

A Study on People's Daily Weibo and Comments

—Taking Hu Xinyu's Case as an Example

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Abstract: The matter has continued to develop for 106 days since the revelation of the suicide of teenager Hu Xinyu. The incident was pushed to the climax after the official release of factual evidence. This is because people still have doubts and questions about the attitude toward the information released by the officials. As a result, the issue of the government's crisis of confidence has erupted again. Taking People's Daily as the research object, this article will use the case study method, content analysis method, and data collection method to introduce the development process of the Hu Xinyu case as the starting point to analyze the culmination of the development of Hu Xinyu case event, as well as the Weibo comment data of People's Daily's official Weibo account about the event, the reasons that caused the bifurcation of Hu Xinyu case comment, regional influence, and whether to trust the government. This paper summarizes that the release of official information in China should grasp the three main points of fast, accurate, and hard, while the dissemination of information needs to cross-regional differences and make full use of the network resource platform to strengthen communication, regulate the network environment and create a good atmosphere for public opinion. For the release of information on hot events, it should focus on the audience and take the audience's needs as the starting point, thus realizing the transformation of the audience from observers to participants.

Keywords: Hu Xinyu, government trust, Weibo, People's Daily

1. Introduction

Hu Xinyu, a student of the senior class (5) of Zhiyuan Middle School in Qianshan County, Shangrao City, Jiangxi Province, was strangely lost from campus on the evening of October 14, 2022. The local provincial, municipal, and county public security authorities set up a joint task force to investigate the incident and announce the results of the investigation to the community in a timely manner. Hu Xinyu's body was found on January 28, 2023. Under the on-site guidance of domestic authoritative criminal technology experts, the provincial, municipal, and county public security authorities worked jointly in a task force to investigate by conducting investigation visits, site investigation, post-mortem

examination, physical evidence examination, and identification. After a series of investigations, Hu Xinyu was found to have hanged himself, and the body was found at the original first site. Although all key evidence points to the death of the unfortunate missing teenager Hu Xinyu by suicide, rumors of Hu Xinyu's "murder" and questions about his suicide have been battling on the Internet from the beginning to the end. Even after the official "hard evidence" was produced, the public had the problem of decreasing trust that "the official's power covers the truth." Throughout the course of the incident, various comments appearing on the Weibo platform are also guiding the direction of the domestic public's attitude towards the matter.

As people know it now, Weibo is generally called Sina Weibo. In fact, Tencent, Netease, and Sohu all had Weibo businesses in the past, but after Sina Weibo went public in 2014, they slowly faded out of view and withdrew from the stage of history. Weibo is similar to Twitter in that it is a platform for public communication and entertainment. According to the Weibo User Development Report 2020, in September 2020, the monthly active users of Weibo reached 511 million, and the daily active users reached 224 million. Weibo user groups are mainly post-90s and post-00s, with the total percentage of both close to 80%, making it the most active and youngest platform for users. According to statistics, the number of Weibo users reached 600 million in 2021. By 2022, the number of Weibo users is expected to reach 1 billion, with the tagline "Discover what's new, anytime, anywhere." Therefore, Weibo has the characteristics of convenience, dissemination, originality, and a tendency to pan-entertainment. Since Hu Xinyu's suicide broke out, the story has attracted the attention of Weibo users and generated 1015 topics. The topic "Hu Xinyu's body was found" alone has been read 2.1 billion times. People's Daily and the user comments below were selected for the study in this paper.

People's Daily is the organ (the official newspaper) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Its official Weibo aims at "authoritative voice, mainstream value, and fresh expression" and takes "participation, communication and recording the times" as its mission. Its content is mainly designed to disseminate the views and information of People's Daily, taking into major account events and service information at home and abroad and organizing micro-interviews, micro-live broadcasts, micro-surveys, and other activities in a timely manner to focus on social hotspots and respond to public concerns. Currently, it has 151 million followers. People's Daily is the official media in China. People's Daily is chosen as the research object of this paper because People's Daily, as an official Weibo certified user, has a certain authority, and its report content is more impartial and objective.

2. Literature Review

As a major social emergency, the suicide of Hu Xinyu has attracted the attention of the general public. The public tends to focus its attention on major emergencies for a certain period of time. The danger, sensitivity, and suddenness of major emergencies are different from those of ordinary events [1]. At the same time, with the addition of Internet communication, major emergencies will achieve a universal level of information diffusion in a very short time. In her study, Han Lu showed that mobile social media drives multi-level groups to participate in discussions, which allows the dissemination of information to break the limits of geography, people, and circles [2]. Therefore, during this period of exponential growth of information dissemination, negative emotions such as tension and anger will emerge in social platforms together with positive emotions such as trust and neutrality [3]. Based on big data technology, public opinion theory, and information dissemination theory, Huang Wei et al. proposed five elements of online opinion dissemination: subject, object, media, ontology, and space [4]. By tapping into the platform of Weibo, this paper examines the essence of online opinion communication in a small way.

