

Research on the Spread and Governance of Internet Rumors under the COVID-19

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Abstract: While COVID-19 raged in 2020, various online rumors were rampant. According to the characteristics of online rumors, this paper analyzed the reasons for the formation and spread of online rumors under COVID-19, and put forward corresponding governance measures from the government propaganda department & health department, government & public network platform operators, and the general public & college students.

Keywords: COVID-19, Epidemic, Internet Rumors, Spread

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the whole country's concerted efforts to fight COVID-19, rumors such as "drinking can resist viruses" and "garlic is better than oral drugs to kill viruses" were overwhelming on the Internet. Some people even associated epidemics with monsters in feudal superstition, by which to cause public panic. Especially with the development of information technology and the popularity of the Internet, Internet rumors have become the main form of rumors. With the help of network platforms and online information channels, rumors spread faster and wider, which brings many unstable factors to society. The prevention and control of epidemic and the accompanying rumor management are a great test for the national governance system and governance capacity.

2. Rumor Spreading Theory and Internet Rumors

2.1. Rumor Spreading Theory

G. W. Allport, an American personality psychologist, once put forward the theory of rumors, and he came up with a formula to determine rumors, that is, rumors = (importance) × (fuzziness) [1]. This formula scientifically expounds on the creation, development and diffusion of rumors. In other words, taking COVID-19 as an example, as a major social public event, the greater the probability and spread of related rumors, the less smooth the news about epidemic protection that people care about.

2.2. Traditional Rumors and Internet Rumors

Before the Internet was widely used in lives, rumors were mainly spread by word of mouth. Compared with internet rumors, the traditional rumor spread by word of mouth has a certain lag in the process of spreading, which has won sufficient time for dispelling rumors, so the harmfulness of traditional rumors is not serious. Internet rumors refer to rumors spread through network media based on certain computer technology. Compared with traditional rumors, internet rumors break the limitation of region and time to a certain extent by the powerful interactivity and real-time of network media, which allow rumors to spread more widely and faster, and at the same time bring greater risks to the public.

3. Main Features of Internet Rumors

3.1. Faster in Spreading

Nowadays, in the Internet age, the information spread through the Internet is extremely rapid. At the same time, the number of netizens is growing at a high speed. According to statistics, the number of Internet users in China reached 989 million as of December 2020[2]. As soon as internet rumors

concerning important events appear, they will be paid close attention to and forwarded by netizens and spread widely under the network media. Intrigues of the Warring States· Wei II has a saying: "Everyone knows there are no tigers in the fair, but if people say more, there are" As a result, internet rumors spread much more, and people will take internet rumors as a fact.

3.2. Content Attracts People's Attention

In the network age under the fragmentation of information, the number of information people gets in a short time is huge. Therefore, whether the content attracts people's attention has become an important factor affecting whether the information can get large-scale clicks. According to Allport, "the generation and spread of rumors in homologous social media are caused by the strong interest of communicators. Internet rumors make use of this factor, select events closely related to people's daily life, cater to the needs of netizens, and publish sentences with guiding and strong subjective emotions in combination with the development of the situation, so that netizens can listen to rumors without knowing the truth, resulting in wrong public opinion guidance.

3.3. Cost Little in Demagoguery

Rumor mongers only needs to register anonymous platform accounts without real-name authentication, add words such as "rumored" and "certified by foreign authoritative experts" when publishing news, and splice pictures of previous hot events through photo retouching software such as PS to form false photos that can attract people's attention, to improve the attention of information, so an internet rumor comes into being. The production of internet rumors does not require superb technical means for tedious proofreading, so the cost of rumors can be negligible. The low cost of manufacturing also lowers the threshold for Internet rumors to be published, which can be said to be available to almost everyone [3].

3.4. Complex in Spreading

The diversity of communication media in the Internet platform determines that the ways of internet rumors are diverse. Therefore, multiple communication stages and communication nodes can be owned in spreading. For internet rumors, you can copy the original post, scene splicing, to fake the real. It will promote the birth of a rumor through various social platforms and spawn various versions of branches. More importantly, it is extremely easy to delete the content after publishing rumors on the Internet. The lack of a structured and modular control mechanism makes it difficult to capture and trace the source of internet rumors, which makes it extremely difficult to supervise and a crackdown on internet rumors.

