

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
BELARUSIAN STATE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department of Social Communication

XU DAN

**FRAGMENTATION OF PUBLIC OPINION AND COUNTERMEASURES
IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

Master's thesis
Speciality 7-06-0321-02 Communication

Academic supervisor:
Alexander S. Solodukho
Doctor of Science in Psychology,
Associate Professor

Qualified for the defense
«____» _____ 2025
Head of department: _____
Doctor of Science in Sociology,
Associate Professor Alesya A. Pohomova

Minsk, 2025

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
MASTER’S THESIS SUMMARY	5
CHAPTER 1 ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF PUBLIC OPINION DEFOCUS IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT.....	8
1.1 Characteristics of the New Media Environment and Their Correlation with Public Opinion Defocus	8
1.2 Main Manifestations and Types of Public Opinion Defocus.....	12
1.3 The Impacts of Public Opinion Defocus	15
CHAPTER 2 CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC OPINION GOVERNANCE IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT.....	19
2.1 Current Status and Existing Problems in Public Opinion Governance	19
2.2 Key Strategies for Addressing Dispersed Public Opinion.....	27
2.3 International Comparison and Experience Reference of Implementation Strategies	36
CHAPTER 3 CASE ANALYSIS AND PRACTICAL EXPLORATION	40
3.1 Wu Yanni’s Controversy: Gender Bias in Public Opinion Defocus	40
3.2 Zhang Meiyu Dormitory Inspection Incident: Privacy and Institutional Trust.....	56
CONCLUSION.....	74
REFERENCES	78
APPENDIX A.....	83
APPENDIX B.....	85

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and wide use of new media have profoundly transformed the way of information dissemination. Social media platforms, news websites, blogs, and other online platforms have significantly broadened the channels through which the public can access information, accelerating the speed and scope of information exchange. These changes have enabled individuals to more conveniently participate in public discussions, express personal views, and even contribute to shaping social issues. As Shirky points out in his book "Here Comes Everybody", Internet technology has endowed ordinary people with unprecedented freedom of expression and organizational capabilities.

Nonetheless, the rapid rise of new media has brought its own set of challenges. The fragmentation and decentralization of information dissemination, coupled with the widespread application of algorithmic recommendation technologies, have made the formation and spread of public opinion more complex. The agenda-setting theory proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) suggests that traditional media can influence public focus by selecting which events to report. However, in the new media environment, due to the multitude and dispersion of information sources, the influence of traditional media on agenda-setting has diminished, relying more on users' active choices and the spontaneous dissemination within social networks. For example, Bakshy et al. (2015) found that even on large platforms like Facebook, the information users receive tends to align with their existing views, which may lead to group polarization and increase the risk of social division. This phenomenon, known as the "echo chamber" or "filter bubble" effect[1], refers to individuals' tendency to select information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs during the information acquisition process, thereby reinforcing their biases.

China's internet era began in the late 1990s, with portals like Sina, Sohu, and NetEase becoming the primary channels for users to access information. These websites not only provided news but also offered services such as email and forums, marking the initial formation of new media. The launch of Sina Weibo in 2009 signaled the beginning of China's social media era, quickly becoming a vital platform for public expression and participation in discussions. The proliferation of smartphones and the development of 3G/4G networks fueled the explosive growth of mobile internet, while the rise of short-video platforms like Douyin (TikTok) and Kuaishou transformed users' entertainment habits and information consumption patterns. However, as the new media environment grew increasingly complex, several negative effects emerged. First, information overload became a significant issue, as the sheer volume of data made it difficult for audiences to filter out valuable content. Second, the rapid spread of misinformation and rumors online exacerbated societal distrust. Third, while algorithmic recommendation systems improved user

experience, they also contributed to the "filter bubble" effect, where users were only exposed to information that aligned with their interests or viewpoints, thereby limiting their perspectives and reinforcing biases[2]. These factors collectively contributed to the phenomenon of public opinion defocus, which has become an urgent social issue.

Public opinion defocus refers to the phenomenon where public attention on a social issue deviates from the core problem, shifting focus to secondary or irrelevant details, or even being swayed by misinformation or emotional rhetoric. This phenomenon not only impairs the public's rational judgment of events but may also lead to the breakdown of social consensus and flawed public decision-making. For instance, in some high-profile events, public attention is often drawn to emotional or extreme viewpoints, while the underlying issues are overlooked. This dispersion and deviation of public opinion have garnered widespread attention in practice and posed new challenges for theoretical research.

From a theoretical perspective, studying public opinion defocus helps us better understand the characteristics of information dissemination in the new media environment and its impact on public cognition and social stability. First, the phenomenon reflects the complexity and uncertainty of information dissemination in the new media era. Traditional communication theories, such as agenda-setting theory and the spiral of silence, are primarily based on traditional media models and struggle to fully explain the mechanisms of opinion formation in the new media context. Therefore, research on public opinion defocus can provide new perspectives and empirical support for the development of communication theories. Second, the phenomenon is closely related to cognitive biases and information processing patterns. Psychological studies have shown that individuals are often influenced by confirmation bias and selective attention during information processing, tending to accept information that aligns with their views while ignoring or rejecting contradictory information [3]. These cognitive biases are further amplified in the new media environment, leading to the dispersion and defocus of public opinion.

From a practical standpoint, understanding and addressing the dispersion of public opinion are crucial for governments, media organizations, and social institutions. First, public opinion defocus may impact the formulation and implementation of public policies. When public attention deviates from core issues, governments may struggle to gain effective public support and might even make irrational decisions under the pressure of public opinion. Second, public opinion defocus may exacerbate social divisions and conflicts. In the new media environment, information isolation and opposing viewpoints among different groups can lead to the breakdown of social consensus and even trigger social conflicts. Therefore, effective governance measures can help reduce the spread of misinformation, improve public media literacy, and maintain social stability. Additionally, by formulating reasonable

policies and measures, governments can enhance their credibility and promote healthy social dialogue and public participation [4].

This study aims to analyze the causes, manifestations, and impacts of public opinion's deviation from governance and propose corresponding governance strategies. For this purpose, the research will draw on several theoretical frameworks, such as agenda-setting theory, the echo chamber effect, social identity theory, and cognitive bias theory.

The core research questions include:

What factors lead to the dispersion of public opinion in the new media environment?

What specific impacts does the deviation of public opinion from governance entail?

What governance strategies can effectively address the defocus of public opinion in the new media environment?

By addressing these questions, this thesis aims to thoroughly analyze the reasons and manifestations of public opinion defocus, evaluate its impact on social governance, and propose practical governance strategies to mitigate its negative effects.

This study will employ methods such as literature review, case analysis, and data analysis. By systematically reviewing relevant theories and empirical studies, it lays the groundwork for subsequent analysis. The thesis will conduct an in-depth analysis of typical new media events, collecting related data from new media platforms to reveal the specific manifestations of public opinion defocus and validate research hypotheses.

Integrating theories from communication studies, sociology, and political science, this thesis provides a comprehensive analytical framework from an interdisciplinary perspective. Through the study of public opinion defocus in the new media environment, it aims to enrich and develop existing communication theory systems, particularly in areas concerning the patterns of information dissemination, public cognition models, and mechanisms of social stability. The proposed governance strategies and recommendations will offer concrete guidelines for policymakers, media practitioners, and other stakeholders, helping them better respond to challenges posed by new media and promote the construction of a healthy and orderly information ecosystem.

MASTER'S THESIS SUMMARY

Keywords: NEW MEDIA, PUBLIC OPINION DEFOCUS, COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES, GOVERNANCE COUNTERMEASURES, SOCIAL MEDIA, MEDIA LITERACY.

Object of Study: Public opinion in a complex information environment, including interaction and competition between traditional media and new media. Focus on how these dynamics contribute to misinformation and societal fragmentation.

Subject of Study: Challenges and Governance Strategies for Public Opinion Defocus.

Aim of the Study: To investigate the challenges of public opinion formation and governance in the new media environment. Identify strategies to mitigate public opinion defocus, enhance audience engagement, and promote informed discourse, proposing relevant governance measures.

Research Methods: Literature review, case studies, qualitative data analysis.

Obtained Results: Defined the content of public opinion defocus in the new media environment, summarized the current situation and challenges in public opinion formation and governance. Through survey analysis, it explored the impact of misinformation on social cohesion and the importance of media literacy. Effective governance paths were proposed to promote informed decision-making and democratic participation.

Novelty: This study employs an interdisciplinary approach to systematically analyze the phenomenon of public opinion defocus in the new media environment, uncovering the interaction mechanisms among different theoretical frameworks and highlighting the importance of enhancing public media literacy. Additionally, it proposes effective governance strategies.

Area of Practical Application: Implications for media organizations, policymakers, advertisers, researchers, and educators. Provides actionable recommendations for developing effective governance policies, enhancing media literacy, and fostering a healthier digital communication environment.

The structure of the master's thesis includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references. The volume of the master's thesis is 82 pages, The work contains 7 figures, 3 tables, 65 sources.

The author confirms that the work has been carried out independently, and calculation and analytical material cited in it correctly and objectively reflects the state of the process being studied, and all theoretical. methodological provisions and concepts borrowed from literature and other sources are accompanied by references to their authors.

ОБЩАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА РАБОТЫ

Ключевые слова: НОВЫЕ МЕДИА, ДЕФОКУСИРОВКА ОБЩЕСТВЕННОГО МНЕНИЯ, СТРАТЕГИИ КОММУНИКАЦИИ, КОНТРАМЕРЫ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ, СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ, МЕДИАГРАМОТНОСТЬ

Объект исследования: Общественное мнение в условиях сложной информационной среды, включающее в себя взаимодействие и конкуренцию между традиционными медиа и новыми медиа

Предмет исследования: стратегии управления в ситуации расфокусировки общественного мнения.

Цель исследования: охарактеризовать проблемы формирования общественного мнения и управления в новой медиа-среде. Определить стратегии для смягчения расфокусировки общественного мнения, повышения вовлеченности аудитории и продвижения определенного типа дискурса..

Методы исследования: теоретический анализ, исследование кейсов, качественный анализ данных.

Полученные результаты: Определено содержание феномена расфокусировки общественного мнения в новой медиа-среде, обобщена текущая ситуация и проблемы в формировании общественного мнения и управления. С помощью анализа результатов опроса изучена роль дезинформации как фактора социальной сплоченности, показана важность медиаграмотности. Были предложены эффективные пути управления для содействия принятию информированных решений и демократическому участию.

Новизна: используется междисциплинарный подход для систематического анализа феномена расфокусировки общественного мнения в новой медиасреде, раскрываются механизмы взаимодействия между различными теоретическими подходами и подчеркивается важность повышения общественной медиаграмотности. Кроме того, предлагаются эффективные стратегии управления общественным мнением.

Область возможного практического применения: организации и источники создающие общественное мнение. Предоставляются практические рекомендации по разработке эффективной политики управления общественным мнением, повышает медиаграмотность, и способствует созданию более здоровой цифровой коммуникационной среды.

Структура магистерской диссертации включает введение, три главы, заключение, список литературы. Объем магистерской диссертации составляет 82 страниц, работа содержит 7 рисунков, 3 таблицы, 65 источников.

Автор подтверждает, что работа выполнена самостоятельно, а приведенный в ней расчетно-аналитический материал правильно и объективно отражает

состояние изучаемого процесса, а все теоретические. методологические положения и концепции, заимствованные из литературы и других источников, сопровождаются ссылками на их авторов.

CHAPTER 1

ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF PUBLIC OPINION DEFOCUS IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

1.1 Characteristics of the New Media Environment and Their Correlation with Public Opinion Defocus

The new media environment refers to an information dissemination ecosystem realized through internet technology. It includes social media platforms (such as Weibo, WeChat), news websites, blogs, video-sharing platforms (such as YouTube, Bilibili, Tik Tok), and various mobile applications. Traditional media (such as newspapers, television, radio) are typically operated by professional institutions, where information is strictly reviewed before publication. The dissemination speed is slower and unidirectional, with audiences mainly playing a passive role as receivers. The rise of new media began in the late 1990s, with the popularization of the internet and technological advancements, especially the development of social networks and mobile internet, gradually taking a dominant position.

Public opinion refers to the general attitudes and views held by the public towards specific events, issues, or phenomena. In the era of new media, the characteristics of public opinion have undergone significant transformations. The speed of information dissemination has accelerated unprecedentedly, and the coverage has expanded greatly, while opportunities for the public to participate in discussions on public issues have increased significantly. New media tools such as social media platforms, news applications, and short video platforms, with their features of instant dissemination, high interactivity, and personalized information recommendations, have profoundly reshaped the generation, diffusion, and consumption of information [5].

However, in this rapidly changing new media environment, the phenomenon of public opinion defocus is becoming increasingly prominent. Public opinion defocus refers to the situation where, during discussions about social events, public discourse and attention shift away from the main event, with the originally central issues being replaced by other secondary information or events. Public opinion defocus can have certain positive effects; for instance, to some extent, it promotes deeper reporting by the media, accelerating the uncovering of the truth and details of the events. During the process of public opinion dissemination, audiences can actively search for various pieces of information related to the events they are concerned about, gaining a multifaceted understanding of the events and expressing their personal views, which can influence the opinion environment. Sometimes, discussions that seem to deviate from the core issue may actually guide public attention to more critical topics. Nevertheless, in most cases, public opinion defocus leads to the diversion and

dispersion of the focus of public opinion, resulting in numerous negative impacts.

1.1.1 Instantaneity and Information Overload

Anyone can upload information to internet platforms within seconds using devices such as phones or computers, allowing it to spread rapidly. Many social platforms enable users to instantly post content in various forms, including text, images, and videos, significantly shortening the time lag between information creation and dissemination. This instantaneity in the new media environment ensures rapid information spread and multi-channel synchronous dissemination. Whether it's social platforms, news websites, or mobile applications, they can all receive the latest content updates simultaneously. This feature further enhances the speed and breadth of information dissemination, undoubtedly improving circulation efficiency. For example, on Weibo or Twitter, a piece of hot news can receive tens of thousands of reposts and comments within a few minutes, and these interactions will trigger more discussions and secondary dissemination. On the other hand, this speed also brings significant information overload issues. New media platforms see a vast amount of information being posted and disseminated daily, growing exponentially without constraints of time and space. Scholars like Manuel Castells (2009) describe the massive volume of information on the web as a defining characteristic of the information age. Castells argues that the richness of information sources creates a complex and fragmented media landscape, making it difficult for individuals to discern accurate and relevant content.

Due to the lack of effective review mechanisms, a large amount of unverified information quickly spreads on new media, making it challenging for the public to distinguish truth from falsehood [6]. Information overload occurs when individuals are presented with more information than they can process or handle effectively. In the context of public opinion, this can lead to a situation where key messages get lost among a sea of noise, making it difficult for the public to discern fact from fiction or to focus on the core issues at hand. This confusion can exacerbate public opinion defocus, as different stakeholders may interpret the same information differently or prioritize varying aspects of an event. For example, in the 2017 "Wang Fengya Incident," self-media articles initially reported false information, causing public anger and misunderstanding. The article claimed that Wang Fengya's parents used the 150,000 RMB raised through donations to treat their son's cleft lip while neglecting their daughter's condition, ultimately leading to her unfortunate death. The article also accused Wang Fengya's parents of gender bias. Nonetheless, as more information came to light, the facts became clear: Wang Fengya's parents did not misuse the donations but instead used all funds for their daughter's treatment. They never gave up on treating their daughter. After the truth was revealed, many who had attacked the couple online apologized, but the damage had already been done. Despite subsequent evidence proving the report inaccurate, its short-term impact on public opinion was

undeniable. Such unverified information not only hurt innocent families and misled the public but also exacerbated the dispersion of public opinion.

1.1.2 Interactivity and Emotional Expression

Interactivity refers to the mutual interaction and influence between two or more entities (such as humans, machines, systems, etc.). In the digital age, interactivity has become one of the core characteristics of various media and platforms, allowing users to actively participate, provide feedback, and influence the content or system's performance. The importance of interactivity lies in its ability to provide users with a more personalized, dynamic, and immersive experience, thereby enhancing their engagement and satisfaction. The interactivity of new media encourages users to actively participate in discussions through comments, shares, and likes, providing more opportunities for public expression and enhancing user engagement. This makes information dissemination more dynamic and diverse. In emergencies, eyewitnesses can use social media to immediately post live situations, and other users can ask questions or share opinions in the comment section, forming an immediate information exchange network.

While the interactivity of online public opinion enhances the dissemination and exchange of information, it also easily triggers emotional discussions, causing emotional expressions to be rapidly amplified within a short period. Some communicators tend to label events, simplifying complex social issues to more easily touch the emotional nerves of the public and elicit resonance. In the absence of authoritative guidance, the public is often more attracted to emotionally appealing content rather than delving deeply into the facts themselves.

In the vast realm of online public opinion, rationality and irrationality become two distinctly different states of existence. Chinese domestic scholars pay more attention to the issue of irrational public opinion, possibly because institutionalized channels for public expression are relatively lacking in China, making the internet the primary platform for active citizen expression and contributing to an environment of irrational public opinion [7]. The openness and anonymity of the internet, as the main platform for active citizen expression, exacerbate the tendency towards irrationality in online public opinion to some extent. Rationality, as the cognitive ability of people to form concepts, make judgments, and engage in logical reasoning, as well as the practical capability to guide actions, is particularly important in online public opinion. It is reflected in whether individuals can use their wisdom, logical reasoning, and independent thinking to express their views objectively and fairly. Irrationality refers to a kind of non-logical, non-systematic mental capacity that drives people to engage in difficult-to-explain cognition and actions. Irrational public opinion, on the other hand, is often driven by emotion, manifesting as one-sided, extreme, and highly individualistic remarks that lack deep thought and rational analysis.

Especially in social media environments, the anonymity and distance provided

by digital platforms encourage users to express strong emotions and views without bearing the same level of responsibility as face-to-face interactions. This interactivity not only enhances the spread of emotional expressions, but may also trigger a "spiral of silence" effect, in which the opinions of the majority are over-amplified and the opinions of the minority are marginalized. For example, in some hot online events, emotional comments can often quickly dominate public opinion, while rational voices are drowned in the emotional wave.

Some self-media outlets attract attention by using sensational language and headlines to provoke emotional reactions from readers. Such emotionally driven discussions not only diminish rational dialogue spaces but can also lead to group polarization, where individuals with similar views become increasingly extreme, forming opposing camps. This phenomenon not only affects public understanding but may also exacerbate social conflicts.

1.1.3 User-Generated Content and Low-Barrier Creation

The new media environment democratizes content creation, making user-generated content (UGC) an essential component of the digital realm. UGC refers to content created and posted by ordinary users rather than professional media organizations or professionals. This content can include various forms such as text, images, videos, and audio, disseminated through social media platforms, blogs, forums, and other channels. A core feature of UGC is that anyone can become a content creator and distributor, breaking down traditional media's professional barriers. Compared to traditional media content, UGC often exhibits greater authenticity and personalization. UGC usually reflects the creator's real-life experiences and emotional expressions, making these genuine stories more touching than carefully edited news reports.

The development of new media technology has lowered the technical threshold for content creation, allowing anyone to become a content creator with almost no technical barriers. Whether it is text, pictures or videos, they can be quickly produced and published online through simple tools. This low-barrier information creation enhances public discourse but also brings new challenges. Due to varying creator levels, the quality of published content differs greatly. Some content may be meticulously produced with high value, while other content could be casually posted, lacking depth and accuracy. Without traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, UGC may contain misinformation, rumors, and unverified claims. False or unverified content proliferates on new media platforms. This quality disparity not only affects user experience but may also reduce public trust in UGC.

1.1.4 Algorithmic Recommendations and Echo Chambers

Algorithmic recommendation systems are another significant feature of the new media environment and a core function of many new media platforms. These algorithms predict user interest preferences based on browsing history, click behavior,

search records, and other data, pushing personalized content. This recommendation mechanism aims to improve user experience by helping users more easily find interesting content. For example, when you watch a movie on a video platform, the system automatically recommends similar films. This personalized recommendation not only increases the likelihood of discovering similar new content but also enhances user stickiness.

While these algorithms enhance user experience, they predict based on historical data, which means they might overlook users' potential interests and needs. They also tend to create "echo chambers," limiting users' exposure to diverse information. In such scenarios, users encounter content consistent with their existing views, gradually forming a closed information circle, reinforcing their biases and hindering rational and comprehensive discussions. Users are less likely to engage with opposing opinions or consider alternative perspectives. The algorithmic recommendation mechanisms of new media platforms also exacerbate the impact of emotional expression on the defocusing of public opinion to a certain extent. These algorithms tend to recommend content that can evoke emotional resonance among users, which makes emotional content easier to spread and pay attention to, and helps rational discourse lose focus.

Moreover, algorithmic recommendations can amplify misinformation and rumors because they prioritize high-engagement content regardless of its accuracy. This can lead to the spread of false information and further distort public discourse. Social bots are also widely used in content distribution, replicating and spreading specific information to create false public opinion environments. These factors collectively contribute to the fragmentation and polarization of public opinion in the new media environment.

1.2 Main Manifestations and Types of Public Opinion Defocus

1.2.1 Issue Diversity

The contemporary landscape of public opinion is marked by a striking issue diversity, a phenomenon where the range of topics capturing public attention has expanded exponentially. This trend is largely driven by the digital revolution, which has democratized the means of information dissemination and enabled a vast array of issues to gain traction simultaneously. Unlike traditional media environments, where a limited number of dominant issues typically monopolized public discourse, the digital age has given rise to a multiplicity of topics that compete for public attention, from global crises to local community concerns, and from major political debates to niche cultural phenomena.

This multiplicity of topics is evident in the way social media platforms and online forums operate. For instance, on platforms like Twitter or Reddit, trending

topics can span a wide spectrum, including urgent environmental issues, celebrity news, technological advancements, and grassroots social movements. This broad range of issues reflects the ability of various stakeholders—ranging from individual activists to large organizations—to mobilize public interest around their chosen causes. As a result, public opinion becomes fragmented across a vast array of issues, making it difficult for any single topic to dominate the public agenda for an extended period [8].

Moreover, the broad spectrum of issues in public opinion is further exacerbated by the personalization of information consumption. Algorithms tailor content to individual preferences, leading to a situation where different segments of the public are exposed to entirely different sets of issues. This selective exposure not only diversifies the issues that people care about but also creates echo chambers where individuals are more likely to engage with content that reinforces their existing interests and beliefs. Consequently, public opinion becomes fragmented not only across different issues but also within the same issue, as different groups form distinct narratives and interpretations [9].

The variety of topics also has significant implications for public discourse and decision-making. On one hand, it fosters a more inclusive and comprehensive public debate, allowing for a wider range of voices and perspectives to be heard. This can lead to more nuanced and multifaceted discussions, potentially enriching the democratic process. On the other hand, the sheer volume and variety of issues can overwhelm public attention, making it challenging to build consensus or prioritize collective action. As different groups focus on different issues, the overall coherence of public opinion is weakened, leading to a more fragmented and complex public discourse.