Weibo is a type of micro-blog. The process of acquiring and disseminating information completed by the users of this platform is time-sensitive and casual [5]. At the same time, Weibo is a broadcast social networking platform that shares short, real-time information, aiming to reflect the user's latest evaluation of the latest progress of the matter at a certain moment, reflecting the dynamics of his or her thoughts at the moment [5]. By analyzing the content characteristics, Wu Bide concluded that Weibo users' comments are strongly subjective, and their comments often reflect users' personal perceptions or emotional expressions [5]. This is also related to the interactive ritual chain. In the research of Deng Xin, the attention and discussion of an object by an individual will cause others to discuss it, thus creating a certain group unity [6]. It is also because public opinion has a certain tendency to trigger a crisis of trust in the government. In Gu Lina's study, she suggested that the development of the Internet is a great challenge for the government because of its certain virtual and anonymous nature [7].

In this study, it was also found that the general public is concerned about the mental health of adolescents in the content of public comments. According to Jingjin's research, the number of people with mental health problems among minors is gradually increasing, especially among adolescents aged 15-19. The types of disorders commonly suffered by these populations are phobias, anxiety disorders, and depression. Moreover, these diseases have become the third leading cause of adolescent death [8]. Adolescent suicidal behavior has gradually risen to become a serious public health problem. In Zhu Zhuohong's study, data showed that 51% of adolescent suicides were secondary school students and that the leading cause of death among these secondary school students was depression [9]. Depression is not something that people think is because the student is too vulnerable or because of the student's personal reasons. Depression is a mental illness that needs to be taken seriously by families, schools, and society. Family support shows a negative correlation with adolescent suicidal ideation. There is a link between campus environment and adolescent mental health, and different exposure to social media can also have an impact on adolescent suicidal ideation [10]. On the basis of Weibo's user comments in this paper, it is already possible to feel that adolescent mental health problems need to be worked on by everyone.

All these studies provide some background information for this paper, but there are still some research gaps. This paper finds that the above studies are mostly theoretical in nature lacking case studies. Thus, this paper intends to study individual users and comments on individual platforms in order to better analyze the direction of public opinion. In this paper, the content analysis was used to explore the opinions of People's Daily and user comments on the Hu Xinyu incident.

3. Methodology

In this paper, the exact development of Hu Xinyu's case was sorted out. It happened on October 14, 2022, but the real outbreak actually occurred on October 16, 2022. It has been three months since the latest development on February 12, 2023. Analysis and collection of comments from netizens through the platform of social media - Weibo. Find the comments and the peaks of the development of things according to the time clues of the development of things. Follow the changes in comments to determine if they will have an impact on public opinion, and use the PyCharm editor to generate crawler code using Python with the requests library and to generate tables. Meanwhile, information related to each user is collected. The data is processed using pandas, plotted and mapped using matplotlib and pycharts, and then looked at which areas are more active and the ratio of men to women. Then, a collection of popular words based on text features was made.

4. Results

In this paper, the number and content of user comments on Hu Xinyu's event on People's Daily, which published 12 posts on Weibo and 142,887 user comments on Hu Xinyu's event was analyzed. The overall number of user comments showed a fluctuating change of rising and then falling. Among them, the peak of comments appeared on January 29, when the content of Weibo was "Police informed the process of Hu Xinyu's remains discovery," and the number of comments from Weibo users reached 38,000. The low point of comments appeared on February 12, when Weibo content read, "1,894 illegal accounts involved in Hu Xinyu incident were disposed of", with 493 comments from Weibo users. Here, 4,000 comments on the official People's Daily account on the day after the official ruling of Hu Xinyu as a suicide case was took and a sample of 200 of these 4,000 comments was analyzed. The results of the sample analysis were divided into the following categories:

1. The attitude towards related public opinion, accounting for 73.24%: 48 posts, accounting for 24%, criticize the self-marketing media for disinformation; 6 posts, accounting for 2.5%, hope the relevant departments will vigorously regulate the self-marketing media; 68 posts, accounting for 34%, question the police's ability to handle cases and control comments.

2. The attitudes toward Hu Xinyu accounted for 24 percent: 33 posts, accounting for 16.5%, for mourning and good wishes for his afterlife and his parents; 6 posts, accounting for 3%, for wishing to protect his privacy and respect the deceased; and 9 posts, accounting for 4.5%, for feeling sorry for his loneliness during his life.

3. The analysis and evaluation of the case accounted for 41.5%: 31 posts, accounting for 15.5%, were concerned about the specific details of the case; 6 posts, accounting for 3%, were of the opinion that the parents were stirring up trouble; 3 posts, accounting for 1.5%, did not understand why such a large amount of social resources were used; 30 posts, accounting for 15%, were of the opinion that the mental health of teenagers should be taken care of when analyzing the causes of the incident; 9 posts, accounting for 4.5%, were of the opinion that previous disappearances were mentioned; 4 posts, accounting for 2%, were of the opinion that it was difficult to find the missing case and felt powerless.