3.5. Greater for Negative Impact

The powerful interactivity of the Internet makes the transmission of information more convenient and fast, but it also makes the spread of internet rumors less affected by factors such as region and time than other rumors, and can almost be transmitted to every netizen in real-time. It is easy to guide public opinion, and easy to cause panic in a wide range [1]. At the same time, it always takes a certain period for the truth to be announced, during which rumors may have harmed society, and even some people may doubt the "motivation of dispelling rumors". All these have led to the fact that after the truth is announced, there is no guarantee that people who have been harmed by rumors will be made up in time, let alone whether there will be subsequent negative impacts.

4. Reasons for the Formation and Diffusion of Internet Rumors under COVID-19

4.1. Internet Rumour Monger: The appearance of bad motive and weak legal consciousness causes the appearance and spread of rumors

For the initiators of rumors, their bad motives for spreading rumors are mostly driven by interests. Combined with the extremely low cost of internet rumors, Rumor Monger was entrusted to get high remuneration by publishing rumors, which virtually gradually expanded the ranks of rumor mongers. On the evening of January 31st, the news that "the research of Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica and Wuhan Institute of Chinese Academy of Sciences found that Shuanghuanglian can inhibit Novel Coronavirus" was exaggerated and interpreted by some We Media, and people lined up all night to snap

up, and even the veterinary Shuanghuanglian was looted. There is often a motive to seek commercial interests behind such rumors. In the early days of COVID-19's release, it did have an impact on public opinion. However, many rumors are gradually hidden in the invisible with the rumors of the official authority. In addition, there are reactionary forces at home and abroad waiting for opportunities to hire professional online rumor-mongering teams, rendering tension and causing social panic. The purpose is to disturb social order in order to achieve their improper goals. It can be said that the emergence of bad motives is one of the important reasons for the rampant rumors during the epidemic.

4.2. Internet Rumors Spreader: Lack of health and safety knowledge and sense of responsibility

Some people lack health and safety knowledge and the ability to identify rumors. It is known that internet rumors widely existing and spreading under COVID-19 are generally rumors about epidemic prevention. In the face of sudden COVID-19, people are already in a panic. Therefore, it is difficult for people to identify the true and false information of many parties and a large amount of information obtained by people on the Internet. In order to ensure the safety of oneself, family and friends, "It is better to believe it than not". Under the influence of herd mentality, people listened to rumors and inadvertently joined rumor spreaders' teams. In addition, compared with developed countries such as the United States, Japan, and Singapore, the education level and mastery of health and safety knowledge of the general public in China are still relatively lacking. According to the 47th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, the proportion of Internet users with a college education or above in China is only 19.8% as of December 2020 [2]. It is precisely because of people's panic about the epidemic and relative lack of health and safety knowledge that the recognition of rumors is not high. Curiosity prompted him to comment blindly and forward, which inadvertently promoted Rumor Spreading.

The lack of sense of responsibility causes rumors to spread wantonly. Unlike the former, the spreader of this part of internet rumors is subjective in the Rumor Spreading process. These netizens have a strong herd mentality and think that if most people are doing the same thing, it will not be a mistake if it is not correct. The concept of "The law can not be enforced when everyone is an offender" seems to be the reason for their wanton reprinting of rumors [4]. However, the traditional concept of "The law can not be enforced when everyone is an offender" does not exist in the principles of jurisprudence. Therefore, the dissemination of internet rumors needs to pay the corresponding legal responsibility and social responsibility. Any spreader of internet rumors is to blame.

4.3. Internet Rumors Supervisor: The real-time supervision of public network platforms and channels is insufficient, which still needs to be strengthened

Nowadays, in the information society, the rapid development of network information technology has promoted the reform of the way of publicizing and sharing information. The network has strong real-time performance, which is different from traditional information propaganda methods. The Internet platform broadens the channels for people to speak, by which every citizen can become a propagandist of social information. However, the disadvantages are that the accuracy of information propaganda is not low with an inaccurate source of information. And the subjective assumption of information spreader is strong. Rumors under COVID-19 are mostly spread through public social network channels such as Weibo, WeChat, Tik Tok, Kuaishou, and WeChat official accounts. However, the real-time supervision of these public network platforms is not keen enough, which makes the spread of rumors seize the opportunity. At the same time, in the face of rumors, the government is still the role of "passive rumor handler" more often [1]. The prevention of internet rumors should be further strengthened.

