

The influence of Key Opinion Leader's attitudes toward Netizens' on public opinion

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the Internet, opinion leaders play a very important role in the guidance of public opinion. Gender equality, epidemic prevention measures, and Environmentalism are all global public opinion topics that have attracted much attention in recent years. In the face of these hot topics, more and more opinion leaders speak enthusiastically and express their attitudes. This study uses Key Opinion Leadership theory and secondary communication theory to explore the impact of Key Opinion Leaders on the three public opinion topics of equal rights between men and women, epidemic prevention measures, and environmental issues. More and more ordinary people pay attention to these events, which are affected by the Key Opinion Leader's attitude and make a positive response. This study made a theoretical contribution that how to promote the harmony and stability of the network environment.

Keywords: Gender equality, Epidemic prevention measures, Environmentalism, Key opinion leadership.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet, various social media platforms are widely used by the public in their daily life. New media representatives by Weibo and our chat are often easy to use, interactive and proactive. In the network environment, many topics will trigger discussion or even secondary fermentation, and the development direction of public opinion is hard to predict. And this kind of social media is one of the main places where information is spreading today.

China is listed by the World Health Organization as one of the 10 countries with high performance in maternal and child health. As a basic national policy, equality between men and women is highly valued in China. There are more than 100 universities offering women's studies and related courses. Laws and regulations in various fields are also constantly put forward and improved. However, there are still some unequal problems in employment, maternity leave, and other aspects of life. It will take a long time for the full realization of equal rights between men and women to be truly realized.

At the beginning of 2020, the spread of COVID-19 has once again triggered the reflection of all sectors of society on current social governance. This outbreak of COVID-19 is not only a test of social public service departments and social governance capacity but also a test of social media's ability to

deal with emergencies. At the same time, the web provides a very convenient platform for the dissemination of environmental science and technology. Science popularization workers can release environmental science and technology information anytime and anywhere and communicate with the public. Weibo can significantly improve the timeliness and interactivity of environmental science and technology dissemination and effectively reduce investment costs [1].

Topics such as "equal rights for men and women, epidemic prevention measures, and environmentalism" often trigger some hot-topic news on communication platforms, generating online onlookers and active discussions, among which public opinions grow sharply and are diverse. With the emergence of new media empowerment mechanisms, online opinion leaders play a very important role in information and guidance of online public opinion and the guidance of public values. KOL's attitude towards these issues and his comments will affect netizens' attitudes towards such hot issues [2].

In fact, with the rapid development of mobile Internet, our media with a certain fan base have become the "key opinion leaders" in the era of the media, and their responsibilities are becoming more and more important, such as in the fields of social supervision, public opinion orientation, cultural orientation, and security [3]. Nowadays, the discussion of online topics is increasingly fierce, and the attitude of key opinion leaders towards different times is bound to have a decisive influence on netizens. Research has clearly shown that key opinion leaders are responsible for controlling issues and content. And many netizens once thought that the feminism of the self-media creator MiMeng became a "representative of the self-media era". To attract fans and earn traffic, the content published by Mimeng often contains false content and even brainwashes the audience. Therefore, when setting the agenda, key opinion leaders should avoid topics that are likely to cause ideological conflicts, and should not deliberately lead wars for the sake of flow. Cause the network public opinion stormed [4].

Even so, in the research on the influence of KOL on netizens' consciousness of such hot topics, there is still little analysis on how key opinion leaders' attitudes towards "gender equality, epidemic prevention measures, and environmentalism" affect netizens' attitudes towards similar topics. Therefore, this paper applies opinion leader theory and literary analysis to study the influence of KOL's behavior and speech on public opinion, aiming to investigate whether netizens will be affected by opinion leaders' opinions when they see opinion leaders on the Internet. According to the research background and conclusion, our group connects the attitudes of netizens with those of opinion leaders. It is assumed that when opinion leaders actively call for women's equality, environmentalism, and positive publicity of epidemic prevention measures, Internet users will be affected, thus reducing gender discrimination, resource waste, and other problems in society. The contribution of this paper has wide applicability.

