

Exploring Guidance Paths for Online Public Opinion Among University Students in the Smart Media Era

Authors: Zhang Xiaoyun

Date: 2023-12-21T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

As the internet and ideology become further coupled in the intelligent media era, university student affairs work is confronted with new risks encompassing the fermentation of public opinion, pervasive latent concerns over online ideological trends, and the erosion of discursive authority. Grounded in practical considerations for risk resolution, universities should endeavor to achieve the internal unity of public opinion leadership, discursive power, and managerial authority.

Full Text

The Path of Online Public Opinion Guidance for University Students in the Age of Intelligent Media

Zhang Xiaoyun

(School of Marxism, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, Guangdong 510631, China)

Abstract: With the further coupled development of the Internet and ideology in the intelligent media era, university student affairs are facing new risks such as public opinion fermentation, hidden concerns over online ideological trends, and the dissolution of authority in public opinion discourse. Based on practical considerations for risk mitigation, universities should strive to achieve the internal unity of public opinion leadership, discourse power, and management authority.

Keywords: intelligent media era; university students; online public opinion

The intelligent media era has witnessed the proliferation of micro-terminal media applications such as Weibo, WeChat, and short-video platforms. The diverse information conveyed through these channels continuously influences people's

thoughts and behaviors in subtle yet profound ways. Owing to the digitization of capital, this information exhibits a dual nature: while technological empowerment enriches information resources, it also carries the dregs of capital, obscuring the positive effects on university students' thoughts and behaviors. Consequently, as a crucial front for ideological and political education, universities must scientifically address the practical crises in public opinion management during the intelligent media era and effectively guide public opinion among university students.

1 New Characteristics of Information Dissemination in the Age of Intelligent Media

With the evolution of network information technology, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data have given rise to new models of information dissemination characterized by “micro” formats, as well as structural changes in public opinion response mechanisms. As a representative of new media, micro-media demonstrates high compatibility with the intelligent media era, exhibiting significant differences from traditional media in terms of dissemination subjects, mediums, and speed. Its emergence has broken through previous spatial, temporal, and preference constraints on information dissemination, presenting novel features that university online public opinion guidance must grasp.

1.1 Human-Machine Alienation and Information Crisis

“Human-machine alienation” represents a crucial characteristic of current information dissemination and a novel manifestation of labor alienation in the intelligent media era, leading to a dual crisis of information cocoons and information commercialization. This alienation stems from the further development of network information technology: information on micro-terminals is often disseminated through algorithmic push mechanisms that cater to general or individual preferences. While such selective information consumption behavior enhances dissemination rates and acceptance, network algorithms' focus on fixed information types ultimately restricts people's information scope and knowledge horizon, resulting in the formation of “information cocoons.” Moreover, beyond the inherent rationality of technology, “human-machine alienation” also originates from the inherent logic of capital, primarily manifested as information commercialization—where information becomes a product of capital operation. This commercialization ultimately triggers a contest between public and private interests, with information manipulated by capital making it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood, posing significant challenges to public opinion guidance efforts.

1.2 Rapid Dissemination and Interactive Transmission

Emerging media in the intelligent media era disseminate information far more rapidly than traditional media, with information spreading explosively at a geometric growth rate. This is attributable to two primary factors: First, dissemination subjects have undergone further hierarchical refinement, with individuals serving as information units for collective exchange. In the intelligent media era, network users leverage platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok to overlap their identities as information recipients and publishers, maximizing information transmission speed and enabling multi-frequency, rapid information transfer and sharing of short texts, brief news, images, emojis, and micro-videos within seconds [1]. Second, information dissemination in the intelligent media era is characterized by interactivity—people are not merely information recipients but also information senders. This has broken down the traditional boundaries between information publishers and receivers to some extent, fully collapsing the space of information dissemination and transforming traditional one-way transmission into interactive “same-frequency resonance” between disseminators and audiences [2], thereby accelerating information flow at multiple speeds.

1.3 Group Expression and Opinion Polarization

As circle-layer interactions deepen and topics progressively intensify, “group expression” based on the intelligent media era can sometimes lead to group polarization effects, which may cause opposition and conflict between different circles and groups. The term “group” here primarily refers to an “evaluation group” composed of people who hold similar views on information assessment after dissemination. This group’s aggregation obscures each individual’s uniqueness, causing individual thoughts to be subjected to group intervention and creating a “bandwagon commenting” phenomenon online. Once “group expression” loses control, it can easily fall into the predicament of opinion polarization, forming excessive support for or opposition to the same issue or theory. This occurs because dissemination rights in the intelligent media environment have gradually shifted to individualized scenarios, coupled with high-speed, fragmented information dissemination that easily triggers public overgeneralization, ultimately leading to sharp contradictions in public opinion viewpoints and endangering the healthy environment of online spiritual civilization construction. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to the pan-politicization mode of public opinion expression within opinion polarization.