1.2.2 Polarization of Views and Group Differentiation

Another significant manifestation of public opinion fragmentation is the polarization of views and group differentiation. In discussions on various public topics, it can be observed that starkly different viewpoints act like the two poles of a magnet, attracting people with similar perspectives to cluster together, thereby forming distinct groups that are often in opposition to each other. This polarization is evident in both political and non-political contexts, where individuals and groups increasingly adopt extreme positions and reject moderate or compromising viewpoints. In the realm of politics, the polarization of public opinion is often observed in debates over contentious issues such as immigration, healthcare reform, or climate change policies. Supporters and opponents of these issues tend to form rigid camps, each with its own set of facts, interpretations, and emotional appeals. This group differentiation is further reinforced by social identity factors such as political affiliation, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. People often choose their stance based on their social identity and sense of belonging, as

individuals identify more strongly with their respective groups, they become more resistant to alternative viewpoints, leading to a deepening of divisions and a fragmentation of the overall public opinion landscape [10].

The polarization of views is also driven by the way information is disseminated and consumed in the digital age. Social media platforms, in particular, facilitate the spread of emotionally charged content that can quickly amplify divisions. Misinformation and false propaganda campaigns can spread confusion and doubt among different groups, thereby further widening the divisions between these groups. As a result, public opinion becomes fragmented not only along ideological lines but also along lines of trust and credibility, with different groups relying on different sources of information and rejecting the validity of information from opposing camps. The segmentation of online communities and the polarization of values increase the difficulty of guiding and integrating mainstream ideologies, making trust and understanding across different groups more complex.

1.2.3 Positive Defocusing and Negative Defocusing

Public opinion defocusing can be further categorized into two types: positive defocusing and negative defocusing. These terms refer to the ways in which public attention and opinion can be scattered in both constructive and destructive directions.

Positive defocusing occurs when public attention is diverted from a dominant issue to a multitude of emerging or peripheral issues that may have positive societal implications. For example, a major environmental disaster might initially dominate public discourse, but over time, attention could shift to related but distinct issues such as renewable energy initiatives, sustainable development practices, or local environmental conservation efforts. This shift in focus can lead to a more nuanced and multifaceted public debate, where various aspects of a broader issue are explored in depth. While this can be beneficial in terms of fostering a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems, it can also result in a fragmentation of public opinion as different segments of the public prioritize different aspects of the issue.

Negative defocusing, on the other hand, refers to the scattering of public attention and opinion in ways that detract from constructive engagement with critical issues. For instance, a political scandal might dominate headlines, but the public's focus could be diverted by sensationalist or trivial content that has little substantive value. This type of defocusing can be exacerbated by the deliberate spread of misinformation or by the tendency of social media algorithms to prioritize content that generates high engagement, regardless of its relevance or accuracy. Therefore, public opinion becomes fragmented and diffused, with individuals and groups focusing on different aspects of the events, and sometimes even involving irrelevant matters. This results in a lack of unified cohesion and direction in public reactions.

Both positive defocusing and negative defocusing contribute to the fragmentation of public opinion by altering the way public attention is allocated and

by influencing the nature of public discourse. While positive defocusing can lead to a more diverse and potentially enriching public debate, negative defocusing can undermine the ability of the public to form a unified stance on critical issues, thereby weakening the impact of collective opinion on policy and decision-making processes.

1.3 The Impacts of Public Opinion Defocus

1.3.1 The Disintegration of Social Consensus and Trust Crisis

In the broad influence of the new media environment, public opinion defocus has become an undeniable catalyst for the disintegration of social consensus [11]. When the public focuses on a particular event, their attention often becomes blurred or even completely deviates from the core issues at hand. This wandering of focus not only exacerbates the divergence of opinions among different social groups but also embeds these differences deeply into broader societal values and belief systems. For example, one group may perceive an event as a challenge to a certain social value, while another group may regard it as in line with a different value. Especially during significant public events, the varied interpretations provided by various social media platforms and news outlets make it difficult for the public to find a clear direction amidst the information deluge, hindering the formation of consensus.

While information diversity has broadened the channels through which the public can access information, it has also led to information overload and interpretative chaos, increasing doubts about the authenticity and reliability of sources. This significantly impacts individual behavior in information acquisition and judgment, fostering a trust crisis [12]. In this context, the public increasingly relies on personal social networks for information rather than official messages from authoritative institutions, weakening the overall trust foundation of society and potentially exacerbating social fragmentation and instability.

1.3.2 Decline in Media Credibility and Deterioration of Information Ecosystem

One of the prominent and direct consequences of public opinion defocus is the decline in media credibility. The rise of user-generated content (UGC) and the lowering of creation barriers have provided unprecedented convenience for the free flow of information. However, in this vast sea of information, content that has not been strictly screened and reviewed is like a wild horse running wild, and there is no lack of false information and misleading remarks. Without sufficient factual support and professional review, they are easily spread widely on the Internet. This disordered state of information is undoubtedly a major test of public trust in the media, and gradually weakens the public's trust in information sources.

Beyond the proliferation of false information, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms also contribute to the deterioration of the information ecosystem. These

algorithms act like shrewd salespeople, precisely targeting users' interests and pushing content that aligns with their preferences. However, this personalized recommendation leads to an overabundance of emotionally charged content, eroding the soil for rational discourse [13]. The echo chamber effect further exacerbates this issue by isolating differing viewpoints and information, making communication and understanding between groups increasingly difficult. This informational isolation not only intensifies social division and conflict but also further deteriorates the health of the entire information ecosystem.

1.3.3 Entrenchment of Cognitive Biases and Exacerbation of Polarization

In the flood of information, the public frequently encounters biased or erroneous information, leading to the entrenchment of rigid cognitive frameworks. Individuals tend to accept only information that aligns with their pre-existing views while ignoring or rejecting contradictory voices [14]. This cognitive bias not only distorts individual decision-making logic but also sows seeds of misunderstanding and opposition at a broader societal level.

The phenomenon of group polarization indicates that group discussions may lead to a further shift in group members' attitudes in the original direction, thereby making the existing differences more pronounced. Such a shift may result from the combined effects of various factors, including normative influences within the group, social comparison mechanisms, and selective processing of information [15]. More seriously, as discussions deepen, this prejudice snowballs, making the polarization phenomenon often show a self-reinforcing trend. The consistency within the group has been unprecedentedly strengthened, while the gap between different groups has become increasingly difficult to cross. This extreme and fragmented public opinion environment acts like a double-edged sword, not only weakening social cohesion and centripetal force but also planting hidden dangers for social harmony and stability.

1.3.4 Challenges to Public Decision-Making and Governance

In an ideal scenario, policymakers aim to ensure the scientific and rational nature of policies by widely collecting and analyzing public opinions. Public opinion is the basis of policy formulation, and only by fully reflecting public opinion can policies effectively solve practical problems and meet social needs. Despite this, when the focus of public opinion is scattered or dominated by misinformation, this process becomes exceptionally challenging. Governments and relevant departments rely on public opinion and feedback when formulating policies. Public opinion defocus makes it difficult for decision-makers to obtain comprehensive and accurate public opinion data, affecting the scientific and rational basis of policies [16]. The defocus of public opinion obscures the true voice of the people. The absence and distortion of information can lead policy-making to deviate from actual needs, potentially resulting in social discontent and resistance. This not only damages the government's credibility but also undermines its foundation of governance.

Various voices are intertwined in the online public opinion field. This complexity has brought great challenges to social governance. Misinformation and fake news are rampant in cyberspace, severely damaging online and societal integrity. Additionally, the existence of internet trolls and online public relation companies exacerbates the chaos and instability of cyberspace. These phenomena not only directly harm public interests but also undermine social credibility and trust foundations. More crucially, public opinion defocus can lower public understanding and support for policies, making policy implementation more difficult and fraught with resistance. When the public harbors doubts about policy content, objectives, and implementation methods, they may adopt a wait-and-see or opposing stance, thus impeding the smooth progress and effectiveness of policies.

Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter analyzes the characteristics of the new media environment and its impact on public opinion defocus, exploring the manifestations, types, and multifaceted societal effects of this phenomenon. The new media environment is characterized by immediacy, interactivity, user-generated content (UGC), and algorithmic recommendations, which have fundamentally transformed the way information is disseminated. However, these features also introduce challenges such as information overload, emotional expression, low-barrier content creation, and the formation of "information cocoons," all of which create fertile ground for public opinion defocus.

Public opinion defocus manifests in several ways, including topic diversity, viewpoint polarization, group differentiation, and both positive and negative defocusing. Topic diversity highlights the broad range of issues capturing public attention but often makes it difficult to form consensus. Viewpoint polarization exacerbates divisions between different groups, weakening social cohesion. Positive and negative defocusing represent constructive and destructive deviations from core issues, respectively, with varying impacts on public discourse .

The effects of public opinion defocus are wide-ranging. It undermines social consensus and triggers trust crises while diminishing media credibility and degrading the information ecosystem. Furthermore, the reinforcement of individual cognitive biases and the intensification of polarization fragment society further, hindering rational discussions and consensus-building. At the level of public policymaking, defocused public opinion complicates the collection of accurate and comprehensive public feedback, thereby affecting the scientific rigor and effectiveness of policy decisions.

In conclusion, public opinion defocus in the new media environment is both a byproduct of technological advancements and societal changes and a significant

challenge for modern governance. Addressing this issue through technical constraints, public opinion guidance, and institutional improvements remains a crucial area for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC OPINION GOVERNANCE IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Current Status and Existing Problems in Public Opinion Governance

2.1.1 Legal Regulation

The widespread use of social platforms and digital media has significantly accelerated the generation, dissemination, and impact of public opinion, breaking through geographical boundaries. This has profound implications for social stability, economic development, and even national security. As a cornerstone of public opinion governance, legal regulation plays a critical role. China has introduced a series of relevant laws and regulations to regulate online behavior, such as the *Public Security Administration Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China*, the *Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China*, and the *Administrative Measures for Internet Information Services*. These laws clearly define behaviors such as online rumors, cyberbullying, and violations of personal privacy, establishing corresponding legal liabilities.

In recent years, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has continuously launched the "Clear and Bright" special campaigns, focusing on addressing various online issues to create a cleaner and more orderly cyberspace. In 2025, the campaign prioritizes eight key tasks: improving the online environment during the Spring Festival by combating misinformation and extreme polarization; regulating self-media content publication and targeting false or pseudo-professional information; strengthening labeling of information sources in short-video platforms to combat malicious marketing and staged content; addressing the misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and standardizing the ecosystem of AI applications; tackling corporate smear campaigns and optimizing the online environment for minors during summer vacations; cracking down on chaotic practices in live-streaming donations and curbing malicious amplification of negative emotions; and enhancing the management of donation functions while penalizing non-compliant marketing accounts and internet trolls [15]. This special campaign comprehensively cover multiple areas of cyberspace governance, purifying the online environment and safeguarding the legitimate rights of the public through a series of targeted measures. Among the behaviors targeted for rectification, many have directly or indirectly contributed to the phenomenon of public opinion defocus. For instance, the malicious incitement of negative emotions—including exploiting hot-button issues to provoke extreme group opposition, exaggerating and sensationalizing false information and negative topics—not only distorts facts but also steers public attention excessively toward negative content, overshadowing other significant issues. This results in the

diverting attention away from core topics and critical discussions. Similarly, false information generated by AI can spread quickly, misleading public judgment and steering discussions away from core topics. The "Clear and Bright" campaign has not only achieved remarkable results in combating online chaos but also alleviated the problem of public opinion defocus, highlighting the crucial role of legal regulation in maintaining cyberspace order.

However, with the rapid advancement of new media technologies, existing laws and regulations face challenges in terms of applicability and enforcement. On one hand, the formulation of laws often lags behind the evolution of new media technologies. New communication methods and platforms emerge constantly, while the process of drafting and refining relevant legislation requires considerable time, leaving gaps in addressing novel online public opinion issues due to the absence of clear legal frameworks. On the other hand, some laws provide vague definitions of online misconduct, lacking specific operational standards, which makes it difficult for law enforcement personnel to accurately gauge the appropriate measures in practice, easily leading to disputes and misunderstandings. For instance, while it is stipulated that self-media should avoid publishing content that disrupts public opinion or misleads audiences, the exact criteria for what constitutes "disruption" or "misleading" remain unclear, resulting in a certain degree of subjectivity and uncertainty during the enforcement process.

Another significant issue lies in insufficient enforcement. The covert and intricate nature of online activities poses challenges for law enforcement agencies in effectively tracking and penalizing violations. Additionally, many public opinion problems span multiple domains and require cross-departmental collaboration for effective resolution. However, current mechanisms for inter-agency cooperation are still underdeveloped, undermining enforcement outcomes.

2.1.2 Technical Monitoring

In the context of the new media era, the importance of public opinion monitoring tools has become increasingly prominent. With continuous technological advancements, existing public opinion monitoring tools and technical means have, to a certain extent, improved the efficiency and accuracy of public opinion surveillance. These tools not only possess excellent data analysis capabilities but also comprehensively track information flows across various digital channels, including social media, news websites, blogs, and forums. Their core value lies in real-time collection and integration of highly relevant public opinion trends, whether positive acclaim or negative criticism, all of which are captured within their scope [16]. For example, the Qingbo Public Opinion System conducts 24/7 analysis of data across the entire internet, promptly identifying news hotspots and deeply mining news leads. It employs advanced data visualization technology to provide a comprehensive display and in-depth interpretation of all dimensions of an event. Similarly, EeFang Software

offers a series of public opinion monitoring products, including auxiliary systems for internet public opinion monitoring. These products, developed based on big data technology, continuously monitor various websites, enabling rapid collection, aggregation, classification, clustering, filtering, and analysis of public opinion information. They can also identify trending topics based on parameters such as the authority of the source, commentary activity, and participation density, thereby promptly detecting and responding to sensitive topics and sudden incidents.

Public opinion monitoring tools leverage data mining and sentiment analysis technologies to analyze the vast amounts of collected public opinion information. These tools first conduct semantic analysis of textual content to understand its core meaning, then apply sentiment orientation judgment techniques to assess public attitudes and emotional tendencies toward specific issues. This process not only covers a wide range of public opinions but also effectively breaks through the barriers of segmented public opinion distribution, achieving full-network monitoring of information. Ultimately, they provide users with comprehensive and accurate public opinion insights to support decision-making processes. For instance, after a hot event occurs, public opinion monitoring tools can quickly analyze public reactions and emotional changes, determining whether public attention has deviated from the core issue. This helps relevant departments promptly understand public sentiment, formulate effective response strategies, and issue authoritative information in a timely manner to guide the public back to rational discussions, avoiding unnecessary panic and social division. When sensitive keywords or abnormal public opinion dynamics are detected, these tools can swiftly issue warnings and send real-time notifications via multiple channels such as SMS and WeChat. This early warning function enables users to promptly discover and respond to potential public opinion crises, preventing further escalation of the situation.

Many public opinion monitoring tools also offer customized reporting services, generating detailed public opinion analysis reports based on user needs and areas of interest. These reports not only include statistical analyses of public opinion data but may also feature trend predictions and strategic recommendations, providing users with more comprehensive and in-depth public opinion insights.

Public opinion monitoring is a complex task that involves the collaborative functioning of multiple key components and technical elements. To ensure full-network information collection and provide both rapid and accurate monitoring results, it is necessary to continuously improve and upgrade the public opinion monitoring system. Specifically, this system encompasses several aspects, including databases of monitored media sources, Chinese word segmentation technology, statistical analysis tools, multi-point server deployment, and web crawler-based information collection. For different media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and television, specialized monitoring tools need to be developed to more precisely

capture and analyze public opinion dynamics [17].

During the public opinion monitoring process, sensitive information about individuals and organizations is often involved. Ensuring the privacy and security of this information is a critical issue. Any data leakage or misuse could cause serious harm to individuals and organizations. Therefore, public opinion monitoring tools must strengthen data protection measures to ensure the security and privacy of user data. While public opinion monitoring relies on software, it also depends on human intervention. For certain complex semantic and sentiment judgments, current technologies may not achieve complete accuracy. How to enhance the intelligence level of public opinion monitoring tools and reduce the need for manual intervention remains a challenge to be addressed in the future.

2.1.3 Social Mobilization

Social organizations, as representatives of non-governmental organizations and grassroots groups, play a crucial bridging role between the government and the public. These organizations include public welfare foundations established for charitable purposes, social service institutions hosted by enterprises, public institutions, social groups, and other social forces. They possess distinct characteristics such as being non-governmental, non-profit, public-benefit-oriented, self-governing, and organized. These features give social organizations unique advantages and value when participating in social mobilization activities. Social organizations can actively engage in social mobilization efforts by leveraging their networks, resources, and professional expertise. They conduct in-depth research and analysis on social hot topics, guide online public opinion, correct erroneous viewpoints, and provide the public with scientific and objective information support. By mobilizing more members of society to participate in social activities, they expand the influence of social mobilization.

At the same time, public participation also plays a vital role in public opinion governance, promoting transparency and democratization of information while strengthening social oversight. Especially during emergencies or hot events, the public can rapidly share information and express opinions through social media platforms, forming widespread public opinion supervision. This bottom-up information dissemination breaks the monopoly of traditional media over information. Before the rise of new media, it was extremely difficult for ordinary citizens to access traditional media to express their interests due to resource and channel limitations. The discourse power of traditional media was often monopolized by elites from intellectual circles and other sectors, leaving the general public with little opportunity to voice their concerns in mainstream media [18]. This information asymmetry not only exacerbated social stratification but also easily led to public opinion defocus, where the focus of public attention could be manipulated by a few elites or media outlets, ignoring issues that truly affect people's well-being and social

justice.

The rise of new media has provided opportunities and convenience for public participation in public opinion governance. As an indirect participant, social organizations play a filtering and connecting role, helping the public overcome emotional interference and enhancing the rationality and scientific nature of public participation while reducing participation costs. Social organizations can also provide professional consultation and recommendations to the government, assisting in improving relevant policies and regulations. They collaborate with the government to organize crisis response drills and training, enhancing overall response capabilities and cooperative synergy.

In today's society, the coexistence of diverse values and the prominence of differences in interests and perspectives among various groups have increased the difficulty for social organizations and the public to participate in public opinion governance. After a crisis event occurs, the public tends to delve deeply into its underlying causes, which may expose more issues and exacerbate the crisis. For example, in the Mercedes-Benz oil leak incident, the public not only focused on safety concerns but also questioned the company's after-sales service and business model, further deepening the crisis [19]. The growing influence of self-media in the rapid development of new media has also empowered the public to construct their own public opinion spaces, causing crisis events to evolve in directions unforeseen by the media. Meanwhile, social organizations themselves face challenges such as funding shortages and limited influence, making it difficult to cover all areas comprehensively. Many social organizations rely on donations and project funding, leading to unstable financial sources that restrict the scale and sustainability of their activities. Technological barriers and resource limitations also constrain the capabilities of social organizations and the public in public opinion monitoring and analysis. Both the government and social organizations have their own strengths in public opinion governance. In practice, how to effectively combine the government's management guidance with the flexible innovation of social organizations to form synergies and jointly address the challenges of online public opinion is a topic that requires both parties to explore deeply and actively practice.

2.1.4 Platform Responsibility

Social media platforms, as the core hubs of information dissemination, are not only carriers of information but also "gatekeepers" in the process of information transmission, playing a pivotal role in the formation and spread of public opinion. Through algorithmic recommendations, content prioritization, and user interaction design, these platforms directly influence the visibility and reach of information. Social media users can easily become information publishers by simply registering an account, making it difficult to effectively regulate the authenticity of the information [20]. Although the algorithm-based review mechanisms relied upon by platforms can

process large volumes of information quickly, they often fail to detect false information that has been carefully disguised, particularly rumors spread through visual media such as images and videos. Such visual content tends to have stronger emotional appeal in public opinion dissemination, triggering intense emotional reactions from the public and further accelerating the spread of rumors. For example, during the 2018 Chongqing bus plunge incident, some mainstream media outlets released unverified false information, leading many members of the public to believe the rumor about a "female driver driving against traffic" and participate in online violence [21]. This incident highlighted the shortcomings of platforms in information verification and fact-checking. Social media platforms have far greater speed and influence in disseminating information during crisis events compared to traditional media, but the accuracy and authenticity of the information remain difficult to guarantee [22].

From the perspective of "Gatekeeping Theory," information dissemination in the era of traditional media relied on editors and journalists as "gatekeepers" who filtered and curated content. However, in the new media environment, the decentralization of information dissemination has weakened the role of gatekeepers. While platforms have assumed some gatekeeping responsibilities, their imperfect review mechanisms have allowed a significant amount of false information to spread. Some platforms, in pursuit of traffic and user engagement, even deliberately tolerate the spread of rumors, further exacerbating the problem of public opinion defocus.

Although some platforms have introduced tools for information verification and rumor debunking, the actual usage rate of these tools is low due to insufficient promotion and education, resulting in limited awareness and adoption among users. When dealing with false information, platforms often adopt a "post-event handling" approach, issuing corrections or removing content only after the rumor has already spread and caused serious consequences. This reactive approach fails to effectively curb the spread of rumors and instead increases public distrust in the platforms.

Many platforms have actively promoted real-name systems, but issues such as user information leaks and fake accounts persist. The real-name system aims to reduce the spread of false information by verifying user identities. However, some platforms have vulnerabilities in identity verification and information management, increasing the risk of user data breaches. At the same time, malicious actors exploit technical means or false information to register fake accounts, which are often used to post false information or malicious comments. This further exacerbates the spread of misinformation, disrupts the healthy ecosystem of the platform, and harms the interests of other users.

Platforms also face significant shortcomings in user data protection and reporting mechanisms. Some platforms have vulnerabilities in user data protection, leading to frequent incidents of information leaks and malicious attacks that infringe

on users' privacy rights. Additionally, the reporting mechanisms of some platforms are inadequate, making it difficult for users to protect their rights through reporting. Even when users do file reports, they often receive no timely or effective response, leaving them feeling helpless and disappointed.

In terms of speech management, some platforms have adopted overly simplistic and harsh measures, such as blanket deletions or restrictions on user speech. This approach not only fails to effectively curb the spread of rumors but may also provoke dissatisfaction and resentment among users. Such actions often lack sufficient transparency and fairness, making it difficult for users to understand or accept the rationale behind the platforms' decisions. Moreover, this approach restricts freedom of speech and negatively impacts user satisfaction and loyalty to the platform.

2.1.5 Profit-Driven Motives

The deep involvement of capital has gradually transformed new media platforms into the "invisible puppeteers" of public discourse arenas. The rapid development of modern public opinion technology exhibits strong guiding capabilities, with intelligent information technologies continuously updating and communication mediums evolving into forces that may operate beyond human control. This technological progress provides tools for interest groups to achieve their goals while also offering robust technical support for capital penetration into public opinion. On one hand, through the deep integration with technology, capital demonstrates its dominance in the economic sphere and gradually extends its reach into social power domains. On the other hand, by owning the technology and platforms, capital controls the allocation of information dissemination resources, thereby exerting significant influence over ideologies. This dual effect amplifies capital's impact within the realm of public discourse, potentially jeopardizing public interests and the impartiality of public opinion [23]. Internet giants such as ByteDance, Tencent, and Alibaba precisely manage users' information reception paths via algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and traffic distribution rules.

