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## Hazards and Management of Online Fake News in China in the Self-Media Era (Postprint)

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### Abstract

In the self-media era, false online news in China has proliferated incessantly; precisely because the development of the internet has paved the way for its dissemination, such false news has caused extremely adverse effects on society and the public. Based on this, this paper elaborates on the harms caused by false online news in China during the self-media era, analyzes the reasons for its emergence, and finally details the management measures for false online news in China in the self-media era.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

#### The Harms and Management of Online Fake News in China' s Self-Media Era

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**Abstract:** In the self-media era, online fake news emerges incessantly in China, precisely because network development has paved the way for its dissemination. Online fake news exerts extremely adverse effects on society and the public. Based on this reality, this paper elaborates on the harms caused by online fake news in China' s self-media era, analyzes the reasons for its emergence, and finally expounds detailed management measures.

**Keywords:** self-media; fake news; harms; management

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In the self-media era, the spread of fake news has become a significant problem. Many media outlets employ ambiguous methods when disseminating news to evade responsibility and legal accountability. The propagation of fake news negatively impacts people's psychology and creates cumulative harms. Therefore, the dangers of online fake news are extremely serious, and such phenomena should be eliminated.

## 1. Characteristics of Online News

Online news can spread rapidly in a short time, representing both an advantage and strength of online media. Compared with traditional media, online media offers faster transmission, broader reach, larger scale, and stronger influence—capabilities that traditional television, radio, and newspapers cannot match. Information dissemination online broadens people's horizons and enriches their cultural lives, but it also generates numerous fake news items. These very characteristics of networks create conditions for the release and spread of fake news, making it emerge in endless streams. Online news features high transmission speed and simple, convenient dissemination methods, free from printing, transmission, and other constraints, enabling real-time updates and reporting of actual situations. Particularly for breaking news events, networks hold greater advantages in release and dissemination. However, networks lack effective information identification and filtering systems, allowing many fake news items to run rampant. While traditional media face constraints of channels, layout, and time, networks amplify information dissemination, enabling anyone to publish information anytime. Coverage extends widely, from minor daily life matters to major international events, all of which can be posted online instantly.

Inadequate network management violates the original purpose of network development, and the faster networks develop, the greater the management challenges become. Especially for today's youth who pursue speed, they lack the time and patience to read lengthy articles. Moreover, in-depth reporting, which introduces the full context and consequences of events in great detail, tends to have higher authenticity, yet such news holds little appeal for young netizens who prefer simple, straightforward content. However, the authenticity of simple news remains questionable.

## 2. Harms of Online Fake News in China's Self-Media Era

With the development and advancement of internet technology, numerous emerging self-media platforms have emerged. Although the self-media era enables people to conveniently browse news unrestricted by time or location, it brings many problems, among which the generation of online fake news becomes increasingly serious, causing social harm and damaging the online environment.

## 2.1 More Severe Cyber Violence, Infringing on Others' Rights and Interests

The anonymity available online creates vast numbers of “keyboard warriors” who blindly follow trends without understanding the truth. For instance, when a bus fell into the Yangtze River in Wanzhou, Chongqing in 2018, online rumors claimed that a driver in an oncoming red car had caused the accident by violating traffic rules. Consequently, many online users viciously attacked and verbally abused the car driver, with some even launching personal attacks.[1] After police investigation and evidence collection, it was revealed that the driver of the red car was also a victim. However, the online false propaganda and mass forwarding and insults subjected the driver to cyber violence, causing serious physical and psychological harm to the individual while also disrupting social order.

## 2.2 Misleading Public Opinion and Confusing the Public

News inherently guides social public opinion and serves as a primary channel for information transmission. In the self-media era, online news dissemination has become mainstream. If online news is untrue or widely reposted by uninformed netizens, fake news spreads rapidly. In 2020, a WeChat public account published an article titled “Attention! The Pronunciation of These Words Has Been Changed!” listing cases such as the character “骑” in “一骑红尘妃子笑” changing from “jì” to “qí,” and “斜” in “远上寒山石径斜” changing from “xiá” to “xié.” The article quickly spread online and sparked intense discussion among netizens. On the same day, relevant authorities responded that these pronunciation modifications were still under discussion and had not been finalized, so the original pronunciations should still be used. Such misleading information easily confuses the public, leading to errors in public cognition.

## 2.4 Damaging National Image and Media Credibility

The popularization of the internet, coupled with the development of self-media, has lowered the threshold for information dissemination. People can access massive amounts of news and information, but this comes with the spread of fake news. Faced with large quantities of mixed-quality news, the public lacks the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. If online fake news that damages national image emerges, it harms the public's right to know and endangers social order. For example, in early 2020 when COVID-19 broke out in China, the epidemic was effectively controlled through the persistent efforts of the entire population and effective national governance—achievements witnessed by the people. However, some Western countries groundlessly criticized China online and maliciously spread rumors, seriously damaging the nation's image.

### 3. Causes of Online Fake News in China' s Self-Media Era

#### 3.1 Inadequate Online News Supervision

Inadequate supervision of online news is a primary reason for the intensification of fake news. The overall quality of online news has not improved but rather declined. Self-media news lacks a sufficient talent pool, and many reports lack originality. Additionally, online news distribution platforms, especially self-media platforms, exercise lax management, leading to rampant homogenization and fragmentation of online news.[2] Particularly when major events occur, traditional media' s cumbersome news release procedures and steps result in delayed publication by authoritative departments. Some online media outlets, aiming to increase traffic, release unverified news online, thereby generating fake news. Therefore, online news management is particularly important; only through effective network supervision and enhanced review can the generation and spread of fake news be effectively reduced.

