From Incapability to out of Control: “Chain Reaction” and Antagonistic Decoding of Social Media

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Abstract: In 2021, the voices of many mass media in China on issues related to “young people's life attitudes” not only failed to achieve the expected guiding effect, but were criticized and attacked like opinion leaders. On this issue, the mass media tried unsuccessfully to guide the public opinion, and the public opinion field was out of control. The reaction behind this loss of control is actually the “incapability” of media work. This is the first time that China's mass media and opinion leaders have met Waterloo under the guidance of public opinion. This paper mainly discusses and analyzes these social events, analyzes the communication logic and social psychology behind the opposition of public opinion. In the process of combing these typical cases, this paper discusses the new mode of public opinion guidance. The research shows that the main social contradictions in this incident have been intensified by the wrong decoding of the media. We should give full play to social synergy, actively seek social consensus and mobilize more forces to participate in social reform, development and structural improvement.

1. Introduction

In January of 2021, Bai Yansong, a well-known host of CCTV, expressed his views on the confusion and pressure of young people in the youth program “Dialogue”. Soon this video attracted attention on Bilibili. In mid-May, this attention turned into the group ridicule and resistance of the younger generation to Bai Yansong, and a large number of spoof videos against Bai Yansong appeared on Bilibili. The spokesman of the mass media in the traditional sense was attacked for a while. Coincidentally, Bai Yansong is not the only media person who has been criticized this year for making comments on issues related to “social pressure” and “young people's attitude”. Almost at the same time, Opinion leaders such as Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of Global Times and Li Fengliang, professor of Tsinghua, were also attacked for their speeches on related issues. At the same time, the voices of many mass media on issues related to “young people's life attitudes” not only failed to achieve the expected guiding effect, but were criticized and attacked like opinion leaders. This is the first time that China's mass media and opinion leaders have failed in guiding public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary for us to explore and analyze the communication logic and social psychology behind these social events and opposition of public opinion, and explore the new mode of public opinion guidance in the process of combing these typical cases.

2. Event Review: the Gradual Opposition between Two Public Opinion Fields

On April 17th this year, in the post of Chinese population, a post titled “Laying Down is Justice” caught fire. The owner of the post told about his experience of two years without a job and living with low desire, and said that he had experienced the true meaning of life in this experience and saw through the shackles of secular society to people. As soon as this post was sent out, it immediately attracted the attention of young netizens. These Internet engineers, famous students, young teachers and parents of “primary school students” who call themselves “employees who work hard all their lives” have expressed that they have found a new way to open their lives. With the continuous popularity of “Laying Down”, the key issue involved, namely “the survival dilemma of contemporary youth”, surfaced, and various related discussions and speeches were re-examined. In this process, well-known media people, mass media, and the younger generation have come off to
express their opinions one after another, eventually forming a scuffle of public opinions. Bai Yansong incident is one example.

On January 21st, 2021, Bai Yansong answered a young student's question “How do contemporary young people deal with the contradiction between pride of national destiny and confusion of their own destiny” in a program “Dialogue” for young people, and Bai Yansong replied “Do we expect low housing prices now? And then look for jobs everywhere? And then there was no pressure at all ... No way “,The tone is full of surprise; On May 8th, a video author of Bilibili published “No way Bai Yansong, I am a scholar”, which satirized the video of young people's life pressure in Bai Yansong. It received 1.311 million broadcasts and 15,000 barrage screens, which attracted attention. On May 14th, another well-known video author of Bilibili, “No way”, became the fuse of Bai Yansong's “three sins”?Wang Shuo's Telling the Truth accused Bai Yansong of being too high to empathize with others, and got 15,000 praises and 5,490 comments, which became the turning point of the Bai Yansong incident. More and more people paid attention to this matter, and many well-known video writers made UGC spoof creations, such as Can you stand Bai Yansong's brainwashing? Bai Yansong was “scolded” and searched hot.On May 26th, Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of Global Times, spoke in Weibo about the Bai Yansong incident. He and Bai Yansong agreed that “fighting for a bloody road through personal efforts is the only choice”, but this excuse was still not bought by netizens.