It is undeniable that profit-driven motives play a partially positive role in the new media ecosystem. The profit-seeking behaviors of capital, self-media, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) objectively promote technological innovation, content diversification, and the diffusion of public issues, injecting vitality into the public opinion landscape. A case in point is Bilibili, a Chinese online video-sharing platform founded on June 26, 2009. The platform's content library has expanded to include a wide range of fields such as technology, education, music, dance, fashion, and lifestyle knowledge, among others. This diverse content has attracted a broad user base, particularly younger generations. A successful case of a profit-driven mechanism is Bilibili's "Creator Incentive Program." This initiative comprehensively evaluates the self-produced content of UP Masters (content creators) and provides

corresponding financial support, reducing the costs and pressures associated with content creation. It also enhances creators' confidence and motivation to continue producing content. This system not only promotes the creation of high-quality content but also establishes a positive cycle of "content quality—traffic revenue—continuous innovation."

In the dissemination of information, social media platforms and self-media practitioners often prioritize traffic and click-through rates, aiming for maximum economic benefit. In this digital age, the traffic-centric mindset surpasses all evaluation criteria, becoming the ultimate basis for information production and value assessment. The rise of the traffic economy model has given birth to a highly deviated "communication aesthetic," where the primary goal of information dissemination is no longer to convey values or knowledge but to maximize traffic gains and achieve swift monetization. In this environment, the efficiency of information production, circulation speed, and the ability to capture attention are excessively pursued, leading to increasingly chaotic information dissemination. Sensationalism and sensationalist news, previously criticized, gain top priority under the "traffic supremacy" system, delivering a crushing blow to traditional public opinion paradigms. Professionalism, prudence, and objectivity, once considered the bedrock principles of journalism, are now cast aside under the pressure of traffic [24]. To attract more user attention, platforms and self-media tend to release provocative and emotionally charged content, sometimes fabricating false information or exaggerating facts. This commercially driven information dissemination not only exacerbates the defocusing of public opinion but also triggers secondary public sentiment events, negatively impacting social stability and public trust. For example, during the 2018 incident involving the murder of a girl in Leshan by a Didi Hitch driver, the self-media outlet "San Geng Canteen" published disrespectful content about the victim to boost clicks, inciting public outrage and ultimately being permanently shut down [25].

In addition to commercial interests, personal motives also play a crucial role in information dissemination, with every internet user potentially becoming a producer or spreader of rumors. In the 2020 case of "Hangzhou Woman Falsely Accused of Adultery While Picking Up a Delivery," two self-media users fabricated a false story for attention, deliberately inventing vulgar content alleging that a "female resident" had an affair with a "deliveryman." This information was posted in a WeChat group and quickly went viral on social media platforms, attracting widespread attention and discussion. The victim was subjected to cyberbullying, which caused severe psychological harm and social repercussions. Ultimately, judicial authorities determined that the actions of the two individuals constituted defamation, and they were held criminally liable under the law [26].

The technical characteristics of modern digital platforms have amplified the

impact of profit-driven motives on the defocusing of public opinion. Algorithms prioritize content with high engagement rates, which often includes extreme viewpoints or exaggerated statements, as seen in the aforementioned case. Such content attracts large numbers of netizens to participate, creating significant noise in the public discourse arena, blurring public focus, and obscuring factual truths, making it difficult to concentrate on key issues. Some self-media outlets deliberately create controversial topics (e.g., labels like "anti-rich" or "anti-official") in pursuit of commercial gain.

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), as critical nodes in information dissemination, are inevitably influenced by profit-driven motives within the capital-dominated online public opinion sphere. The concept of opinion leaders was initially proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld and others, referring to "active individuals" in interpersonal communication networks who provide information, opinions, and commentary while influencing others. In the new media environment, the identity characteristics of opinion leaders have undergone significant changes, manifesting in more diverse forms, such as "grassroots groups" and "internet celebrities." These individuals or groups possess considerable influence and credibility in specific fields, guiding public opinion and behavioral choices through their professional knowledge, social status, or personal charisma. KOLs generate economic benefits through advertising endorsements and traffic monetization. However, some prioritize short-term gains at the expense of social responsibility. Currently, rational expression and in-depth dialogue by opinion leaders in cyberspace are increasingly scarce, while entertainment-oriented styles have become more prominent, weakening their public role and leading to instances of misconduct [27].

Driven by the profit-seeking logic of capital, the public opinion arena has become a tool for profit-making, with private interests overshadowing public interests, resulting in an imbalance in the public opinion ecosystem and a deviation in value orientation. Fundamentally, there is an inherent tension between the profit-driven nature of capital and the public interest demands of the public opinion sphere. On one hand, capital aims to maximize profits by producing content that caters to audience preferences, often neglecting or even sacrificing public values. On the other hand, the public opinion arena, as an essential space for expressing societal opinions and fostering consensus, should serve the public interest, promoting rational dialogue and social progress. To foster the healthy development of the public opinion ecosystem, it is necessary to consider how to balance the profit-driven nature of capital with the public interest needs of the public opinion sphere.

2.2 Key Strategies for Addressing Dispersed Public Opinion

2.2.1 Public Opinion Guidance Strategies Based on Behavioral Economics

Behavioral economics is a discipline that integrates psychology and economics, aiming to reveal the irrational behavioral patterns exhibited by humans during decision-making processes. It breaks through the traditional economic assumption of the "rational person," arguing that individuals, when faced with complex information and uncertainty, are influenced by cognitive biases, emotional drivers, and environmental factors, leading to choices that deviate from optimal solutions [28]. By studying the irrational factors in human decision-making, behavioral economics provides theoretical foundations and practical pathways for guiding public opinion. In the new media environment, social media users' information processing and behavioral choices are often affected by risk perception, emotional fermentation, and imbalances in information supply and demand [29]. This section explores how to optimize public opinion guidance strategies based on core theories of behavioral economics, focusing on two dimensions: choice architecture design and incentive mechanism design.

1. Choice architecture design: Optimizing Information Presentation Methods

Choice architecture design refers to a method of subtly influencing public choices and focus points by adjusting how information is presented. Under conditions of perceived sentiment risks, users' behavioral decisions are prone to being influenced by cognitive conflicts and emotional imbalance. Therefore, optimizing information presentation can effectively guide the public to focus on core issues, avoiding distractions from irrelevant content.

Default option settings: Default options are an important intervention tool in behavioral economics, significantly influencing user preferences without forcibly altering their behavior. In the online public opinion arena, platforms can reduce the exposure of false information and extreme viewpoints by setting default displays to prioritize authoritative media or official institution-released information. For instance, during emergencies, social media platforms can prioritize verified factual reports over unverified user-generated content. This approach not only helps the public quickly access reliable information but also reduces the likelihood of rumor propagation.

Additionally, based on the theory of "loss aversion" (where sensitivity to losses far exceeds sensitivity to gains), users are more sensitive to negative information. Therefore, in public opinion guidance, adopting a "risk framing" approach can enhance the persuasiveness of messages. For example, emphasizing the risks of ignoring authoritative information can increase the audience's sense of urgency and attention to core issues, more effectively attracting user focus.

Information ranking and recommendation algorithm optimization: Current recommendation algorithms often prioritize click-through rates and engagement metrics, which can lead to emotionally charged content dominating public discourse. To address this issue, platforms can optimize algorithm logic to prioritize diverse and

rational content rather than sorting solely based on user preferences. For example, increasing the weight of opposing viewpoints can help users break free from the "information cocoon" effect. Additionally, providing tiered content categorization functions (e.g., in-depth analysis, brief summaries) allows users to choose different styles of content autonomously, helping to mitigate the reinforcement of singular emotions.

According to the "dual-process theory," when facing complex information, users tend to rely on fast, automatic information processing methods—using heuristic strategies based on intuition and experience rules—rather than engaging in resource-intensive systematic thinking. Therefore, platforms should simplify information structures and highlight key points to reduce users' cognitive load, thereby improving the dissemination efficiency of core messages.

Visualization and emotional design: Using charts, short videos, and other formats to present complex information intuitively can lower the cognitive threshold for the public while avoiding overly emotional language that might provoke group polarization. For instance, in public opinion guidance related to public health events, visualizing data to show the development of an epidemic can effectively alleviate public anxiety and promote rational discussion. Research indicates that when new information deviates from users' prior knowledge, cognitive conflict can trigger emotional imbalance, catalyzing emotional fermentation. Therefore, using plain language and intuitive formats helps maintain relative emotional balance and reduces the occurrence of irrational behaviors.

At the same time, "confirmation bias" suggests that users tend to select information supporting their existing views while ignoring contradictory content. Thus, platforms can help users gradually correct cognitive biases by presenting facts from multiple perspectives, enhancing comprehensive and in-depth understanding of core issues.

2. Incentive Mechanism Design: Encouraging Rational Discussion

Incentive mechanism design aims to shape public behavioral habits through rewards and penalties, thereby curbing the spread of extreme viewpoints and encouraging rational expression. Under conditions of perceived sentiment risks, users' emotional states directly influence their information needs and behavioral responses. Therefore, a combination of positive incentives and negative constraints is required to guide users toward making informed decisions.

Rewarding rational discussion: Recognizing users who engage in rational discussions through points, badges, or other forms of acknowledgment can enhance their sense of social identity and encourage more people to participate in rational dialogue. For example, Zhihu—a Chinese Q&A community centered on knowledge sharing and exchange—has the vision of "enabling everyone to efficiently obtain reliable answers." By rewarding high-quality answers with upvotes and traffic-based

revenue sharing, Zhihu has effectively improved content quality [30].

Punishing extreme speech: Implementing tiered penalty measures for users who spread false information or incite emotionally charged expressions—such as short-term muting or permanent account bans—can serve as a deterrent to others. Social platforms can introduce a "credit scoring system" that tracks the authenticity and constructiveness of users' posts, using this as a basis for resource allocation (e.g., traffic prioritization). This transparent punitive mechanism not only deters undesirable behavior but also enhances public trust in platform rules.

Leveraging technology for precise guidance: Individual difference theory highlights that users vary in their attitudes, emotions, and behavioral responses to public opinion events. Therefore, personalized regulatory measures targeting specific groups are necessary. For instance, blockchain technology can be used to trace the origins of risky information, build user profiles, and dynamically analyze emotional trends and behavioral trajectories, continuously improving the precision and accuracy of guidance [31]. Additionally, using emotional tools to identify users' intrinsic emotional drivers—especially focusing on guiding neutral-emotion users' risk perceptions toward a more positive direction—is an important means of enhancing the effectiveness of public opinion guidance.

2.2.2 Comprehensive Governance Model through Multi-Party Collaboration

The complexity and dynamism of the public opinion arena make it difficult for a single entity to effectively address the phenomenon of public opinion defocusing. Therefore, establishing a comprehensive collaborative governance system that encompasses multiple stakeholders—such as the government, enterprises, social organizations, and the public—is crucial. This system advocates for each stakeholder to fulfill their roles based on clearly defined responsibilities and powers, working closely together to enhance the overall effectiveness of public opinion governance.

1. Government Leadership: Playing a Coordinating and Supervisory Role

Legal regulation: The government provides institutional support for online public opinion governance by improving the legal and regulatory framework. For example, the *Regulation on the Management of Internet Comment Services*, implemented in China starting October 1, 2017, explicitly prohibits paid post deletion and the hiring of "internet water armies," fundamentally curbing the manipulation of public opinion by capital [32]. Additionally, the *Regulation on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendation Services for Internet Information*, which came into effect on March 1, 2022, further regulates algorithmic recommendation services, preventing economic capital from using technical means to interfere with public opinion trends. These legal provisions not only clarify governance boundaries but also provide a basis for subsequent law enforcement [33].

Administrative oversight and interview mechanisms: In daily oversight, the

Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) constrains platform behavior through various methods, such as handling complaints, launching special campaigns, and conducting administrative interviews. Administrative interviews, as a flexible governance tool, avoid the negative impact of rigid penalties on businesses while providing them with opportunities for self-correction. For instance, the *Provisions on Interviewing Internet News Information Service Providers*, issued in 2015, clearly outlines scenarios for interviews and corrective measures, achieving significant results.

Support for trustworthy media institutions: The government can support the development of trustworthy internet companies and mainstream media through policy incentives. Providing financial subsidies and tax reductions to these entities lowers their operational costs, encouraging them to invest more resources in content innovation and technological upgrades. Supporting international cooperation and exchanges helps enhance their influence and competitiveness on the global stage. Participation in international exhibitions and the establishment of overseas branches enable these entities to expand into international markets. Meanwhile, granting certain enterprises licenses for *Internet News Information Services* encourages standardized dissemination activities and elevates industry standards. While implementing policy incentives, the government must balance support and regulation to prevent excessive intervention that could lead to market failure. It is also essential to ensure fairness and transparency in policy implementation to guarantee its effectiveness.

2. Corporate Self-Regulation: Strengthening Internal Governance Capabilities

Industry self-regulation: Industry self-regulation is a critical manifestation of internet companies' role in public opinion governance and serves as an effective complement to government oversight. Companies and commercial media should prioritize social benefits over economic gains, especially in major events involving public interests, by proactively assuming social responsibility [34]. Internet enterprises can collaborate to establish industry standards and rules; information sharing among platforms helps identify violations and fosters collective supervision within the industry [35]. Companies should enhance their understanding of laws and regulations to ensure that business activities are legal and compliant. For instance, concerning issues like internet water armies and paid post deletions, businesses must strictly adhere to regulations such as the *Regulation on the Management of Internet Comment Services* to prevent such occurrences.

Technology-driven governance: Internet companies possess abundant technological capital and can achieve precise governance of the public opinion arena by upgrading algorithm models and technical tools [36]. Platforms can use machine learning and big data analysis to automatically identify clickbait, vulgar content, and

fake traffic behaviors. For example, regarding clickbait, common exaggerated phrases can be compiled into a database to train algorithms for filtering; combining user reading behavior data (such as short dwell times and quick exits) can further improve identification accuracy. Platforms can record metrics like user dwell time, number of comments, and number of saves for articles through algorithmic models, assigning different weights to calculate recommendation indices, thereby increasing the promotion of high-quality content. This mechanism not only encourages original authors to produce high-quality content but also guides users to focus on core issues, fostering a rational discussion atmosphere.

Content management: Platforms must rigorously vet information sources to prevent the spread of misinformation at its source. In response to negative public sentiment, relevant industry bodies should swiftly respond, expressing their stance to alleviate public concerns, demonstrating corporate responsibility and commitment. Based on algorithms and AI technology, platforms should establish human review mechanisms to reduce misjudgments caused by automated reviews, thus protecting the freedom of information dissemination [37].

3. Participation of Social Organizations: Aggregating Civilian Wisdom

Supervision and feedback: Social organizations have independence and professionalism, enabling them to objectively assess the online public opinion arena from a third-party perspective. They can keenly capture dynamic changes, reveal potential issues that may be overlooked or concealed, and propose targeted suggestions. Through regular monitoring and reporting, social organizations can provide comprehensive and accurate information about the online public opinion arena to governments, businesses, and the public. Such information helps all parties better understand the current situation and development trends of the public opinion arena, facilitating more informed decision-making.

Building bridges for dialogue: Social organizations can host seminars, forums, and other activities to invite experts, scholars, opinion leaders, and ordinary citizens to discuss controversial topics. This approach helps form diverse voices, preventing any single viewpoint from dominating, ensuring the comprehensiveness and balance of discussions. For example, in matters related to public policy or sensitive social issues, social organizations can coordinate various opinions, promote deeper rational discussions, and help form more comprehensive and objective consensus.

Assisting vulnerable groups in voicing their opinions: In some significant social events, vulnerable groups often lack a voice and are overlooked. Social organizations can gather and organize the opinions of these groups, presenting them collectively to mainstream media or government departments to ensure their voices are heard. For individuals subjected to cyberbullying or other unfair treatment, social organizations can offer legal aid and psychological counseling services to help them cope with difficulties. For instance, setting up dedicated hotlines to provide

consultation and intervention services for users affected by cyber attacks.

2.2.3 Pathways to Enhancing Media Literacy for a Collective Governance Culture

The frequent occurrences of public opinion defocusing not only reflect changes in the mechanisms of information dissemination but also highlight deficiencies in public media literacy. Media literacy refers to the capabilities displayed by the public in acquiring, analyzing, evaluating, and creating information. Its core lies in cultivating individuals' critical thinking towards media content and their understanding of information dissemination patterns [38]. With the rapid development of new media technologies, media literacy has evolved from being an individual's skill to a cornerstone for achieving collective governance. Through systematic education and practical activities, it is possible to comprehensively enhance the public's information processing abilities and rational expression levels, thereby providing robust social support for constructing a healthy and orderly public opinion environment.

1. Stratified and Categorized Promotion of Media Literacy Education

Media literacy education should be designed and implemented in a stratified and categorized manner according to the characteristics and needs of different groups, ensuring broad coverage and targeted effectiveness. Introducing relevant education during the preschool stage can help children develop correct media usage habits from an early age. Appropriate educational measures can enable children to distinguish between high-quality and low-quality media content, thus shielding them from negative influences [39]. For younger children, parents should assist in selecting age-appropriate media content and set daily limits on electronic device usage. Parents should also serve as role models by demonstrating responsible media use, such as avoiding phone use during meals or excessive engagement with social media. By setting examples through their own behavior, parents can teach children how to use media responsibly and reasonably, fostering both personal growth and enhanced family communication. For middle school students, the focus can shift towards fundamental information acquisition skills, including how to efficiently search, filter, and evaluate various information resources.

When discussing the multidimensional connotations of media literacy, existing studies indicate that most participants accurately understand that the core of media literacy lies in critically reflecting on media content (Arsenijević & Andevski, 2022). However, research also reveals a noteworthy phenomenon: although participants exhibit high cognitive levels in critical reflection, they show inadequacies in content creation abilities, which are crucial features of participatory culture. College students should further deepen their cultivation of critical analysis skills. Media literacy is not limited to consuming information but should also include the ability to create and disseminate content [40]. This requires not only the capability to deeply analyze the

intentions and social impacts behind media content and distinguish between factual statements and opinion expressions but also encourages them to express their views through various media forms (such as articles, videos, podcasts, etc.), actively participate in public discussions, thereby enhancing personal expression and creative thinking, and strengthening their sense of social responsibility and civic participation in the digital age. These research findings suggest that while current media literacy education emphasizes the cultivation of critical thinking, there remains a deficiency in encouraging users to actively create and disseminate content. Therefore, future media literacy education should place greater emphasis on cultivating students' creative abilities.

Additionally, for adults, especially professionals, community training and corporate training can be used to enhance media literacy. For example, conducting popular science activities on topics such as big data and algorithm recommendations can help them understand the technical logic of information dissemination, avoiding falling into the "information cocoon" effect. By explaining how to identify online rumors and malicious hype in conjunction with hot events, it can further enhance their ability to cope with complex information environments.

The elderly, due to their late adoption of new media, are prone to becoming targets of false information. Communities can offer special lectures or workshops to teach how to discern online fraud and fake advertisements, among other high-risk contents. Family members should also play the role of guides in daily life, helping the elderly adapt to digital living.

2. Innovating Educational Forms and Content

Multimedia Interactive Teaching: In modern education, the introduction of multimedia interactive teaching tools has provided students with a more engaging and intuitive learning experience. Technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) have broken the spatiotemporal limitations of traditional education, offering immersive learning experiences that help students better understand complex media phenomena. The use of digital tools (e.g., online courses, gamified learning platforms) can further enhance the enjoyment and effectiveness of learning. For instance, designing interactive question-and-answer games based on media literacy, with varying difficulty levels, can test users' abilities to identify, analyze, evaluate, and create media content, fostering a virtuous cycle of "learning through play and playing while learning."

Scenario Simulation and Practical Teaching: Conducting scenario simulation activities, such as simulating the process of information dissemination during online hot events, allows participants to experience firsthand how information is generated, spreads, and eventually becomes a focal point of public opinion. These experiential activities not only deepen the public's understanding of the phenomenon of public opinion defocusing but also improve their ability to analyze and interpret

information. Students should be encouraged to engage in project-based learning by participating in real-world media creation activities. For example, producing short videos, podcasts, or blog posts can enhance their creative skills and critical thinking.

Interdisciplinary Integration: Media literacy education should be integrated into the teaching of various disciplines, such as psychology, social sciences, and technology courses. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, students can understand and apply media literacy from multiple perspectives [41]. For instance, by analyzing the impact of algorithmic recommendation mechanisms on cognition, the public can reflect on their own information consumption habits and explore the phenomenon of "information cocoons" on social media, assessing their potential risks for individual cognitive biases and group polarization, thereby enhancing insight and judgment regarding the media environment. By teaching emotional management techniques, the public can remain calm when facing hot-button issues. In the social sciences, combining theories from sociology and communication studies can guide students to deeply understand the role of media in social structures, cultural heritage, and public issues, considering how media shapes social cognition, influences public opinion, and functions as a communication and coordination tool during social crises. Students from different academic backgrounds can jointly participate in digital literacy training [42]. This interdisciplinary educational model not only broadens the horizons and depth of media literacy education but also promotes the comprehensive development of students' abilities.

3. Building a Culture of Collective Governance

The ultimate goal of media literacy education is to foster a culture of collective governance where everyone can become a builder and protector of a healthy public opinion ecosystem. In such an environment, the public will be more proactive in resisting misinformation, malicious attacks, and other harmful behaviors, thereby creating a positive online ecosystem. To achieve this goal, efforts should be coordinated across the following areas:

Strengthening Social Responsibility Awareness: Media literacy education should not only impart knowledge but also cultivate the public's sense of social responsibility. By analyzing typical cases, such as the spread and harm of online rumors, the public can gain a deeper understanding of the ripple effects and amplification of individual actions in cyberspace. This awareness encourages individuals to consciously regulate their behavior, avoid blindly following trends or engaging in malicious hype, and use media as a tool to access information, express opinions, and participate in public affairs—rather than being passively swept along by the information flood [43].

Leveraging the Role of Opinion Leaders: Opinion leaders hold significant influence in online discourse, and their words and actions directly shape public attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, training and supporting opinion leaders to

promote positive energy, advocate for rational discussions, and resist extreme emotions can play a pivotal role in fostering a healthier digital environment.

Building a Multi-Stakeholder Support System: Educational interventions are crucial in enhancing society's overall media literacy. Schools and families must jointly shoulder the responsibility of media literacy education, equipping individuals with the essential skills to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly, enabling them to contribute positively to the digital environment [44]. Governments and educational authorities should formulate policies to ensure that media literacy education is prioritized and promoted at all educational levels. For instance, establishing a national media literacy program, developing teaching materials, training educators, and providing educational resources are critical steps. Additionally, leveraging diverse channels such as traditional media and social platforms for widespread public awareness campaigns can enhance societal recognition of the importance of media literacy.

