

Research on the Reconstruction of University Network Public Opinion Ecology and Governance Paradigm in the Smart Media Era

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Abstract: The continuous penetration of smart media technologies and the ongoing updating of social media platforms are driving structural adjustments in the network public opinion ecology of universities. From the perspective of media and communication, this paper examines the main characteristics and practical difficulties of university network public opinion communication in the smart media era, proposes reconstruction approaches based on technology empowerment, and discusses methods for building a governance paradigm for university network public opinion from the standpoint of value guidance. The paper argues that to improve governance effectiveness in cyberspace, universities need to integrate technical tools with value orientation, advancing simultaneously in areas such as algorithmic governance, technology empowerment, institutional improvement, and pluralistic co-governance.

Keywords: Smart media era; University network public opinion; Ecological reconstruction; Governance paradigm

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1. Introduction

With the gradual evolution of smart media technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and algorithmic recommendation, the landscape of information dissemination has undergone fundamental changes. As of June 2025, the number of internet users in China reached 1.123 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 79.7%. Virtually all university students are online, and more than half of them spend over three hours per day on social networks. As places with a high concentration of young people, universities are witnessing a relatively profound restructuring of their network public opinion ecology^[1].

The changes brought by smart media technologies are not only about increased communication efficiency; more crucially, they are transforming the mechanisms by which public opinion is generated, diffused, and exerts influence. Against this backdrop, several questions need to be addressed: How can we correctly understand the new characteristics and new problems of the university network public opinion ecology? How can we effectively utilize media and communication technologies to promote ecological reconstruction? How can we establish a systematic set of governance approaches within the value-guidance framework? These questions are all relatively urgent for ideological and political

education and campus management in universities. This paper intends to explore these issues from the two dimensions of “media perspective” and “value guidance”.

2. The current state of university network public opinion ecology in the smart media era

2.1. Communication characteristics of university network public opinion in the smart media era

The composition of communication subjects has become highly diverse. Smart media technologies have significantly lowered the threshold for information release, making it possible for every student to become an initiator or disseminator of public opinion. Surveys show that platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, Bilibili, QQ, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo are the main channels through which university students access information and express opinions daily. In the information transmission chain, teachers and students, opinion leaders, mainstream media, and the general public together form a complex pattern of multi-agent interaction. Within this pluralistic structure, the role of campus personnel accounts has become increasingly prominent, especially the private accounts of students enrolled at the institution. People tend to believe that information released by these accounts is closer to the facts, akin to “unofficial news”. In some cases, the communicative power and emotional influence of such information even surpass that of authoritative releases from official media, thereby significantly affecting the direction and intensity of public opinion ^[2].

The formation of public opinion is often sudden and easily charged with emotion. University students are relatively sensitive to social hot topics and are accustomed to immediately expressing their positions and emotions on social platforms. Consequently, the generation and fermentation of campus network public opinion are often abrupt, spread quickly, and tend toward emotional extremity. In the smart media era, the fermentation of public opinion generally follows the path of “initial release on a personal account, diffusion within community circles, detonation on public platforms”, and the information initially posted by individual accounts often becomes the starting point for subsequent large-scale public opinion events ^[3].

Semi-enclosed or even anonymous social spaces such as QQ groups, WeChat groups, “campus walls,” and “tree holes” serve as important sites for public opinion dissemination. Information flows within these channels are difficult for traditional monitoring methods to capture effectively. In these relatively closed spaces, private accounts of university students release information and express views. Because they evade the scrutiny and questioning of public platforms, they are more likely to form unverified chains of “insider information” dissemination, thereby establishing a certain narrative tone at the very early stages of public opinion development.

In terms of expression, there is a relatively strong emphasis on emotional empathy. In the “post-truth” environment, the expression of university network public opinion increasingly relies on emotional rhetoric and narrative styles that elicit empathy, making it prone to “emotional chain reactions” that cause public opinion to spread rapidly and move toward extremes in a short time. In this process, students’ personal accounts, narrating in the first person as “parties involved” or “insiders”, generate a strong sense of authenticity and empathic resonance, often becoming important vehicles for emotional mobilization.