2 Actual Crises in University Public Opinion Guidance in the Age of Intelligent Media

Alongside the empowerment of cyberspace by the intelligent media era, university public opinion guidance work has exhibited new tendencies and crises under the influence of new technologies and ideological trends. If universities cannot

scientifically analyze the self-evolution patterns of public opinion and mitigate public opinion risks, they will lose the initiative in public opinion management. Therefore, we must maintain a clear understanding of these crises.

2.1 University Emergencies Triggering Public Opinion Fermentation

The handling of emergencies serves as a “touchstone” for testing university public opinion work. Public opinion development generally follows four stages: incubation, diffusion, outbreak, and decline [3]. The application of intelligent media software accelerates the fermentation of public opinion and the turnover of dissemination cycles. If universities cannot promptly control, intervene in, and alleviate public opinion challenges, the consequences may range from reputational damage to “public opinion conflicts.” The primary dilemmas in current negative public opinion fermentation triggered by emergencies lie in inadequate early prevention, untimely mid-stage analysis, and improper late-stage handling.

First, early prevention is insufficient, encompassing ideological publicity work and the establishment of university rules and regulations. In recent years, incidents such as academic misconduct and teacher-student suicides have frequently appeared online, partly attributable to inadequate early-stage construction of faculty and student thoughts and behaviors. Second, when public opinion erupts, universities often fail to conduct timely analysis, which primarily tests their capacity for public opinion collection and feedback. If universities cannot promptly identify the conditions for public opinion generation and its fermentation status, and cannot coordinate across hierarchical levels to formulate solutions in a timely manner, their management efforts will fall into a passive predicament. Finally, post-climax handling is often inadequate. Improper handling after campus emergencies can easily trigger secondary public opinion recurrences.

2.2 Negative Public Opinion Exacerbating the Impact of Online Ideological Trends

As digital capitalism reconstructs production relations and modes, algorithmic technology, as its product, likewise conforms to the logic of capital accumulation. To maximize profits, capital seeks various means to increase information popularity to gain more traffic, without considering the correctness of information. This causes unhealthy ideological trends to hide within negative public opinion information, intensifying ideological conflicts, inducing ideological disorder among university students, and challenging the security of mainstream ideology in universities. For instance, individualism and utilitarianism, bolstered by intelligent media, employ more covert means to influence students, attempting to suppress the impact of core values.

First, individualism is on the rise, with the core tenet of neoliberal ideological trends being individualism. Under its influence, students often exhibit selfishness and self-centeredness. Second, utilitarianism prevails, primarily manifest-

ing as “rational economic man thinking”—the pursuit of self-interest maximization. Under utilitarianism’s influence, education loses its functions of value shaping and personality perfection, with interest appeals becoming the primary goal. Examples include the “score-only” mentality, where students focus solely on obtaining high marks, leading to superficial learning that completely contradicts our advocated spirit of dedication and community consciousness.

2.3 Intelligent Media Diluting the Authority of University Discourse

Communication platforms in the intelligent media era exhibit extreme openness, interactivity, and information diversity, significantly weakening the authority of university public opinion discourse and reducing the dissemination power and guiding force of mainstream ideological discourse. These characteristics pose crises for the construction of university public opinion discourse power: First, “pan-entertainment” information undermines the authority of university discourse. University students can more conveniently access entertainment information through micro-media terminals, exposing their thinking to the risk of “pan-entertainment.” This leads to psychological resistance against mainstream ideological discourse in university education and even fosters anti-intellectual sentiments. The paradox of “pan-entertainment” lies in its gradual displacement of mainstream consciousness-related content, marginalizing materials that align with society’s main themes.

Second, “online opinion leaders” weaken the authority of university discourse. “Online opinion leaders” in the intelligent media era have become increasingly democratized, with varying quality levels that cannot guarantee the positive nature of their ideology. Coupled with their possession of online discourse power, they can easily create a “spiral of silence” in public opinion, potentially resulting in weak university educational discourse that cannot effectively correct the negative misleading effects of online public opinion on student thoughts and behaviors.