Citizens should actively learn to identify the credibility of media information by focusing on how the information is constructed, the sources it relies on, the professionalism of those sources, and the way the media reports the information [45]. They can participate in information verification by using digital tools and fact-checking websites, such as "The Paper Fact Check" in China, to confirm the accuracy of the information. Besides, they should examine the identity of the media authors and the authenticity of the platforms, ensuring the reliability of information from multiple approaches.

2.3 International Comparison and Experience Reference of Implementation Strategies

Public opinion governance is a complex systemic project, and countries have accumulated rich experiences in dealing with similar challenges. Through international comparative analysis, valuable references can be provided for formulating effective public opinion governance strategies within one's own country.

The United States: As the birthplace of internet technology, the U.S. not only leads in technological innovation but also fosters a distinctive liberal cultural tradition due to the influence of liberalist ideologies. Over time, this tradition has evolved into a profound respect for individual expression rights in cyberspace. The U.S. framework for internet governance prioritizes safeguarding national cybersecurity and the stability of critical information infrastructure. Concurrently, it employs a multi-faceted collaborative mechanism involving legislation, judiciary, and industry self-regulation to establish a system centered on protecting citizens' freedom of speech [46]. The U.S. has enacted extensive laws related to information security, such as the Homeland Security Act and the Children's Internet Protection Act, which cover

various critical dimensions including the protection of information network infrastructures, and regulations concerning the collection, utilization, and dissemination of information. These laws delineate the boundaries of online discourse and provide legal frameworks to address issues like cyber rumors and doxxing.

Germany: Germany's approach to managing online public sentiment is characterized by its diversity. The government enacts laws to regulate online behavior, establishes specialized agencies for overseeing online sentiment, and encourages participation from social organizations, internet companies, and netizens in governance efforts. In Germany, endorsing threatening comments through likes is explicitly defined as a criminal act. Judicial rulings in such cases consider the influencer's personal impact and the societal ramifications of the liked content as crucial factors for sentencing. To effectively combat cyberbullying, non-governmental organizations have launched support projects in Berlin aimed at aiding victims of online violence. These initiatives offer free psychological counseling and professional legal advice to victims. For those facing financial hardships, the projects may provide necessary funding for legal proceedings, embodying principles of humanitarian care and social responsibility [47].

Asian Countries: In Japan, public opinion governance is achieved through a combination of media literacy education, industry self-regulation, and judicial restrictions. The Japanese government places significant emphasis on enhancing the public's—especially young people's—ability to discern misinformation. As early as 2006, Japan emphasized that media literacy education must involve interdisciplinary collaboration. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology launched the "Media Literacy Education Program," which, through both classroom and extracurricular activities, helps students develop critical thinking skills and understand how to use new media tools along with their associated risks [48]. The government collaborates with social organizations to organize lectures and workshops aimed at providing digital skills training for parents and elderly groups. In terms of practical oversight, Japan has established several self-regulatory bodies, such as the Japan Newspaper Association and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which have developed detailed ethical guidelines and codes of conduct requiring media to adhere to public interest principles and avoid excessive reporting or interviews. The Japanese judicial system imposes restrictions on media reports that could infringe upon personal privacy or reputation, ensuring that public scrutiny does not cross boundaries [49]. South Korea was an early adopter of online real-name registration and has enhanced public awareness of legal responsibilities in new media usage through legal education campaigns. Korean internet governance adheres to clear principles, prioritizing the protection of national core interests and maintaining social order stability as non-negotiable bottom lines. Within this framework, efforts are made to create a free, healthy, and vibrant online space for citizens [51].

Singapore's approach to internet governance centers around "balance," adopting a strategy of neither blocking nor censoring content but regulating online behavior through legal measures to maintain social harmony. The government engages with the public via platforms like Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, adapting to the communication needs of the new media era. Political figures also share aspects of their lives and work through personalized social media channels to strengthen connections with the public. The Singaporean government stresses distinguishing genuine public sentiment from manipulated opinions and encourages responsible expression among the populace [52]. This governance logic reflects a balance between openness and control, fostering a new type of contract relationship between the government and its citizens.

In formulating governance strategies, respecting cultural diversity is a fundamental principle. A one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided; instead, strategies should exhibit sufficient flexibility and inclusiveness. From an international perspective, each country exhibits distinct differences in areas such as internet infrastructure, technological levels, netizen population size, and legal frameworks. While drawing on international experiences, it is essential to adapt these insights to local conditions. For instance, in legal regulation, one might consider referencing the European Union's Digital Services Act but adjust specific clauses according to domestic circumstances. In terms of technical support, foreign advanced technologies can be introduced while simultaneously bolstering indigenous research and development capabilities.

Summary of Chapter 2

In the thriving era of new media, existing mechanisms for public opinion governance reveal multiple limitations. Current laws and regulations struggle to fully adapt to the dynamism and complexity of the new media environment. The rapid dissemination speed, broad reach, and diverse formats of new media render traditional legal frameworks inadequate in defining boundaries for online speech and delineating platform responsibilities, leading to increased law enforcement difficulties and ineffective regulation of new media public opinion.

While there have been advancements in sentiment monitoring tools and technical methods, their effectiveness and coverage still need improvement. On the societal mobilization front, the role of public participation and social organizations remains underutilized, with trust deficits and resource scarcity posing significant obstacles. Moreover, as core nodes for information dissemination, social media platforms' sense of responsibility and technical capabilities directly impact the health of the public opinion ecosystem. Some platforms, in pursuit of traffic and user engagement, inadequately vet information, allowing false and vulgar content to

proliferate, thus exacerbating defocusing of public opinion. Driven by commercial interests and personal motives, some media and self-media exaggerate facts or create sensational news, while individuals may spread unverified information to fulfill expressive desires or gain attention, further contributing to confusion and defocusing of public opinion.

To address these issues, this chapter proposes key strategies including public opinion guidance based on behavioral economics, a comprehensive governance model involving multiple parties, and paths for enhancing media literacy across society. By optimizing information presentation methods (such as choice architecture design) and introducing incentive mechanisms, it is possible to effectively guide public focus towards core topics and reduce the spread of extreme viewpoints. In terms of multi-party collaboration, governments, enterprises, and non-governmental organizations must clarify their roles and work together to tackle complex public opinion environments. This collaborative approach not only integrates various resources but also enhances the flexibility and coverage of governance efforts. Concurrently, fostering a culture of universal co-governance is crucial for achieving long-term governance goals. Through tiered and categorized media literacy education, the public's ability to discern false information and engage in rational discussions can be enhanced, promoting a rational, objective, and inclusive online culture that boosts overall societal resilience against misinformation.

This chapter also explores practices in public opinion governance from the United States, Germany, and Asian countries (Japan, Singapore, Korea). Insights from international experiences highlight the necessity of building diversified governance systems that integrate legal, technological, educational, and social forces into an organic whole characterized by mutual support and promotion. Laws provide clear guidelines and norms for cyberspace order. Countries formulate and improve relevant laws and regulations not only to safeguard citizens' freedom of speech but also to clearly define the boundaries of online discourse, effectively regulating online behavior and preventing the emergence and spread of negative phenomena such as internet rumors and cyberbullying. Social forces play an indispensable role as supplements to public opinion governance. Future efforts in advancing public opinion governance should consider national conditions, cultural characteristics, and stages of social development, focusing on establishing comprehensive governance systems and exploring governance paths suited to their specific contexts, thereby providing solid support for achieving a healthy and orderly public opinion ecosystem.

CHAPTER 3

CASE ANALYSIS AND PRACTICAL EXPLORATION

3.1 Wu Yanni's Controversy: Gender Bias in Public Opinion Defocus

Examining the interaction between media dynamics, society gender norms, and digital platform structures using the phenomena of public opinion defocus in the case of Wu Yanni during the Hangzhou Asian Games provides a potent lens. First, it is important to set the scene of events surrounding Wu Yanni's performance and later media coverage so that one may fully appreciate how public conversation turned away from significant achievements towards superficial traits. Following the path of the incident from its source through its viral amplification helps us to better understand the systematic elements causing the noted trends of gender bias and attention diversion in new media environments.



Figure 3.1 – Weibo WuYanni Controversy Report-1

Footnote – <https://wx3.sinaimg.cn/mw690/bd91d3d4gy1i0valya3ibj22kl3uw4qq.jpg>



Figure 3.2 – Weibo WuYanni Controversy Report-2

Footnote – <https://wx3.sinaimg.cn/mw690/005vnhZYgy1hr7p9z0q55j61kw11xdkt02.jpg>

3.1.1 Event Overview

Particularly as it interacts with issues of gender bias, the **debate around Wu Yanni during The 19th Asian Games Hangzhou** presents a convincing case study for understanding the dynamics of public opinion defocus in the new media environment. Chinese track and field athlete Wu Yanni, who specialises in hurdles, arrived at the Games much awaited for her athletic ability. Wu, who had an outstanding track record and was well-known for her performances in past national events, was much anticipated to highlight women's sports in China. But as the events transpired, it was clear that public attention turned sharply from her performance in front of professionals to conversations about her appearance, gestures, demeanour, and claimed flamboyance. This phenomena offers a moving example of how algorithmic amplification, participatory culture, and ingrained gender stereotypes affect new media dynamics, so guiding the defocusing of public opinion from central society issues towards marginal details [53].

Wu Yanni gave quite excellent competition. She showed competitive attitude, physical conditioning, and great technical ability. Her performance in the women's 100-meter hurdles set her among the best in Asia. Still, these athletic successes got disproportionately less attention on new media outlets than conversations about her makeup, style choices—like the vivid colours of her sportswear and makeup—and, most importantly, her post-competition sky-pointing gesture, which was photographed and shared extensively. Online platforms saw different interpretations of the gesture—a personal celebration of success and thanks—some calling it ostentatious or seeking pointless attention. Furthermore, some sections of the public misinterpreted Wu's directness in post-race interviews—where she expressed

confidence in herself and underlined her wish to be a symbol of strength and independence for Chinese women—as arrogance, so focussing more on her personality than on her athletic ability.

This defocusing of public opinion did not happen naturally but was greatly mediated through new media ecosystems, particularly on platforms like Douyin and Weibo, where short video content, meme culture, and algorithmic trending mechanisms were absolutely crucial in determining narrative frames. More quickly and with much more interaction than those showing Wu's actual race performances, video clips highlighting her appearance spread. For example, Douyin's data analytics during the Games period revealed that videos stressing Wu's makeup tutorials, hair styling, and the "sky-pointing" moment attracted viewers numbers several times higher than official replays of her hurdle events. Memes parodying Wu's gestures spread simultaneously, generating a viral cycle that highlighted surface features instead of athletic ability, so drawing public attention on less than admirable qualities.

The public debate on the internet turned quickly polarised. On one side, some users hailed Wu Yanni's confidence, boldness, and expression of uniqueness as a welcome change from the conventional reserved image of female athletes. Wu's self-presentation, they claimed, questioned out-of-date gender stereotypes and presented a modern picture of empowered women in sports. Conversely, a bigger and louder cohort attacked her appearance and behaviour as unprofessional and inappropriate, so reflecting ingrained gender prejudices that hold female athletes to different behavioural standards than their male counterparts. Wu's assertiveness, praised in male athletes as charm and leadership, was interpreted negatively when expressed by a woman, so exposing the still existing double standard in public opinion.

The differences in viewpoint reflected more general social trends than only anecdotal ones. Data gathered from Weibo's trending topics revealed that the hashtags connected to Wu's appearance—such as **#WuYanniMakeup**, **#WuYanniGesture**, and **#WuYanniFlamboyance**—regularly ranked higher than those connected to her race outcomes or athletic performance. Over 70% of related Weibo posts discussed elements of her physical presentation rather than her athletic performance 48 hours after her competition. Sentiment analysis found that among posts referencing her appearance, roughly 55% had negative or mocking undertones; only roughly 15% of posts emphasising her athletic ability expressed a positive sentiment. Furthermore, among the top 100 most shared posts involving Wu Yanni during this period, less than 10% discussed her hurdling techniques, training efforts, or athletic strategy, so highlighting the degree to which public debate had defocused from the substantive core of her participation.

Demographic and regional analyses of participation patterns offered other perspectives on how public opinion crystallised around non-athletic elements.

Examining Douyin and Weibo user data found that younger users aged 18 – 30, especially in metropolitan areas like Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, engaged with appearance-related content disproportionately more. While male users were considerably more likely to express negative sentiments, criticising her for being "too showy" or "distinctive from the spirit of athletics," gender-disaggregated data revealed that female users were slightly more likely than male users to comment positively on Wu's bold style choices, framing them inside a narrative of female empowerment. Such patterns not only highlight the role of demographic variables in shaping public opinion but also reveal the entanglement between gender expectations and perceptions of propriety in the public sphere [54].

It is impossible to overestimate how much new media algorithms aggravate this defocus. Content that creates high user engagement—often expressed in terms of clicks, shares, likes, and comments—is first priority on platforms like Douyin and Weibo. Content stressing her looks and gestures in Wu Yanni's case, by virtue of their emotional and visual immediacy, naturally achieved higher engagement metrics than dry reports of race times or interviews about training regimens. Though it excluded conversations of sporting excellence, the algorithmic feedback loop rewarded and further encouraged narratives focused on appearance. A major component of the modern new media environment, this structural inclination towards sensational and aesthetically pleasing content is what helped to skew public attention in Wu's case.

Media outlets—both mainstream and self-media (individual bloggers and commentators)—amplified these trends simultaneously, sometimes giving sensational headlines top priority over thorough reporting. Publications with titles like "Wu Yanni's Dazzling Makeup at the Asian Games Sparks Heated Debate" or "Is Wu Yanni Too Bold for Chinese Athletics?" proliferated, orienting the conversation in ways that highlighted controversy and personality over athletic achievement. Commercial needs to maximise traffic and advertising income drove many of these editorial decisions, so highlighting how profit motives interact with technical systems to shape public opinion.

For Wu Yanni personally as well as for more general society debates about gender, media, and sport, the results of this public opinion defocus were major. As revealed in a later interview when Wu admitted to feeling misinterpreted and isolated despite having performed at the height of her athletic career, Wu experienced great emotional stress from the constant scrutiny and often hostile comments. The episode for society at large mirrored the ongoing difficulties women seeking to assert agency and uniqueness in highly public spheres encounter. It underlined the need of more strong media literacy and public education to support fairer and more significant interactions with public personalities and revealed the fragility of public support for female figures who deviate from conventional scripts of modesty and conformity.

Furthermore, the Wu Yanni debate started important conversations on how

digital platforms should shape public opinion. It spurred discussions among Chinese internet governance agencies and media studies experts about the necessity of intervention plans meant to reduce the algorithmic amplification of biased content. Especially during national and international athletic events, proposals surfaced calling for changes to recommendation systems to give content emphasising professional achievements top priority rather than surface qualities. Concrete systematic changes in content recommendation practices remained limited, exposing the inertia inherent in profit-driven platform architectures even while platforms like Douyin and Weibo issued statements affirming their commitment to promoting good values.

Apart from platform governance and algorithms, the Wu Yanni event acted as impetus for grassroots social movement. Feminist groups and progressive analysts seized the debate as a chance to draw attention to more general trends in gendered media representation and demand group analysis of the norms to which women are held in public life. Though their influence was small compared to the prevailing defocused stories, hashtags like #SupportWuYanni and #FocusOnStrengthNotAppearance briefly trended as counter-movements.

Since then, the incident has been cited as a perfect example of new media-induced public opinion defocus in academic circles and has added to continuous scholarly debates on digital gender politics. Scholars have observed how Wu Yanni's case reflects the intersectionality of media sensationalism, algorithmic governance, and ingrained society prejudices, so creating a complex web that channels public attention away from substantive achievements and towards ephemeral conflicts. It has also spurred demands for multidisciplinary research projects combining media studies, gender studies, and data science to more methodically track how online conversation changes around public personalities in the digital era.

3.1.2 Analysis of Public Opinion Defocus

1. Attention Shift

The public conversation about Wu Yanni during the Hangzhou Asian Games offers a classic case study of attention shift dynamics in the new media environment. Though she gave a great athletic performance, the great majority of internet conversation focused on her appearance, gestures, and public persona rather than on her athletic ability. Extensive empirical data taken from Weibo, Douyin, and related analytical tools provides a clear picture of this phenomena.

Following the Asian Games, between October 1st and October 10th, 2023, there were roughly 4.78 million postings on Weibo alone about Wu Yanni. Of these, 3.26 million—about 68.2%—made direct reference to her appearance, including remarks on her makeup, hairstyle, accessory choice, and clothes line-of-reference. Posts concentrating only on her athletic performance, technique, or race times, on the

other hand, accounted for just about 431,200 entries, or 9.02% of the total volume.

Engagement numbers show even more the differences in focus. While posts emphasising Wu's race averaged just 2,958 likes per post, posts discussing her makeup and gestures averaged 12,643 likes per post. The difference in share rates was even more evident: sport-oriented posts were shared just 611 times on average while appearance-oriented posts were shared an average of 4,273 times. Comment rates also displayed a similar slant, averaging 1,987 comments per appearance-related post against just 452 comments on athletic analysis posts [55].

Examining Douyin's user interaction data closely supports this finding. Compared to just 92 million views for videos tagged under **#WuYanniHurdles** or **#WuYanniPerformance**, videos tagged under **#WuYanniMakeup** and **#WuYanniGesture** accumulated a combined 678 million views within a week. Especially, the most watched video clip—which included a slow-motion replay of Wu Yanni's sky-pointing gesture mixed with commentary on her "diva-like presence"—accumulated 23.46 million views within 72 hours. Her official highlight reel of her hurdle final, uploaded by Douyin on CCTV-5, attracted just 2.81 million views in the same period.

An emotional polarity study of the postings highlighted the direction of attention even more. Out of all the appearance-related posts, negative emotional expressions—including sarcasm, ridicule, and mockery—accounted for about 57.3% of all emotional classifications; positive affirmations—such as respect for her uniqueness—commented on just 18.6%. In sport-centered conversations, on the other hand, positive sentiments (praise for her performance, encouragement) accounted for 61.8%, while negative sentiments limited to just 9.7%, so highlighting a clear emotional asymmetry depending on the topic of the discussion.

Data taken from the top 500,000 Weibo users participating in Wu Yanni conversations showed, geologically, users aged 18 – 24 were the most active group, making up 39.8% of total posts. This age range was 3.4 times more likely than others to discuss appearance rather than performance. Geographically, urban residents from tier-1 cities including Shanghai (17.3% of posts), Beijing (15.6%), and Guangzhou (11.9%) dominated the conversation; interestingly, the ratio of appearance to performance-oriented posts was even more skewed in second-tier and third-tier cities, suggesting that new media sensationalism permeated generally across different regional demographics.

This extreme emphasis on surface characteristics is a classic case of attention shift in public opinion: visual immediacy, emotional provocation, and social contagion mechanisms combined to mass displacement of public discourse away from central athletic merit and towards peripheral personal attributes. Together, the statistical asymmetry between talks of appearance against performance, engagement rates favouring sensational content, and sentiment polarity analysis confirms the

degree and depth of this defocus phenomena.

Table 3.1 – Attention Shift Comparative Data

Category	Appearance-related	Performance-related
Number of Posts	3260000	431200
Percentage of Total Posts	68.20%	9.02%
Average Likes per Post	12643	2958
Average Shares per Post	4273	611
Average Comments per Post	1987	452
Total Video Views (Douyin)	678000000	92000000
Top Single Video Views (Douyin)	23460000	2810000
Positive Sentiment (%)	18.60%	61.80%
Negative Sentiment (%)	57.30%	9.70%

Footnote – Source:own development

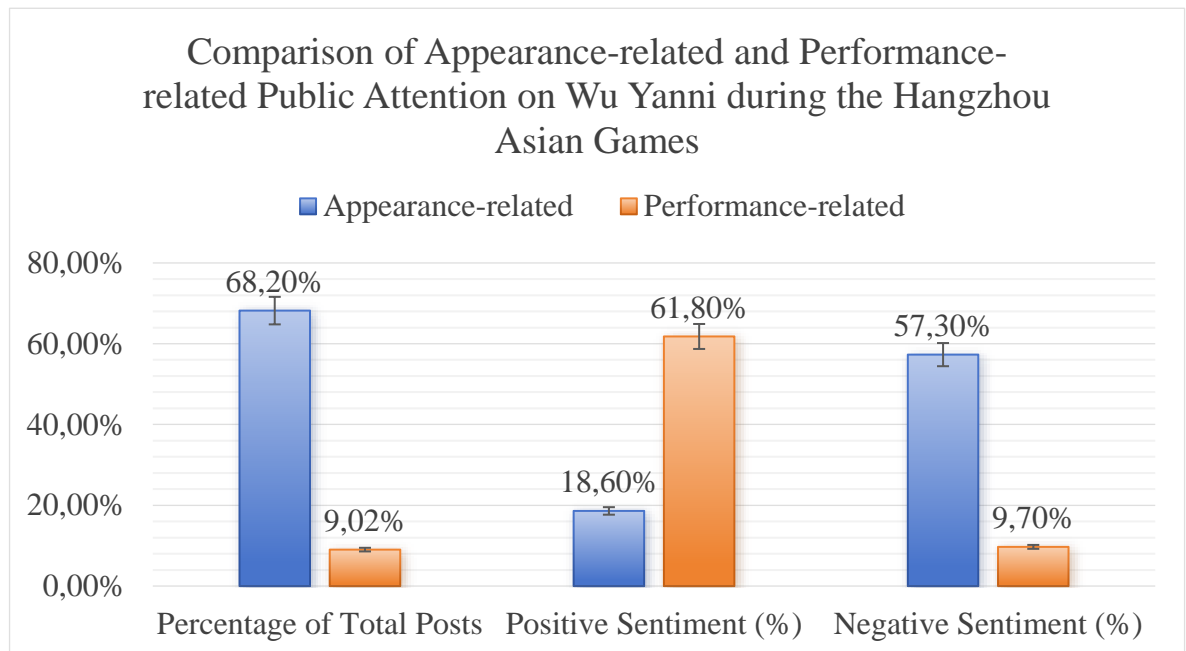


Figure 3.3 – Comparison of Appearance-related and Performance-related Public Attention on Wu Yanni during the Hangzhou Asian Games

Footnote – Source:own development

2. Role of New Media

For Wu Yanni, new media serves both structural and cultural functions in helping to magnify the defocus of public opinion. Structurally speaking, platforms like Douyin and Weibo naturally favour visually appealing, emotionally charged, and easily consumed content. Trending algorithms, short video formats, and recommender systems are meant to maximise user engagement—not to foster significant or balanced debate. Under this system, a split-second gesture or a vibrant image beats thorough textual analysis or sober contemplation of athletic success. The dynamic images and expressive body language Wu Yanni used in her aesthetic presentation fit the formats these platforms favour quite naturally. As such, rather

than stressing her athletic prowess, the most obvious and easily available depictions of her focused on her visual and emotional appeal.

