The Influence of Public Figures on Social Media in the Times of Covid-19

Chunrui Shao[1,a,*]

[1]*School of Media and Communication, Taylor's University, Selangor, Malaysia*
a. shaochunrui@sd.taylors.edu.my
**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the early 21st century, social media was not prevalent. People cannot obtain more information through the Internet but only through the daily news broadcast on TV and traditional media such as newspapers and magazines. With the continuous advancement of the Internet, social media has become an indispensable tool and platform in people's daily life. Especially in the covid-19 period, people can only communicate through social platforms when they have to work from home and maintain social distancing. During this period, people can go to work and study through social platforms at any time and forward and discuss current events on social platforms. This study based the investigation from the period covid-19 as a timeline in a progressive way, analyzing the events. This paper studies the influence of "Public Figures" on people. This study mainly collects data and uses a progressive method to explore the development trend of public figures' effects During the different periods of covid-19. The results show that the experimental data is valid and draw valuable conclusions such as "social media has a great influence on public figure's effect." The Impact of Social Media on public figures in the Time of Covid-19.

Keywords: social media, social platform, public figures, Covid-19

1. Introduction

During the SARS epidemic, China had the worst outbreak in the world [1,2]. Eight thousand ninety-eight cases were diagnosed worldwide and in Asia,-Pacific region, with a mortality rate of 9.6% [3]. Covid-19, also known as SARS-CoV-2, broke out in China in 2019 and constituted a significant public health event globally [4]. This outbreak has affected people in countries worldwide, and as of April 7, 2020, approximately 1,400,000 people have been diagnosed globally [5]. Fortunately, the fatality rate of Covid-19 is not as high as that of SARS [6].

As we all know, there is a 17-year gap between the SARS period and the Covid-19 period. Fortunately, using social media research comes in handy during covid-19. This article first examines the covid-19 timeline, listing five landmark events. It can be seen that the development of social media has enabled many important news items to be recorded on social platforms during the covid-19 period [7]. Due to this convenience, many important data were found, so the cases found while researching were very rich. This allows for obtaining valuable data for comprehensive analysis. Section 3 is the experimental results and analysis. The first three sections focus on data analysis, public figures' effects, and people's subjective judgments. For example, about "speeches by public figures and suggestions by public figures", people have different opinions on "fully agree",

“immediately implement” or “doubt”. Second, through the study of the time axis, it was found that the investigation of the events during the SARS period was challenging. The collected data will be relatively small, so this research has specific difficulties and workloads. The fourth part of Section 3, through the world’s major public health events, uses the characteristics of social media to understand how people communicate in a specific period and analyzes the influence of public figures on the public during the epidemic. The fourth part of the third section first shows the source of the data and proves the authenticity of the data in this study by showing that the data comes from well-known social media platforms and authoritative accounts. The results show that the public figure’s effect affects people not only in advertising and selling goods but also in the case of epidemics. Section 4 concludes the whole paper.

This article juxtaposes the development of social media and the Internet in China and the world, people’s way of thinking has changed from TV, radio, and magazines before to mobile phones and mobile communications, and the transformation from traditional media to new media. And the importance of social media in life and the trend of public figures’ effect.

2. Covid-19 Period

Covid-19, also known as SARS-CoV-2, broke out in China in 2019 and constituted a significant public health event globally [4]. This outbreak has affected people in countries worldwide, and as of April 7, 2020, approximately 1,400,000 people have been diagnosed globally [5]. Fortunately, the fatality rate of Covid-19 is not as high as that of SARS [6].

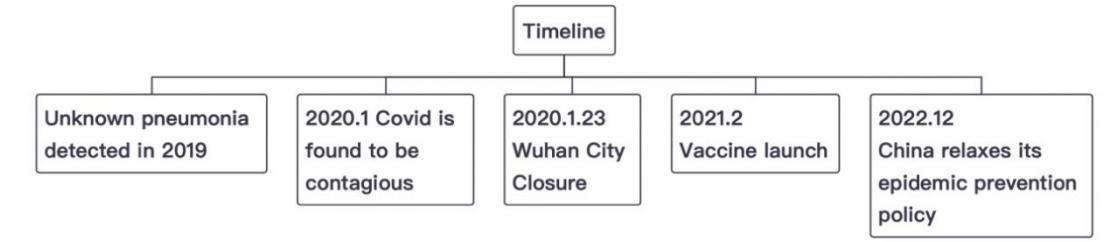

Figure 1: 5 key events during covid-19.

