

Research on Media Participation Phenomenon in Network Communication - Postprint

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Abstract

Among the numerous self-media platforms, Weibo is favored by netizens for its strong interactivity, immediacy, and grassroots characteristics. This study addresses the phenomenon of media participation in network communication, taking the Sina Weibo platform as a case study, to investigate the media network participation, conceptual transformations, and their consequential impacts engendered by Weibo; to explore specific pathways and methods for enhancing media literacy against the backdrop of the new media era; and to assist both social media and the public in participating with scientific perspectives and actions, thereby creating a harmonious and upwardly positive atmosphere for network communication.

Full Text

An Exploration of Media Participation Phenomena in On-line Communication

Abstract: Among the numerous self-media platforms, Weibo has gained particular favor among netizens for its robust interactivity, immediacy, and grassroots character. This paper examines the phenomenon of media participation in on-line communication, using the Sina Weibo platform as a case study to investigate how Weibo facilitates networked media engagement, shifts in perspectives, and their consequential impacts. It seeks to identify specific pathways and methods for enhancing media literacy within the new media era, which can enable both social media institutions and the public to participate with a scientific viewpoint and approach, thereby fostering a harmonious and positive atmosphere for online communication.

Keywords: online communication; media participation; opinion leaders

1. Online Communication and Media Participation

Online communication merges mass communication and interpersonal communication into a distributed network structure where every network node can produce and disseminate information. All information generated and released flows non-linearly into the network to achieve social and cultural communication objectives. Network technology has propelled the development of online communication, diversifying information sources so that people can learn about world affairs simply through multimedia devices. Online communication has torn down the walls of traditional media, transferring the influence and creativity of content dissemination from media giants to individuals and resulting in a fundamental shift in discourse power. Everyone now has the right to express opinions online and showcase their individuality, achieving a state of equitable exchange.

The speed, convenience, and two-way interactivity of online communication enable people not only to transmit information but also to receive immediate feedback. With the liberation of online speech, constraints on public opinion have been lifted, and information dissemination is presented more three-dimensionally to audiences. As living standards improve and network technology advances, the public's information sources have gradually shifted to the internet. To maintain their relevance, traditional media must adapt, seeking digital and networked breakthroughs that require corresponding strategic adjustments and progress.

2.1 Pathways for Traditional and Self-Media Participation in Online Communication

In terms of content production, traditional media have digitized their information, achieving mobile-based content creation and editing. Regarding dissemination methods, traditional media cooperate more frequently with network mobile clients and leverage new online media platforms for promotion to expand their influence. From a profit perspective, traditional media have added online revenue channels through promotion via mobile phones and the internet.

The diversification of online communication forms has provided traditional media with expanded options. Traditional media following online trends apply for official Weibo accounts to post informal mini-blogs and register WeChat public accounts to publish current affairs content, often employing novel formats, texts, and graphics to attract audience attention while keeping pace with trending social topics. Popular mobile live streaming, which requires only a smartphone to complete cross-regional, people-friendly, timely, interactive, and convenient information dissemination and feedback, can now be seen across political, economic, entertainment, and cultural domains.

For example, when China's Tiangong-1 spacecraft launched aboard the Long March-7 rocket, the event was not only broadcast live on television but also si-

multaneously streamed on CCTV News's official Weibo account. This enabled timely interaction with audiences who could not watch television, allowing people worldwide to share in the joy of Tiangong-1's space achievements.

2.2 Opinion Leaders on Weibo

Opinion leaders on Weibo typically possess two key characteristics: high follower counts and high comment volumes. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that Weibo opinion leaders mainly include celebrities, newspapers, media professionals, and official television station accounts. Behind media opinion leaders stand hosts, journalists, editors, and commentators. Behind official media lies representation of regional and even national image, with extraordinary diffusion influence, making media statements on Weibo particularly crucial.

First, media opinion leaders must maintain an objective and calm attitude, analyzing and explaining facts to help the public see the truth clearly. Their role is to help audiences objectively organize information and make clear-headed judgments on hot topics or events, correcting erroneous descriptions and viewpoints to better maintain social order.

Second, media opinion leaders, with their high credibility, have won numerous followers. Media influences audiences, and followers tend to have strong emulation abilities. Therefore, as opinion leaders, media must maintain proper attitudes, objectively and calmly point out directions, and avoid misleading public cognition.

Taking the Yu Huan case as an example, the article "The Mother-Insulting Stabber" published by *Southern Weekly* triggered a media 舆论 storm. The participation and reporting of major domestic media on this case largely provided reliable 舆论 guidance and opinion support. Through the Weibo platform and leveraging their institutional advantages, they conducted in-depth and comprehensive reporting on the Yu Huan case, sparing no effort to provide reliable truth for netizens and restore the real situation as much as possible, attracting attention and responses from relevant departments.