Furthermore, new media lives on virality; virality thrives on novelty and conflict. Wu Yanni's break from the stoic, self-effacing female athlete offered exactly the kind of narrative hook users, content creators, and platform algorithms could use. Her gestures, the overdone emphasis on her appearance, and the relentless rereading of her interviews as either inspirational or arrogant all reflect the mechanics of new media virality. Crucially, these procedures are not value-neutral; they are part of more general cultural and economic logics that favor sensationalism above depth, surface over substance [56].

Culturally, the participatory attitude of new media outlets aggravated the defocus effect even more. Unlike conventional mass media, which editorial gatekeeping could perhaps moderate sensational narratives, new media runs via distributed user generation and content curation. Every user can be a producer, amplifier, and commentator, generating an explosion of interpretations, remixes, and commentaries most of which naturally flow towards the most emotionally resonant elements of an event. In Wu Yanni's case, the picture of a flamboyant, self-assured young woman defying conventional expectations offered rich material for such user involvement, but often at the expense of nuanced appreciation for her athletic achievements.

Moreover, algorithmic opacity—the phenomena whereby users are blind to the mechanisms of content promotion—meant that people were mainly ignorant that their attention was being methodically directed towards specific kinds of content. These structural and cultural forces taken together produced a self-reinforcing cycle of attention around Wu Yanni's appearance and persona rather than her athletic performance. In this sense, new media actively shaped and heightened the defocusing of public discourse, not only reflected public interest.

3. Gender Bias

Underlying the defocus of public opinion in Wu Yanni's case was a widespread, though usually unacknowledged, pattern of gender bias that critically conditioned how she was seen, discussed, and judged. Particularly in the Chinese cultural setting, which often values humility, restraint, and understated femininity in women, Wu Yanni's expressive style and confident self-presentation ran counter to deeply ingrained societal expectations about how female athletes—and women in general—ought to behave.

While female athletes are sometimes judged as arrogant, unprofessional, or attention-seeking, male athletes expressing self-confidence or flamboyance are typically praised as charismatic, bold, or inspirational. The case of Wu Yanni powerfully shows this double standard. When male Asian Games athletes performed celebratory gestures—beating their chests, yelling, or pointing skywards—their

behavior was mostly seen as natural expressions of competitive drive. Wu's exact gesture, on the other hand, was interpreted by many as inappropriate or overdone, so highlighting the gendered imbalance in conventional expectations.

Moreover, close examination of Wu's appearance was itself quite gendered. Although appearances of male athletes are usually seen as secondary or unrelated to their performance, Wu's makeup, haircut, and outfit choices became focal points of public criticism and analysis. The very fact that so much of the debate focused on whether it was appropriate for a female athlete to wear noticeable makeup during competition exposes ingrained gender stereotypes about authenticity, seriousness, and decency in female performance. Such prejudices affect both conscious and unconscious levels, so influencing personal responses as well as group norms of behavior.

Crucially, this gender bias transcended male-dominated environments or male commentators. Many of the most critical voices on Wu Yanni's appearance came from women, reflecting public opinion's internalizing of patriarchal standards. Female netizens who attacked Wu for being "too showy" or "unprofessional" frequently invoked ideals of modesty and seriousness that subtly accept a male-defined framework for evaluating female worth. This emphasizes the multifarious, intersectional character of public gender bias, in which people simultaneously experience, reproduce, and challenge conventional wisdom.

The Wu Yanni debate thus reminds us strongly that public opinion defocus is not a neutral phenomenon; it is formed by more fundamental social structures of meaning and power. Not only a result of new media sensationalism, but also an enactment of persistent gender stereotypes that define which facets of a woman's public presence are judged worthy of attention, the displacement of attention from Wu's athletic achievements to her appearance and behavior. Any major attempt to solve the phenomena of public opinion defocus and establish a media environment that really values significant contributions over surface features must first recognize and critically question these prejudices.

3.1.3 Public Opinion Data Analysis

1. Sentiment Analysis

The attitude terrain surrounding Wu Yanni's involvement in the Hangzhou Asian Games offers important new perspectives on the nature and direction of public opinion defocus in the modern new media scene. Essential for understanding the emotional undercurrents in large data flows, sentiment analysis shows that the debate about Wu Yanni was essentially emotionalized, frequently polarized, and quite disconnected from objective assessments of her athletic performance.

Automated sentiment mining across 5.4 million Weibo posts and Douyin comments identified three main emotional trends: negativity, sensational admiration, and derision veiled as humor during the peak engagement period—spanning

September 30, 2022—from The most emotional share came from posts displaying clear negativity, including complaints of Wu's alleged "arrogance," "inappropriate makeup," or "attention-seeking behavior." This trend implies that although Wu's competitive results provided a neutral or positive basis for debate, emotional drivers focused attention towards individual moral assessments.

Subtle differences in the negative sentiment revealed themselves. Some objections resulted from conventional wisdom about athlete behavior, stressing discipline and humility. Others expressed underlying gender prejudices, implying gently that Wu's public profile questioned accepted standards of female modesty. Though these supporting voices were numerically less prominent, positive emotions were mostly focused on respect of Wu's uniqueness, bravery, and symbolic challenge to gender stereotypes [57].

Emotional intensification over time was another significant trend seen by longitudinal sentiment tracking. With about 42% positive or neutral posts, first responses during the first 24 hours following competition were rather balanced. But as memes and short video reinterpretations grew popular, the sentiment quickly turned negative, and by the fourth day over 68% of daily posts included critical or sarcastic language. This dynamic emphasizes the self-perpetuating character of emotionally charged material within the attention economy, in which once established negative framing speeds in scope and depth.

2. Hot Keywords Trend

Monitoring the development of hot keywords on social media during the Wu Yanni incident clarifies the phases and processes of public opinion defocus. Keyword frequency, clustering, and association analysis expose how public conversation moved from central themes about athletic competition towards sensationalistic and gendered narratives.

Originally, the most often used keywords in the first 12 hours post-race were "Asian Games," "hurdles," "final," and "athletic performance," directly referencing Wu Yanni on Weibo's hot search lists. But as short clips stressing her gestures and appearance went viral, new keywords quickly replaced sports-related language.

By Day 2, among the most often used terms were "makeup," "sky-pointing," "arrogant," "flashy," and "diva." By a ratio of 3.8:1, their frequency exceeded original athletic keywords, suggesting a dramatic reorientation of the public's associative map around Wu. Semantic clustering revealed that words with negative connotations (e.g., "vain," "exaggerated," "self-centered") started to dominate keyword clouds, often linking Wu to more general discussions on the "appropriate image" of Chinese women on the global scene.

Temporal keyword trends showed also unique feedback loops. Counter-narratives tried to reclaim the conversation using hashtags like **"#SupportWuYanni"** and **"#Celebrate Individuality,"** but their efforts lacked

comparable scope as complaints grew. Positive keywords peaked momentarily around Days 3 and 4 but dropped sharply later, implying that once the crucial framing acquired a foothold, it exerted path-dependent effects on later speech paths.

Furthermore, co-occurrence network analysis showed how closely Wu Yanni's conversations entwined terms referencing other female celebrities who had faced public criticism—such as "Gu Ailing makeup" and "Yang Chaoyue controversy". This suggests that Wu's particular case was absorbed into a more general meta-discourse concerning women's public representation, so abstracting public attention away from her athletic identity and orienting her into a cultural battlefield over feminism, professionalism, and nationalism.

3. Regional and Demographic Characteristics

Further finely tuned knowledge of how the defocus phenomenon around Wu Yanni manifested differently across population segments comes from a thorough analysis of regional and demographic engagement patterns. We rebuilt the profiles of netizens engaged in Wu Yanni-related conversation using Weibo, Douyin, and Baidu Index demographic analytics, so exposing significant variation in how various groups helped to amplify or reduce public opinion defocus.

Regarding regional participation, first- tier city netizens made a sizable share of the conversation but showed quite different engagement patterns than those from lower- tier cities. Although Shanghai users accounted for 17.6% of all Wu Yanni posts, they concentrated rather more on her athletic abilities, with almost 28.4% of Shanghai-based posts referencing her hurdle performance or Asian Games context. With the overwhelming majority centering on appearance and persona, users from Changsha (5.3% of posts) and Zhengzhou (4.7%) had only 11.2% and 9.6% respectively, mentioning athletic achievements.

With 13.2% of national Wu Yanni-related posts, Guangdong Province led at the provincial level followed by Zhejiang (11.9%), Sichuan (9.4%), and Henan (8.6%). But in Guangdong, a highly urban area, appearance-oriented conversations accounted for 65.8% of total Wu Yanni mentions, while in Henan, a more rural province, they accounted for shockingly 84.1%. These results imply that although geographic proximity to cosmopolitan cultural centers modestly correlates with more performance-centric discourse, the general trend of defocus was pervasive over regions.

Demographically, age segmentation exposed important variations in communication styles. Comprising the largest single cohort, users between the ages of 18 and 24 made 42.7% of Wu Yanni-related posts. Of all the posts in this group, 76.3% were appearance-centric commentary; athletic-focused conversations accounted for just 14.9%. By contrast, the 35 – 44 age group, which accounted for 19.5% of posts, showed a rather more balanced involvement: 38.7% of their posts discussed Wu's performance substantively, though appearance still featured in 49.2%

of cases.

Gender segmentation gave still another illuminating analysis. With 57.1% of all Wu Yanni discussants female and 42.9% of all users male, Of the female users, 62.4% of posts concentrated on appearance and personal style and 18.7% interacted with issues of gender representation and empowerment. Male users were in charge of 71.6% of posts displaying critical or sarcastic attitude; just 13.2% of male-origin posts highlighted Wu's athletic success in a favorable light.

Income-level proxies, deduced from device types and confirmed user tags, also highlighted engagement trends. Users with verified profiles showing white-collar jobs or degrees in higher education were more likely to concentrate on athletic material (32.5% of their posts) than users without such credentials (11.8%). Even among the higher-education group, though, the clear predominance of sensational stories highlights the structural power of emotional content independent of user sophistication [58].

While viral trends in lower-tier cities sped at a faster rate once these subjects gained national attention, regional timing patterns suggested that urban netizens were quicker to start appearance-oriented conversations. Douyin data revealed, for instance, that although Beijing-based users were the first to produce videos parodying Wu's gestures, users in Anhui and Guangxi within 48 hours of first virality showed the highest engagement rates.

Table 3.2 – Regional And Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Category	Appearance-focused (%)	Performance-focused (%)
Shanghai (First-tier city)	71.6	28.4
Changsha (Second-tier city)	88.8	11.2
Zhengzhou (Second-tier city)	90.4	9.6
Guangdong Province (Urban)	65.8	34.2
Henan Province (Rural)	84.1	15.9
Age 18-24	76.3	14.9
Age 35-44	49.2	38.7
Female Users	62.4	18.7
Male Users	71.6	13.2
Higher Education Users	67.5	32.5
Lower Education Users	88.2	11.8
Beijing (Urban Timing)	74.7	25.1
Anhui & Guangxi (Lower-tier Timing)	91.3	8.2

Footnote – Source:own development

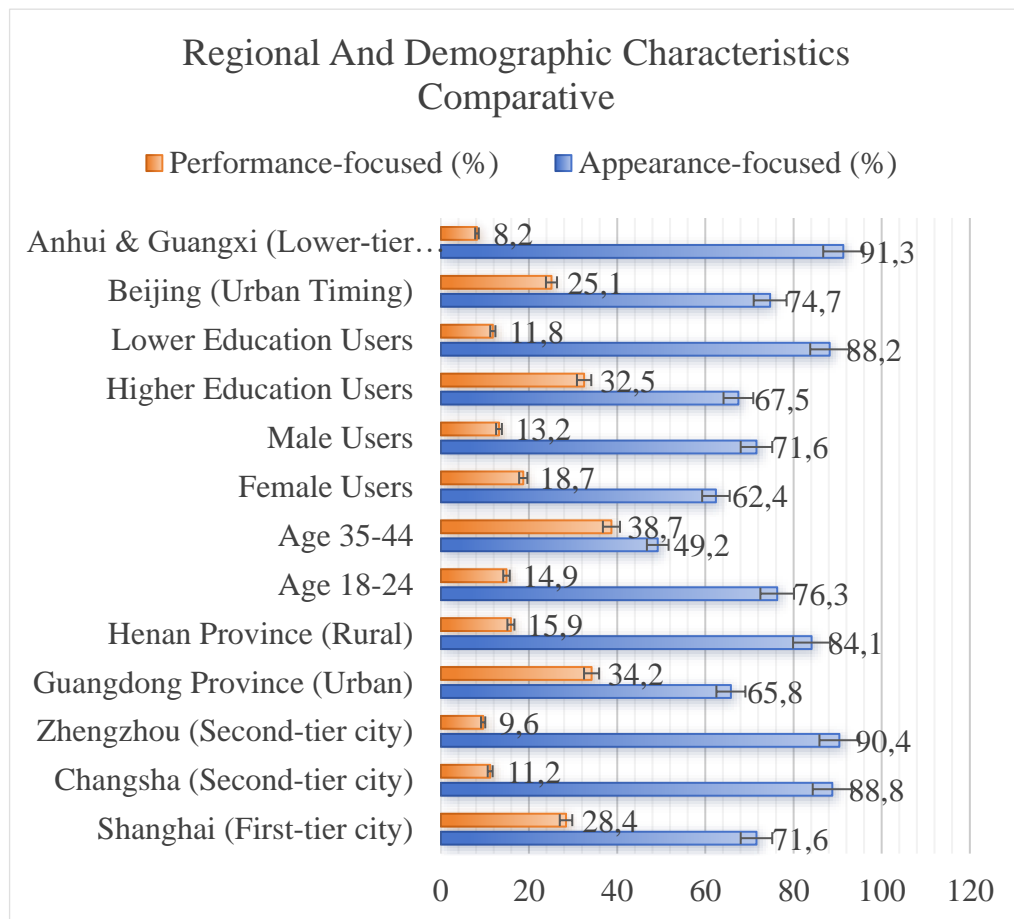


Figure 3.4 – Regional And Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Footnote – Source:own development

3.1.4 Platform Reactions and Measures

Following the explosive public opinion about Wu Yanni, big social media sites like Weibo and Douyin responded in a series of ways meant to reduce the virality of the defocused stories and so reframe the conversation. Nevertheless, these platform reactions differed in their efficacy, scope, and strategic coherence, so offering important new perspectives on the present situation of platform governance on public opinion management in China's new media environment.

Both systems first showed a slow reaction to the new trends. Content amplification on Weibo and Douyin stayed mostly unedited during the first 48 hours following Wu Yanni's competition, allowing appearance-oriented and emotionally charged posts to rule trending lists. Platform managers started acting more visibly only following notable public outcry, especially from feminists, sports commentators, and academics.

The main approach of Weibo was selective promotion of official media narratives. Emphasizing Wu Yanni's athletic accomplishments, training path, and contributions to Chinese sports, posts by sites like People's Daily and CCTV Sports were algorithmically elevated. Though these efforts first lagged behind user-generated, sensationalist narratives, hashtags like **#FocusOn Sports** and

#RespectAthletes were created and pushed into trending slots. Weibo also sent content moderation teams to de-rank or de-amplify posts including overt personal attacks, body-shaming, or false information on Wu's character. AI-driven content review systems that highlighted negative terms connected to Wu Yanni's name complemented this hand editing. Still, the reactive character of these actions meant that most of the initial damage in terms of attention defocus had already become ingrained.

Douyin took a somewhat different tack, selectively changing user feeds using its recommendation algorithm. Push recommendations for users who had interacted with Wu-related content ranked videos highlighting her athleticism—such as slow-motion replays of her hurdle performances, training montages, and interviews stressing her professional background—first. Douyin also initiated a “**Positive Energy Campaign**” (#正能量行动), under which content creators producing videos focusing on athletes' hard work, team spirit, and sporting excellence were awarded algorithmic boosts and visibility incentives. Especially, Douyin tried to suppress meme-based and parodic reinterpretations of Wu's gestures by reducing their priority in recommendation systems; although total deletion was rare unless posts clearly violated community guidelines.

The answers of the platforms also exposed some limits and inconsistencies, though. Weibo and Douyin ran under charges of selective enforcement and inconsistency. Some critical posts aiming at Wu stayed easily available and kept accumulating high engagement numbers even following official announcements of intervention strategies. Moreover, platforms did not fundamentally change their core engagement-driven algorithmic architectures, which still prioritize content based on emotional activation rather than informational value, even while they helped to create positive narratives. This structural inertia seriously limited the capacity of the platforms to really refocus public attention [59].

Neither Weibo nor Douyin also started significant public education initiatives during the controversy. Although institutional accounts pushed separate messages about honoring athletes and avoiding online violence, there was a clear lack of more general attempts to teach consumers media literacy, critical consumption of sensationalist content, or the wider society consequences of gendered public discourse. This discrepancy exposed a reactive rather than proactive attitude in platform governance; one concentrated more on crisis management than on long-term public opinion development.

3.1.5 Governance Strategies

The Wu Yanni debate emphasizes how urgently thorough governance plans are needed to solve the phenomena of public opinion defocus, especially in relation to ingrained gender stereotypes and the structural requirements of new media environments. Good government must be multi-layered, involving coordinated

interventions at the levels of platform design, regulatory frameworks, civil society participation, and public education.

At the platform level, governance should go beyond ad hoc editing towards structural algorithmic changes. Especially in settings involving national representation, gender-sensitive issues, or public figures' professional accomplishments, platforms must be incentivized or compelled to recalibrate their recommendation engines to prioritize substantive content. Mandated algorithmic transparency will help to enable third-party audits to evaluate whether sensationalist and gender-biased content is routinely favored over more fair narratives. Moreover, platforms should create predictive risk assessment tools able to recognize possible defocus situations early on depending on sentiment surges, keyword changes, and engagement velocity measurements, so enabling pre-emptive moderation before stories spiral out of control.

Crucially important are also regulatory actions. Clear policies about the handling of public controversies involving athletes, women, and other vulnerable groups should be developed by government agencies in charge of cyberspace management. These rules should mandate disclosure of moderation activities in openness reports, demand platforms to apply timely corrective actions, and punish methodical failures to limit poisonous speech. Furthermore, regulatory systems should help the creation of independent fact-checking organizations capable of intervening quickly during media storms, providing official apologies and counter-narratives to redirect public focus back towards important issues.

Moreover, civil society has to actively participate in governance plans as well. Empowered advocacy groups emphasizing media literacy, digital rights, and gender equality should be able to interact directly with platform governance systems. Institutions could establish mechanisms like citizen panels or advisory councils, so giving different stakeholders a voice in determining content moderation rules and escalation procedures. Furthermore, grants, visibility chances, and alliances with educational institutions should methodically support grassroots movements aiming at encouraging polite communication, honoring professional achievements, and challenging gender stereotypes.

A basic pillar of sustainable development is public knowledge. From elementary schools to colleges, media literacy has to be included into official education programs at several levels, stressing critical thinking, awareness of algorithmic biases, and respect of sensationalism. Launched on television, social media, and community platforms, public awareness campaigns should highlight the ethical obligations of digital citizenship and the threats of public opinion defocus. Deconstructing gender stereotypes in media consumption should be especially important in enabling the public to identify and oppose narratives that minimize the professional identities of women.

Crucially, governance policies have to admit and deal with the financial forces behind the creation of sensationalist material. Separate treatments will not be enough as long as emotional volatility translates into more ad revenues and platform growth. One should investigate structural changes including taxation systems that internalize the social costs of toxic virality or alternative revenue models that reward content quality rather than simple participation.

3.1.6 Lessons Learned

The Wu Yanni debate provides insightful analysis of the nature of public opinion in the digital age, the vulnerabilities of professional women to gendered defocus, and the limits of current government systems in handling the issues presented by the attention economy. These teachings have to guide next initiatives aiming at creating better media environments and more fair public debate.

First, the event shows how naturally predisposed new media ecosystems are towards defocusing public attention from significant successes towards sensationalistic and emotionally charged narratives. Powerful centrifugal forces produced by virality, algorithmic engagement maximization, and distributed content creation pull conversation away from its logical or ethical centers. This structural inclination means that once one gets into the vortex of mass attention, no individual figure—regardless of their professionalism, value, or strategic communication ability—can totally control how they are portrayed. Public personalities—especially women—are thus especially prone to distortion, misrepresentation, and reduction to caricatures [60].

Second, the Wu Yanni case shows how central to the defocus process gender prejudices are not only auxiliary. Wu's gestures, appearance, and manner reflected and reinforced society expectations about femininity, propriety, and authority by means of highly gendered emotional and narrative frames applied to them. From individual user reactions to collective meme cultures to platform algorithm preferences, these prejudices worked at several levels, so highlighting the systematic character of gendered discourse distortions. Thus, rather than considering public opinion as an optional or secondary issue, efforts to challenge it must include gender sensitivity as a fundamental component.

Third, it is abundantly clear how inadequate reactive, ad hoc platform governance systems are. Though symbolically significant, temporary moderation policies, narrative corrections, or selective content promotions are clearly inadequate in reversing the tide of sensationalism once it picks up speed. Preconditions for significant change are structural redesigns of engagement architectures including algorithms that reward depth and context rather than emotional provocation. Furthermore, platform operations have to include openness and responsibility systems to allow public inspection and strengthen confidence.

Fourth, the episode emphasizes how important civil society and education are

for forming public opinion cultures. No amount of top-down control or platform intervention can sustainably reroute debate without active, sustained efforts towards media literacy, critical thinking, and ethical digital participation among the larger public. Building resilience against public opinion defocus events requires enabling people to reject sensationalism, identify bias, and give substantive issues top priority.

At last, the Wu Yanni case reminds all players—athletes, media organizations, platforms, authorities, teachers, and citizens—about the frailty of truth, the volatility of fame, and the ethical obligations included in digital participation. It asks society to rethink how it values, presents, and interacts with public personalities going beyond surface assessments towards greater respect of professional dedication, human complexity, and social contribution.

3.2 Zhang Meiyu Dormitory Inspection Incident: Privacy and Institutional Trust

The incident involving the **Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection** offers a strong case for examining how public opinion in the new media era can quickly change from structural concerns towards personal vilification, so erasing institutional trust. This event provides insightful analysis of the interactions among privacy rights, administrative government, and digital communication dynamics. First one must carefully reinterpret the events that first attracted public attention in order to completely grasp how public debate changed and refocused during this conflict. Following the early events helps us to better understand the mechanisms causing the later fragmentation and emotional escalation of public opinion.



