The Public Opinion Response Mechanism in the Era of Network Media

-- Taking the Tianjin Port Explosion on Aug. 12 as an Example

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Abstract

This article analyzes the interactivity, time-space-cross, virtuality and individuation of the Internet, and expounds the characteristics of Internet public opinion. Taking the "8.12" fire and explosion accident in Tianjin Port as an example, this article combines agenda setting theory, information asymmetry theory and opinion leader theory to analyze the reasons why netizens' attitudes toward the explosion have changed from resisting the official attitude to gradually accepting it. This study disassembled the dissemination of public opinion into four stages, and analyzed the hidden dangers of public opinion in the early stage of the explosion, the official information processing methods and the attribution of the public opinion outbreak. The author analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of government network public opinion response strategies based on the relevant theories of public opinion guidance for emergencies.

Keywords

New Media; Public Opinion; Crisis Public Relations.

1. Introduction

With the popularization of the Internet, the way people obtain information has developed and changed. Various communication devices and the seamless connection between the network and life make the virtual network world and the real world permeate each other. The emergence of various forms of network media provides people with a platform for information acquisition, opinion expression and emotional exchange. Nowadays, the widespread use of Weibo and WeChat has made social media gradually become an important channel for public interest expression and emotional venting. In the face of China in the transitional period, the public has paid special attention to issues related to the government, police and other aspects, and it is easy to form public opinion on the Internet. Internet public opinion is a double-edged sword, which may not only enhance the government's credibility, but also damage the government's image.

This study will analyze the characteristics of online public opinion from a theoretical perspective, and take the 8.12 Tianjin Port bombing case as an example, divide the public incident of the online public opinion outbreak into different stages and conduct attribution analysis. Then, based on the characteristics of public opinion this time, the article critically analyzes the government's public opinion response mechanism and makes recommendations.

2. Theoretical Studies

2.1. Theoretical Research on New Media

What exactly is the new media? Academics don't have a standard definition. The author thinks that "new" is a relative concept. According to Enzensberger, compare with the traditional media like radio, newspaper, and television, which works in a single transmitter with multiple receivers, there is no direct communication between receiver and transmitter, but a one-way transmission of information. [1] However, the new mass media make it possible for the mass to participate in a social and socialized productive process for the first time in the history. In the present situation, traditional mass media does not serve communication but even impedes it, because there is no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver. New mass media is like a huge linked system, that is to say, it would be such if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of allowing the listener not only to hear but to speak, and did not isolate him but brought him into contact.

About the definition of the new media, professor Kuang said that, new media is a relative concept whose content will develop along with the progress of communication technology. [2] From the perspective of human communication history, it should be an era category, especially referring to "new today" rather than "new yesterday" or "new tomorrow". Professor Gong considered that new media in a broad sense is a means or form of communication that provides integrated information and entertainment services to users through various transmission channels and output terminals by using digital, network and mobile communication technologies. [3] It is constantly updated with the change of times and technological innovation. The characteristics of new media are mainly shown in the following four categories:

Interactivity

Achieving communication is a major breakthrough in new media. Look at the social media around the world, for example, QQ, Wechat and Weibo in China, Instagram and Facebook, the difference between these media and traditional media lies in the realization of the two-way transmission of information. [4] Each user is both a receiver of information and a disseminator of information, and also, have the control of information. When people comment on the information and post it on the network media, the public opinion formed will affect the subsequent development of the matter. Compared to the traditional media, the interactivity of new media not only brings about convenient information communication, but also has drawbacks. In the traditional information transmission, the transmitter holds the absolute control of information and instructions, which is not only the information exchange, but also the embodiment of social class that the right to feedback information is in the hands of the elite. [1] However, the low cost, instantaneity and popularity of network media interaction enable people with different educational levels to participate in the development of public opinion affecting the event, which leads to the development and result of the event doesn't necessarily move towards a theoretically optimal outcome.