#### 3.2 Low Professional Standards of Self-Media Journalists

Network dissemination has certain particularities. Self-media workers, unlike traditional media journalists, lack professional journalism competence. Due to the rapid rise of online news media, there is an extreme shortage of online journalism professionals, and the industry experiences high personnel turnover. This results in a significant gap in professional standards between self-media workers and traditional media journalists. Most personnel working in online news media have not undergone comprehensive systematic training.

#### 3.3 Excessive Market Competition

In the new media era, intense market competition has greatly impacted media development. Many media outlets, in their development, blindly pursue economic benefits, taking increased economic returns as their primary development goal. This causes some media to lose their direction and original stance, a phenomenon particularly prominent among online self-media. Self-media is inherently open, flexible, and timely, leading many platforms to release news without strict review to increase click rates and maximize economic benefits. Some self-media even deliberately create hype and fake news to increase followers and economic revenue. Such behavior violates fundamental journalistic principles and bottom lines, losing its sense of responsibility and leading to severe online fake news problems.[3] Traditional media such as television and newspapers undergo rigorous processes from interview to draft writing, review, and final release, requiring multiple layers of control and verification, thus resulting in lower probabilities of fake news. However, in the self-media era, to compete for attention and first-release positions, many processes are omitted, greatly increasing the likelihood of fake news. In online self-media, the focus is not on news authenticity but on click rates, attention, and the number of reposts and comments. Consequently, many self-media adopt improper meth-

ods to release news, with “clickbait” headlines frequently appearing and causing public disgust.

### **3.4 Network Openness Facilitating Fake News**

Network platforms are highly open, and netizens can operate anonymously, giving them a high degree of freedom of speech online. Some netizens recklessly publish inappropriate remarks, while others maliciously create fake news for dissemination. They often exploit people’ s psychology by releasing false statements that spread faster and provoke strong reactions online. Some online “water armies” or “manipulators” also exploit hot topics of public concern to create public opinion and gain attention. Faced with massive numbers of comments and reviews, netizens lose their ability to evaluate objectively, with their emotions becoming subject to online news and public opinion.

### **3.5 Imperfect Management Systems**

Due to the rapid rise and development of self-media, original management systems no longer suit modern self-media network management, and corresponding management systems have not kept pace. Many self-media platforms and netizens lack legal awareness, and punishments for those who create and spread online fake news are insufficient, making such actors even more unscrupulous. Although China continuously improves its management systems, some still exploit legal loopholes. Real-name systems should be implemented in online news publication, but many self-media platforms neglect this aspect and fail to effectively enforce online real-name systems. Some platforms even illegally use people’ s registration information, leading to privacy leaks. Therefore, implementing real-name systems is necessary. News published on self-media platforms should undergo strict review before release.[5] Some platforms attempt to shirk their responsibilities under the guise of freedom of speech, exercising lax platform management. Although freedom of speech is a citizen’ s right, when it contradicts facts and harms citizens’ legitimate rights, disrupts social order, or threatens national security, such false news and speech should be restricted. If self-media platforms discover published news is untrue, they should promptly delete it and provide explanations.

## **4. Management Measures for Online Fake News in China’ s Self-Media Era**

With the rapid development of internet technology, many self-media platforms have quickly emerged, and fake news has become rampant. The spread of online fake news harms the nation, society, and the people. Therefore, we should identify its root causes, manage and control it from the source, and improve the authenticity and effectiveness of news in the self-media era.

#### 4.1 Strengthen Network Supervision to Ensure News Authenticity

As online marketing develops toward marketization, to effectively improve online news authenticity, reforms and improvements should be made to the online market environment. Supervision of networks should be strengthened, public awareness of online news should be enhanced, and the timeliness of news content should be improved to jointly maintain the online news environment. For example, public supervision power can be leveraged by strengthening public oversight of online news. The public should be encouraged to objectively verify news accuracy when browsing and to report untrue content that does not match actual facts on platforms, thereby fully exercising public supervision to maintain the online environment. Popular self-media platforms such as blogs, Weibo, Kuaishou, and Douyin should be strictly managed to improve the overall quality of the online news environment.

#### 4.2 Strictly Manage Editorial Work and Improve Journalist Quality

News editing should ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of online news. Editors play an important role in news release, so the quality of editorial staff should be enhanced to enable them to consciously abide by online order and supervise news content, thereby improving online news authenticity. For example, both traditional and self-media should conduct regular training for news editors to help them adapt to modern network development needs, improve their professional competence, and enhance their professional ethics. When facing large volumes of news information, they should be able to objectively distinguish authenticity and accuracy. Additionally, emphasis should be placed on news content review, with strict examination after editing and layered controls to strictly follow journalistic procedures, ensuring news authority. For online news to develop better, authenticity must be guaranteed while also focusing on the production and dissemination environment, strengthening analytical capabilities, and effectively ensuring content authenticity to prevent the generation and spread of online fake news.

#### 4.3 Use Advanced Technology to Implement Real-Name Systems

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

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