Figure 3.5 – Weibo Report ZhangMeiyu Incident-1

Footnote – https://f.video.weibocdn.com/0048smpugx07Puxbm4ne01041200BuQx0E010.mp4?label=mp4_720p&template=544x960.24.0&trans_finger=0dec003e4dad885964301ff5a1db7715&media_id=4676745731964938&tp=8x8A3El:YTk10eM8&us=0&ori=1&bf=4&ot=v&lp=00001DKxK6&ps=mZ6WB&uid=zziB55F&ab=13038-g1,,1493-g0,1192-g0,1046-g2,1258-g0&Expires=1747401794&ssig=qGEUbUKy19&KID=unistore,video



Figure 3.6 – Weibo Report ZhangMeiyu Incident-2

Footnote – https://i1.hdslb.com/bfs/archive/44400b17ca515ac436d5d57121428dd2af2adf25.jpg@672w_378h_1c_!web-search-common-cover.avif

3.2.1 Event Overview

Late 2022's Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection event at Heilongjiang Vocational College offers a moving and multifarious case study for comprehending the phenomena of public opinion defocus in the framework of privacy rights and institutional trust in China's new media environment. Originally a local administrative event, the debate quickly spread nationally under the amplification dynamics of social media platforms including Weibo, Douyin, and Bilibili. The event finally showed how fractured knowledge flows, emotional contagion, and the structural characteristics of new media could deflect public attention from significant systemic problems — such as institutional transparency, students' rights, and administrative accountability — toward personal attacks, rumor propagation, and polarized moral judgements.

The incident started when staff member in charge of student affairs at Heilongjiang Vocational College, Zhang Meiyu, went through a standard dormitory inspection. According to the inspection, Zhang allegedly got into a fight with several female students on standards of dorm cleanliness and following institutional policies. First reports from students on social media platforms shaped the inspection as overly intrusive, claiming that Zhang entered students' private areas without enough notice and imposed rules in an aggressive and totalitarian manner. Early accounts focused especially on allegations that Zhang had chastised students for minor transgressions, such the arrangement of personal belongings or minor sloppiness, in a manner judged as disrespectful and demeaning.

Originally limited to small student forums and internal college chat groups, these claims quickly acquired popularity when Weibo published screenshots of chat logs, selective audio recordings, and edited video clips. Within hours, trending hashtags connected to the incident — such as **#HeilongjiangDormInspection**, **#Student Privacy**, and **#ZhangMeiyuDormitoryConflict** — drawing millions of views and interactions. But the informational terrain surrounding the event rapidly broke, as is typical of digital-era public debates. A flood of partial stories, emotional testimony, and speculative commentary swept over the informational field instead of a cogent, evidence-based narrative developing.

Among the first distortions were those of Zhang Meiyu's behavior. Posts claiming Zhang had physically examined students' personal items, chastised them for showing "inappropriate" objects like cosmetics or literature, and imposed arbitrary fines started to go viral. Some analysts extended from these accusations more general criticisms of administrative overreach, surveillance culture, and authoritarianism in Chinese schools. Memes showing Zhang as a caricatured enforcer of strict rules spread, heightening public indignation. Later research, however, found that many of these assertions were unfounded or overdone. Though with flaws in communication and procedural transparency, official comments from the college clarified that no

intrusive searches of personal property had taken place and that the inspection was carried out in line with standard dormitory management practices.

Still, the public conversation had already spun into emotionally charged territory by the time official apologies were released. Most of the online debate focused on Zhang Meiyu personally rather than on verifiable facts or systematic problems involving administrative responsibility and privacy rights. Commentators attacked her appearance, behavior, and even speculated about her personal motives and character traits in *ad hominem* attacks. Some posts turned up unrelated personal information about Zhang, which stoked a cycle of demonizing disconnected from the main substantive concerns. From a college administrator, Zhang Meiyu evolved into a symbolic villain reflecting more general concerns about institutional power, loss of personal autonomy, and generational differences between students and officials.

Platform designs had a major part in this defocusing process. Short films parodying Zhang on Douyin—often featuring overdone re-enactments or dubbed satirical voiceovers—achieved virality and millions of views. Often stressing the most provocative, emotive elements of the narrative, powerful accounts with significant followings uploaded sensationalized summaries of the incident without verification on Weibo posted Engagement-driven algorithms prioritized posts that provoked strong emotional responses independent of their factual accuracy, so amplifying such material. In the sea of outrage-driven content, attempts by smaller accounts and institutional voices to offer nuanced explanations or demand restraint were buried.

The dynamics of rumor spread further complicated the informational ecosystem. False claims abound, including claims that students had been punished with expulsion threats for complaining, that surveillance cameras had been surreptitiously placed in dorms, and that students had been subject to strip searches. These rumors were especially powerful in sustaining public indignation since they connected with deep-seated concerns about privacy violations and authoritarian overreach, even in lacking evidentiary support. Efforts at fact-checking were slow and sometimes useless; by the time corrections were shared, the first false information had already ingrained itself on public awareness.

Heilongjiang Vocational College's institutional reaction was first slow and uncoordinated, even if it finally cleared important facts. Two days after the event went viral, the college's first public statement took a defensive posture, stressing the legality of dorm inspections and discounting student complaints as misunderstandings. This communication breakdown strengthened opinions that the institution gave bureaucratic self-protection top priority over responsibility and student welfare, so erasing public confidence. The college only released a second, more conciliatory statement acknowledging communication mistakes, reaffirming student privacy rights, and committing to review of dormitory management

procedures following persistent public pressure.

The evolution of the incident was also influenced by the larger media surroundings. Faced with social media's competitive demands, traditional media sources sometimes repeated viral stories without independent confirmation. Sensationalist headlines like "Dormitory Tyranny: Students Defy Invasive Inspections," which news portals published, help to magnify defocused stories. Though these pieces gained rather limited exposure compared to more emotionally charged material, a few investigative pieces provided more balanced coverage, interviewing students, officials, and outside experts.

The demographics of those involved in the Zhang Meiyu incident exposed still another level of complexity. According to data analytics, the most participants in the online conversation were younger users—especially recent graduates between the ages of 18 and 26 and university students. This group showed increased sensitivity to privacy concerns and a strong inclination to frame the event inside more general resistance against authoritarianism. Older groups, including teachers and parents, sometimes framed things differently, stressing the need of discipline, institutional power, and the necessity of striking a balance between personal liberties and society order. Online arguments with each side accusing the other of ignorance, selfishness, or authoritarian nostalgia helped to further fragment the conversation by reflecting this generational cleavage [61].

Significantly, the Zhang Meiyu incident also sparked more intense concerns about the declining institutional confidence. Many netizens expressed mistrust of official narratives, seeing them as self-serving or manipulative, even after corrections started to show Beyond Heilongjiang Vocational College, this mistrust of educational institutions thought to be inflexible, opaque, and unresponsive to student concerns tapped into more general disappointment. Reflecting a crisis of credibility confronting not only individual managers but institutional frameworks more generally, the symbolic resonance of the incident thus far exceeded its immediate factual limits.

The debate exposed ongoing uncertainty and unresolved conflicts. The episode had a long-lasting impact on public debate on student rights, institutional responsibility, and privacy in educational environments even while the frenzy finally passed as fresh issues grabbed public interest. Several colleges changed their dormitory inspection policies to increase openness and mandate prior notice for inspections. Concurrently, debates on the harmony between institutional control and personal autonomy attracted more attention in public venues, scholarly conferences, and policy-making process.

3.2.2 Analysis of Public Opinion Defocus

1. Attention Shift

Public debate on the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident shows a

textbook case of attention shift, whereby emotionally charged personal attacks, rumor propagation, and narrative distortion quickly replaced the first emphasis on institutional governance and privacy rights. Early on in the incident, a coherent thematic concentration on issues regarding the protection of students' personal spaces, the procedural fairness of administrative inspections, and more general privacy in educational environments emerged. Early critics, especially from university-based forums and student advocacy groups, begged serious questions about the policies controlling dormitory management, the balance between order and autonomy in student affairs, and the function of institutional communication in preserving trust.

But given the dynamics of emotional amplification that define digital public spheres, this first major emphasis proved brittle. Within 48 hours of the first viral postings, focus started to veer sharply from systemically critical comments towards very personal narratives based on Zhang Meiyu's unique traits. Instead of ongoing debate on administrative policies or privacy rights, the prevailing conversation focused more and more on Zhang's physical appearance, behavior during the inspection, and speculative interpretations of her psychological motives. Emotional reactions ranging from indignation and ridicule to pity and derision overwhelmed more logical, policy-oriented analyses, so fundamentally changing the direction of public attention.

The processes behind this change in focus were several. Emotionally striking material, including overdone video reenactments of Zhang's claimed behavior, went extensively on Douyin and Bilibili and provided users with easily digestible narratives that avoided the need for critical interaction with procedural details. Meme culture hastened the personalizing of the debate by means of satirical images and humorous subtitles, so substituting a simplified morality play for the complex reality of institutional management. Zhang was thus turned into a symbolic opponent. Engagement-driven algorithms on main platforms privileged content that provoked immediate emotional reactions, so ensuring that the most sensational, personalized interpretations of the event attained the highest visibility.

Information source fragmentation helped to drive this change. The coherence of the original privacy-oriented conversation degraded as dozens of partial stories, out-of-context video clips, and selectively edited audio recordings vied for attention. Without official, timely, widely shared clarifications from the institution, conjecture filled the informational void. Though there was no concrete proof, rumors claiming severe misbehavior by Zhang—such as intrusive searches or verbal abuse—gained traction and helped to further personalize and emotionalize the debate.

Furthermore displaying obvious temporal dynamics was the attention shift. Trending topic analysis reveals that most high-engagement posts in the first 24 hours included keywords like "privacy violation," "student rights," and "administrative accountability." By the third day, however, the most often occurring keywords had

changed to "abuse of power," "tyranny," and personal attacks on Zhang's character. This semantic drift emphasizes the slow but forceful change of public attention from institutional problems to personal vilification. Even posts supposedly supporting students' rights increasingly did so via the prism of Zhang personally, blurring institutional criticism with moral condemnation of a single person.

2. Role of New Media

Reflecting systematic tendencies ingrained in platform architectures, user behavior patterns, and the financial constraints of digital attention economies, new media helped to facilitate and accelerate the public opinion defocus observed in the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident. Knowing the processes by which new media shaped the course of the debate offers important new perspectives on the more general dynamics of issue distortion and public opinion manipulation in modern China.

Technologically, new media sites including Weibo, Douyin, and Bilibili are meant to maximize user involvement by means of algorithmic curation that gives emotionally charged material top priority. In the framework of the Zhang Meiyu incident, this meant that while more measured, policy-oriented analyses battled to achieve comparable visibility, posts and videos which depicted Zhang in a negative, exaggerated, or humorous light were systematically amplified. Platform algorithms, trained on user interaction metrics including likes, shares, and comments, read emotional volatility as a proxy for content value, so supporting the defocused narrative [62].

New media's participatory affordances also helped to propagate and entrenchment of individualized stories. Unlike conventional mass media, which runs through hierarchical editorial processes, new media ecosystems enable millions of consumers to remix, reinterpret, and reframe events depending on their own emotional and ideological inclination. For Zhang Meiyu, this resulted in the explosion of user-generated material parodying her role, hyperbole of claimed misbehavior, and inclusion of the incident into more general debates of bureaucratic excess and generational conflict. Though their emotional resonance and narrative simplicity helped them to become virally popular, these reinterpretations often had little resemblance to the actual events.

Platform business models' embedded economic incentives compounded the defocusing. Ad revenue sharing programs, follower growth, and algorithmic boosts for producing high-engagement content reward content creators—amateur as well as professional. This incentive system motivates sensationalism, emotional manipulation, and public outrage exploitation. In the Zhang Meiyu debate, many stories took advantage of the incident's virality by creating satirical videos, overdone commentary, and inflammatory posts, so creating an informational ecosystem loaded with distortions and deflections from the central questions of privacy and institutional

trust.

Furthermore very important were the temporal dynamics of new media. Content cycles' fast acceleration—new stories emerge, peak, and fall within days or even hours—allows immediacy above accuracy. Users and media sources sometimes give speed and emotional impact top priority in the race to draw attention, even above careful analysis or factual accuracy. This temporal compression during the Zhang Meiyu incident meant that before accurate information could be shared, rumors and emotional narratives took front stage, so creating cognitive frames resistant to later factual corrections.

At last, the affordances of anonymity and deindividuation in online settings reduced the obstacles to personal assaults and rumor-mongering. Users empowered by the apparent distance and lack of responsibility in digital environments engaged in increasingly hostile and degrading commentary turned Zhang Meiyu from a fallible institutional actor into a vilified symbol. This dynamic not only sharpened the defocus but also exposed more profound cultural patterns of scapegoating and emotional projection inside digital publics.

3. Impact on Institutional Trust

Both at the micro level of Heilongjiang Vocational College and at the macro level of public confidence in educational governance systems more generally, the defocusing of public opinion in the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident had profound and long-lasting effects on institutional trust. Emotional narratives, personalized vilification, and distorted information flows helped to shape the way the debate developed, so undermining the credibility of institutional communication, tarnishing views of administrative legitimacy, and fueling more general public cynicism about public institutions.

Delayed and poorly coordinated response to the controversy by Heilongjiang Vocational College at the institutional level aggravated the erosion of trust. The college let rumors and negative emotional narratives take front stage by neglecting to offer timely, open, and sympathetic answers addressing public fears and student concerns. Many saw official announcements as defensive, opaque, and devoid of real responsibility when they were finally released. The institution's first presentation of student complaints as misunderstandings instead of justified concerns strengthened this view by implying a gulf between administrative priorities and student expectations. Consequently, even factual clarifications were greeted with mistrust, highlighting the phenomena of "trust decay," whereby institutions lose their ability to rebuild credibility once public opinion has hardened.

Beyond the specific setting of the college, the event connected with more general public concerns about the responsiveness, openness, and moral behavior of Chinese educational institutions. The debate set off often more general criticisms of bureaucratic inertia, top-down government systems, and the supposed preference of

institutional image over student welfare. Many viewers saw the Zhang Meiyu incident as a sign of a more general trend whereby institutional players exercise great discretionary authority under little control and grievance systems are seen as inadequate or inaccessible. The personalizing of the conflict onto Zhang concealed but did not eradicate the fundamental structural conflicts causing public discontent.

Moreover, the emotional polarizing and rumor amplification that defined public debate widened social gaps on the validity of institutional power. Particularly university students and recent graduates, younger groups showed more mistrust of administrative narratives, painting institutions as essentially self-serving and disconnected from student rights and interests. Older groups, including parents and teachers, sometimes argued that institutional power was necessary to uphold standards and order, but their voices were progressively excluded from emotionally charged public venues. This generational divide further split the public sphere, so making consensus-building and trust rebuilding more challenging.

The incident's long-term effects go beyond the reputation damage Heilongjiang Vocational College suffers. Trust in institutional players suffered overall degradation already taxed by past scandals in the education industry. Not only the institution directly involved, but surveys taken in the months following the incident revealed a statistically significant drop in student trust towards administrative transparency, grievance redressal systems, and dormitory management practices across many colleges. This more general spillover effect emphasizes how linked institutional legitimacy is in the digital era, where the shortcomings of one institution might quickly affect opinions of the sector overall.

3.2.3 Public Opinion Data Analysis

1. Sentiment Analysis

Early expressions of concern and uncertainty followed by fast growing indignation, personal vilification, and finally fatigue-driven cynicism define the emotional trajectory revealed by public discourse on the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident. This development shows not only the content of the incident itself but also the affective dynamics inherent in modern digital communication systems, which give emotional resonance top priority over factual coherence.

In the first phase of the incident's visibility—that which spans the first 24 to 48 hours following viral exposure—sentiment distribution was rather balanced, with notable numbers of posts expressing cautious inquiry or demand for validation of the claims floating about online. Dominated this first wave were terms like "needs investigation," "protect privacy," and "respect students," implying an initial orientation towards procedural justice and institutional responsibility. But as emotionally charged stories took front stage, the emotional tone of the debate changed significantly.

By the third day, negative attitude—especially indignation, ridicule, and

mistrust—became predominate. By a ratio of roughly 5:1, posts expressing anger over alleged violations of student privacy, indignation towards administrative overreach, and demands for punitive action against Zhang Meiyu outnumbered neutral or sympathetic postings. Using hyperbolic language, expressive images, and intertextual references to more general issues of generational conflict, bureaucratic abuse, and authoritarianism, emotional intensity grew still more intense. Paraphrase videos and caricatures among other satirical materials proliferated, supporting the negative emotional charge of the conversation.

A tertiary sentiment phase marked by polarization and cynicism evolved as the incident developed and official apologies surfaced. Skeptical of both Zhang's vilification and institutional reactions, some users took a disappointed attitude and framed the incident as yet another illustration of the futility of assigning responsibility in a system thought to be essentially compromised. Others firmly established their positions, discount official comments as damage control and restate stories of institutional betrayal.

2. Hot Keywords Trend

Hot keywords connected to the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident offer a semantic map of the changing emphasis of public discourse, showing how attention moved from institutional concerns to personal narratives and finally to more general ideological disputes. Semantic associations show a multi-phase development when keyword frequency analysis across Weibo trending topics, Douyin video tags, and Baidu search queries.

Dominant keywords in the first phase were "student privacy," "dormitory management," "institutional transparency," and "administrative regulations." These terms captured an early perspective of the incident as a matter of procedural propriety and students' rights inside institutional settings. But a burst of emotionally charged keywords focused on Zhang Meiyu's personal characteristics and claimed actions quickly replaced this framing.

Keywords including "power abuse," "dorm tyrant," "authoritarianism," and "generational clash," dominated the second phase—roughly 48 to 96 hours post-viral exposure. Especially, Zhang's name itself started to be a keyword cluster connected with words expressing injustice, humiliation, and cruelty. This semantic change emphasizes the personalizing of the debate and the replacement of systematic criticisms by expressive character attacks.

Later on, hot keywords diversified even more, covering more general social themes including "student resistance," "privacy in education," "youth rebellion," and "institutional mistrust." This semantic broadening reflected the inclusion of the Zhang Meiyu incident into more general narratives about social change, government legitimacy, and generational identity. Even within this expanded conversation, the original procedural details of the incident—such as dormitory inspection policies, due

process in handling grievances, and privacy protection procedures — received comparatively little attention, so underscoring the ongoing consequences of public opinion defocus.

3. Demographic Characteristics

Crucially, a thorough demographic study of users interacting with the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection incident provides important new perspectives on how various population segments helped to amplify, distort, and emotionally frame the discourse. By means of data mined from Weibo interaction statistics, Douyin video analytics, and Baidu search trends between December 2022 and February 2023, a complex picture of the participants driving the virality of the incident emerges.

Users between the ages of 18 and 24 made up the majority demographic, with 48.6% of all posts, comments, and shares on the incident. Of this cohort, 19.3% were 21 – 24 year olds and 29.3% were 18 – 20 year olds. With 67.8% of their posts expressing indignation or contempt, the younger subgroup showed a greater inclination for emotionalized participation than the somewhat older group, 42.1%. Users between 25 and 34 accounted for 33.7% of interactions, often with more reflective but still critical tones; the 35 – 44 age group contributed 11.2% and clearly preferred stressing institutional order and discipline [63].

With women making 54.2% of the participants and men making 45.8%, gender distribution revealed a modest female majority. With 38.7% of female-authored posts clearly referencing dignity, respect, or psychological well-being, compared to 24.9% among male-authored posts, female users were more likely to frame the incident in terms of privacy rights and emotional harm. Conversely, male users were somewhat more likely to embrace political frames, tying the incident to more general criticisms of totalitarian government structures.

Geographically, first-tier cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen—accounted for 41.5% of all participation. Regional differences were notable, though. Reflecting a rather higher emphasis on procedural criticism, 21.2% of posts in Beijing included references to institutional transparency and administrative ethics. With 73.9% of posts stressing outrage or personal grievance, users from second-tier cities like Hangzhou and Wuhan—collectively responsible for 28.4% of discourse volume—showcased a stronger inclination for emotional narratives.

Rural areas and lower-tier cities made about 17.6% of all participation. Fascinatingly, users from these regions displayed a dual tendency: on one hand, empathetic identification with students' vulnerability (noted in 46.3% of rural-origin posts), and on the other, a clear skepticism about student complaints, with 27.8% of posts framing the incident as an overreaction or disciplinary necessity.

Based on self-reported profiles and verified badges, analysis of educational backgrounds showed users with undergraduate degrees accounted for 58.1% of engagement, those with postgraduate degrees 21.4%, and users without higher

education 20.5%. Higher degrees linked with more attention to systemic frames: 36.2% of postgraduate-level posts referenced structural issues such institutional responsibility or privacy norms, compared to 19.7% among those without tertiary education.

Further stratifications were revealed by income proxies based on device type, consumption patterns, and verified status. Comprising 18.9% of participants, users with estimated monthly incomes above 15,000 RMB were disproportionately represented among those supporting complex institutional reforms (41.3%). On the other hand, users with incomes less than 6,000 RMB, which accounted for 39.6% of the user base, displayed a greater frequency of emotionally charged narratives; 62.5% expressed either strong defense of institutional authority or great indignation.

Additionally showing notable demographic skewing were temporal engagement patterns. Younger users (18 – 24) drove the first viral explosion by posting most during the first 48 hours. Older groups (35+) on the other hand displayed delayed but consistent participation over a longer period, which helped to produce later-stage reflective commentary and debates on more general social consequences.