American scholar Lazarsfeld first put forward the concept of "opinion leaders" in his book *The people's choice* in 1944. In other words, in the process of disseminating media information to social groups, these groups play an influential intermediary role. This concept and the "two-level communication" proposed simultaneously believed that the audience does not directly obtain information and receive influence from the mass media, but is influenced by a few people who receive information first. These few people that receive information first will analyze and process the content they receive and add their ideas and views. Then these people's ideas will be further disseminated to the audience through mass media, and the audience will also be affected by these people's ideas [5]. It can be seen that from information release to information acceptance by the public has entered a new stage, which has not been proposed in the past research.

Opinion leaders generally have the following characteristics: 1. They have a certain influence and prestige among the masses. 2. Highly sensitive to information, able to capture events in time, and have their ideas and understanding. 3. Rich information channels, so people can receive some

information first. 4. Extensive social communication and sufficient knowledge accumulation, able to convey information in this field to the public in an easy-to-understand way [6].

In recent years, with the popularity of the Internet, personal reputation has been transformed into fans and attention on online social networks. The emergence of the Internet itself has broken the restrictions on public access to information. At the same time, more people can express their views and analyze events through social media. Therefore, people can see that the threshold of opinion leaders has been lowered, and more and more ordinary people have become opinion leaders in various fields. With this development, people have also put forward new views on opinion leaders. A new opinion leader is proposed in the article "significance and characteristics of construction". It is mentioned that on social platforms, people will pay attention to the public's views on events through the comment area. At this time, the comment content with high popularity will become the most impressive and seen comment content. At this time, such an information publisher has also become a new opinion type leader [7]. Therefore, with the development of media, the group of opinion leaders is also expanding. At the same time, nowadays, netizens pay more and more attention to the ideas and opinions of others, and opinion leaders have a greater and greater impact on Netizens' views and attitudes towards events.

Network opinion leaders have the value function of mediating influence. They may be organizers of virtual communities or authoritative netizens [8]. For example, Du Yun's analysis of the role of opinion leaders in network communication and Wang Li's analysis of the communication role of opinion leaders in virtual communities. In terms of the identification and characteristics of opinion leaders on different network platforms such as microblogs and Zhihu, the study found that opinion leaders have enough professional knowledge and skills to stand at the center of social networks and connect the relationship network of online communities to the greatest extent [9]. At the same time, the strong radiation of social media can also expand the influence of opinion leaders [10]. For example, Wang Xiuli's research on the influence mechanism of opinion leaders in online communities -- Taking the "Zhihu" of social Q & a community as an example, and song Hao's analysis of the characteristics of "opinion leaders" in the microblog era. When it comes to the role of opinion leaders in marketing communication, some studies have found that the impact of the same opinion leader on different consumers is often different. Consumers are often more likely to accept the opinions of opinion leaders with similar product preferences, interests, and tastes, and then generate purchase intention [11]. At the same time, opinion leaders influence consumers' behavior intention in many ways [12]. For example, Meng Fei's research on the influence of opinion leaders on purchase intention in the social and business environment and Louis v. Casaro's influencers on Instagram: antecedents and order of opinion leaders.

The concept of "secondary communication" theory was put forward by American communication scholars Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and others [13]. It is a unique mass communication theory. It refers to the process of communication from mass media to opinion leaders, and then from opinion leaders to all audiences [14]. The flexibility, purpose, and popularity of "opinion leaders" enable the recipients to receive the communication content well, At the same time, it also shows the importance and necessity of interpersonal communication with mass communication, and has the guiding significance of the study of mass communication affected [15].

Secondary communication theory is often combined with "opinion leaders". "Opinion leaders are primary communication, while secondary communication is spread by opinion leaders to the affected recipients through interpersonal communication." secondary communication "is regarded as the accompanying effect of" primary communication "to a certain extent, but in recent years," secondary communication "is no longer an accessory effect, and its communication power and influence even exceed that of" primary communication "[16].

In the era of increasingly developed mass media, it is not difficult to find that "secondary communication" is now in an independent stage. In TikTok public address, micro-blog platforms, and short video platform, the influence of the two-level communication is extraordinary, even playing a role in decisions, and has been separated from the subordinate position of "first-class communication". For example, the official account of WeChat is a great example of "first-level communication".