2.2. Existing problems in the current university network public opinion ecology

The information cocoon effect is continuously intensifying. Algorithmic recommendations distribute personalized content based on user profiles, gradually forming a relatively closed information environment over time. The information cocoon not only narrows the cognitive horizons of university students but also weakens their ability to encounter and understand different viewpoints and to think rationally, making them more susceptible to being led astray by certain narratives constructed by personal accounts ^[4].

The task of official media accounts is to release truthful information and disseminate mainstream values, but in the actual communication environment, they often face a situation of “considerable volume but insufficient penetration”. In

contrast, private accounts of university students gain a special kind of trust precisely because of their “unofficial” status, with people tending to believe that the information released by these accounts is an unembellished “authentic voice”. When official releases differ from the “grapevine news” spread through students’ private accounts, the latter often gain the upper hand in public opinion because they align more closely with people’s expectations of “truth”. This misalignment of trust has become a considerable obstacle to public opinion guidance in universities.

The structure of public opinion governance is relatively passive. In the face of sudden public opinion incidents, some universities still focus primarily on “ex post facto handling”, with relatively weak pre-incident early warning capabilities. The existence of anonymous social platforms allows a large amount of public opinion to brew in an “invisible” state, and traditional keyword filtering and manual review can no longer provide comprehensive coverage.

Under the long-term influence of pan-entertainment content and algorithmic recommendations, university students’ attention to and acceptance of mainstream ideological content is structurally declining. Some researchers have pointed out that the “digital panopticon”, “capital-driven traffic manipulation,” and “concealed information cocoon” brought about by algorithmic recommendations are profoundly affecting university students’ value judgments. If the content production of official media accounts cannot effectively align with students’ cognitive needs and reception habits, their value guidance function will find it difficult to gain an advantage in competition with the vast amount of personalized content ^[5].

3. Reconstruction of the university network public opinion ecology from the media perspective

3.1. The role of media technologies in public opinion ecological reconstruction

Media technologies are a vital force driving the reconstruction of the university network’s public opinion ecology. In the smart media era, technologies such as big data analytics, natural language processing, and deep learning provide universities with new tools for monitoring, early warning, and guiding network public opinion. With these technologies, universities can access multiple data sources, including campus networks, social platforms, and on-campus forums, to conduct real-time sentiment analysis and semantic recognition on large volumes of textual information, automatically detect abnormal emotional fluctuations, track the changing trajectories of hot topics, and visualize communication paths, diffusion speed, and influence scope. This enables early warning of potential public opinion risks and promotes a shift in governance approach from “passive response” to “proactive early warning”. On this basis, technical systems can dynamically monitor the information release behavior of campus personnel accounts, assess their communicative influence, and promptly identify personalized content that could potentially ignite public opinion, thereby providing more forward-looking reference points for precise guidance.

3.2. Strategies for reconstructing the university network public opinion ecology

Building an integrated and intelligent public opinion management platform is a foundational task. Universities should integrate the data resources and functional strengths of multiple departments to construct a comprehensive platform covering the entire workflow of public opinion collection, intelligent analysis, early warning and assessment, and response and feedback, so as to break down information silos and allow governance forces to converge. The platform construction should pay particular attention to enhancing the capacity to perceive the communication behavior of campus personnel accounts, incorporating the influence assessment of private accounts into the monitoring indicator system, and constructing a complete communication map covering both official and personal accounts.

To counter the information cocoon effect and value deviation caused by algorithmic recommendations, universities can promote the practical exploration of “algorithm for good”, embedding recommendation mechanisms that emphasize diversity and public-value orientation within campus media platforms. In terms of content form and expressive style, they should proactively adapt to the reception habits of young students, achieving precise and demassified communication, and narrowing the psychological distance between official accounts and student audiences.

As for official media accounts, efforts should be made to enhance the timeliness, transparency, and approachability of information release, seizing the first point of information dissemination during emergencies and changing the passive situation of “official releases being slower than grapevine news”. Regarding student private accounts, while safeguarding their legitimate right to expression, there should be guidance for account holders to establish a sense of responsibility for information dissemination. At the same time, by cultivating student opinion leaders and establishing a credible matrix of student accounts, the positive communicative power of personal accounts should be incorporated into the overall framework of public opinion guidance.