Figure 1 shows a timeline of five key events in China, from the covid-19 outbreak in 2019 to the relaxation of the vaccination policy in 2022. Two of these events have been selected for study: vaccine news and relaxation of vaccination policies. Vaccines are developed in China in two stages (inactivated, recombinant, and mRNA), with mRNA being the vaccine that has only been used in recent years [8]. The heat on this matter has been very high, both in the early and mid-term of the vaccine launch. In one survey, 52.2% of people wanted to be vaccinated immediately, and the remaining 47.8% wanted to be vaccinated after the vaccine had been assured of safety [9]. Not only that, but people are discussing the matter on social media platforms. The following news is analyzed by its popularity on social media.

The experiment was divided into four parts, with two separate surveys on vaccine news and the relaxation of China’s vaccination policy. There were two methods of investigation, and one was to collect data on the number of retweets and comments for the same account, different content, and time. The other was a survey of the duplicate accounts and content at different times. Through the method of data analysis, the trend of the influence of the public figure’s effect was summarised.

3. Experiment Results and Analysis

3.1. Popularity of the Covid-19 Vaccine

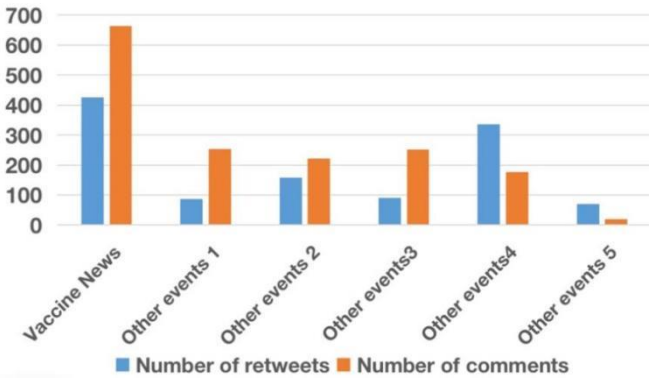

Figure 2: Popularity of news from the same account.

Figure 2 shows data from a survey conducted on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, which investigates the number of retweets and comments on the same Weibo account (Sina News), at different times and with different content. Comparing the vaccine news with two other random events in 2021, two in 2022, and one in 2023 shows that not all news and stories in this authoritative news account receive much attention. The random events were not chosen to highlight this conclusion by deliberately looking for events that received less attention. Instead, four typical cases were selected for comparative analysis after a cursory review of several hundred news events over the three years from 2020-2023.

The number of comments was three times higher than the highest for the other four events. The keywords used in the comments were mostly positive feedback, such as “support, participation,” As stated in the previous section of the survey, 100% of people want to be vaccinated, but the timing of the vaccination varies.

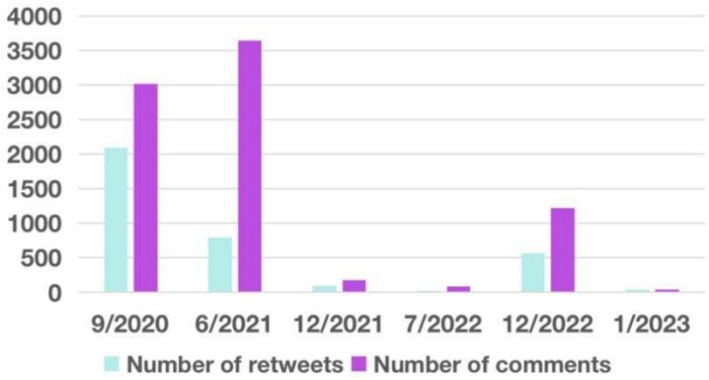

Figure 3: Vaccine News in the Spotlight.

It is worth noting that the vaccine news investigated in the picture was introduced by Zhang Quan, director of the Shanghai Science and Technology Commission, at the Covid-19 press conference in March 2020. The reason why people have received such high attention is first because of their environmental background. One of the most concerning things in society in 2020 is covid-19. Once there is any news about it, it will become a social focus. However, the role of public figures effects in this matter cannot be ruled out. Since “public figures” are people with lofty abilities and are admired from all walks of life, the words of public figures retain their authenticity and influence in

people's hearts, which will expand the reputation of public figures. Said events are within the range of social platforms [10]. Therefore, this kind of public figures effect belongs to the aspect of "epidemic impact."