Now various studies have fully proved that opinion leadership refers to individuals who have a strong influence in a specific environment or specific events, and can exert varying degrees of influence on Internet users in many cases [17,18]. Secondary communication is very important to the speech communication of opinion leaders. In addition, netizens will seek advice or comments on people regarded as opinion leaders on the Internet and conduct secondary dissemination [19]. However, few people pay attention to the leading role of opinion leaders in equal rights between men and women, epidemic prevention measures, and environmentalism. Therefore, this paper mainly discusses these three points. Information seekers are more likely to participate in gender equality, epidemic prevention measures, and environmentalism for a long time. They have rich experience and professional knowledge, participate in and contact with many discussions on such topics, and become opinion leaders [20,21]. The comments of opinion leaders are widely considered to have a great impact on the attitude of Internet users because most Internet users will believe the comments of influential opinion leaders. In short, these studies together provide important insights for opinion leaders in many fields. Public opinion leaders' cognition of the three is considered to be the key to affecting the attitude of netizens, because their professional knowledge and participation have different degrees of influence on netizens, and netizens will think it is reliable information and affected [22].

This study reviewed the impact of KOL on Internet users from three public opinion perspectives, gender equality, epidemic prevention measures, and environmental protection to summarize how KOL's view has affected the views of netizens.

2. Public Opinion

2.1. Gender Equality

Gender equality has always been a topic of great concern on the Internet. Many people insist on speaking out for it, and many people despise it. Some scholars believe that, with the popularization and development of new media, the spread of feminist consciousness is wider, and at the same time, the problem of demonizing feminist rights also appears. As pointed out in Wang Lan's *Feminist Communication in New Media Environment*, Many self-media accounts targeted at female users not only provide a platform for the spread of feminist consciousness but also shape the recognition of self-worth for women [23]. However, the mainstream media rarely reports on gender equality, and even describes feminists as radical and extreme images.

With the development of new media, traditional opinion leaders are gradually being replaced by new opinion leaders. The new KOL is often active on major social networking sites, insisting on making original remarks. Today's KOL not only has many fans but also has a positive voice. It also has its attitude towards public opinion events. When there is a hot topic of public opinion on the Internet, KOL can always seize the opportunity quickly. Express opinions, thus attracting fans quickly. Therefore, many feminists will choose to cooperate with KOL, hoping that KOL can speak for women, and even many people who speak for gender equality are KOL themselves [24]. KOL, who focuses on a certain vertical field, is usually easier to get more people's attention. At the same time, their remarks will be considered more convincing by the public.

Since the media era, when KOL has a large number of fans by chance, it will gain more attention when it speaks, and it will get more attention after it gains more attention, which is a positive and good cycle [25]. KOL is often more difficult than other hot topics when speaking up for gender equality because gender equality is a "sensitive" topic in itself, Once KOL's remarks are inappropriate, they will be amplified by the public, thus losing fans and attention.

2.2. Epidemic prevention measures

As a major public emergency, the COVID-19 epidemic not only has the real risk of infection but also has the risk of public opinion on social media. Some scholars have found that security and social needs are the core needs that drive netizens to produce and spread public opinion, and the topic agenda-setting of mainstream media and KOL's public opinion guidance are the important driving forces for the spread of public opinion [26]. In the COVID-19 incident, KOL played an important role in public opinion. On the one hand, KOL exported common knowledge about medicine and popular science to the public; on the other hand, KOL encouraged people's anti-epidemic morale and spread effectively epidemic prevention measures to the public.

At the beginning of the epidemic, the public can only get the latest information from mainstream media. But gradually, more and more doctors released the truest news they knew through social platforms and became KOL in a special period. Doctors use the power of network communication to convey effective information to the public in their way. This allows the public to know about the virus more quickly.

In the process of epidemic prevention, rumors emerge one after another. In the tense atmosphere of epidemic prevention, some people maliciously spread false statements and interpret policies unilaterally to gain attention, which seriously hindered the spread of public policies. Therefore, it is very necessary to dispel rumors. Some scholars have found in their research that the network rumors of the COVID-19 epidemic, It is the agenda setter of the government's network rumors, and expert KOL plays a very important guiding role [27].

The expert KOL exports correct epidemic prevention knowledge to the masses most conveniently and quickly in the network so that the masses can receive effective positive information quickly and directly, which contributes greatly to dispelling rumors. It not only soothed the public mood, and maintained social stability, but also improved the efficiency of "anti-epidemic".