Synchronized with the Bai Yansong incident, it was the “joint encirclement and suppression” of the word “Laying Down” by major mass media. On May 18th, Guangming Daily published an article “Young people choose Laying Down ;which is also a signal”, pointing out that “Laying Down Phenomenon” should be paid attention to; May 20th,Guangming Daily continued to publish the article “Guiding Laying Down People to Cherish their Prosperity and Make Great Efforts” to point out the negative effects of Laying Down, but the tone was still persuasion. On May 20th, Nanfang Daily published “Laying Down”. is shaming, where is the sense of justice? “Stand clear, accusing young people of Laying Down behavior; On May 25th, Xinhua News Agency published “Xinhua News Agency talks about’ Laying Down ‘:”Lay down before you get rich “Be wary!The article is consistent with the position of Nanfang Daily; Correspondingly, the questions of “What do you think of Nanfang Daily's' ‘Laying Down Shame” appeared in Weibo and Zhihu one after another.

At this point, the question of “whether the Laying Down is correct or not” officially heated up. Subsequently, Professor Li Fengliang of Tsinghua University's speech caused another wave of public opinion climax.

On May 25th, Li Fengliang, an associate professor appointed by the Dean of Education of Tsinghua University, attendedScience net Published the article “Incapacity is the cost of education's screening function”, in which he pointed out that “Laying Down” is an extremely irresponsible behavior to oneself, family and society; On the same day, the question “How to treat Associate Professor Tsinghua's evaluation that” Laying Down is an extremely irresponsible attitude “appeared in Zhihu; May 28th, WeChat official account New trench Published “To Tsinghua University Li Fengliang: It is the elderly like you who really lay down”, accusing Li of failing to keep up with the times; On May 28th, the Bilibili Jiangcheng Evening News sent a video “Professor Tsinghua said that young people” Laying Down “is not responsible, sorry for parents, but netizens don't buy it” 28,000 plays 81 barrage;

May 28 thGlobal Times“Young people who claim to be” Laying Down “are always awakened by their own alarm clock at dawn”, and their attitude has eased. On June 1st, Bai Yansong gave an interview to Cover News about the spoof, with relatively soft language, explaining “I have been standing with those who scolded me” and so on, but after Bilibili and Zhihu broadcast, most people didn't buy it.He thinks “the position is inconsistent”, which means “I don't trust him anymore”.

So far, the mass media and Bai Yansong and other media people have temporarily retreated, but the discussion on this issue in Bilibili and Zhihu continues.

3. Dislocation Decoding and Opposition of Public Opinion
In this way, it is the first time that a well-known media person has come forward to explain the situation of “truce”, which shows that on this issue, the mass media failed to guide the trend of public opinion, and the phenomenon of “out of control” appeared in the field of public opinion, and the reaction behind this loss of control is actually the “incapability” of media work.

There are many reasons for “incapability”. The direct reason is that there is a deviation between the mass media and young netizens' deep understanding of “Laying Down”. In the concept of the mass media and traditional opinion leaders, “Laying Down” means lying down to the ground, no longer boiling with blood, giving up struggle and muddling along, so it should be criticized. And most netizens think, Laying Down is to rebel against the oppression of capital and power by doing nothing, and some people even look for the basis from religion. Due to the misplacement of decoding between the two sides, the meaning space is different and the focus of attention is different. For example, the main views of the mass media and opinion leaders are that “you should strive when you are young” and “it is not right to give up”. No, it's not advisable to lie down before you get rich. Young people's responses to this matter are “it's easy to stand and talk”, “vested interests, why don't you eat meat” and “above”, etc.

Behind the prejudice of words is the arrogant attitude of the mass media. In fact, as early as 2017, the contradiction between economic development and the survival crisis of young people has already appeared. In March 2017, articles such as “Confession of a researcher of Chinese Academy of Sciences: Why did I choose to leave” and “Beijing school district can buy a town in America, how do you choose” caught fire, This shows that the voice of reflecting on reality has appeared at that time. As mentioned earlier, decadence and Buddhist culture were all over the country in the same period. However, in the face of such contradictions, the positions of the mass media and media people are almost identical.

Zhao Hanlu, a reporter of Liberation Daily, observed the article published by WeChat official account in Shanghai, “Don't feel sorry for Beijing! Waiting for the city to love you at the age of 30 may be a lack of mental strength. He believes that high housing prices are a “historical optimization choice” to force people to flee from Beijing. “Media man” Xipo Beijing News published the title “Don't struggle to escape from big cities, Only when you read the city can you read China,” ; Xiong Zhi, a well-known commentator, published an article entitled “It's shameful to be overly lyrical about the North drift” in Phoenix Review. He said: “Even the unattainable housing prices just show that the city has a huge enough market demand. And strong enough money purchasing power?” ; Cao Lin, director of the social commentary department of China Youth Daily and a well-known commentator, said “I am still in high spirits, I hope you are too”, which transcends reality and encourages young people to continue their struggle.