2.3.1 More Accessible Expression

During the Two Sessions held from March 3 to March 15, 2017, Weibo played a crucial role. Following Premier Li Keqiang's proposal to "make government affairs transparency as simple as scanning a QR code," the government work report included a QR code for public scanning. Through Weibo, scanning the code revealed a 2-minute 50-second H5 animated short video and a chart that vividly and intuitively presented the government work report content. This demonstrates that government work has further integrated with the internet and reached deeper into the masses.

Meanwhile, official media Weibo accounts also followed up. CCTV News's official Weibo launched a live activity—"What's on Your Mind at the Two Sessions,

We'll Help You Ask”—and initiated the topic “Watching the Two Sessions on Weibo.” During the Two Sessions, it called on Weibo users to ask questions during live broadcasts, which on-site journalists then posed directly to NPC deputies, receiving immediate responses.

2.3.2 More Transparent Content

During the Two Sessions, whether the Premier's report or proposals from committee members or deputies, Weibo rapidly disseminated them to netizens, who also provided immediate feedback on their views and ideas. The flexible use of Weibo short videos made the entire Two Sessions more intuitive and accessible to netizens, giving them opportunities to “face-to-face” participate with leaders and deputies. According to data, starting from March 4, within seven hours, the top five media outlets saw over 110 million incremental reads on Two Sessions topics. The common characteristic of the top five topics was that all media used Weibo live streaming. The *People's Daily* official Weibo reached 100 million reads on the third day of Two Sessions reporting, and by the afternoon of March 6, it had achieved 140 million reads.

2.3.3 More Integrated Forms

During the 2017 Two Sessions, major television media began using long Weibo posts to analyze and explain main content for netizens, while print media like *China Youth Daily* increasingly adopted short video formats for dissemination on Weibo. This integrated traditional media with new media and print media with the internet. Data shows that during the 2017 Two Sessions, media released 24,000 short videos, conducted over 100 live streaming events, reaching 1.3 billion views, with over 50 million viewers and more than 100 million likes. This demonstrates that Weibo has promoted public support for government work and enhanced public enthusiasm for political participation. Weibo's value continues to rise, with continuous reform and innovation across political, economic, and cultural fields. As an interactive information platform, it has brought convenient lifestyles to people and advanced human society.

3. Media Responsibilities in Online Communication

3.1 Disseminating Truth and Combating Falsehood

Weibo, as an instant information platform with the slogan “Discover fresh things anytime, anywhere,” is highly susceptible to spreading false information. Weibo's pursuit of “newness” and speed becomes its fatal weakness, as media often cannot immediately “gatekeep” information, and unverified content gets published, resulting in higher distortion rates than traditional media. Furthermore, Weibo's reposting function means that once false information is released and shared, it spreads in a diffusion pattern that challenges the original truth.

Media's role is obviously crucial. While false news will not be covered up forever

and true news will eventually surface, we must do our utmost to improve the situation. As online media, platforms should follow the principle of authenticity, combat and eliminate the spread of false information, and not be blinded by interests. As mainstream media, outlets should uphold professional ethics and integrity, not only refraining from spreading false information but also timely and objectively reporting truth, clarifying facts, and providing satisfactory and truthful responses to the public.

3.2 Conveying Correct Values

Mainstream media's values represent society. Media's role on Weibo is to guide the public in forming correct values, which must be established based on the standpoint of socialist core values. Our values aim to build a harmonious society, not mislead the public into forming values that run counter to social harmony. Media should convey positive values through concise commentary, correct inappropriate speech, and further consolidate our harmonious society.

3.3 Building a Healthy Online Culture

Due to Weibo's broad user base with diverse values, divergent views emerge on the platform, occasionally including malicious verbal attacks, abuse, or fabrication of false information. The urgent priority is to adopt proactive and strong measures to resist such phenomena. On November 1, 2009, at the third second meeting of the China Internet Association Council, the "Weibo Self-Discipline Service Specification" was proposed and formulated, using technical means for guidance and regulation, which has played a powerful auxiliary role in the healthy operation of Weibo communication.

Additionally, media, as highly credible and authoritative groups on Weibo, must recognize that advantages and disadvantages coexist. As the media market gradually expands, competition intensifies. In today's media market, to attract audience attention, achieve high ratings, gain fame, and obtain profits, some outlets do not hesitate to fabricate fake news or exaggerate stories, using sensational headlines to deceive audiences and fostering the unhealthy trend of fake news. However, satisfying the public's spiritual needs must be based on truth as the principle and bottom line.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.