2.3. Environmentalism

Environmental problem is one of the common problems faced by all mankind. Taking Chai Jing's Under the Dome as an example, some scholars have found that when Chai Jing was a KOL, she was not only a journalist but also a mother and an environmentalist. Through her in-depth investigation, she explained the environmental problems of the public from all directions and solved people's doubts.

In fact, on the major social networking platforms, the activity of KOL makes the existence of public opinion more prominent, and the voice of KOL further promotes the follow-up reports of major media [28]. Just as Chai Jing accepted an exclusive interview with the official media after the release of "On the Dome". Just because KOL has spoken before, more official media will pay attention to the event itself. Thereby expanding the influence range of the event and effectively amplifying the communication effect.

In the process of network public opinion dissemination, ordinary people, public intellectuals, media workers, etc., all participate in it as KOL and speak for environmental protection [29]. In recent years, the government will also invite KOL to speak about some environmental protection activities, hoping to let more people know about the situation with the help of KOL. In closing the gap between the government and the public, It can also increase the activity heat with the help of KOL.

KOL in their familiar areas, to express their understanding to the public, not only to push public opinion to a climax but also to make more people pay attention to the public opinion topic. Although KOL plays an important role in the publicity of environmental protection awareness, it is still insufficient for professionalism and scientificity. Therefore, in the dissemination of environmental awareness, KOL still needs to improve its professionalism while speaking to ensure the preciseness and accuracy of its information.

3. Conclusions

Compared with the traditional opinion leaders, the new opinion leaders have a great influence on the guidance of public opinion. The new KOL not only plays the role of information intermediaries in secondary communication but also acts as the integrator of information and opinions, thus changing the formation of traditional public opinion [30]. The discourse power of KOL in social platforms makes KOL play a very positive role in guiding many public opinion events. At the same time, KOL also brings effective information to the public, so that more people can understand the event itself.

Due to the great influence of KOL, proper supervision and management is also very necessary [31]. The government also needs to strengthen its communication with KOL, because the information reflected by KOL is a practical problem of public concern, and the public is easily affected by KOL. Therefore, the government needs to maintain good interaction and communication with KOL. KOL should also strengthen its media and moral literacy, Before expressing opinions and commenting on events, people should collect comprehensive information, deeply understand the public opinion itself, and make it objective and accurate, rather than extract the information that is piecemeal at will and present it to the public. While improving the ability of thinking, KOL should also actively assume social responsibility and strive to exert KOL's influence in more places where it is needed, rather than spreading wrong information on the Internet, causing panic among the masses.

Nowadays, with the surge of Internet users, people are more and more active in discussing topics on the Internet, and the content is gradually rich. It is no longer a difficult thing to become a KOL. Given the lack of research on the influence of KOL's attitude on netizens, this paper conducts research on the influence of KOL on netizens in such hot topics as "gender equality, epidemic prevention measures, and environmentalism". Through the previous research on relevant aspects explored by scholars in the field of "opinion leader theory", information collation and analysis were carried out to prove that opinions expressed by KOL have a certain influence on netizens' attitudes. It confirms the role of KOL in the field of public discussion, verifies the practicability of secondary communication theory, and also provides direction for the influence mode of KOL's speech.

The conclusion of this study is the quality and originality of KOL's speech; The online interaction of KOL is positively correlated with netizens' attitudes. For KOLS on social media platforms, the importance and influence of their opinions are clearly defined. For many netizens, the ability of opinion leaders in information dissemination and attitude influence is also confirmed.

This study has the following limitations, which can be further studied and improved. Our group studied KOL itself and its published contents. Due to the different scope of the research topic, Our group did not investigate its potential personal factors. Therefore, researchers should explore the implications. For example, the authenticity of sources of information on KOL's claims on equality on social media, or whether there is deliberate dissemination of inflammatory speech. Researchers can study typical KOL and their publications in the field.

In the future, as for the role of opinion leaders on the Internet, it can not only focus on hot topics, but also expand the influence of KOL on Internet users to other fields, or take Internet users in different countries as research objects to expand the scope of research and conduct more in-depth research and analysis.

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