Time-space-cross

Traditional media is limited to time and space. Before the advent of online media, people who wanted to see the Mona Lisa had to go to the Louvre. But the same thing is very different today. If someone goes to the Louvre and takes a picture of the Mona Lisa, and he posts it on his social network, then anyone with an Internet connection can view it online without leaving home. New media has completely broken the communication mode based on time and space, it completely breaks the transmission mode based on time and space, and realizes the transmission of information through the Internet and communication satellites. [4]

Virtuality

The Internet is not only a product of science and technology, but also a popular image. It creates a "metaphorical world and a whole new way of life. Information posted on the Internet is essentially virtual, as all text can be reduced to binary metacoding. [5] Now the development of technology makes information free of paper, text and other tangible constraints. People use all kinds of software to create virtual information, such as special effects, animation, artificial intelligence and so on. In network media, not only information is virtual, but also the relationship between the two parties to realize information exchange. According to Baudrillard, traditionally, signs are a reaction of reality. But now, the Internet has broken the distance between metaphor and reality. It abandoned "real" and turned to "hyperreal", presenting a simulation of life similar to reality. In new network media, people are anonymous, which leads to the publishers are not sure who the receivers of their publicly released information are, and the receivers are also uncertain about the who the publisher is. Communication in such a "double-blind" relationship creates a virtual relationship between publisher and receiver. The new virtual interpersonal relationship brought by network media has also brought great influence and change to human life.

Individuation

What traditional media does is to spread the news widely without any target. However, with the help of big data, new media has realized the "mass decentralization spread" of the news. When people receive messages, they are no longer aimless, but with the help of network technology and various tools to retrieve what they need in the huge database. At the same time, the Internet provides a platform for people to form groups with people who share the same interests and opinions, such as Wechat group. In this way, the network media is created by individuals and their relationships and reinforced by word of mouth through sharing links and posts. [6] For people, new media provides them with a personalized service compared with traditional media. Through mobile devices such as mobile phones, the recipient of the message can control when and where the message is received. In addition, in today's developed big data technology, each major new media analyzes users' preferences through user search, browsing time of a message, feedback and other aspects by using their own big data analysis technology so as to recommend different content targeted.

2.2. Theoretical Research on Public Opinion Dissemination and Response

In the environment of new media, people's sense of participation in mass communication is becoming stronger and stronger. After an emergency or a major event occurs, public opinions will inevitably arise. Therefore, modern public opinion response is so important rather than blindly "blocking the mouth of the masses".

2.2.1. Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory attributes its intellectual origin to a thesis that the news media construct a pseudo-environment for the public which connect people's behavior in the fictitious world with real life, mentioned in Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*. In other words, news media is the main source of images of the vast and unfamiliar outside world in people's minds, so people's understanding of the world is largely based on what the media decides to tell. [7] The core point of the agenda setting theory is that the prominent elements on the media agenda have become prominent in the minds of the public. The more attention a media receives, the more attention the public will pay to the information transmitted through this media, and the more discussions they will have. Even if the media cannot directly intervene in the public's opinion on a certain event, they can guide the public's focus or social values through the time, words and attitudes of the release of news. [8]

The agenda process is a three-pronged process, starting with ensuring that the message that gets media attention is important and worthy of attention. Then, the media agenda influences

the attitudes and ideas of the public, and finally, the relationship between the public and information influences the decision-making of the government and generates the government agenda. Electronic bulletin boards, as an aspect of the Internet, provide Internet users with opportunities to discuss important topics publicly. Because EBBs have a large audience; they can send and retrieve information quickly, and the cost is very low, so the agenda setting in online media affects public opinion even more. [9]

Asymmetric information theory.

The concept of asymmetric information was first introduced by George A. Akerlof. The theory of information asymmetry refers to the fact that in the market, different people have different information. Those who have sufficient information tend to be in a favorable position. The buyer only knows the more external average market price, while the seller has more information channels and has a better understanding of the actual price of the goods. Such information asymmetry will prompt sellers to reduce the quality of goods, leading to a decline in the average quality of goods on the market. The theory of asymmetric information can also be applied to communication. [10]

In today's Internet communication era, the units that publish news have more information, and the masses, as receivers, have a huge demand for information. Information asymmetry will lead to a variety of problems and risks. In order to prevent the information advantage party from making use of its advantages for its own profit, generating opportunistic motives and causing economic and life harm, it is necessary to introduce the power of a third party such as the government for adjustment.