Not only that, but the heat of the news is also slowly decreasing. As shown in Figure 3, this is data from a Weibo account with the same content at different points, and this data set is also about vaccine news. There was a considerable stir, with people retweeting and commenting on the good news. In June 2021, experts from the Chinese CDC answered whether the vaccine needed to be replaced six months after the completion of the vaccination at a press conference. However, as there was no absolute answer to this question, the news was not retweeted much on social media but received 3,639 comments. The reason for this is that the public figures' effect on the "spread of the news" was that most of the comments were confused because there was no substantive answer to the question at the conference. This incident has hurt the public figure effect.

The relatively high number of retweets and comments on the news in December 2022 was due to the arrival of the mRNA vaccine. Academician Zhong Nanshan urged people at the conference to add this vaccine. However, since China was nearing the end of its fight against the epidemic during this period, people should have paid more attention to this type of news on social media. Therefore, not all epidemic impacts words receive much attention. The public figure's effect is not highly echoed in all situations and environmental contexts.

3.2. Concerns about the Relaxation of Covid-19 Prevention Policies

Three years after the outbreak of covid-19, that is, in December 2022, China relaxed its policies on epidemic prevention and control [11]. This is nothing short of exciting. Covid-19 has taken a significant toll on the world and countless people. It has caused unemployment, the decline of the national economy, and a shortage of medical care [12]. The country's economy and tourism recovered after the anti-epidemic policy was relaxed [13].

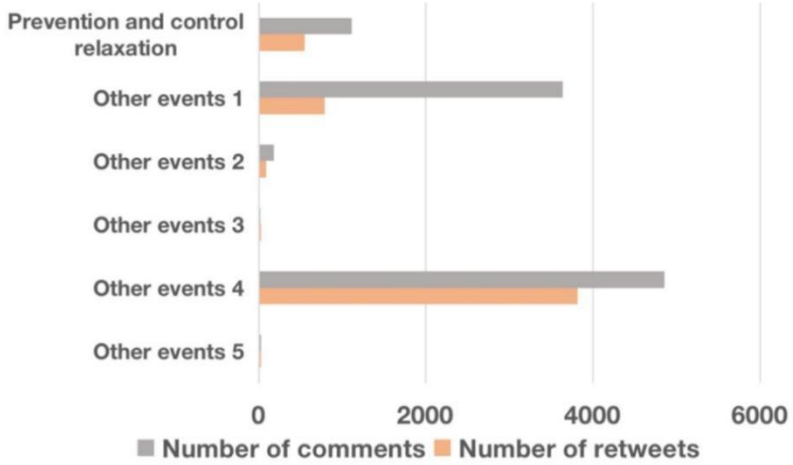

Figure 4: The degree of attention of the 6 events.

The five data sets in Figure 4 are events that occurred in the past three years. Events 1 and 4 have attracted much more attention than the other three. Although prevention and control relaxation and Event 1 belong to the field of covid-19, the content is not the same. It can be seen from the figure that people pay more attention to event one than prevention and control relaxation because, in event 1, academician Zhong Nanshan said in October 2020 that there would be more cases in the future. However, PACR was officially released in December 2022" Covid-19 has been downgraded to a Class B infectious disease in China". Event 4 also reports a public figures event. The public figure's

effect greatly influences people in terms of news dissemination. Although official information and public figures' words can ensure accuracy, people prefer to pay attention to the authoritative speech of public figures. From this, it can see the progress of new media. During the SARS period, due to the backwardness of the Internet and social platforms, most of the information people obtained was through official and public figures channels, so it took much work for people to question the information obtained through these channels. However, in the 21st century, people have so many ways to get information that they can choose to focus on their preferred channels. Compared with the public figures effect and official information in this data set, the influence brought by the public figures effect is higher.