4. University network public opinion governance paradigm under value guidance

4.1. The significance of value guidance in public opinion governance

Technological governance has its own limitations, characterized by instrumental rationality. Without a clear value orientation, technological means may only exercise a superficial “control” over public opinion, making it difficult to truly achieve in-depth guidance of young students’ thinking.

The core of value guidance is to promote the socialist core values as an inherently motivated consensus foundation within the network public opinion ecology, rather than merely serving as an externally imposed constraint. In the context of campus account ecosystem governance, value guidance means not only regulating the order of information dissemination but also cultivating students’ ability to discern the truthfulness of information and their ethical awareness in online expression, so that when faced with discrepancies between official information and “grapevine news”, they can base their judgments on rational analysis rather than blind trust. Through value guidance, university public opinion governance can truly achieve a paradigm shift from “control” to “guidance”, and from “passive response” to “active construction”.

4.2. Approaches to constructing a university network public opinion governance paradigm

Constructing a governance paradigm centered on value guidance requires simultaneous efforts at multiple levels, including institutions, technology, and culture.

Establishing a sound institutional framework for public opinion governance serves as the fundamental guarantee. Universities should establish and refine a tiered and classified public opinion management system, clarifying the response procedures and disposition authority for different levels of public opinion, while also setting up correction and remedy mechanisms to ensure that governance actions always operate within the boundaries of the law.

Universities can construct multi-source data fusion analysis models to gain real-time insights into students’ psychological and ideological states through aspects such as academic pressure, social behavior, and emotional expression, providing data support for precision-oriented educational guidance. At the level of public opinion guidance, the content of personal accounts that students follow should be brought into the analytical purview, accurately assessing the information preferences and focus of attention among the student population, thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of mainstream value communication.

Establishing a co-governance structure with the collaborative participation of multiple actors is an important direction for optimizing the governance structure. University network public opinion governance should not rely solely on top-down, one-way control by administrative departments; rather, it should integrate the resources of multiple parties, including university administrators, faculty, counselors, student leaders, technical experts, and social forces, to form a collaborative governance network. Special emphasis should be placed on giving play to the principal role of students, guiding them to shift from being “passively managed” to “actively participating in governance”, and encouraging responsible students to use their personal accounts to engage in constructive public opinion expression. A cohort of student opinion leaders who identify with mainstream values, possess media literacy, and have communication skills should be cultivated, enabling them to become effective bridges connecting official discourse with the student community.

Strengthening the establishment of a long-term mechanism for online literacy education is a fundamental measure

to consolidate the foundation of governance. Online literacy education should be systematically integrated into talent cultivation programs to help university students improve their ability to verify information, express themselves rationally, and cultivate an awareness of online ethics. This is foundational work for optimizing the university network's public opinion ecology at its source. An important goal of online literacy education is to enable students to recognize that the credibility of information does not depend on whether the publisher carries an "official" or "personal" identity label, but on whether the information itself can be verified and whether the publisher has a sense of responsibility. Universities should carry out online literacy education on a regular basis, linking it with national online education activities, so that university students can achieve a unity of rational internet use and value consciousness in their digital lives.

5. Conclusion

The reconstruction and governance of the university network public opinion ecology in the smart media era involve issues of both technology and value. The iterative development of media technologies provides unprecedented tools and possibilities for ecological reconstruction, while value guidance sets the direction and boundaries for technological application. These two are not an either-or choice but should form a governance synergy through coordination and integration.

The unique influence of campus personal accounts in the public opinion field merits sustained attention and in-depth research. How to transform this force into a constructive resource for public opinion ecological development, under the premise of safeguarding students' legitimate right to expression, rather than allowing it to become a breeding ground for "grapevine news", is a key issue that needs to be carefully managed in governance practice. The relationship between official media accounts and personal accounts should not be positioned as a zero-sum competition for discursive power; rather, a healthy communication landscape characterized by division of labor, cooperation, and mutual complementarity should be constructed through institutional design, technological empowerment, and value guidance.

Looking to the future, university network public opinion governance should seek breakthroughs through the unity of technology empowerment and value guidance: continuously deepening the application of big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies in public opinion monitoring, early warning, and precise guidance, and enhancing the scientific and intelligent level of governance. Only in this way can universities firmly grasp the initiative and dominance in the public opinion environment of the smart media era, and foster a clean and orderly cyberspace for the healthy growth of the vast number of young students.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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