2.2.2. Opinion Leader Theory

The "opinion leader" was proposed by Lazarsfeld and others in the 1940s. When facing some social time, opinion leaders can give socially influential opinions, which serve as the public's guiding ideology and guide them to understand social issues. [11] People's decisions are often influenced by their friends, relatives and other acquaintances. Such "acquaintances" play the role of opinion leaders in the process of communication, and they convey their views and attitudes to people who are less interested in media attention and interest. Opinion leaders are important individuals in social networks because they can connect information publishers and recipients in a more efficient way, and influence the attitudes or behaviors of others.

In online social networks, opinion leaders will establish communication platforms with their followers. People often don't directly believe in information released by mainstream media, but are more inclined to believe in information from known and trustworthy opinion leaders. Because of this, mastering opinion leaders can greatly reduce the difficulty of information dissemination. [12]

2.2.3. Stage Theory

Steven Fink proposed a four-stage model of crisis management to reveal the life cycle of crisis transmission, named prodromal stage, breakout stage, chronic stage and resolution stage. [13]

The potential stage of crisis in the first stage is the simplest period for crisis management, but also the most easily overlooked period. The impending crisis may appear in the form of suggestive clues. It requires leaders to think about whether their actions will lead to a crisis before making decisions, and what to do if a crisis occurs. People need to have a sense of crisis and stay alert to potential dangers.

The acute stage of crisis in the second stage is the shortest among the four stages, but it has the greatest impact on people. The occurrence of a special event marks the beginning of the acute phase. This stage may cause health or property damage to the public or organization. The characteristics of the acute stage are the rapid development of the situation and the continuous escalation of incidents, attracting more and more attention from the media and the public. Internally, the speed of information dissemination like an avalanche has brought tremendous

psychological pressure to managers, and has seriously affected the team's activities and reputation.

The third phase of chronic is the longest among the four periods, and the duration of the crisis depends on the crisis management. In this case, the reputation of relevant organizations may be damaged for a long time, because it is difficult for them to return to their normal state before the crisis. If policy makers take effective measures at this stage, the damage caused by it can be remedied. If policymakers are indecisive and hesitant during this period, it is likely that the crisis will continue to simmer and spiral out of control.

The fourth stage is the crisis resolution period, during which the impact of the crisis on the organization gradually decreases, but managers still cannot relax their guard and should always prevent the resurgence of the crisis.

The stage analysis theory proposed by Fink provides a complete process of analysis from the origin, development, mutation and resolution of the crisis. The imperiling process is a cyclic, just like boiling water, it is a continuous process from calm to boiling and then back to calm. A problem in any of these four stages may lead to repetition of the crisis, as if you turn on the stove again, and the water will continue to boil. [13]

2.2.4. Image Restoration Theory

The image restoration theory was proposed by Benoit in 1995. He believes that reputation is the most important asset of an individual or organization and should be highly valued and maintained from a strategic perspective. The public's perception will greatly affect the organization's image restoration. Benoit classifies image restoration into five main strategies, which are denial, avoid responsibility, reduce hostility, correct behavior, and apologize.

There are two types of "denial". One is to simply deny that his organization has improper conduct, and the other is to point out that other organizations should be responsible for the incident. There are many ways to avoid responsibility, such as the organization's inability to avoid bad results, the original intention of the organization is good, but good intentions do bad things, etc. Organizations can reduce the hostility of public opinion by treating the incident differently from more serious incidents, counterattacking public opinion and compensating the victims of the incident. Corrective actions such as active internal improvements to prevent similar incidents from recurring can also restore the image of the organization. At the same time, a straightforward expression of an apology is also an efficient and effective way to calm the anger of victims and public opinion, thereby, achieving the effect of improving the direction of public opinion and the image of the organization. [14]

2.2.5. Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Some scholars, led by Coombs, built a situational crisis communication model based on attribution theory. Compared with traditional theories, the breakthrough of the situational crisis communication model lies in the introduction of the three concepts of "crisis responsibility", "stakeholder" and "crisis history".