These professional and well-known commentators rationalized the phenomenon of high housing prices by selling chicken soup and condemning individuals. Although they temporarily suppressed the arrogance of young people, they also covered up the essential problems. As the saying goes, “If you don't die in silence, you will explode in silence.” In 2021, the discussion on the phenomenon of “Laying Down” broke the superficial harmony of the public opinion field with long-standing dissatisfaction.

Hall believes that the audience has three positions when interpreting the mass media content, namely, dominant-hegemonic position, negotiated position and oppositional position. The adoption of these three positions is closely related to the relationship between the media and the audience. When the interests of the media are consistent with those of the audience, the audience tends to interpret in a compliant manner. When the interests of the media are slightly different from those of the audience, the audience tends to compromise interpretation; when the voice of the media runs counter to the interests of the audience, it will lead to confrontational interpretation. This scuffle of public opinion has proved that if the media can't reflect the voices of the masses, it will bring greater opposition; If you try to cover up the problem, it will lead to bigger problems.

4. Group Anxiety of Young People and Practical Meaning of Laying Down
In December 2020, the word “Incapability” was selected as “pay excessive attention to wording’Top ten buzzwords in 2020As a typical phenomenon of the popularity of cold words, the connotation of Incapability has changed from the initial reflection on system and culture to the description of individual and group behaviors and situations. Its main meaning is “the phenomenon of excessive population competition caused by the shortage of resources”, which covers education, workplace, housing and other fields. Incapability phenomenon is closely related to the weak global economic growth and small overall increase. Under this background, individuals are more sensitive to the living situation. Under such an anxious and contradictory realistic condition, a life attitude of rejecting internal friction and pursuing the truth of life quietly rises, and gradually forms a new subculture sweeping the world. For example, the British Nit, the low-desire group in Japanese society, the homecoming group in America, etc. In China, the young people who are influenced by “decadence” and “Buddhist culture” and this year's “Laying Down” group are the most influential.

Especially with the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, people's anxiety is unprecedented, which is accompanied by the individual's redoubled efforts. However, when everyone works hard, the efforts become “a rising tide lifts all boats”. The most obvious perception of people is that they can't get the same return for the same efforts as before. Some people also call this phenomenon “struggling inflation”. Another situation is that China's rapid development since the 21st century has brought about the improvement of the overall economic strength on the one hand, and on the other hand, the division between the rich and the poor has become more obvious. In recent years, the news of “Luxury Houses Showing off Wealth” and “Tsinghua Graduates Being Babysitters” are tearing at people's hearts in both directions.

“Decadence” mainly refers to the language, words or pictures with decadent, despair, pessimism and other emotions and colors among the youth groups. In China, “waste”, “lie” etc. as the main representatives, it reflects the spiritual characteristics and collective anxiety of young people to a certain extent, and is a microcosm of youth subculture in the new media era. After decadence, it is Buddhist culture. Buddhism mainly means No desire, no desire Don't be sad or happy, but pursue inner peace. The word originated from a magazine in Japan in 2014, which introduced “Buddhist man”, after the network spread, a series of online words such as “Buddhist youth” and “Buddhist women” were derived from Buddhism. In China, according to baidu index, the data platform shows that the search peak index of “Buddhism” keyword reached 32,912 in 2017. The popularity of Li's birthday in 2017 is an obvious Buddhist cultural phenomenon. This young man with an ugly appearance and shouting “The world is not worth it” has aroused the empathy and goodwill of the majority of netizens with his grounded and anti-positive personality characteristics. But in those days, the mass media have also expressed their attitude towards this kind of subculture: the popularity of “Buddhism” reflects young people's aversion to irrational disputes and hopes to build a harmonious life order. Young people laugh at themselves with “Buddhism”, which reflects a kind of helplessness of simply lowering expectations, and an undesirable negative attitude towards life (Henan Daily 2018).

In 2021, under the influence of the COVID-19 epidemic, the word “Laying Down” broke ground. “Laying Down” refers to the submissive psychology of “no matter what reaction the other party makes, there will be no waves in your heart, and there will be no reaction or resistance to it”. The rise of “Laying Down Family” also has a deep socio-economic background. On the one hand, China's economic growth is shifting down and the industrial structure is deeply adjusted, so the development space of the industry is limited and the competition is more intense. On the other hand, past economic development achievements have created conditions for diversified lifestyle choices. At present, when the material is relatively abundant, people can selectively slow down and get enough living conditions by working in a relatively comfortable way.

