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# Analysis on the Impact of Post-Truth Phenomenon of Online Public Opinion on Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities and Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** The rapid advancement of network media technology has given rise to a post-truth era in public opinion ecology, where emotion-driven dynamics and algorithmic recommendations jointly shape new information dissemination trends, posing significant challenges to traditional educational models. As key participants in online public opinion, university students exhibit strong information-seeking tendencies but face heightened risks of post-truth phenomenon spread due to structural deficiencies in new media information discernment capabilities. This study examines the post-truth phenomenon in online public opinion as a focal point, analyzing its formation mechanisms, dissemination characteristics, and profound impacts on ideological and political education in higher education institutions. Five systematic countermeasures are proposed: enhancing fact-tracing mechanisms, facilitating rational emotional expression, reconstructing teacher-student dialogue frameworks, cultivating deep media literacy, and implementing proactive value guidance. These strategies aim to help educators accurately grasp online public opinion patterns, improve the precision and effectiveness of educational guidance, and establish innovative ideological education models adapted to digital era characteristics.

**Keywords:** online public opinion; post-truth; ideological and political education in higher education institutions; media literacy; value guidance

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## 1. Introduction

The iterative advancement of social media technologies and their pervasive integration are propelling universities into a new phase of digital “post-truth” governance. Within this context, the “post-truth” phenomenon has become increasingly prominent, characterized by its tendency to replace factual judgment with emotional resonance and undermine rational discourse through ideological alignment. These trends are profoundly reshaping the logic of online public opinion formation and its dissemination patterns. As pivotal platforms for ideological and cultural development, universities now confront unprecedented complexities in ideological and political education, necessitating urgent adaptation and innovation of traditional educational approaches.

## **2. The Formation Mechanism and Propagation Characteristics of Post-Truth Phenomenon in Online Public Opinion**

The “post-truth” phenomenon in online public opinion stems from two fundamental drivers: advancements in digital technology and inherent cognitive limitations. Algorithmic recommendation systems generate personalized information feeds based on user behavior patterns, inadvertently reinforcing existing ideological biases and creating cognitive loops. Social media platforms’ real-time interaction features have fostered emotion-driven information consumption patterns, where users prioritize narratives aligned with personal expectations over objective facts<sup>[1]</sup>. Cognitive psychology research reveals that confirmation bias mechanisms are amplified in digital environments, with individuals selectively engaging with information fragments that support their preconceptions while actively filtering or questioning contradictory evidence. From a communication perspective, post-truth content exhibits pronounced emotional primacy – inflammatory statements consistently outperform objective analyses in generating clicks and shares. Viral dissemination patterns enable unverified information to spread exponentially within minutes, far exceeding fact-checking efficiency. The growing prominence of echo chambers sees communities forming closed information ecosystems based on shared values, where internal opinion resonance intensifies information bias. Emotional resonance now replaces logical reasoning as the core driver of influence, with users demonstrating greater willingness to share content that evokes strong emotional responses. This communication logic overturns the traditional fact-based generation patterns of public opinion, where emotional narratives and fragmented cognition reinforce each other, emerging as a defining feature of contemporary cyberspace information ecosystems.

## **3. Multiple Impacts of Post-Truth Phenomenon on Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions**

### **3.1. Deconstructing the Cognitive Basis of Facts to Increase the Difficulty of Value Judgment**

The “post-truth” phenomenon in online public opinion most directly impacts the blurring of objective fact boundaries, making it difficult for college students to establish solid cognitive foundations when facing complex social issues. As authentic information intertwines with fabricated narratives during dissemination, students often find themselves trapped in a dilemma where distinguishing truth from falsehood becomes challenging. Certain trending events undergo continuous processing and repackaging during online propagation, with original facts gradually overshadowed by emotional expressions, resulting in highly fragmented information reception. This cognitive confusion directly undermines the effectiveness of value guidance in ideological and political education, as value judgments lacking clear factual basis often degenerate into hollow moral preaching. More critically, some students begin questioning the inherent significance of facts themselves, perceiving all narratives as subjective and consequently falling into the cognitive trap of relativism.

### **3.2. Intensifying Group Emotional Opposition and Challenging Rational Dialogue Space**

In the post-truth era, online public opinion exhibits pronounced emotional mobilization characteristics. Individuals holding divergent viewpoints often form sharply divided oppositional camps based on emotional alignment rather than rational analysis. As hubs of diverse ideologies, higher education institutions see student groups prone to emotional polarization under the influence of online discourse. Academic issues that could be rationally debated have transformed into emotionally charged expressions of entrenched stances. This emotional polarization manifests not only in heated online discussions but also permeates offline interpersonal interactions and classroom dynamics, significantly compressing space for rational dialogue. Some students habitually employ stereotyping to hastily judge others’ positions while rejecting alternative perspectives, disrupting the free discussion atmosphere in ideological and political education classes. Educators observe that traditional heuristic teaching methods frequently prove ineffective when addressing emotionally volatile student groups, with rational persuasion strategies facing unprecedented challenges in educational practice.