From the perspective of crisis responsibility, crisis scenarios can be divided into three categories: "victims", "accidents" and "errors", meaning that "Organizations are also victims", "Accidents caused by technological collapse or accidents" or "Organizations' misconduct and management caused the accident". Different crisis scenarios adapt to different types of communication. The "victimized" crisis event is suitable for the use of "diminished" or "negative" communication strategies, that is, the organization shows condolences and concerns and dilutes people's attention or resonates with them by saying that the organization is also a victim. "Accident-type" crisis events are suitable for use of "desalination", "negative" or "remodeling" to provide remedial or corrective measures, showing the organization's attitude that "accidents are inevitable, but they are actively working to remedy and rectify". "Errors" events are suitable for "reshaping" communication strategies. Since the accident was caused by

the organization's own negligence, it should take the initiative and make corrections to restore the reputation. [15]

3. Case Analysis

3.1. Background of the Case

The Tianjin Port 8.12 explosion occurred at midnight on August 12, 2015. It is located in Tianjin Port in the Binhai New Area of Tianjin, China. Dangerous goods stored in the warehouse of Ruihai Economic and Trade Co., Ltd. At around 10:55 that evening, a fire broke out in the warehouse of the accident center. Subsequently, the first explosion occurred during the rescue of local firefighters, and a second explosion occurred soon after. The open flame at the explosion site was not completely extinguished until about 4 pm on August 14. The accident caused 165 deaths, including 24 active firefighters, 75 Tianjin Port firefighters, 11 local police officers, and 55 residents and company employees. The direct economic loss was as high as 6.866 billion yuan. Since then, the State Council established a special investigation team for the 8·12 explosion accident in Tianjin Port. The investigation team found that the direct cause of the explosion accident was that the nitrocellulose in the container on the south side of the Ruihai Company's dangerous goods warehouse was partially dried due to the loss of wetting agent. Nitrocellulose accelerates the release of heat under the action of high temperature weather and other factors, and the accumulated heat triggers spontaneous combustion, causing the hazardous chemicals in adjacent containers to burn on a large area for a long time. This eventually led to the explosion of hazardous chemicals such as ammonium nitrate stacked in the arrival area. This explosion is of the "errors" crisis type. Ruihai Company seriously violated relevant laws and regulations and was the main responsible unit for the accident. At the same time, Binhai New Area Party Committee and the administrative department of Tianjin Port Government are not strict in law enforcement management. Afterwards, the state imposed severe penalties on the main responsible units, departments and personnel. [16]

3.2. The Process of Spreading Public Opinion

3.2.1. Public Opinion Prodromal Period

In the early morning of August 13, 2015, information about the explosion began to appear on Sina Weibo, which quickly caused a huge sensation and was quickly forwarded and commented by netizens. Subsequently, many self-media and websites responded immediately and reported the explosion. However, although some of the information is accompanied by live video, these media did not explain the reason and details of the incident, only the time, place and circumstances of the incident.

Eleven minutes after the explosion, the Tianjin Municipal Government released basic information about the incident through the Tianjin website and Sina's official Weibo. It was 7 minutes later than the private network information release, and the content of the release was basically the same. In the process of information release, the expressions adopted by government units and workers are almost always positive. The investigation team and the local government neither deny nor acknowledge the doubts of netizens. The official Weibo posted a lot of blessing messages, and the attitude was mainly to praise and publicize the heroic performance and sacrifice of the firefighters.

3.2.2. Public Opinion Acute Stage

As the government and society's attention to the explosion continues to rise, after August 13, the public and netizens have focused on the number of casualties. Newspapers, TV stations, and the self-media began to continuously report on the progress, causes, and casualties of the incident. Within 7 days of the accident, a total of 294 microblogs and announcements were published on official channels such as the central government website Tianjin Net and the

government's official Weibo to report the progress of the accident investigation. At this stage, public opinion began to explode. By taking advantage of the agenda setting theory and the principle of information asymmetry, the authorities did not choose to make the information and truth transparent, but tried to divert people's attention and focus of discussion by releasing only positive news, in order to guide public opinion. As the official media continued to output uniform and positive content, Weibo users began to feel resistance. Many netizens believe that the officials did not handle the case rationally, and did not spend their energy and thoughts on finding the cause of the accident, but instead offered such meaningless "blessings." Such public opinion has also caused considerable controversy on the Internet. There are also some Weibo users who think their government's response is appropriate. Because as the saying goes, "the dead are the most important", it is more important to focus on the victims than to explain the tragedy that has occurred.