In fact, both decadence and Buddhist culture reflect the group anxiety of young people, which is a cultural form for young people to vomit society, and also the result of young people looking for identity and group ownership on the Internet. We just didn't expect that in this year's public opinion about “whether Laying Down is right or not”, there will be such a big tear and collision between the mass media and the young audience, so it is necessary for us to find out.
5. Some Reflections after the media’s “Incapability”

This is the incapability of media work, which also reflects the misjudgment of the communication environment by the mass media. The first is the misjudgment of one's own authority. Whether it is the mass media represented by Nanfang Daily or the traditional media represented by Bai Yansong, they also take it for granted that they still play the leading role in social key issues. From Guangming Daily's initial speech to Xinhua News Agency's article, as the attitude of the mass media gradually hardened, the “kickback” of young groups is also getting stronger; Bili and the Communist Youth League jointly produced the May 4th video “I don't want to be such a person” for several years, which was intended to persuade young people to cultivate a sunny attitude and face life positively. However, it was edited twice by netizens and criticized as “full of affectation” and “only exhorting young people if they don't solve the problem”. The publicity effect can be imagined. Secondly, for misjudgment of communication channels, the aura brought by media exclusivity has disappeared in the TV era, and in the era when everyone has a microphone, public opinion is hard to be completely concealed. With the blessing of algorithm technology, people with similar situations or identical opinions are more likely to link with each other, and they can drop into a river or single spark can start a prairie fire. The third is the misjudgment of the receiver. In the Internet age, the change from “audience” to “user” is not only the change of meaning, but also the innovation of thinking and dialogue. Take the main users of Bilibili as an example. After obtaining material satisfaction, these young people born in the 1990s are more diverse in ideas, energetic and eager for equality. Compared with their parents' silent resistance to different opinions, young people are better at expressing themselves actively. Output opinions and attitudes in an intuitive way such as video.

Devler believes that society, media and audience are an interdependent system. The higher the degree of social development and the more complex the structure, the greater the functions played by the media and the more dependent the audience will be on the media. When the society is in a period of transformation or change, the audience's sense of unease will increase, and they will become more and more dependent on the media. In the current social development of China, the actions of the mass media are crucial, and the author believes that the following points can be noted in the future:

First, the media should accurately judge the objective situation and be alert to elitism. As the mouthpiece of the eyes and ears of the party, the country and the people, the mass media is the basic requirement to reflect the reality, upload and release it. At any time, it can't go beyond the facts to guide public opinion, let alone stand on the opposite side of the masses with the attitude of elitism, which will only lead to opposite interpretations in the new public opinion field. Form a chain reaction that will affect the whole body, and the mass media and media people will suffer the consequences.

Second, we should increase the information concentration in the process of communication and attach importance to the role of new opinion leaders. An event or a phenomenon can detonate public opinion, the essence of which is that it is related to the actual survival and development of most people or their inner moral judgment. Behind the phenomenon of Incapability is the public's group anxiety about medical care, education, housing and promotion. Even if this universal crisis can't be solved immediately, it should increase people's understanding of it. The media should actively establish a dialogue space, introduce experts to face the difficulties and questions of the masses directly, and avoid more negative imaginations caused by information asymmetry. At the same time, we should pay attention to two new types of opinion leaders: one is self-media people who have certain influence in a certain field, For example, “Bi Dao” and “Director Lin Chao”, and the other kind of celebrities who are close to the people and have a good reputation, such as Li Jian, a singer who speaks for young people in recent years, Dai Jianye, a professor of Huazhong Normal University with funny language, and Zheng Yuanjie, a children's writer, etc. The position and language system of the former is representative to some extent, which can reflect the social psychology and culture of a specific era or a specific group; The celebrity effect of the latter can play a leading role in the event of similar public opinion conflicts.
Third, play the role of the safety valve of the network and keep the outlet of emotional catharsis. Modern conflict theory holds that society is dynamic and full of conflicts. If society wants to survive stably for a long time, it should keep an open, flexible and inclusive state, and release social tension through controllable and legal mechanisms. The weakening of the world's real power by the Internet makes it have the function of social “safety valve”. People can enter this “arbitrary door” at low cost and express their true selves in the masquerade. To a certain extent, the Internet is also the weather vane for the government to observe people's livelihood and public opinion. We can't choose to close our eyes because the truth is not perfect, and we shouldn't ignore the truth because lies are more pleasing to the ear. How to face up to pressure and ugliness is a yardstick for social development.

References