### **3.3. Erosion of Mainstream Narrative Authority and Induction of Intergenerational Trust Transfer**

The “post-truth” phenomenon in online public opinion has fundamentally challenged traditional authoritative discourse models. The mainstream narrative framework long relied upon in ideological and political education at universities now faces a crisis of trust. Young students increasingly tend to trust voices from peer groups or online opinion leaders, while remaining skeptical of official statements and authoritative media reports. This intergenerational shift in trust has significantly diminished the discursive influence of ideological education, with educators’ authority being increasingly questioned. Many students perceive mainstream media and educational institutions as harboring “stereotypical biases,” leading them to prefer informal channels for information acquisition. Grassroots narratives on social media have gained discursive power surpassing traditional authorities through their relatability and authenticity, creating intense discourse competition in value-shaping processes for ideological education. The continuous erosion of educational content’s authority and persuasiveness compels ideological educators to re-examine their communication strategies and dissemination methods.

### **3.4. Disrupting the Educational Rhythm of the Impact System, Forcing Education into Passive Response**

Sudden online public opinion events often disrupt campus environments in unpredictable ways and rhythms, undermining the systematic framework and progressive cultivation plans inherent in ideological and political education. Educators are forced to make last-minute adjustments to teaching content to address student concerns, forcing meticulously designed curricula to yield to emergency public opinion analysis and value clarification. This reactive approach not only consumes substantial educational resources but also erodes the proactive and forward-looking nature of ideological education. Students’ attention is easily captured by trending online events, leading to a significant decline in interest and patience for systematic theoretical learning. They tend to engage more with specific social incidents rather than abstract theoretical principles<sup>[2]</sup>. The continuity and depth of education are compromised, with critical values and theoretical concepts failing to be adequately explained due to insufficient instructional time. Ideological education has shifted from proactive value guidance to passive crisis management, facing severe challenges in both effectiveness and quality.

## **4. Effective Strategies for Higher Education Ideological and Political Education to Address the “Post-Truth” Phenomenon in Online Public Opinion**

### **4.1. Deepen the fact tracing mechanism to strengthen the foundation for public opinion response**

Currently, the ideological and political work model in universities urgently needs to establish a routine, proactive mechanism for online public opinion fact-checking and traceability, thereby fundamentally transforming the long-standing passive response model to sudden public opinion events. Traditional public opinion monitoring often focuses solely on topic popularity and dissemination scope, lacking in-depth analytical capabilities regarding information authenticity. The new working mechanism requires ideological and political teams to actively integrate into students’ daily active digital social spaces, such as life-sharing circles on Xiaohongshu, interest discussion communities on Douban, video bullet-screen interactions on Bilibili, and short-video dissemination platforms like TikTok. When facing sudden public opinion incidents, staff must maintain calm professional judgment and employ cross-validation methods to systematically compare different information sources<sup>[3]</sup>. In terms of organizational structure, a rapid-response team should be formed comprising ideological and political course teachers, full-time counselors, and outstanding student leaders, with members collaborating based on their professional backgrounds and online experience. Team members must master basic information traceability techniques to effectively distinguish original information from secondary materials that have been repeatedly retold, while accurately identifying potential logical gaps and emotional manipulation factors in online narratives. The fundamental goal of establishing such a mechanism is to seize cognitive initiative, obtaining relatively accurate and reliable factual frameworks early amidst the cacophony of online public opinion, thereby creating favorable conditions for subsequent

targeted educational guidance and effectively avoiding educational pitfalls caused by one-sided or emotionalized information.

#### **4.2. Empower Rational Emotional Expression and Transform Emotions into Educational Resources**

We must abandon the traditional approach of simply dismissing or forcibly suppressing students' online emotions, instead viewing their emotional responses as valuable windows to understand youth ideological trends and value orientations. Ideological and political education should design specialized teaching modules that guide students in conducting "emotional archaeology" activities through typical post-truth public opinion cases. For instance, educators could select hot-button issues related to students' immediate interests—such as educational equity and employment competition—to help students recall their initial reactions when encountering information, analyzing the underlying value expectations behind emotional fluctuations. Simultaneously, discussions should explore the inherent tension between emotional impulses and factual verification, helping students recognize that intuitive perceptions and rational analysis are not mutually exclusive. Transforming these cases into engaging teaching materials enables students to initiate constructive reflection after experiencing profound emotional engagement. Group discussion sessions could be implemented to facilitate sharing of diverse perspectives on common events, revealing the complexity and diversity of emotional expressions through dialogue. The entire process aims to effectively channel and elevate raw, externally influenced emotional energy, gradually steering it toward constructive thinking about core values like social justice, institutional improvement, and public welfare—ultimately achieving the educational goal of "transforming emotions into nourishment."

