

The Governance of Online Public Opinion in the Era of Big Data

Chengjie Wei

Chongqing Technology and Business University, Chongqing 400067, China.

Abstract: In the era of big data, the governance of online public opinion has become an increasingly important part of social governance in China. This paper firstly clarifies the necessity of strengthening public opinion governance in the Internet society, and then proposes ways to optimize online opinion governance in the era of big data as follows: first, increasing the capacity of public opinion detection and improve the information communication mechanism; second, cracking down on illegal activities on the Internet and strengthen the construction of the legal system; and third, ensuring that the government will maintain its leading role in building a mechanism with multi-actor coordination.

Keywords: Big Data; Online Public Opinion; Governance

Introduction

The era of big data has led to tremendous transformation of information, exerting a profound impact on online public opinion. Compared with online public opinion at the early stage of Internet development, it is now being communicated in an increasingly faster speed, with more diversified subjects and surging data volume in greater complexity. The Internet has become a key space where public incidents are exposed and disseminated, and the incubator of online public opinion. As a result, the governance of online public opinion has gradually attracted the attention of government attention.

1. The necessity of online public opinion governance in the era of big data

Information technology has been developed and upgraded all the time, in the process of which, the significance and necessity of online public opinion governance has become more prominent. Through information monitoring and analysis, a stronger governance of online public opinion and better social governance will effectively reduce the risks of possible evolution of online public opinion events, realize two-way and equal interaction between the people and the government.

1.1 Reducing online public opinion risks and creating a harmonious and disciplined online environment

The formation and evolution of public opinion on the Internet shows a certain degree of complexity, while the frequent activities of Internet users may escalate an incident to a major activity when it is related to the people's wellbeing, which is highly risky. The irrational social emotions multiply as an incident becomes trending online, which can be easily converted to negative comments, intensifying its level of controversy and sensitivity, and the risks of public opinion. ^[1] In the era of big data, all information online can be captured as data and analyzed to evaluate and understand public sentiment, group behavior and the trends of online public opinion. Through mining and analyzing interaction data via technologies, the government can improve their governance of online public opinion, reduce or contain relevant risks, foster a harmonious and disciplined Internet environment, and conduct more precise and scientific social governance decision making.

1.2 Maintaining the authority of the government and reducing resistance to the implementation of social governance policies

Big data and other technological tools can provide support in better collection and analysis of public opinion in various forms in the Internet society, assist the government in accurately identifying the direction and dynamics of online public opinion, study and judge its level of risk in the virtual world, improve the relevance and operability of government decisions, and reduce the resistance and uncertainties that may be encountered when the decisions are being implemented. The government can also make use of big data technology to collect and analyze public opinion information in the process, and then continuously improve and optimize the policy content to align it with the current situation of the Internet society and real public opinion through reasonable screening and absorption. In addition, the government can give full play of platforms such as the official Weibo account, the WeChat Public Account and government official websites to explain and publicize the policy and guide the online public opinion, so as to facilitate the policy's implementation and enforcement.

2. Optimized path of governance of online public opinion in the era of big data

In the context of the deep integration of the Internet and the real society, building a comprehensive Internet governance system and modernizing the governance system and governance capacity will have remarkable and practical significance. ^[2]

2.1 Improving the level of public opinion detection and perfecting information dissemination mechanism

Given the current communication environment, the evolution of public opinion incidents has become more and more complicated and changeable, with a great number of single public opinion incident being evolved into complex social or even political event. ^[3] Mitigating public opinion risks through proper prevention places higher demands on the government's online public opinion monitoring and information dissemination mechanisms. Single public opinion incident cannot be easily spotted as it is to some extent hidden. However, the comparative analysis based on big data technology can help the detection of the public opinion incidents which have similar features, and then predict its development trends via matching the incident with previous ones in the same type in the database. It can improve the government's ability to predict online public opinion incidents, significantly increasing the level of the government's online public opinion monitoring and effectively reducing public opinion risks.

What's more, the government can realize innovation in philosophies, methods and approaches through big data and mobile Internet technology and thus achieve the conceptual shift from "government publicity" to "government communication". ^[4] When public opinion incidents occur, big data platforms will timely send out early warning signals and monitor the development of public opinion in real time, so that the government can have a good control of the trajectory of the public sentiment, derivative topics and scope of influence of public opinion incidents in a timely manner and realize comprehensive multi-angle monitoring. To respond effectively to public opinion incidents, the government should value information data to explore the bias of public opinion to see whether it contains irrational demands, so that it can accurately identify the direction of public opinion and hot spots. Moreover, the government can improve the information dissemination mechanism through social media, proactively respond to social concerns to avoid the spread of rumors and other false information that may turn the public opinion incidents towards an irrational direction.

2.2 Cracking down on illegal activities online and strengthening legal system construction

Although the Internet society is a virtual world, the main activists in the Internet world are real people in the real society. That's why laws are needed to constrain and regulate the behavior of the public online, strengthen the legal thinking and promote the construction of the legal system in the Internet society. A sound legal system of laws and regulations are undoubtedly a powerful tool to the enhance governance of the Internet society and safeguard national network security. ^[5]

In the era of big data, the data of the public generated in their cyber activity might be leaked. As a result, private data of netizens should be protected through legislation, which will clarify the boundaries of the government's collection and use of information data and build an open and transparent government management system of data to prevent the abuse of power and the leakage of public information. In the context of being empowered by online technology, online "Water Army" (paid posters), publish many comments deliberately on major social media platforms to get paid, with their real public opinion being hidden, misleading the direction of public opinion and interfering in the government's decision-making in social governance. Therefore, the regulation of public opinion collection under the technological support of big data should strengthen the screening of "false public opinion" and punish and resolutely crack down on online paid posters and the employers behind them, improve the accuracy of big data-based public opinion monitoring and analysis system, and perfect the construction of the legal system of the Internet society.

2.3 Clarified government leadership and a multi-actor coordination

mechanism

The government should take a leading role in the governance of the Internet society in the context of big data and establish a good and harmonious interactive relationship with multiple agents to improve governance in this regard by pooling the strength of all parties. The government should also take the initiative to shoulder the responsibility and tasks in governing social public affairs, give full play to its leadership, coordinate the conflicting interests of various parties on the Internet, maintain normal operation order, and promote the smooth and orderly development of the Internet. In the governance of the Internet society, the government's agencies should have a clear division of their tasks and establish a unified and coordinated internal management mechanism, so as to avoid overlapping of responsibilities, which might undermine the decision-making efficiency in social governance.

On the basis of complying with the rules and regulations of the Internet society, Internet companies should take the initiative to provide the government access to partially open information data so that the government can make social governance decisions correctly and efficiently, make use of big data and other technological means to screen rumors and false information, take the initiative to avoid or contain the spread of false information, and promote the development of a Clear and Bright society. As for the public, they should try to improve their media literacy so that they will be able to evaluate the authenticity of information on their own after receiving it in cyberspace, thus avoiding becoming a link in the spread of rumors. They should also be alert about whether they have properly exercised their right to speak out, so that they will not become a member of online "Water Army" (paid posters) without knowing it, making the work of online social governance more challenging.

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