

Research on the Dissemination Characteristics and Guiding Power of Weibo “Medium-V” Users: A Case Study of the Luo Yixiao Incident (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-08-26T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Due to their inherent characteristics, Weibo verified users are more likely to become opinion leaders in online networks; however, current research predominantly focuses on “big V” users while neglecting “medium V” users. This study examines Sina Weibo’s “medium V” users as research subjects, analyzing their propagation characteristics and public opinion guidance capacity, thereby providing targeted management recommendations. [Method/Process] Employing the “Luo Yixiao” incident as a case study, this paper analyzes the propagation characteristics of “medium V” users from two dimensions: event evolution and user typology; concurrently, it integrates sentiment computing models and opinion leader index evaluation methods to construct a user attribute matrix for investigating the public opinion guidance capacity of “medium V” users. [Results/Conclusion] The research reveals that “medium V” users exhibit distinctive features including strong public opinion guidance capacity, high professionalism, weak commercial nature, and high fan homogeneity, and proposes relevant management recommendations.

Full Text

Research on the Propagation Features and Guidance Power of Weibo “Mid-V” Users: The Luo Yixiao Incident as a Case Study

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Verified users on Weibo are more likely to become opinion leaders due to their distinctive characteristics. However, existing research has predominantly focused on “top-V” users (those with over 1 million followers), neglecting the role of “mid-V” users. This study examines mid-V users on Sina Weibo, analyzing their propagation features and public opinion guidance capabilities to provide targeted management recommendations.

[Method/Process] Using the Luo Yixiao incident as a case study, we analyze mid-V users’ propagation features from two dimensions: event evolution and user typology. We construct a user attribute matrix by integrating a sentiment analysis model with opinion leader evaluation metrics to investigate mid-V users’ public opinion guidance power.

[Results/Conclusions] Our analysis reveals that mid-V users exhibit four significant characteristics: relatively strong public opinion guidance power, high professional competence, weak commercial orientation, and high fan homogeneity. Based on these findings, we propose relevant management suggestions.

Keywords: mid-V user; propagation features; sentiment analysis; public opinion guidance power

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the internet, social media platforms such as Weibo have become primary channels for information acquisition and dissemination. Users can freely express opinions and participate in discussions on public events. According to statistics, as of June 2017, Sina Weibo’s monthly active users reached 361 million [1], establishing it as a crucial arena for online public opinion.

Weibo users actively shape public opinion through their posts, which subsequently influence event development and impact real-world outcomes. Sina Weibo classifies users into ordinary accounts and verified accounts, with the latter receiving different “V” certifications based on their industry or field. Existing research has predominantly focused on verified users with over 1 million followers, defining them as “top-V” users [2-3], while overlooking other verified users with smaller followings who nonetheless play important roles in information dissemination and opinion guidance.

Verified users with fewer than 1 million followers present two key scenarios: First, some have low social recognition due to the diverse nature of Weibo verification criteria. Second, some maintain low activity levels with minimal posting or interaction. Both categories exert limited influence on network information propagation and public opinion guidance. Consequently, we define “mid-V”

users as verified accounts with 300,000 to 1 million followers who demonstrate relatively active engagement.

During public events, mid-V users often serve as observers providing professional interpretations, acting as a buffer between official and civilian discourse arenas. However, their large numbers and relatively low visibility make identification and monitoring challenging. When mid-V users generate negative impacts in public opinion propagation, these effects may go unnoticed while causing significant harm to the online environment. In many respects, mid-V users' importance to the public opinion landscape far exceeds that of top-V users. This study therefore investigates mid-V users' propagation features and guidance power, using the Luo Yixiao incident as a case study to provide empirical insights for mid-V user management and foster a healthier online public opinion environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public Opinion Guidance Power and Key User Research Public opinion exhibits strong spontaneity and blindness, manifesting in complex, diverse patterns. Different social strata, groups, and individuals form distinct perspectives based on their positions, influencing others' attitudes toward events. While domestic and international scholarship employs various terms—"public opinion guidance," "opinion leadership," or "public opinion regulation" [4-5]—all emphasize how specific actors employ particular methods and techniques to set agendas and systematically influence public sentiment trends from a comprehensive perspective.

Among the vast sea of online users, only a tiny minority of "opinion leaders"—key user nodes—play decisive roles in guiding public opinion [6]. These individuals serve as active agents who provide information and exert influence within interpersonal communication networks. They represent not only critical nodes in Weibo information propagation but also key drivers of public opinion hotspots.