#### **4.3. Reconstructing Teacher-Student Dialogue Spaces to Break Down Information Barriers Between Social Circles**

Educators in ideological and political education must swiftly transition from traditional one-way communication models, actively engaging with vibrant online communities through concrete actions. Merely registering social media accounts or posting official content regularly proves insufficient. Educators need to proactively learn and master the unique online discourse patterns and interaction norms of young demographics, building effective communication bridges based on equality and sincerity<sup>[4]</sup>. Teachers should integrate into student communities as "participant observers" rather than maintaining a top-down disciplinary monitoring role. For instance, educators can join popular QQ groups, WeChat groups, or Douban forums under personal identities to understand students' genuine thoughts and concerns. Cultivating "weak ties" as opinion nodes within specific social circles proves crucial. This strategy empowers students with strong critical thinking skills and moral integrity to voice rational perspectives within their communities, while encouraging counselors to participate in online discussions as friends. When controversial events arise among students, educators should avoid hasty statements. Instead, they can pose thought-provoking questions to guide students in exploring underlying logic. Such approaches gradually soften the rigid boundaries of information cocoons, allowing objective, multidimensional, and logically sound information to permeate students' cognitive frameworks through approachable and credible channels. This subtle process gradually improves information reception habits and value judgment standards, ultimately achieving natural extension and effective amplification of educational influence.

#### **4.4. Cultivating Deep Media Literacy to Transcend Superficiality and Reach Authenticity**

Higher education media literacy education should move away from traditional skill-transfer models and focus on the deep establishment of students' cognitive abilities, helping them develop the ability to discern truth from falsehood in complex information environments. Current ideological and political education courses lack in-depth analysis of digital media operation mechanisms, leaving students often unclear about how algorithmic recommendations shape their information exposure and limited understanding of how social media platforms manipulate emotions and guide opinions. Curriculum design should include dedicated modules to educate students on the production principles of deepfake technology, common tactics of misleading information, and how the commercial logic of various platforms influences content presentation. In teaching practice, a combination of case analysis and hands-on training can be fully utilized. For example, teachers can

collect different versions of the same news event across platforms such as Weibo, TikTok, and Zhihu, guiding students to analyze the information sources, narrative angles, and emotional tendencies of each version. Students can collaborate in groups to trace the original sources of information, compare key content from different media reports, and identify expressions that may exhibit obvious guidance or incitement. Additionally, a “perspective-switching” segment can be designed, allowing students to write commentaries from different stances on the same event, personally experiencing the impact of narrative frameworks on readers’ cognition. For instance, regarding college student employment topics, students can write analytical articles from the perspectives of the government, enterprises, and job seekers, then compare the emphasized focal points and argumentation logic used in each. Such training enables students to understand how information is ‘packaged’ and ‘shaped’ through practical experience, thereby fostering vigilance when encountering online content. It gradually cultivates habits of proactive verification and rational analysis, ultimately transforming them into responsible participants in information dissemination.

#### **4.5. Pre-value Guidance Phase: Mastering Narrative Definition Initiative**

Higher education ideological and political education must move beyond the passive approach of “reacting hastily after public opinion emerges.” Instead, it should establish a discourse framework during routine teaching practices—one that combines theoretical persuasiveness with the ability to resonate with young minds. Educators need to deeply understand contemporary college students’ real concerns: how social equity is reflected, where personal development opportunities exist, whether social mobility remains achievable, and how ordinary citizens participate in public life. Centering on these core issues, educators can develop explanatory frameworks through economic development patterns, institutional achievements, cultural value preservation, and innovative social governance approaches. When online hot topics arise, educators can leverage this established analytical framework to promptly propose insightful perspectives that counter fragmented, emotionally charged “wild opinions.” For instance, when discussions about “involution” and “lying flat” trends emerge, educators should analyze objective causes of intensified competition through the lens of societal developmental stages, while aligning with national policy directions to provide students with rational and constructive viewpoints rather than allowing anxiety to spread unchecked. The key lies in helping students gradually internalize this analytical methodology through daily learning. When encountering complex information later, they will naturally apply these thinking tools for judgment, fundamentally reducing the influence of “post-truth” content and effectively transitioning from “passive response” to “active guidance”<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **5. Conclusion**

The “post-truth” phenomenon in online public discourse is not a transient noise but a profound reflection of transformative shifts in information production methods during the digital era. The challenges it poses to ideological and political education in higher education institutions essentially demand a paradigm shift from “information dissemination” to “cognitive construction.” Addressing this challenge requires not only technological innovations but also fundamental iterations in educational philosophies. Only through such comprehensive approaches can ideological and political education maintain its core role in value guidance amidst cacophony, cultivating youth of the new era who possess both rational analytical capabilities and steadfast value convictions.

### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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