In response to the public opinion on the 8·12 Tianjin Port explosion incident, the Chinese government held a press conference. However, the official processing of information has not fully met the needs of the people. For example, many people are concerned about "whether the construction of an explosive dangerous goods warehouse meets the regulations" and "whether the warehouse has long been a hidden safety hazard but no one has solved it." The official explanation is: "The construction of this community has been approved and inspected by the real estate department." The government failed to meet the information needs of Internet users who are in a disadvantageous position based on the principle of information asymmetry. For the public attention issues, the official showed a "dodge" and "evasive" attitude. Such an attitude is very unconvincing for the masses. If everything is as perfect as you said, what caused such a serious explosion?" "Who is responsible for this incident?" "What needs to be done in the future to avoid similar incidents?" Official statement Failure to respond to public concerns, leading to an explosion of public opinion. A large number of Weibo netizens posted messages to express their dissatisfaction with the government's handling. In the era of online communication, this official attitude quickly fuels rumors and suspicions. This situation has led to some self-media taking advantage of the loophole and acting as "opinion leaders". They published false rumors like "The government is in cahoots with Ruihai Company" to achieve the purpose of attracting the attention of netizens. The masses gradually believe the information provided by "opinion leaders", and under the leadership of opinion leaders, bad network public opinion is formed.

The long response period of the official follow-up handling of the incident has contributed to the spread of the rumors. For example, the biochemical pollution caused by the explosion was rumored on the Internet and caused panic among the people in the surrounding areas. Until the situation got out of control, the authorities urgently dispatched a biochemical control team to clear the entrance and responded to public opinion so that the truth became clear to the world. The government's improper handling of online public opinion triggered the second stage of public opinion outbreak. People began to resist accepting content posted by official accounts, public opinion grew rapidly, and online debates were fierce.

3.2.3. Public Opinion Chronic Stage

Within a week after the accident, government agencies made full use of Internet technology to release video, audio, etc., to quickly and intuitively display the whole story of the explosion. According to the agenda-setting theory, officials realize that the focus chosen by official media in the communication process will become the focus of people's concern. Not only the local media, but also mainstream entertainment programs across the country are suspended. Special programs and rolling news will appear in the form of real-time rescue and case progress. Judging from the key changes in the official content of the explosion, the reactions of local governments and mainstream media are relatively sensitive. After the official released media information, it continued to follow the attitudes of the masses and the trends of public opinion.

When the feedback from netizens is not good, they will make changes in time to avoid further deterioration of public opinion.

Within a week after the accident, the accident investigation team and the Tianjin Municipal Government jointly held 13 press conferences, which answered a total of 244 questions, lasting 924 minutes, and used the spokesperson mechanism to publicly respond to public opinion related issues. Actively guide the healthy and stable development of online public opinion. Therefore, although there is a certain conflict between official and public opinion, public opinion has not been allowed to cause excessive social instability. [17]

In the chronic period, netizens paid less attention to the accident than in the acute period. In addition to continuous attention to the cause of the accident and environmental impact, relevant plans for post-disaster reconstruction have also begun to gradually attract netizens' attention.

3.2.4. The Crisis Resolution Period

One month after the explosion, the investigation team made a final report. The government imposed penalties on those responsible for the accident, made up for loopholes in the management of the local government, and compensated the families of the victims. The resistance of netizens has gradually faded, and attention to the incident has gradually declined from the peak period. The Binhai New Area government and related real estate developers have been praised by surrounding residents for their implementation of the aftermath of damaged houses. The Internet public opinion formed by the 8·12 explosion gradually faded, and the government's credibility was restored. [18]

4. Research on Strategies to Improve Government's Response to Public Opinion

The famous American scholar Scott M. Catlip once put forward: "Public relations is a management function. It establishes and maintains a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the public that determines its success or failure." Crisis management Refers to the organization to avoid or reduce the threat and serious harm caused by the crisis. It is necessary to study crisis issues systematically and in a planned way, and formulate and implement a series of management measures. This is a dynamic process that includes avoiding, controlling, resolving and restoring crises. It includes responsibility principle, sincere principle, speed principle, system principle, authority principle.