Current approaches to evaluating users' status and influence generally fall into two categories: opinion leader indicator evaluation methods and social network structure mining methods. The indicator evaluation approach analyzes opinion leaders' attribute characteristics to construct reasonable evaluation systems. For instance, Liu et al. [7] developed a system comprising two primary indicators (influence and activity) and seven secondary indicators (including reposts, comments, mentions, original posts, self-replies, replies to others, and active days). The social network structure mining method constructs social relationship networks based on user connections, then employs algorithms such as SNA and PageRank to identify opinion leaders. For example, Wu et al. [8] proposed a PageRank-based influence algorithm to identify opinion leaders across different time periods. However, neither approach can effectively evaluate users' capacity

to alter others' commenting behavior or influence public opinion trends.

2.2 Weibo Information Propagation and User Research Academia identifies source, channel, message, and receiver as four essential elements of information propagation [9-10]. Weibo information dissemination primarily occurs through user forwarding and commenting [11], making users (who function as both sources and receivers) the primary research focus. For example, Liu and Li [12] categorized information propagation patterns into single key point, multiple key points, and chain types based on user forwarding behavior. He et al. [13] analyzed propagation features in Weibo user communities during emergencies by combining label propagation algorithms, random diffusion models, and content analysis. Liao et al. [14] examined user behavior characteristics in online public opinion events by analyzing posting volume, comment volume, and forwarding volume.

Weibo users are divided into ordinary users and verified users. Verified users, certified by Sina's official verification system (including individual and institutional verification) [15], include numerous celebrities, well-known institutions, and enterprises with high social recognition. Current research on verified users typically selects those with over 1 million followers as "top-V" users, investigating their categories, characteristics, management measures, and information propagation roles. For instance, Gan [16] studied top-V user types and governance strategies based on persuasion models, while Jing and Wang [17] analyzed changes in top-V propagation behavior and proposed regulatory recommendations.

Existing research on user propagation features typically adopts a single perspective, analyzing metrics such as forwarding volume, comment volume, or posting volume, or examining user relationship networks. However, online public events develop dynamically, with different stages presenting distinct characteristics. Relying solely on forwarding or comment metrics cannot dynamically reflect users' propagation features across different event evolution phases. Analyzing online public opinion from an event evolution perspective better aligns with its inherent patterns. Therefore, this study examines user propagation features from two dimensions—event evolution and user typology—and proposes the "public opinion guidance power" indicator to conduct more comprehensive analyses of users' propagation characteristics and guidance capabilities.

3. Research Framework and Methods

3.1 Research Framework This study investigates mid-V users on Sina Weibo through a specific case study. The process involves: (1) collecting Weibo posts and comments related to the event to establish an initial dataset; (2) analyzing mid-V users' propagation features from event evolution and user typology dimensions; (3) selecting Weibo corpora to construct a public opinion

guidance power calculation model based on sentiment analysis, combined with user information sets to build a user attribute matrix for comprehensive analysis; and (4) comparing mid-V and top-V users' propagation features and guidance power to identify mid-V users' distinctive characteristics and propose management recommendations. The research framework is illustrated in [Figure 1: see original paper].

3.2 User Propagation Feature Analysis 3.2.1 Event Evolution Dimension Analysis

Dynamic event analysis on Weibo requires examining hotspot changes and opinion trend developments throughout the evolution process. Scholars typically divide propagation stages according to event chronology or lifecycle. This study adopts Li et al.'s [18] emergency event network information propagation model, combining it with the selected case to analyze daily posting volumes and create an event evolution diagram for temporal analysis of Weibo information propagation. This approach enables objective examination of mid-V users' propagation features across different event stages.

3.2.2 User Typology Dimension Analysis

To investigate different mid-V user types' propagation features in public events, we classify verified users by their verification credentials. This approach reveals different user types' attribute characteristics and distribution patterns, combined with posting content, volume, and timing to summarize propagation features. We also compare similarities and differences between top-V and mid-V users within the same category.

3.3 User Public Opinion Guidance Power Analysis 3.3.1 Calculation Model for User Public Opinion Guidance Power

This study defines public opinion guidance power as "a user's emotional influence on their commenters." Specifically, we measure the degree to which a user influences commenters' emotional orientation toward the posted content. Using sentiment analysis, we analyze verified users' original posts and corresponding comment corpora to determine post sentiment orientation and comment sentiment values.

