflecting public opinion, but also can be regarded as a method and means for government departments to continuously improve and refine their own service level, and timely correction of problems found is the real function of public opinion on the Internet.

## 5 Conclusion

Today, with the prevalence of self-media, the development of online public opinion is becoming more and more complex and has a significant impact on the development of Chinese society. The existence of these problems will directly affect public sentiment and social order, which in turn will weaken government authority and adversely affect social and political stability. Government departments should continuously improve the mechanism for handling online public opinion, effectively respond to complex and changing public opinion, so that the level of China's online public opinion governance can enter a new stage and effectively maintain social security and stability. Although governments at all levels in China are aware that online governance is a major part of government work and

a focus of research, there are still many shortcomings in the actual handling of online public opinion. Governments at all levels should continue to increase research on the development of online public opinion in the era of self-media.

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