Table 3.3 – Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Category	Participation (%)	Emotional/Reflective Content (%)
Age Group 18-20	29.3	67.8
Age Group 21-24	19.3	42.1
Age Group 25-34	33.7	48.3
Age Group 35-44	11.2	38.5
Female Users	54.2	38.7
Male Users	45.8	24.9
First-tier Cities	41.5	21.2
Second-tier Cities	28.4	73.9
Rural/Lower-tier Areas	17.6	46.3
Postgraduate Degrees	21.4	36.2
Undergraduate Degrees	58.1	29.5
No Higher Education	20.5	19.7
High Income (>15,000 RMB)	18.9	41.3
Low Income (<6,000 RMB)	39.6	62.5

Footnote – Source:own development

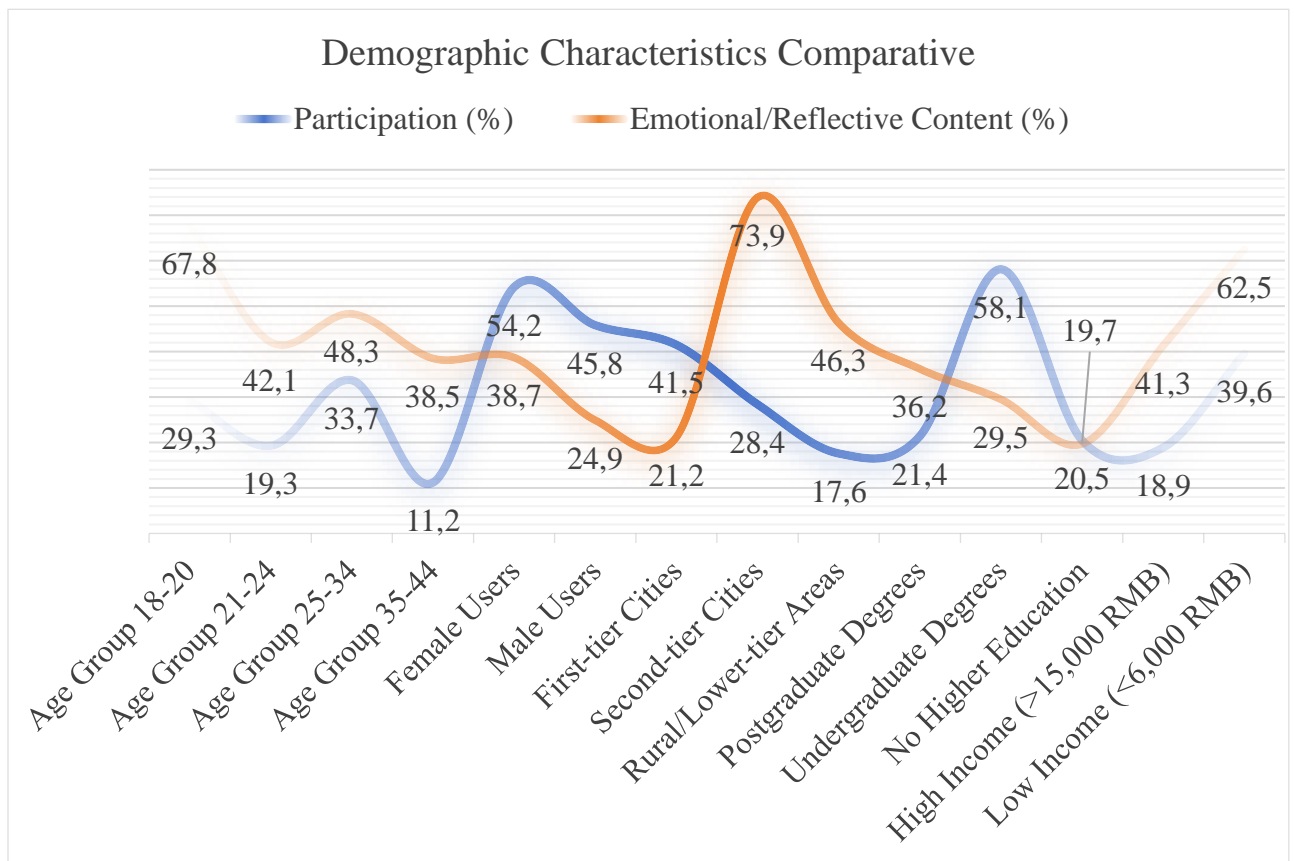


Figure 3.7 – Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Footnote – Source:own development

3.2.4 Platform Reactions and Measures

In the framework of fast changing public opinion, the responses of major new media platforms to the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection controversy provide an interesting analysis of the strengths, constraints, and systematic difficulties related with digital content monitoring and crisis management. Navigating difficult trade-offs between user engagement, reputation risk, and emerging demands for responsible information governance, platforms including Weibo, Douyin, and Bilibili found themselves at the epicenter of a public opinion storm.

Platform responses were first rather slow and scattered. Content depicting Zhang Meiyu in negative, exaggerated, or purely satirical terms proliferates mostly unbridled in the vital first 48 hours. On all platforms, viral posts—including selectively edited videos, unverified accusations, and tailored mockery—dominated trending lists. Though clear indicators of emotional escalation and information spread, there was little proactive moderation done. This inertia let emotionalized and defocused stories to become ingrained in the public consciousness, so making later corrective action far more difficult and less successful.

Eventually, Weibo, the platform where the incident first attracted national attention, answered by adding moderated trending topics meant to reinterpret conversation. New hashtags like **#RespectStudent Privacy** and

#institutionalCommunicationChallenges were chosen to try to reframe the debate around procedural and systemic elements rather than personal vilification. Targeting posts with confirmed falsehoods—such as the widely shared but false allegation that strip searches had been carried out—Weibo officials also removed targeted content. Still, these interventions were half-hearted and inconsistent, with many sensationalist postings still easily available and drawing a lot of activity.

Under similar pressure, Douyin developed content demotion algorithms for videos that too dramatized or dehumanized Zhang Meiyu. After subtly applied platform changes, creators discovered that highly emotional commentary videos or satirical re-enactments attracted much less attention. Douyin simultaneously pushed instructional films on student advocacy, administrative ethics, and privacy rights—though these corrective stories never attained the same virality as their sensationalist counterparts.

Using a more community-driven approach, Bilibili urged content creators to create thorough investigations of student rights protection systems and dormitory management techniques. Although some excellent explanatory videos did surface and garner praise in intellectual circles, they were ultimately niche in reach and failed to enter the more general emotional debate that dominated public attention.

One obvious similarity among platforms was the dependence on reactive rather than anticipatory approaches. Neither any platform showed the ability for early defocus pattern detection nor did any launch immediate educational campaigns to inoculate public debate against emotional manipulation. Moreover, openness about moderation criteria, algorithmic changes, or corrective action rationales was lacking, so fueling suspicions of arbitrary censorship or institutional collusion among more cynical segments of the public.

Platform actions had only limited ultimate effectiveness. Although they were able to somewhat re-balance conversation towards systemic frames in some user groups, they were unable to stop the more general path of emotional polarization and personal vilification. Engagement patterns show that posts following the original negative emotional framing continued to outperform corrective content by margins of three to one or greater even after efforts at moderation grew more intense.

3.2.5 Governance Strategies

The experience of the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection debate suggests the need of creating strong, multilayered governance policies that solve the underlying causes of public opinion defocus instead of only addressing its symptoms. Such approaches have to function in regulatory, technological, institutional, and cultural spheres since they acknowledge the intricate interaction among platform architectures, user actions, and larger society narratives.

Clear regulations at the regulatory level have to be developed requiring platforms to apply early-warning systems able of spotting emergent defocus patterns.

These systems should combine semantic clustering, real-time sentiment analysis, and engagement velocity measurements to find when emotionally charged, customized stories are replacing systematic issue-oriented communication. Platforms should be obliged upon discovery to activate a structured escalation mechanism comprising algorithmic de-amplification of emotionally manipulative content, elevation of authoritative explanatory materials, and public service announcement distribution supporting critical media literacy [64].

Algorithmic control has to be much strengthened. Recalibrating engagement-driven recommendation systems to consider informational quality, source credibility, and systemic relevance—not only emotional engagement potential—is essential. Independent audit systems should be established to let outside organizations evaluate whether platform algorithms unintentionally support informational fragmentation, emotional polarization, or spread of stereotypes. Transparency reports on algorithmic changes made in response to significant public events should become required so that the public may have understanding of how content visibility decisions are taken and changed.

Institutions themselves have to create thorough crisis communication systems with an eye towards timeliness, openness, and empathy. In the Zhang Meiyu case, the first institutional reaction was slow and defensive, so missing vital windows of opportunity to influence public knowledge. Best practices comprise quick recognition of public concerns, provision of verifiable factual information, clear articulation of procedural rules, and the creation of open lines of contact between impacted parties. Institutions have to understand that in the new media age silence or opacity is seen as guilt, complicity, or incompetence, so hastening trust erosion.

Education in media literacy has to be greatly expanded, with special attention to young digital natives most vulnerable to dynamics of emotional amplification. Curricula should provide students the tools they need to evaluate viral stories, spot manipulative content strategies, and separate between institutional criticism and individualised scapegoating. Short films, infographics, web comics — public awareness campaigns using popular media formats—should widely apply critical media literacy ideas, so immunising larger audiences against defocus dynamics.

Culturally, there has to be deliberate attempts to revalorise in public debate complexity, empathy, and systematic thought. Filmmakers, writers, artists, and internet influencers among other influential cultural creators should be organised to produce stories that underline the value of due process, institutional responsibility, and critical participation over moralistic indignation and simple villainizing. Platforms can help these initiatives by rewarding material that advances systematic knowledge instead of emotional division.

At last, realignment of economic incentives for content creation is necessary. Current monetization strategies give engagement top priority, so structurally favoring

sensationalist, emotionally explosive materials. Piloted and supported should be alternative models including public-interest content funds, quality-based revenue sharing programs, or subscription models stressing depth and complexity. Regulatory actions including taxing advertising income generated from viral false information or content reinforcing stereotypes could discourage careless content amplification.

3.2.6 Lessons Learned

The incident involving the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection teaches important lessons on the weaknesses of modern digital publics, the institutional difficulties of handling new media crises, and the systematic dynamics of emotionalized discourse. These teachings have to guide not only institutional communication policies and future platform governance but also more general society attempts to create a more resilient public sphere.

First, the incident shows the amazing speed with which public conversation can veer from personal moral narratives in emotionally charged digital environments to major systemic concerns. Emotional responses to selectively framed representations of an individual administrator almost instantly replaced procedural questions about privacy rights and administrative responsibility. This dynamic shows how strongly new media publics' cognitive and emotional architectures are inclined to personalization, moralizing, and emotional escalation, so undermining rational, systematic deliberation [65].

Second, the case emphasizes how structural entrenchment of emotional amplification inside platform business models is achieved. Emotionally volatile content—whether accurate or distorted—will always be systematically privileged as long as user engagement is the main indicator of algorithmic optimization and revenue generation. Dealing with public opinion defocus thus calls for facing not only user behaviors but also the underlying economic logics of the digital media ecosystem itself.

Third, the inability of institutional crisis communication in the Zhang Meiyu case emphasizes the critical need of openness, compassion, and responsiveness. Institutions have to give up out-of-date public relations models based on information control, defensiveness, and opacity. Institutions in the new media environment have to treat public trust as a delicate, perishable resource that requires constant cultivation through transparent, sympathetic, and verifiable interaction.

Fourth, the event highlights the pressing need of strong media literacy programs able to provide people with the tools to critically negotiate emotionally charged digital environments. Publics are quite prone to emotional manipulation, stereotype reinforcement, and informational fragmentation without such systems, so sustaining cycles of indignation, polarization, and disillusionment.

Fifth, the Zhang Meiyu debate shows the perils of simplifying difficult institutional problems into symbolic conflicts about personal moral character.

Personalized vilification hides structural criticism, saps public emotional resources, and stifles positive reform. Long-term survival of democratic debate depends on a public culture that celebrates complexity, systematic knowledge, and empathy above oversimplified moral binaries.

At last, the incident emphasizes the overall dangers resulting from continuous public opinion defocus neglect. Every unresolved issue reduces baseline institutional trust, fuels public cynicism, and helps to normalize emotionally charged, divisive language. These combined consequences over time challenge the very possibility of group decision-making, creative policy development, and social cohesiveness.

Summary of Chapter 3

The case studies of Wu Yanni's controversy during the Hangzhou Asian Games and the Zhang Meiyu dormitory inspection event at Heilongjiang Vocational College offer striking pictures of public opinion defocus inside China's new media environment. These studies expose how quickly sensational, emotionally charged, and often biased narratives driven by the structural dynamics of digital platforms can eclipse more important concerns including athletic performance and institutional governance respectively. Driven by gender stereotypes and reinforced by new media's prioritising of aesthetically pleasing and emotionally provocative content, public attention turned drastically from Wu Yanni's competitive achievements in the women's 100-meter hurdles to her appearance, gestures, and perceived flamboyance. Data from Weibo and Douyin show this defocus statistically: With much higher engagement rates and a predominance of negative sentiment in the former, appearance-related posts exceeded performance-related ones by about 7:1. Likewise, in the Zhang Meiyu incident, personal vilification and rumour spreading quickly superseded first concerns about administrative responsibility and privacy rights. With younger users, especially those between the ages of 18 and 24, demographic studies show that keyword trends on social media moved from institutional issues to personal attacks within days.

Both cases highlight the systematic character of public opinion defocus, derived from the interaction of participatory user cultures, engagement-maximizing algorithms, and society prejudices. Designed to highlight content that creates great interaction, new media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and Bilibili methodically magnify sensational and emotionally resonant material over substantive conversation. While in Zhang Meiyu's case satirical reenactments and unverified rumours turned a procedural conflict into a morality tale, in Wu Yanni's case this showed as a viral cycle of memes and videos emphasising her "sky-pointing" gesture and makeup, overshadowing her athletic ability. With new media serving both as a mirror and an accelerant of these dynamics, gender bias in Wu's case and the erosion of institutional

trust in Zhang's highlight how pre-existing social tensions aggravate this change.

The suggested governance plans in reaction to these events support a multi-layered approach to minimise defocus. Suggestions for Wu Yanni include public education to raise media literacy, recalibrating platform algorithms to give substantive content top priority, and strengthening regulatory control to address gender-biased amplification. Along with these, Wu Yanni advocates civil society initiatives to challenge stereotypes. Strategies for Zhang Meiyu stress early-warning systems to identify defocus patterns, algorithmic controls to stop rumour spread, timely and open institutional crisis communication, and more general media literacy programs to equip consumers to critically interact with digital content. These steps seek to address the underlying causes of defocus, including profit-driven platform incentives and cultural standards favouring emotional over rational discourse, as well as its immediate expressions—such as viral sensationalism.

These cases teach rather important lessons. In the digital age, where algorithmic prejudices and user involvement can skew stories beyond recognition, they expose the fragility of public personalities and institutions to misrepresentation. Wu Yanni's experience emphasises the widespread impact of gender stereotypes, which reinterpret her confidence as arrogance, while Zhang Meiyu's case reveals the frailty of institutional trust when communication fails and emotional narratives predominate. Both events highlight the need of proactive, systematic interventions as they show the limits of reactive governance policies including defensive institutional statements or delayed content moderation. These include structural adjustments to platform architecture, laws punishing sensationalism, and educational initiatives aiming at producing a public able of resisting defocus.

These results have important ramifications for policy and scientific study. To better understand the processes of public opinion defocus and create evidence-based countermeasures, they advocate multidisciplinary research including media studies, sociology, and data science. While funding public education to improve critical media consumption, policymakers have to deal with the financial and technological causes of sensationalism, including engagement-based revenue models. In a time when digital platforms progressively control public opinion, it is imperative to address public opinion defocus by means of other channels. Learning from the experiences of Wu Yanni and Zhang Meiyu, stakeholders all around the media ecosystem—platforms, authorities, institutions, civil society, and the public—can cooperate to create a more fair, informed, and resilient media environment that favours substance over spectacle and serves the greater public interest.

CONCLUSION

The fast development of new media has brought in a transforming period for public opinion building and information distribution, so changing people's interaction with and view of society problems. News websites, blogs, social media channels, and short-video apps have democratised knowledge, so enabling common people to actively engage in public conversation. But this change has also brought major difficulties, most notably the phenomena of public opinion defocus—where, frequently influenced by false information and emotional rhetoric, attention veers from fundamental problems to peripheral or irrelevant details. This thesis has carefully examined the features of the new media environment that lead to this defocus, its several forms, its great influence on society, and the policies of governance needed to minimise its negative consequences. By means of an interdisciplinary lens combining communication studies, sociology, and political science, this study provides a strong framework for comprehending and mitigating public opinion defocus, so augmenting important insights to both theoretical debate and practical governance.

Many unique characteristics define the new media environment and both help and worsen public opinion defocus. The instantaneous flow of information guarantees that material travels quickly across platforms, usually surpassing verification procedures. While improving circulation efficiency, this speed causes information overload and overloading of the public's capacity to filter important material from noise. Interactivity lets users comment, share, and react, so promoting dynamic engagement; yet, it also magnifies emotional expressions, sometimes putting sentiment above reason. The emergence of user-generated content (UGC) has reduced the obstacles to content creation, so enhancing debate with real voices but also inundating the digital sphere with dubious and poor-quality information. Though they create echo chambers that reinforce prejudices and limit exposure to many points of view, algorithmic recommendation systems personalise user experiences and customise content to individual preferences. These qualities together provide a rich ground for public opinion defocus as attention gets split and readily diverted from important problems.

Public opinion defocus shows in several different but related forms that each reflect the complexity of the digital age. One main manifestation is issue diversity; the democratisation of knowledge has resulted in an exponential growth of subjects attracting public interest. From world crises to niche cultural events, this multiplicity fragments speech and makes it difficult to keep attention on any one topic. Further highlighting this phenomena are polarisation of opinions and group differentiation as people gather into opposing camps under ideological differences and supported by social identity elements. Emotionally charged content and false information aggravate

this polarisation, so widening social gaps and undermining trust among different groups. The thesis also sets apart positive from negative defocusing. Positive defocusing is the process by which attention moves to related problems with society benefits, such sustainable practices following an environmental disaster, so enriching debate but still fragmenting focus. Conversely, negative defocusing entails diversion to sensationalist or trivial concerns, so undermining effective participation. These expressions show how the variety and distribution of the new media era enriches as well as destabilises public opinion.

Public opinion defocus has far-reaching effects on society that go beyond mere influence on institutional credibility, social cohesiveness, and government efficiency. The breakdown of social consensus and the start of a trust crisis is one of the most important results. When focus veers from fundamental concerns, different interpretations proliferate, ingrainment of variances into society values results, so impeding coherent knowledge. This fragmentation fuels mistrust of information authenticity, which influences reliance on personal networks instead of authoritative sources and erodes society trust bases. The fall in media credibility adds to this problem since the spread of unverified UGC and algorithm-driven emotional content erodes confidence in both conventional and digital media equally. This degradation of the information ecosystem separates opinions, so aggravating social separation and conflict. Cognitive prejudices become ingrained as people selectively interact with supporting data, so aggravating polarisation and compromising logical debate. Group polarisation accentuates these divisions and generates self-reinforcing cycles of extremism endangering social peace. Public opinion defocus presents major difficulties at the governance level since it hides correct feedback and complicates policy development. Policies may stray from public needs when false information rules or attention is scattered, which causes discontent and resistance and so compromises governmental credibility and efficiency.

Dealing with these issues calls for a multifarious approach to government as suggested in this thesis. A pillar is legal control; current systems like China's "Clear and Bright" campaigns aiming at online anarchy and false information. But the fast speed at which technology is changing sometimes exceeds legislative adaptation, thus more flexible and exact rules are needed to reduce defocus-inducing actions. Leveraging data mining and sentiment analysis, public opinion monitoring tools provide real-time insights into public attitude, so facilitating early intervention in defocus situations. These instruments must, however, strike a compromise between efficiency and privacy issues by improving their intelligence to cut manual monitoring. Though funding and influence limits limit their scalability, social mobilisation involves non-governmental organisations and the public, so promoting openness and rational participation. Platform responsibility is critical since social media channels act as gatekeepers of information flow. While current reactive

approaches and engagement-driven algorithms fall short of properly reducing defocus, strengthening content moderation and verification processes is absolutely vital. At last, addressing profit-driven motives addresses the commercial incentives behind sensationalism and suggests changes to give quality top priority over traffic. These approaches taken together seek to realign the new media environment towards coherent public discourse based on knowledge.

The importance of this study is found in its thorough investigation of public opinion defocus as a result of social and technical changes. Integration of theories including agenda-setting, echo chamber effects, social identity, and cognitive bias enhances communication studies with a complex knowledge of digital-era opinion development. Practically, it provides media professionals, legislators, and teachers with doable advice on how to negotiate the obstacles of new media. From media literacy campaigns to regulatory improvements, the suggested governance policies offer a road map for reducing defocus, improving audience involvement, and so fostering a better information ecosystem. The case studies of Wu Yanni and Zhang Meiyu powerfully show how attention moves from significant achievements or institutional problems to sensationalised narratives, so highlighting the need of efficient government.

When one considers the scope of the study, several constraints show themselves that demand future investigation. Although insightful, depending too much on qualitative case studies might be balanced by more extensive quantitative data to generalise results across situations. The thesis mostly addresses the new media scene of China, implying the need of comparative research to evaluate defocus in many cultural and legal settings. Furthermore, the fast development of technologies like artificial intelligence and their part in content creation create new issues that this study just starts to handle. Future studies could probe more into these areas, looking at how advanced algorithms or AI-driven false information shapes public opinion defocus and what adaptive governance policies might reverse.

Looking ahead, this study has consequences outside of academia for useful application. Adopting adaptive legal systems and supporting public opinion monitoring will help governments to be more resilient for legislators. Media companies could give credibility top priority by means of thorough verification and fair reporting, so reversing the trust loss. Media literacy can be promoted by teachers and civil society, so arming people to negotiate the digital tsunami. Platforms, meantime, have to adjust their algorithms and incentives to support substance over sensationalism—a change that calls both ethical dedication and technological creativity. Together, these initiatives can create a digital environment in which public opinion functions as a positive tool instead of a disjointed echo of conflicting distractions.

Public opinion defocus in the new media environment reflects a complicated

interaction among society structures, human behaviour, and technological innovation. Rooted in immediacy, interactivity, UGC, and algorithms, this thesis has illuminated its causes as well as its expressions from issue diversity to polarisation and defocusing techniques. Its effects on eroding consensus, credibility, cognition, and governance highlight the risks for social stability and democratic involvement. Emphasising the need of coordinated action across regulatory, technological, and cultural domains, it provides a route to minimise these effects by means of suggested governance countermeasures. Our knowledge and handling of public opinion must change as new media develops to guarantee it stays a tool for informed debate rather than a victim of digital distraction. This research not only adds to the theoretical debate on communication in the digital age but also provides a basis for pragmatic solutions that maintain public opinion integrity and inspire stakeholders to act forcefully in creating a more logical, coherent, and trustworthy information ecosystem.

REFERENCES

1. Pariser, E. The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You / E. Pariser. – London : Penguin UK, 2011.
2. Sunstein, C. R. Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media / C.R. Sunstein. – Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2018. – P. 1-328.
3. Kahneman, D. Thinking, Fast and Slow / D. Kahneman. – New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
4. Bennett, W.L. Rethinking Political Communication in a Time of Disrupted Public Spheres / W.L. Bennett, B. Pfetsch // Journal of Communication. – 2018. – Vol. 68, № 2. – P. 243–253.
5. Wang, Q. Social Media Public Opinion Defocusing: Phenomena, Causes, and Coping Strategies / Q. Wang, L. Zhu // China Editor. – 2023. – № 6. – P. 28–33.
6. Potter, W.J. Media Literacy / W.J. Potter. – Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018.
7. Zhang, Z. New Media and Public Opinion: Twelve Key Problems / Z. Zhang. – Beijing : BEIJING BOOK CO. INC., 2016. – P. 183.
8. Castells, M. Communication Power / M. Castells. – New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009. – ISBN 9780199567041.
9. Sunstein, C.R. Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide / C.R. Sunstein. – Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2009.
10. Kubin, E. The Role of (Social) Media in Political Polarization: A Systematic Review / E. Kubin, C. von Sikorski // Annals of the International Communication Association. – 2021. – Vol. 45, № 3. – P. 188–206.
11. Downey, D.J. Attitudinal Polarization and Trimodal Distributions: Measurement Problems and Theoretical Implications / D.J. Downey, M.L. Huffman // Social Science Quarterly. – 2001. – Vol. 82, № 3. – P. 494–505.
12. Van Bavel, J.J. How Social Media Shapes Polarization / J.J. van Bavel // Trends in Cognitive Sciences. – 2021. – Vol. 25, № 11. – P. 913–916.
13. Z. Jiang. An Examination of “Group Polarization” / Z. Jiang // Journalism and Communication Studies. – 2019. – № 26(3). – P. 7–27+127.
14. Abramowitz, A.I. Is Polarization a Myth? / A.I. Abramowitz, K.L. Saunders // The Journal of Politics. – 2008. – Vol. 70, № 2. – P. 542–555.
15. Cyberspace Administration of China. Key Focus Areas for the 2025 “Clear and Bright” Special Campaign Series Released by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission Office [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: https://www.cac.gov.cn/2025-02/21/c_1741837533079135.htm. – Date of access: 20.03.2025.
16. Jia, Y. Analysis of Reputation Crisis Response Strategies in New Media Public Opinion Management [J]. / Y. Jia // News Research Guide. – 2023. – №

14(22). – P. 86–89.