Post sentiment orientation is manually classified as positive, negative, or neutral, denoted as "+", "-", and "" respectively. Comment sentiment values are calculated through Python programming by identifying sentiment words, negation words, and degree words in comment text. The sentiment and negation dictionaries are based on the HowNet sentiment dictionary [19], manually screened to remove uncommon terms. Degree words and weights reference Han et al.'s [20] list of common internet short-text adverbs.

The algorithm proceeds as follows: (1) Segment comments into sentences using Jieba; (2) Identify sentiment words in each sentence, recording their position and

polarity (positive = +1, negative = -1); (3) Search for degree words before and after sentiment words, stopping at the first found and multiplying the sentiment value by the degree weight; (4) Search for negation words before and after sentiment words, multiplying by -1 for odd counts and 1 for even counts; (5) Calculate all sentences' sentiment values in a post's comments and sum them; (6) Determine comment sentiment polarity ($>0 = "+"$, $<0 = "-"$, $=0 = ""$), then normalize using min-max standardization.

User public opinion guidance power derives from the relationship between post sentiment polarity and comment sentiment values. When post sentiment is neutral, guidance power is 0 (no subjective viewpoint). When post sentiment is non-neutral: if post and comment polarities match with comment sentiment value a ($0 < a < 1$), the post exerts positive guidance ($F=a$); if polarities differ, it exerts negative guidance ($F=-a$). For a user posting n Weibo messages with guidance powers $f_1, f_2, \dots, f_n$, the user's overall guidance power F is the average, expressed in formula (1):

$$F = \frac{f_1 + f_2 + \dots + f_n}{n}$$

3.3.2 User Attribute Matrix

This study constructs a user attribute matrix (UVM) incorporating six attributes: forwarding volume, comment volume, follower count, like volume, posting volume [7,21-22], and the newly proposed public opinion guidance power. Posting volume refers to event-related Weibo posts, not total posts. Forwarding, comment, and like volumes represent average values across relevant posts.

The matrix construction process involves: (1) Statistical analysis of collected user information to record attribute data; (2) Integration with guidance power calculations from Section 3.3.1; (3) Construction of the final UVM, expressed in formula (2):

$$\begin{bmatrix} l_{11} & \dots & l_{1j} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ l_{i1} & \dots & l_{ij} \end{bmatrix}$$

where i represents user ID and j represents attribute ID ($j=1-6$ corresponding to the six attributes).

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Sample Selection The Luo Yixiao incident was selected as the case study for three reasons: (1) It was a high-profile event with broad propagation and participation, providing appropriately scaled data; (2) It exhibited clear developmental stages and strong opinion reversals, making it representative of

online public events; (3) It involved discussions about emerging phenomena like online fundraising, holding practical significance.

Data collection proceeded as follows: (1) Retrieved 1,305 Weibo posts from the Wisers data platform using keyword “Luo Yixiao” with date range November 1, 2016 to February 1, 2017; (2) Extracted each post’s URL and used Python to request the page and extract the mid parameter (post ID); (3) Called Weibo’s comment API using mid to obtain post content, user information, and comments; (4) Filtered 840 records of verified users’ posts, corresponding comments, and user profiles.

4.2 Verified User Propagation Feature Analysis

4.2.1 Event Evolution Dimension

By analyzing daily posting volumes related to the Luo Yixiao incident, we created an event evolution diagram [Figure 2: see original paper]. The event was divided into five stages (see):

1. **Incubation Period (Nov 29):** The event emerged locally in Shenzhen with limited Weibo propagation but media involvement spreading information society-wide.
2. **First Climax (Nov 30-Dec 4):** The most intense phase with widespread societal attention and massive public opinion formation.
3. **First Decline (Dec 5-Dec 23):** Attention decreased significantly with fewer user posts.
4. **Second Climax (Dec 24-Dec 26):** Luo Yixiao’s death reignited discussion, creating a second peak.
5. **Settlement Period (After Dec 27):** The event concluded with steadily declining attention.

4.2.2 User Typology Dimension

During the data collection period, 523 verified users posted 840 Weibo messages about the incident. This included 120 mid-V users (300,000-1 million followers) and 189 top-V users (over 1 million followers). Based on verification credentials, users were classified into six categories: expert, media, government, entertainment, institutional, and other types (see).