4.1. The Speed Principle

The speed principle means that after a crisis occurs, one of the important tasks an organization needs to do is to inform the public of the details and truth of the incident in a timely and accurate manner. Only such a quick response can control the dominant force of public opinion and prevent the public from making judgments about the organization at the center of the crisis due to the wrong guidance of some gossip. Nowadays, with the development of network information, the influence of reputation and image on a subject is increasing, and its negative influence is almost impossible to completely eliminate and restore. Because the bad records of an organization are very easy to be searched on the Internet, the "past" will be retained in the form of "Internet memory". Therefore, once a crisis of public opinion occurs, the organization should respond immediately to stabilize people's hearts, so that people will not turn to believe rumors because they do not see the organization's attitude. This is a sufficient condition for future work.

Studying the 8·12 explosion accident, we can find that the organization's response speed in the early stage was not up to standard. The official news about the Tianjin Port 8·12 explosion was released later than the private news, giving people the impression that "the official attitude is

not serious and the action is not strong." This has laid hidden dangers for the subsequent acute stage of online public opinion. At the same time, in response to the public opinion of the entire incident, the investigation team and the local government lacked initiative in setting the agenda, and the response was relatively slow. Officials always start to respond after negative public opinion has been generated and reached a certain scale, instead of actively "explaining the situation", but passively "clarifying the problem". This behavior is magnified several times under the strong interaction of the network and the intersection of time and space, making the Internet public opinion spread rapidly like a wildfire.

4.2.   The Sincerity Principle

The principle of sincere communication is a bridge to deal with the relationship between the organization and the public after a crisis, and this communication must be based on sincerity. When the organization really puts the rights of the people first, it can reach a mutual understanding with the public. As an organization, you should proactively provide detailed information about events and each step of the process.

In this case, after the Tianjin Port 8·12 bombing incident, government departments and organizations did not show sufficient sincerity in handling the incident. Data shows that the official network and information monitoring team collected 120.5 million pieces of public opinion information related to the case, and blocked 38.74 million pieces of information and rumors. [19] From the perspective of the entire process of accident information disclosure, the government has obviously covered up, delayed, avoided, and obstructed online public opinion. In order to maintain their image of authority and social stability, the authorities tried to deal with online public opinion through suppression. The effect is obvious to all, and the masses do not buy it for this compulsory method of responding to public opinion on the Internet.

Online public opinion is like a flood. The "containment" method cannot really calm public opinion, but will lead to the accumulation of public grievances, and the bank will burst someday in the future. There is a kind of information asymmetry in the relationship between the organization and the masses. As the information-poor party, the masses are at a disadvantage and will seek information from the information-rich people. The government needs to fill in the information gap in a timely manner to balance this asymmetric relationship. For such "wrong type" crisis events, the organization itself has greater responsibility. At this time, using the "remodeling" communication strategy, sincerely apologizing for the organization's mistakes, taking responsibility and compensating the victims can more effectively solve the problem of organizational image crisis.

4.3.   The Shoulder Principle

This means that after a crisis, organizations cannot evade or refuse to take responsibility. Otherwise, the credibility of the organization will be compromised. After the incident, every action of the organization will become an important way for the public to judge the company. If the organization can actively take responsibility during this period and show a serious and responsible attitude towards the problem, the damage to the corporate image will be reduced to a certain extent. If the problem is concealed during this period, public opinion may deteriorate. The chronic period of public opinion has been continuously prolonged. The image of the organization has been greatly reduced in the minds of the public.

After the explosion, the government's official media and public opinion generally found excuses to divert public attention and evade responsibility. The official media tried to direct online public opinion to "pray for the victims of the disaster" and "praise the heroes of the firefighting", and release high-frequency information about the heroic performance and sacrifices of firefighters. From the perspective of the entire process of accident information disclosure, the government adopts a "desalination" communication strategy, which uses cover-ups, delays, and

avoidance to dilute online public opinion. The official media provided too much debugging information to express condolences and concerns. For such "errors" crises of non-natural disasters, the "diminished" communication strategy cannot achieve good communication effects. Instead, it will make the masses think that the official avoids the important and the light to avoid the responsibility. This intensified the questioning of public opinion. After the incident, the government held 13 press conferences with a total of 495 minutes and 121 questions were asked, but 35.4% of the questions were not answered. Unanswered questions include hazardous chemicals, casualties, Ruihai Group's qualifications, and the cause of the accident. The news spokespersons all prevarication, saying that they don't know, it is not convenient to answer and so on. [16] From the perspective of public opinion, the most discussed issues are the handling of the incident, the reason for the incident, the case of supervision, and the lack of government responsibility. At this time, the strategy of eagerly carrying out positive publicity to downplay public opinion not only failed to respond to online public opinion in a reasonable manner, but increased the suspicion and resistance of the masses to the incident.