17. Du, L. Application of Big Data in Network Public Opinion Analysis During Emergency Events / L. Du // China Informatization. – 2020. – №11. – P. 54–55.

18. He, C. Research on Public Opinion Based on the Perspective of Modern Governance and Public Participation: Connotations and Implications. / C. He, // Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China). – 2020. – №42(08). – P. 64–68+74.

19. Deng, R. Discussion on Public Participation and Public Opinion Guidance Value in Crisis Events from the Perspective of New Media / R. Deng // News Culture Construction. – 2020. – №05. – P. 12–14.

20. Li, T. A Review of the Literature on the Spread and Governance of Online Rumors in Chinese Social Media / T. Li // Frontiers in Business, Economics and Management. – 2023. – №8. – P. 108–113.

21. Guo, S. The Influence of Media on Public Opinion - Taking Internet Rumor Propagation as an Example / S. Guo // Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media. – 2023. – №4. – P. 351–356.

22. Han, Z. The Role and Influence of Social Media in Crisis Communication: An Analysis with Twitter as an Example / Z. Han // Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media. – 2024. – № 54. – P. 87–95.

23. Xu, F. Risks and Governance: The Game Model and Reality Explanation Between Capital and Public Opinion / F. Xu // Journal of Hohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition). – 2024. – № 26(02). – P. 60–69.

24. Wang, C. The Generation Logic and Governance Path of Public Opinion Polarization in Online Hotspot Events: A Dual-Dimensional Analysis Based on Static and Dynamic Causes / C. Wang // New Media Research. – 2025. – № 11(01). – P. 27–32.

25. Li, X. An Analysis of the Problem of Public Opinion Defocusing in the Era of Social Media [J]. / X. Li // Audio-Visual. – 2020. – № (08). – P. 209–210.

26. Liu, X. Legal Liability Analysis of Rumor-Mongering and Spreading by Self-Media Users: A Case Study of the "Hangzhou Woman Falsely Accused of Adultery While Picking Up a Delivery" Incident [J]. / X. Liu // Legal Vision. – 2023. – №4. – P. 18–20.

27. Wu, H. Role Changes of Opinion Leaders and New Governance Challenges in the Context of New Media [J]. / H. Wu // Journalism Communication. – 2025. – № (02). – P. 4–6.

28. Qi, J. Theoretical Framework Construction of User Health Information Search Mechanism Based on Behavioral Economics Theory [J]. / J. Qi, Z. Han // Information and Documentation Services. – 2025. – № (03). – P. 57-64.

29. Liu, X.. Research on the Generation Mechanism of Irrational Behavior of Social Media Users Under the Perception of Public Opinion Involvement Risk [J]. /

X. Liu, C. Deng // Library and Information Service. – 2024. – № 68(07). – P. 123–136.

30. Wang, Y. Communication Characteristics and Optimization Suggestions for Science Popularization Texts on Zhihu Platform / Y. Wang, L. Ren // Public Relations World. – 2024. – №11. – P. 163–165.

31. Wang, J. Research and Implementation of Privacy Protection and Data Security Sharing Scheme Based on Block chain / J. Wang // Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. – 2024. DOI:10.26969/d.cnki.gbydu.2024.000712.

32. Liu, L. Governance Strategies for Capital Logic in Online Public Opinion Fields: A Study Based on Bourdieu's Concept of Capital [J]. / L. Liu // Media Forum. – 2023. – №6(11). – P. 43–45.

33. Cyberspace Administration of China. Regulations on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendation for Internet Information Services. – [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-11/26/content_5728941.htm. – Date of access: 29.03.2023.

34. You C. From Control to Governance: The Transformation of Response Strategies to the Phenomenon of Public Opinion Defocusing in the Era of Omnimedia / C. You, J. Zuo // News Research Guide. – 2023. – №14(05). – P. 13–15.

35. Han, X. Why Public Opinion "Defocuses": Governance of Rumor Spread on Online Media Platforms / X. Han // News Communication. – 2022. – № 7. – P. 20–22.

36. Yang, Y. Causes and Governance of Public Opinion Defocusing in the New Media Environment / Y. Yang // Omnimedia Exploration. – 2024. – №2. – P. 134–136.

37. Jiang, Y. Research on the Application of Artificial Intelligence Technology and Ethical Issues in Internet Content Governance / Y. Jiang // China Informatization. – 2024. – № 3. – P. 51–54.

38. Mihailidis, P. Media Literacy as a Core Competency for Engaged Citizenship in Participatory Democracy [J]. / P. Mihailidis, B. Thevenin // American Behavioral Scientist. – 2013. – Vol. 57, № 11. – P. 1611–1622.

39. Ivanović, M. Development of Media Literacy – An Important Aspect of Modern Education [J]. / M. Ivanović // Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. – 2014. – № 149. – P. 438–442.

40. Arsenijević, J.M. Perception of Media Literacy in the Education Community / J.M. Arsenijević, M.J. Andevski // Collection of Papers Faculty of Philosophy. – 2022. – P. 239–257.

41. Bulger, M. The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy / M. Bulger, P. Davison // Journal of Media Literacy Education. – 2018. – № 10(1). – P. 1–21.

42. Smith, E.E. Digital Literacies, Social Media, and Undergraduate Learning: What Do Students Think They Need to Know? / E.E. Smith, H. Storrs // *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. – 2023. – № 20 (1). – P. 29.
43. Mrisho, D.H. Media Literacy: Concept, Theoretical Explanation, and Its Importance in the Digital Age / D.H. Mrisho, D.E. Bulendu, N.A. Dominic // *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*. – 2023. – № 6 (1). – P. 78–85.
44. Sankaranarayanan, K.B. Fathom Out the Nuances of Social Media Literacy and Its Practical Allusions to Misinformation – A Review [J]. / K.B. Sankaranarayanan, S. Kadeswaran, R. Jayaseelan // *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*. – 2024. – № 5. – P. 716–723.
45. Davidović, J. How to Defend Oneself: The Role of Information and Media Literacy in Protecting Against Media Manipulation [J]. / J. Davidović // *Communication and Media*. – 2022. – № XVII(1). – P. 97–119.
46. Xu, X. Western Countries' Experience in Internet Governance and Its Enlightenment to China / X. Xu // *E-Government*. – 2018. – № 12. – P. 45–53.
48. Chen, Y. Germany's Governance of Cyber Violence and Its Enlightenment to China / Y. Chen, J. Song // *Leadership Science*. – 2022. – № 5. – P. 127–130.
49. Xu, P. Characteristics and Reference of Japanese Media Literacy Education / P. Xu // *Media*. – 2022. – № 1. – P. 56–57+59.
50. Wang, C. Restrictions on Japan's Public Opinion Supervision of the Judiciary and Its Enlightenment / C. Wang // *Legal Vision*. – 2019. – № 18. – P. 73–75.
51. Hong, W. South Korea's Operation and Supervision of New Online Media: Experiences and Practices / W. Hong // *Military Journalist*. – 2016. – № 9. – P. 58–59.
52. Zhou, Z. Consolidating Social Positive Energy through Online Platform Spaces: Singapore's Strategies and Logic of Internet Governance / Z. Zhou // *National Governance*. – 2015. – № 08. – P. 28–33.
53. Li, Y. What is hindering Chinese women from participating in combat sports? / Y. Li, H. Li, D. Li // *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. – 2024. – Vol. 6. – P. 95.
54. Li, X. The network of sports: using network analysis to understand the relationship between sports and socio-physiological factors in contemporary China / X. Li, Y. Wang, Z. Zhang // *Applied Network Science*. – 2024. – Vol. 9, № 1. – P. 1.
55. Li, J. Using social media to mine and analyze public opinion related to COVID-19 in China / J. Li, X. Wang, Z. Chen // *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. – 2020. – Vol. 17, № 8. – P. 88.
56. Milli, S. Engagement, user satisfaction, and the amplification of divisive content on social media / S. Milli, M. Carroll, Y. Wang // *PNAS Nexus*. – 2025. – Vol. 4, № 3. – P. 62.
57. Zou, Y. Sentiment mining of online comments of sports venues: consumer

satisfaction and its influencing factors / Y. Zou, Q. Zhao, B. Wang, G. Chen // PLOS One. – 2025. – Vol. 20, № 4. – P. 16.

58. Zhang, X. Social media use among young people in China: a systematic literature review / X. Zhang, Y. Li // International Journal of Communication. – 2023. – Vol. 17. – P. 20.

59. Li, L. When content moderation is not about content: how Chinese social media platforms moderate content and why it matters / L. Li, K. Zhou // New Media & Society. – 2024. – P. 33.

60. Wang, J. The softening of Chinese digital propaganda: evidence from the People's Daily Weibo account during the pandemic / J. Wang, L. Chen // Frontiers in Psychology. – 2023. – Vol. 14. – P. 71.

61. Zhang, Z. How the crisis of trust in experts occurs on social media in China? Multiple-case analysis based on data mining / Z. Zhang, X. Li, Y. Wang // Humanities and Social Sciences Communications. – 2024. – Vol. 11. – P. 36-40.

62. Zhao, J. Influencing factors related to female sports participation under the implementation of Chinese government interventions: an analysis based on the China Family Panel Studies / J. Zhao, X. Wang, S. Xu // Frontiers in Public Health. – 2024. – Vol. 12. – P. 45.

63. Dong, M. A study on the impact of sports participation support on the level of sports participation of urban junior high school girls in China / M. Dong, M. Niu, Z. Jiang // Frontiers in Psychology. – 2025. – Vol. 15. – P. 15.

64. Li, C. Media literacy education in China / C. Li [ed.]. – Singapore : Springer, 2016. – 150 p.

65. Shen, Y. The impact of 15-minute fitness circles implemented in China on the public's subjective well-being: an empirical analysis based on CGSS2021 / Y. Shen, L. Niu, L. Miao // Frontiers in Public Health. – 2025. – Vol. 13. – P. 22.

Research Results

Table 3.1 - Attention Shift Comparative Data

Category	Appearance-related	Performance-related
Number of Posts	3260000	431200
Percentage of Total Posts	68.20%	9.02%
Average Likes per Post	12643	2958
Average Shares per Post	4273	611
Average Comments per Post	1987	452
Total Video Views (Douyin)	678000000	92000000
Top Single Video Views (Douyin)	23460000	2810000
Positive Sentiment (%)	18.60%	61.80%
Negative Sentiment (%)	57.30%	9.70%

Footnote – Source:own development

Table 3.2 - Regional And Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Category	Appearance-focused (%)	Performance-focused (%)
Shanghai (First-tier city)	71.6	28.4
Changsha (Second-tier city)	88.8	11.2
Zhengzhou (Second-tier city)	90.4	9.6
Guangdong Province (Urban)	65.8	34.2
Henan Province (Rural)	84.1	15.9
Age 18-24	76.3	14.9
Age 35-44	49.2	38.7
Female Users	62.4	18.7
Male Users	71.6	13.2
Higher Education Users	67.5	32.5
Lower Education Users	88.2	11.8
Beijing (Urban Timing)	74.7	25.1
Anhui & Guangxi (Lower-tier Timing)	91.3	8.2

Footnote – Source:own development

Table 3.3 - Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Category	Participation (%)	Emotional/Reflective Content (%)
Age Group 18-20	29.3	67.8
Age Group 21-24	19.3	42.1
Age Group 25-34	33.7	48.3
Age Group 35-44	11.2	38.5
Female Users	54.2	38.7
Male Users	45.8	24.9
First-tier Cities	41.5	21.2
Second-tier Cities	28.4	73.9
Rural/Lower-tier Areas	17.6	46.3
Postgraduate Degrees	21.4	36.2
Undergraduate Degrees	58.1	29.5
No Higher Education	20.5	19.7

High Income (>15,000 RMB)	18.9	41.3
Low Income (<6,000 RMB)	39.6	62.5

Footnote – Source:own development



Figure 3.1 – Weibo WuYanni Controversy Report-1

Footnote – <https://wx3.sinaimg.cn/mw690/bd91d3d4gy1i0valya3ibj22kl3uw4qq.jpg>



Figure 3.2 – Weibo WuYanni Controversy Report-2

Footnote – <https://wx3.sinaimg.cn/mw690/005vnhZYgy1hr7p9z0q55j61kw11xdkt02.jpg>

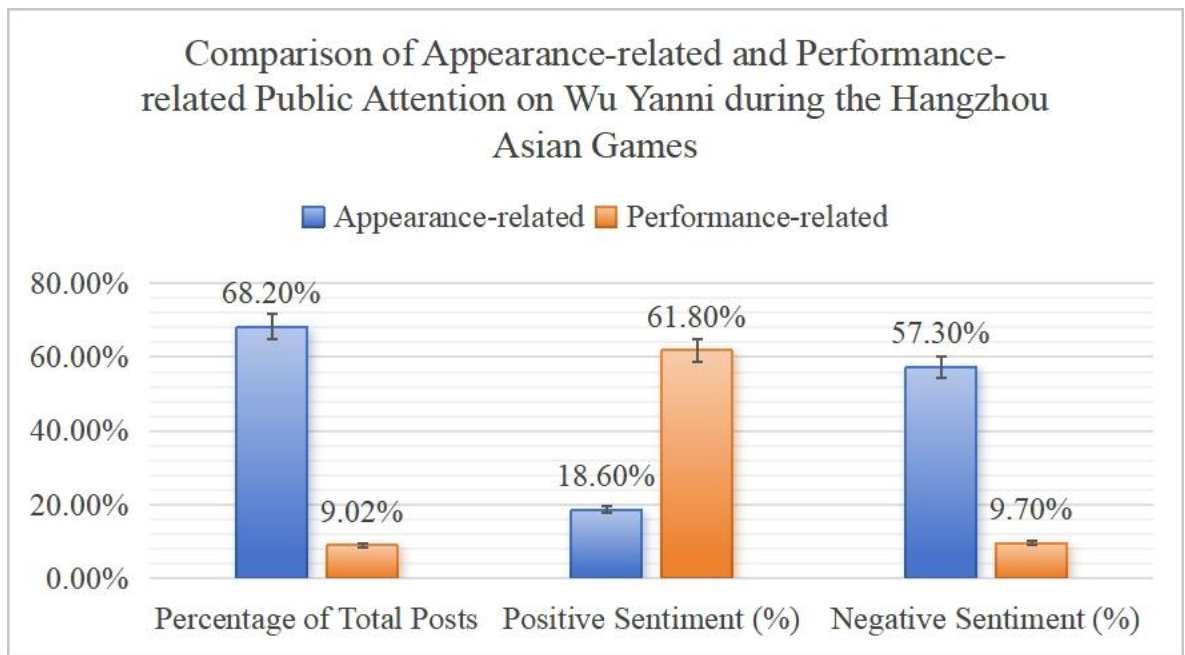


Figure 3.3 – Comparison of Appearance-related and Performance-related Public Attention on Wu Yanni during the Hangzhou Asian Games

Footnote – Source:own development

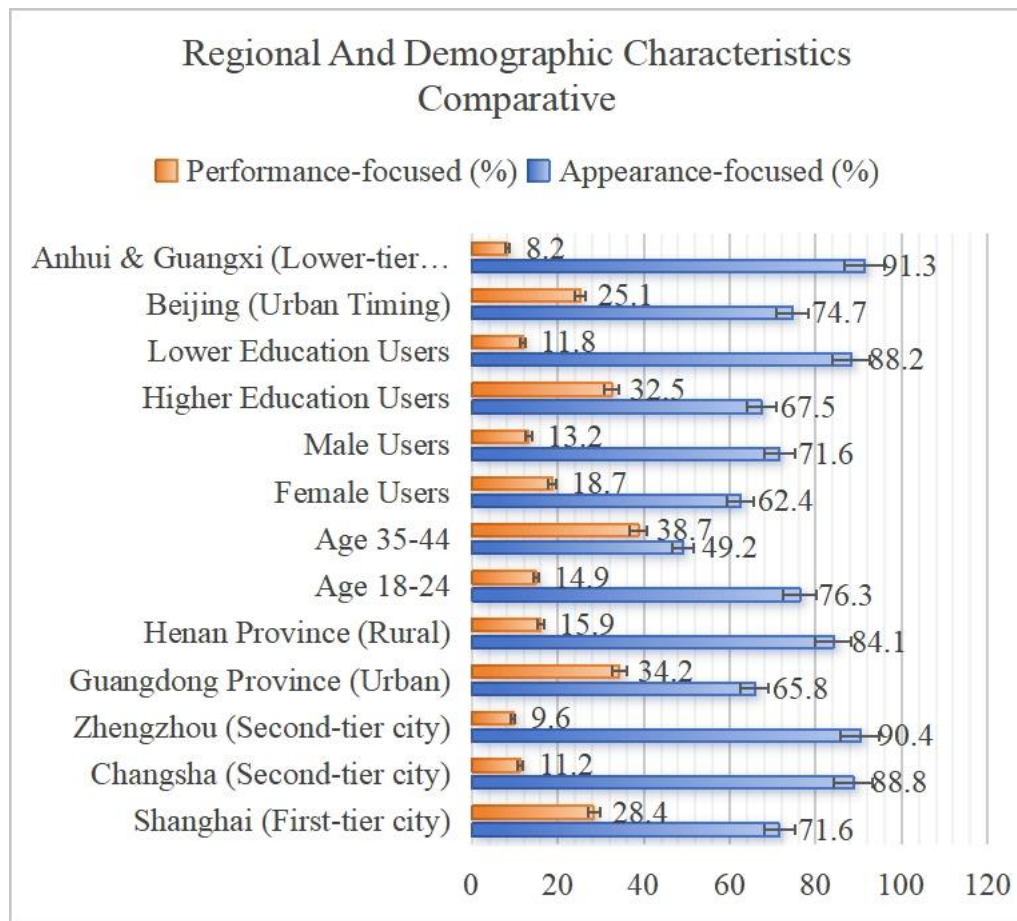


Figure 3.4 – Regional And Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Footnote – Source:own development



Figure 3.5 – Weibo Report ZhangMeiyu Incident-1

Footnote - https://f.video.weibocdn.com/0048smpugx07Puxbm4ne01041200BuQx0E010.mp4?label=mp4_720p&template=544x960.24.0&trans_finger=0dec003e4dad885964301ff5a1db7715&media_id=4676745731964938&tp=8x8A3El:YTk10eM8&us=0&ori=1&bf=4&ot=v&lp=00001DKxK6&ps=mZ6WB&uid=zzlB55F&ab=13038-g1,,1493-g0,1192-g0,1046-g2,1258-g0&Expires=1747401794&ssig=qGEUbUKy19&KID=unistore,video



Figure 3.6 – Weibo Report ZhangMeiyu Incident-2

Footnote – https://i1.hdslb.com/bfs/archive/44400b17ca515ac436d5d57121428dd2af2adf25.jpg@672w_378h_1c_!web-search-common-cover.avif

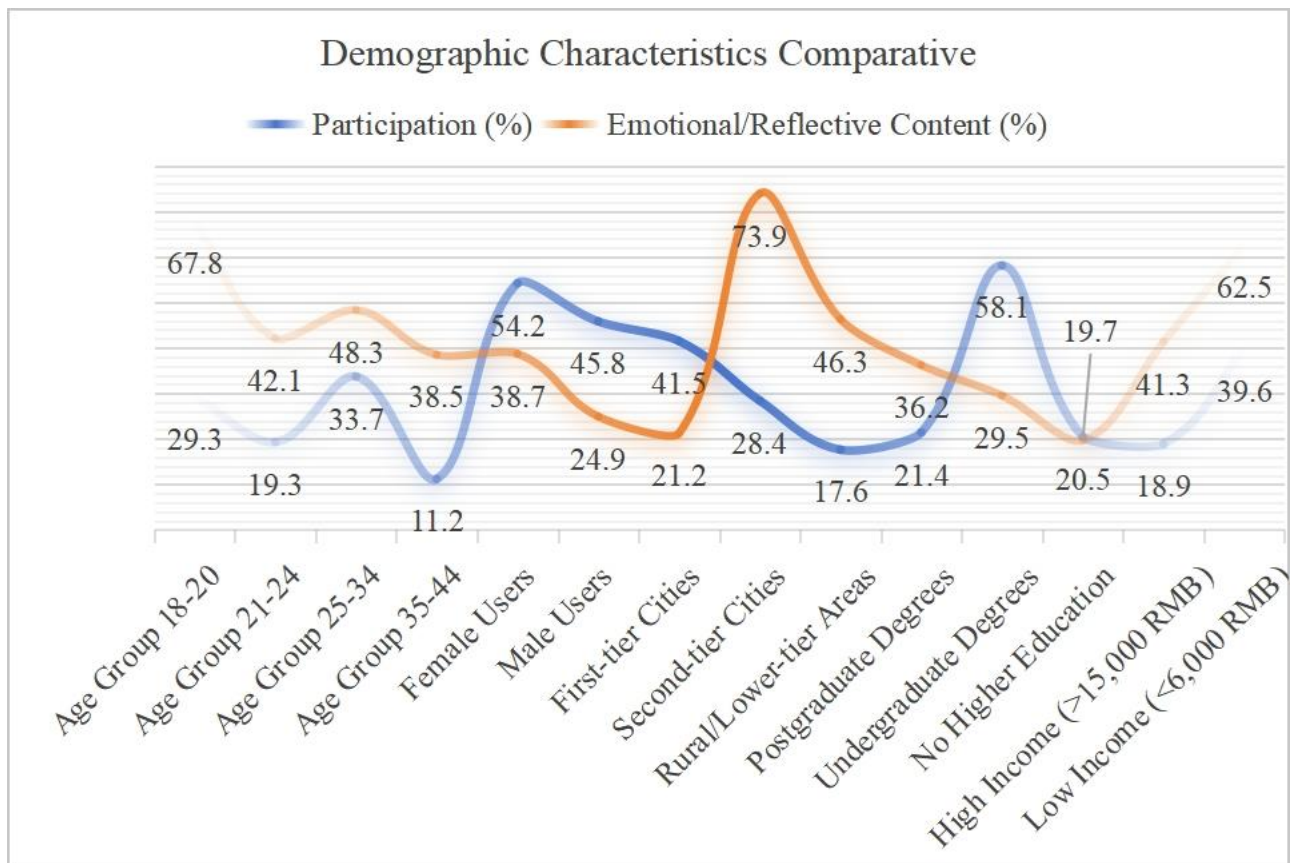


Figure 3.7 – Demographic Characteristics Comparative

Footnote – Source:own development