Table 2 shows category proportions for top-V and mid-V groups. Mid-V users include significantly more expert-type users but fewer media-type users compared to top-V users, while other-type users are slightly more prevalent. Government, entertainment, and institutional proportions are similar between groups.

Expert-type users are typically well-regarded professionals who become opinion leaders within specific interest or occupational communities by sharing specialized knowledge and interpretations. For example, user “Chen Yongdong” (verified as “Well-known IT blogger, associate professor and master’s supervisor in new media creativity and marketing, Weibo contracted self-media”) published

multiple posts including a headline article analyzing the incident's impact, which received over 10,000 views.

Media-type users include media organizations and professionals. Media organizations focus on objective reporting without subjective emotion, possessing clear advantages in information propagation breadth. During this event, 6 of the top 10 most active users and 7 of the top 10 most-commented users were media organizations. Media professionals, with their professional perspective, significantly influence social attention and event development. User "A Journalist with Some Ideals" posted 4 messages during stages 2-4, with one post receiving 639 forwards, 1,013 comments, and 1,826 likes.

Government-type users are primarily government agencies or public officials using Weibo for official information release and public interaction. Only 11 such users participated (3 mid-V, 8 top-V), posting 41 messages total, indicating limited engagement with general social events.

Entertainment-type users include celebrities, public figures, and grassroots users who have gained followings through their work, image, or personality. Their posts cover personal viewpoints, life reflections, and daily status across various topics. When they engage with social events, they generate significant influence within their fan circles.

Institutional-type users are commercial enterprises or public welfare organizations using Weibo for product, service, or concept promotion. During this event, "Health Network," "Sina Public Welfare," and "Child Harm Exposure Platform" were the most active institutional users, posting 4, 3, and 3 messages respectively—demonstrating that institutional users actively participate primarily in events related to their operational domains.

Other-type users include ordinary professionals like "XX company staff" or "XX school teacher." This smallest category shows "growth potential," as they may evolve into expert-type users by posting professional content or into entertainment-type users by sharing lifestyle content. Mid-V users include some other-type users, while top-V users rarely do, as ordinary professionals must consistently produce high-quality, domain-focused content to gain large followings.

4.3 User Public Opinion Guidance Power Analysis After excluding posts without comments, 643 Weibo messages remained for sentiment analysis. Using the method from Section 3.3, we calculated users' guidance power and constructed the user attribute matrix (partial results in).

The average guidance power was 0.0044 for top-V users and 0.0278 for mid-V users, indicating that mid-V users generally possess stronger public opinion guidance power. While user "Headline News" (Sina News Center) had the highest forwarding (501.67) and comment (1,035) volumes among all participants with 50 million followers, its guidance power was only -0.1061. Conversely, "Shijiazhuang Weibo" (a mid-V user) ranked first in guidance power despite only

dozens of forwards and comments.

Tables 4 and 5 show the top 10 and bottom 10 users by guidance power. Among the top 10, only 2 are top-V users (both media-type), while 6 are mid-V users spanning expert, media, institutional, and entertainment types. Among the bottom 10, 8 are top-V users across media, entertainment, institutional, and expert types, with only 2 mid-V users (media and government types). This demonstrates mid-V users' stronger influence over their followers, independent of user type.

5. Discussion

5.1 Correlation Analysis of Mid-V Users' Guidance Power While top-V users far exceed mid-V users in follower count, forwarding volume, and comment volume, mid-V users demonstrate stronger guidance power. To explore relationships between guidance power and other attributes, we conducted Pearson correlation analysis using SPSS (results in).

The analysis shows no significant correlation between guidance power and the other five attributes ($p > 0.05$), indicating guidance power can serve as an independent evaluation metric. The lack of correlation with follower count demonstrates that mid-V users, despite smaller audiences, play crucial roles in information propagation and opinion guidance. This stems from three key characteristics:

5.1.1 Vertical Focus and Strong Professionalism: Mid-V users typically offer unique insights within vertical topics. They possess specialized knowledge, post cautiously and responsibly within familiar domains, and rarely comment outside their expertise.

5.1.2 High Fan Homogeneity: Mid-V users operate as "narrowcast" channels with highly segmented audiences. Their followers congregate based on shared interests, hobbies, or professions, forming small but influential circles that can surpass top-V users' impact in specific domains.