3.1 Upholding Party Leadership to Strengthen Public Opinion Leadership

University public opinion guidance must consistently uphold Party leadership, strengthening student public opinion work centered on Party and youth organizations to ensure the stability of university public opinion leadership. First, student Party members should receive enhanced theoretical education, particularly in the basic principles of Marxism, to deepen their understanding of the socialist system and policies. This enables student Party members to genuinely support Party leadership and proactively maintain ideological purity and advancement. Second, regarding non-Party students, the exemplary power of peer relationships between Party members and non-members should be fully utilized. When facing the influence of unhealthy online public opinion, student Party members should promptly report situations to Party and youth organizations, helping non-Party students align their thoughts and behaviors with Party

members. Finally, concerning public opinion crisis prevention, university Party and youth organizations can conduct diverse cultural activities to help students build “immunity.” For example, they may employ virtual VR technology to optimize Party-building center installations and organize student visits through Party activities or classroom sessions, enabling students to immerse themselves in the arduous years of Communist revolution and experience the great journey of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

3.2 Leveraging the Educational Role of Ideological and Political Courses to Strengthen Discourse Power

The intelligent media era demands greater vigilance against the loss of public opinion discourse power. For universities, this means coordinating both internal and external situations [4], particularly by maintaining the primary position of ideological and political theory courses and utilizing classrooms for timely public opinion guidance. Teachers conducting public opinion guidance should observe three key points: First, rationally employ “value clarification.” Traditional ideological and political theory courses focus on theoretical indoctrination, lacking gradual guidance for students from cognition to identification, making them somewhat weak in resisting public opinion impacts. Therefore, teachers can adopt the “value clarification” model, establishing problem awareness based on the people’s needs standpoint, innovating classroom presentations with intelligent media technology, observing student ideological trends during instruction, and precisely addressing the influence of online public opinion.

Second, transform discourse methods. An important reason for the decline of university public opinion discourse power is its disconnect from reality. Teachers should effectively utilize tools such as courseware, video, and audio to explain mainstream media discourse to students in ways that resonate with them and reflect the times. Third, enhance their own discourse capabilities. Some ideological and political theory teachers have weak information reception abilities on media platforms, creating a language and digital divide with students. Therefore, these teachers should keep pace with the times, master the characteristics and usage of emerging media, and improve their media literacy and discourse expression abilities. Only then can they successfully interpret the manifestations and meanings beneath different public opinion information, thereby strengthening university public opinion discourse power.

3.3 Building High-Quality Publicity Platforms to Strengthen Management Authority

In the intelligent media era, if universities are to achieve coordinated operation between ideological and political work and information technology while strengthening public opinion management authority, they must inevitably build an exclusive high-quality publicity platform and establish a news and public opinion processing mechanism. To accomplish this goal, three points require attention: First, cultivate a professional media team, including online news in-

interview and editing personnel, video creators, photographers, etc. [5]. The news and public opinion work team forms the foundation of the publicity platform, enabling faster grasp of public opinion trends and helping the university conduct timely public opinion guidance and dispersion.

Second, coordinate across university departments, as establishing a publicity platform requires cooperation from all university publicity departments. The publicity platform is not limited to a single website or APP; it actually represents the sum total of all university publicity departments. In addition to the university's official WeChat and Weibo accounts and official accounts on major applications, it also includes offline publicity boards, advertising columns, newspapers, and periodicals. Its publicity work should be based on three major items: "daily current affairs interpretation," "correct public opinion guidance," and "emergency incident handling." Third, information publicity should prioritize positive content, promoting reports rich in social positive energy. Information with positive value orientation helps shape students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, creating a favorable public opinion atmosphere for students and reducing the impact of negative information in the intelligent media era. Therefore, public opinion publicity must align with socialist core values.

The transformation of information technology in the intelligent media era has brought about the reconstruction of the online public opinion landscape, continuously impacting university students' ideological consciousness and values. Once the university public opinion security position is lost, online ideological security will lose its protective barrier. As a crucial variable in university ideological publicity, public opinion guidance work must adapt its development trends and methods to the demands of the times. It should fully leverage existing ideological and political education resources and micro-media technological advantages to achieve further optimization and improvement on the basis of rationalizing the intrinsic value order of mainstream ideology.

[1] Hu Jian. Research on the Construction of Media Ethics Governance System from the Perspective of Micro-Communication[J]. *Journal of China University of Mining and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2022, 24(01): 43-54.

[2] Tao Da. Rational Reflection on the Construction of Mainstream Ideological Discourse Power in Universities in the All-Media Era[J]. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 2021(10): 70-71, 78.

[3] Peng Xiangrong. The Evolution Law of University Public Opinion in the New Media Environment—Based on a Survey and Analysis of Seven Universities in Xi'an[J]. *Contemporary Communication*, 2013(05): 105-107.

[4] Ye Zhengfang, Cao Peng. Analysis on the Innovation and Development Path of University Propaganda and Ideological Work in the New Era[J]. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 2022, (12): 1287-1289.

[5] Ma Tianchen, Li Huaijie. Research on the Guidance Power of University Network Public Opinion in the New Media Era[J]. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 2022(06): 58-60.

Received date: 2023-05-11

Author biography: Zhang Xiaoyun (1998-), female, Master's student, School of Marxism, South China Normal University.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.