4.4.   The Standard Principle

The standard principle is that after a crisis, what the masses want to see is a prophet standing in the "fog" filled with rumors and false information, telling them what is "true". At this time, the disclosure of information by a credible authoritative organization can effectively clarify issues and achieve effective information communication with the masses.

The company involved in the 812 explosion, Tianjin Dongjiang Free Trade Zone Ruihai International Logistics Co., Ltd., is a dangerous goods monitoring station established by Tianjin Maritime Safety Administration and a dangerous goods licensing unit of Tianjin Transportation Commission. Prior to this, the company conducted several dangerous goods accident drills. In the face of such a major event as the explosion caused serious casualties and economic losses, the government did not sit idly by, but actively took over. The government conducts online public opinion guidance through Weibo, official online media and other channels, and announces the progress of the incident and related developments. The main official Weibo accounts participating in the response to online public opinion are Tianjin Municipal People's Government News Office, Tianjin's official Weibo accounts "Tianjin Release" and "Sina Tianjin". The former is a government microblog, and the latter is a Tianjin civil microblog. At the same time, the accident investigation team also made full use of the news spokesperson mechanism to release information through official channels in response to negative online opinions.

In this way, the statement issued by an authoritative organization acting as an opinion leader directs standardized information to the masses, responds to negative and false news in the most direct way, and effectively realizes the mediation of online public opinion.

4.5.   The System Principle

The principle of system operation means that the organizer shall work in a planned, comprehensive and orderly manner in the process of handling crisis events. The process of crisis management is a complete system. All departments are closely linked together, and the consistency of information is strictly ensured throughout the organization. Unite within the organization to jointly respond to crises.

In response to the explosion, the accident investigation team formally established a headquarters one day after the accident, composed of several senior officials in Tianjin. There are five working groups under the headquarters: accident site treatment team, wounded rescue team, mass security work team, information release team, and accident cause investigation team, to carry out all-round rescue and aftermath work. During the press release process, government agencies, national public security agencies, and environmental protection agencies worked together. The authorities are cautious about releasing the news. Although various

departments cooperate, they strictly maintain the same speech, release news and respond to public opinion through official channels. This method is accurate and effective, avoids unnecessary trouble in clearing public opinion, ensures the credibility of the government, and responds to public opinion in one fell swoop.

5. Conclusion

Through a comprehensive review, combing and summarizing the existing research conclusions and concepts, this article summarizes the characteristics of the Internet public opinion that is dependent on the modern Internet media. The article analyzes the changes in public opinion during the prodromal period, acute stage, chronic stage, and resolution period of the case. Combining the various stages of the development of public opinion, the article outlines how the government should take specific measures in each stage of public opinion through research on agenda setting theory, information asymmetry theory, opinion leader theory, image restoration theory, situational crisis communication theory, and crisis public relations 5s theory.

Using the "8.12 Tianjin Port Explosion Case" as an example, the author believes that this incident is an "errors" crisis event. According to the agenda setting theory, the government needs to proactively respond to public opinion in the handling of the entire crisis, starting with opinion leaders, and formulating public opinion response strategies. During the public opinion prodromal period, the government should respond to online public opinion in a timely manner based on the principle of speed. During the public opinion breakout stage, the government should adopt a "remodeling" communication strategy, and apologize to the public for the mistakes made by the organization based on the principle of sincere communication. At the same time, according to the information asymmetry theory, the process and related investigation results will be announced in a timely manner. In the chronic period of public opinion, the government should adopt a "diminished" communication strategy and use various forms of media to publish organizational rectification actions. During the period when public opinion is resolved, the government should spread the positive image and value system of the organization based on the image restoration theory. Eventually achieve the purpose of calming public opinion, resolving crisis events, and repairing the image of the organization.

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