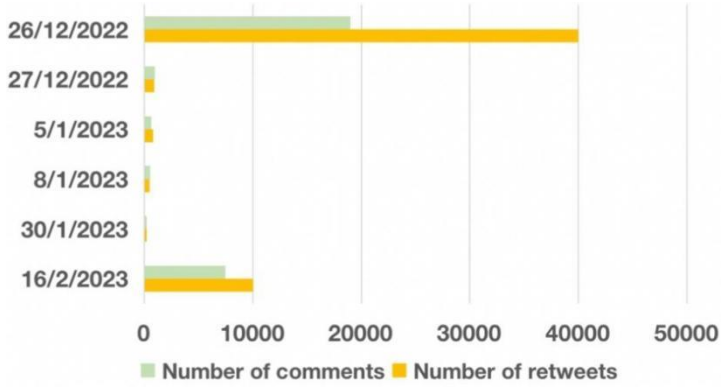

Figure 5: The popularity of the relaxation of the vaccination policy at different times.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 present the same conclusions. To exclude the chance behavior of the data, Figure 5 presents an additional set of data for the same account and content for different periods. This is the number of comments and retweets on Weibo regarding the gradual relaxation of China's epidemic prevention policy. The two highest data sets in Figure 5 are the first and the fifth. The first set of data reports that on 26 December 2022, China changed the term covid-19 from "virus" to "infection" and that 40,000 people retweeted this news. The next day the news fell off a cliff on social media platforms until February 2023, when it was brought back into the public eye through the influence of public figures spreading the news.

The number of infections in China rose steeply from December 2020 onwards. However, no data support the number of infections during this period, as covid-19 was much less dangerous than during the high outbreak period. People mostly recovered at home after the virus had been classified as "influenza" in China. There is no data to support the number of infections during this period. People in this period often posted their diagnoses on social media but without defamatory news. This means that people at this time no longer dealt with the issue as blindly as they did in the early days of covid-19.

3.3. Timeline of Selected Events

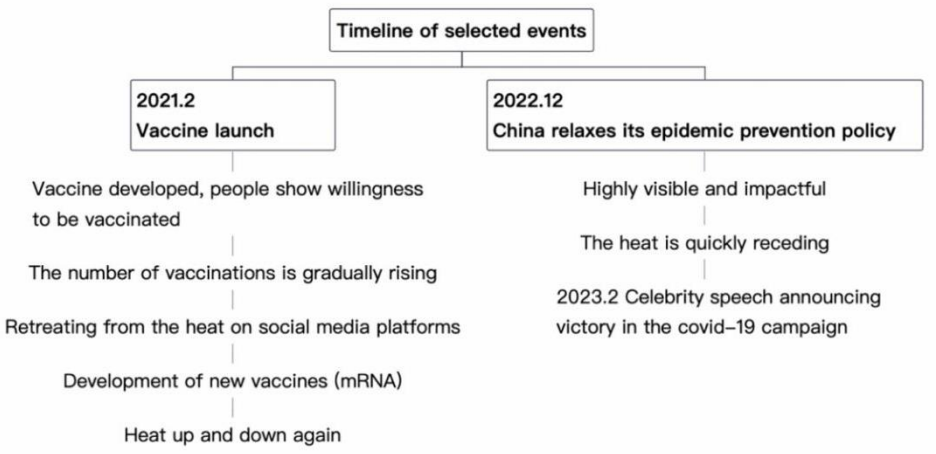

Figure 6: Refine the two events in Figure 1.

This research paper focuses on the two most hotly anticipated events in the timeline of Figure 1 for investigation. The timeline of these two events is continually refined through the survey data in the study. Figure 6 is a refined version of Figure 1.

3.4. Analysis

The following conclusions were drawn through experiments: 1) Discover the importance of social platforms. The emergence of social platforms can keep the footprints of the times. 2) Hot events will fade from people's view as time passes. 3) Not all public figure's speeches can be highly regarded. 4) Public figures' effects have a great influence on people. 5) Public figures' benefits have both positive and negative effects on the public. Based on the above conclusions, it can be concluded that the timely release of real information can make the influence of public figures play a positive role.

Spreading positive influence is the goal of the media. So, if the user wants to expand the positive impact of news, the user needs to pay attention to the following: 1) When public figures or officials make speeches, they need to pay attention to the objectivity of the content to ensure the authenticity of the information content. 2) Public figures' effects will have different effects in different public opinion environments. For example, public figures are speaking out during the post covid-19 period. Even if the speech is true, since the background of public opinion has become a thing of the past, it may arouse people's doubts, which will have a negative impact.

4. Conclusion

The 'Public figures effect' has been found to affect people in two ways: the 'spread of news' and the 'impact of the epidemic.' "Both types of 'Public figures effect' need to be contextualized, and the social status of the event they describe to have the most significant impact. The experiment culminated in five conclusions and achieved three originally envisaged research objectives. The first is that the Public figure's effect has a significant impact on people. The second was that hot events fade out over time. Moreover, public figures affect strongly impacted people throughout the covid-19 period. The remaining two conclusions were drawn from the study. They are that not all public figure's statements are highly visible and that public figures' benefits positively and negatively affect the public. The importance of social media is reflected in the survey, as people in the age of social

media can access information more quickly than ever before, and the amount and variety of information they can access are much more significant.

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