On the basis of the above data analysis, this paper further analyzed the Weibo content with the highest and lowest number of comments. In Weibo with the largest number of comments, 4133 user comments were randomly selected, and the word "believe" was filtered to 995, among which 647 comments believed the police believed the official, while 348 comments questioned. This result indicates that most users are supportive of the results released by the official media and that People's Daily has some credibility on Weibo. According to the gender information set by individual users, female users are slightly lower than male users, at forty-nine percent and fifty-one percent, respectively was found.

A geographical analysis of user comment volume was conducted based on user IP addresses. The comment rate of Weibo users varies from region to region, with the most active region being Guangdong Province, with a user comment rate of 10.46%. Moderately active regions include Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Shandong, Hebei, and Beijing, with user comment rates ranging from 4% to 7%. The lowest active regions are Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, and Gansu Province, with user comment rates between 0% and 1%. According to the above data, it is found that the number of comments is higher in southeast and coastal areas and first-tier cities in China, and the number of comments is lower in northwest China. It can explain that due to economic, cultural, and other factors, information transmission and circulation is faster in developed areas and slower in less developed areas, and the attention to information is lower.

5. Discussion

Most users are supportive of the results released by the official media, which also shows that People's Daily has some credibility on Weibo. As an official media, People's Daily belongs directly to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and has some government credibility. During the Hu Xinyu incident, the full text of the detailed Hu Xinyu incident Q&A was released, as well as a live video broadcast of the police conference held in response to the Hu Xinyu incident. This not only helps Weibo users to understand the development process of the incident more intuitively but also reflects the importance the government attaches to this incident and helps to maintain the government's credibility. Although most of the users believe the officials, there are still some skeptical users. The late coverage of the Hu Xinyu incident by People's Daily led to serious information pollution, making it difficult for the public to distinguish the authenticity of the information, so much so that some users no longer believed the official information even after the correct results were released. Thus, in order to maintain the credibility of the government, the official media should identify problems and solve them in a timely manner, respond to the public in a timely manner, and reduce the misinformation to the public.

Influenced by economic, cultural, and other factors, information transmission and circulation are faster in developed regions and slower in less developed regions, which pay less attention to information. Due to the influence of China's economic and cultural policies and geographical location, different regions show different development speeds. Coastal areas and first-tier cities have more frequent foreign exchanges and trade and are more receptive to information, and have stronger communication skills. In addition, the economically developed areas have more entrepreneurial people, more colleges and universities, more active thinking, and a stronger desire for expression. Less developed regions are more old-fashioned in their thinking, more concerned about personal life, less concerned about external information, and less involved. The difference in attention to information reflects the current situation of regional development to a certain extent. However, it is easy to pay too much attention to outside information and lack of personal judgment to follow the trend, and too little attention to outside information is easy to be stagnant. Although regional economic development is different, for the outside information to have a certain degree of attention, strengthens the exchange of ideas between individuals and the outside world. The activity of personal ideas can drive the development of the local economy to a certain extent.

According to the results, female users are slightly lower than male users. Still, the difference is quite small and basically equal, suggesting that for this type of incident, which concerns the personal safety of teenagers, the concern aroused is universal. The suspenseful nature of the Hu Xinyu incident, which itself has a certain mysterious color, is also the reason why male users are slightly higher than female users. More than half of them are concerned about the direction of public opinion, and they are concerned about the openness and transparency of the progress of the incident, which means they have high demands and expectations of the credibility of the government. Nearly a quarter of the people who commented showed their attitude towards Hu Xinyu as a person whose concern is more about personal privacy and issues related to what happened to him during his life. They care about humanitarian and humanistic concerns. Nearly half of them commented on the incident, and the comments mainly focused on the call for care of youth health and the social resources taken up by the incident. They were concerned about the warning effect caused by this incident and the security management of the society.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, Hu Xinyu was taken as a specific incident and analyze and study the phenomenon that some netizens still have doubts and questions about after the official media released the hard evidence

of his “suicide” one hundred and six days after his strange disappearance. The purpose of this paper is to analyze a sample of comments on People’s Daily’s official Weibo to obtain the demand for attention to hot topics underlying public opinion. Most people believe in the information released by the official media. At the same time, in regions where information flows faster in China, the degree of information acceptance is stronger, the degree of open-mindedness is high, and people are participants about observers for hot events. On the contrary, there still exists a skeptical attitude toward the information released by the official. Because the release of official information was later than public opinion for the Hu Xinyu incident, leading to a decline in the government’s credibility. Meanwhile, the participation in relatively less developed areas is much less than in developed areas. It may be influenced by the level of economic and cultural development and overly conservative thinking. The data on the ratio of men to women in the comments is also a direct reflection of this. However, the difference is small, as there is a certain amount of bizarreness in the event itself, and the participation of men is slightly higher than that of women for reasons of personality traits. The starting point of the review is humanitarian and humanistic, focusing on people’s mental health issues and Hu Xinyu’s privacy protection. In summary, the government has a high level of trust and a high level of government credibility. However, there are still problems, such as the slow release of official information and the loss of government credibility brought about by the slow progress of things and the long-term occupation of public resources.

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