5.1.3 Weak Commercial/Entertainment Orientation and Greater Rationality: Mid-V users generally maintain stable incomes and engage in knowledge sharing based on passion rather than commercial motives or fan economies. Their expressions tend to be more rational, objective, and professionally grounded.

5.2 Management Recommendations for Mid-V Users Analysis reveals that mid-V users serve as crucial intermediaries and buffers between official and civilian discourse arenas. They help resolve opposition between these spheres by interpreting official positions, analyzing social hotspots, and distilling public opinions. Their detached, professional observer stance enhances credibility.

However, their large numbers, low visibility, and specialized expertise make negative impacts more concealed and potentially destructive in rumor propagation and ideological propaganda.

Therefore, beyond improving policies and strengthening network-wide monitoring and content management, differentiated strategies should target specific mid-V types:

5.2.1 Expert-Scholar Mid-V Users: Should be supported to become core forces in news interpretation, event analysis, and positive energy dissemination based on domain knowledge. Many rumors and ideological struggles masquerade as scientific or elite discourse, requiring professional knowledge to counter. Expert mid-V users can help the public make accurate judgments and prevent harmful misinformation, particularly through rational discussion and open debate that presents diverse viewpoints and builds consensus.

5.2.2 Journalist Mid-V Users: Require strengthened guidance and monitoring to leverage their advantages in information dissemination, public 知情权 satisfaction, and in-depth analysis. Journalists possess unmatched advantages in information acquisition, production, and release. Monitoring should prevent negative, false, or emotionally charged information from misleading the public, while guidance should encourage them to provide professionally curated, verified, evaluated, and recommended information during social hotspots, promoting crisis prevention and resolution.

5.2.3 Grassroots Government Mid-V Users: Require enhanced training and standardized management. Currently, grassroots departments' online information release represents a weak link in government e-governance. Some grassroots agencies or officials lack unified, standardized Weibo management, occasionally releasing inappropriate content. Though normally low-impact, these "online spokespersons" become frontline actors during crises. Professional teams and standardized operations are essential.

5.2.4 Institutional, Entertainment, and Other Mid-V Users: Require institutional management to prevent them from becoming breeding grounds for false information and rumors. These users often lack media literacy, legal awareness, and political consciousness. Their influence within specific circles may cause blind fan support, or commercial institutions may engage in exaggerated or false promotion. Strict legal and regulatory constraints are necessary.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates mid-V users' propagation features and public opinion guidance power through event evolution and user typology dimensions. By integrating sentiment analysis to construct a guidance power calculation model and user attribute matrix, we provide comprehensive analysis of mid-V users' opinion guidance capabilities. The Luo Yixiao case study reveals mid-V users'

distinctive features: strong guidance power, high professionalism, weak commercial orientation, and high fan homogeneity. Corresponding management recommendations are proposed.

The guidance power indicator relies on sentiment analysis accuracy, which significantly impacts results. Future work will explore more sophisticated sentiment ontologies and segmentation methods to improve analysis accuracy and enhance the indicator's reliability.

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Author Contributions

Zhang Yuchen: Paper writing; Zhai Shanshan: Data collection, processing and analysis; Xu Xin: Research design and methodology; Xia Lixin: Paper revision and finalization.

English Abstract

Research on the Propagation Features and Guidance of the Mid-class Verified User Based on the Microblog

—Taking the Case of Yixiao Luo as an Example

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] The verified users of microblog are more likely to become the opinion leaders, but researchers are likely to focus on the top-class verified users and the lacks studies about the mid-class verified users. This paper analyzes the mid-class verified users' propagation features and abilities in public opinion guidance, and provides some suggestions for administration. [Method/process] The Yixiao Luo incident is taken as an example. First, related microblogs are divided into several phases by time. Meanwhile the users are divided into several groups by their verified reasons. With these two steps, we can conduct thorough research of users' propagation features from two different viewpoints. Then a matrix of verified users' basic attributes along with public opinion guidance ability which is based on sentiment analysis is built to evaluate the mid-class users' ability in public opinion guidance. [Result/conclusion] After researching, we find out the mid-class verified users have four significant features: their abilities in public opinions guidance are relatively strong, their opinions are more professional, they are comparatively rational and their followers are relatively homogeneous. With our findings, we propose some management suggestions for the mid-class verified users.

Keywords: mid-class verified user; propagation features; sentiment analysis; public opinion guidance

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.