5. Solutions to Internet Rumors under Epidemic

5.1. Government Propaganda Department and Health Department: Strengthen the popularization of public health safety, and further play the role of mainstream media and official channels to improve people's rumor recognition and do a good job in dispelling rumors

In the face of major national emergencies, the crackdown and governance of malicious phenomena must be inseparable from the strong control of government departments. People's Daily Public Opinion Monitoring Office once put forward the principle of "Golden Four Hours", which means that the government should speak out, deal with problems at the first time, and be the "first definer" of emergencies. The propaganda department of the government and the corresponding health departments should coordinate well, that is, the health departments should do a good job in selecting and compiling

health and safety knowledge, and provide people with universal, practical and daily life-related health and safety knowledge. The propaganda department should let the general public learn and make good use of relevant knowledge through extensive, reasonable and simple propaganda methods. At the same time, the government propaganda department should also publish and update authoritative front-line information on epidemic prevention, so as to smash rumors and guide people not to believe or pass on rumors using mainstream media and official information channels.

5.2. Government and Public Network Platform Operators: Work together to further improve network supervision, improve the level of real-time supervision and improve the prevention

During the epidemic, the national network supervision departments and public network platform operators should pay more attention to the real-time supervision of the release of public network information, so as to nip internet rumors in the bud. While curbing Rumor Spreading, pay special attention to its balance with freedom of speech and avoid the "Chilling Effect". At the same time, the government should further improve the prevention of internet rumors. Seize the opportunity, take the initiative to crack down on malicious rumors. For example, data technology such as artificial intelligence can be used to monitor the reposting and posting of information of opinion leaders. Identify the scientific nature of information from the source, channel and content, share and build a database with system functions such as collection, screening and publishing, and enlarge and strengthen the "China Internet Joint Rumor Platform". The joint information communication media actively labels the falsified rumors as rumors [5]. Effectively protect the safety of public opinion and the lives, health and safety of the general public to create a clean and positive network environment.

5.3. Public: Improve the ability to identify rumors and personal moral cultivation, enhance awareness of law and responsibility

Xunzi ·Roughly said: "Rumors stop at a wise head." [4]. This requires people to learn the knowledge of public safety and epidemic prevention, and think and distinguish more to improve their ability to identify rumors and protect themselves in the face of epidemic. At the same time, the resistance of rumors needs people's self-consciousness and the promotion of personal moral cultivation in addition to the strong control of the government and the strong restraint of the law. Therefore, we should consciously put an end to the generation and spreading of internet rumors, strengthen the awareness of law and responsibility, and jointly build a powerful barrier that is difficult for internet rumors to breakthrough through external legal constraints and internal moral norms.

5.4. College Students: Improve political consciousness, consciously resist the generation and spreading of internet rumors, and bravely fight against that of the phenomenon around

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Youth is the future of the country and the hope of the nation" [6]. In the face of the sudden COVID-19, young college students in the new era should improve their political awareness and actively respond to the call of the Party, "Face hardships and dangers, charge ahead with true contribution to show the spirit of contemporary Chinese youth" [7]. In the special period of epidemic prevention and control, young college students should consciously resist the generation and spreading of internet rumors, set an example in the whole society, and popularize the knowledge of health and safety and rumor prevention to their families and friends, so as to form a good atmosphere of resisting internet rumors together. When confronted with the phenomenon of making and spreading internet rumors maliciously, young college students should be brave enough to fight against the makers of internet rumors and malicious spreaders with laws and policies as weapons. Pay their strength and contribution to maintain the normal order of society and the health and safety of the public.

6. Conclusion

What is more terrible than an epidemic is the spread of rumors. The battle against rumors is a long-term one, which requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society. As the public, we should abide by national laws and regulations, work schedule, stick to civic morality, self-discipline, strengthen confidence in victory, without generation, believing, and spreading rumors, so as to make our contribution to the prevention and control of COVID-19. As young college students, we should consciously resist the generation and spreading of internet rumors, fight against the phenomenon of malicious spreading to contribute to the final victory of the COVID-19 epidemic war for our country.

When people are of the same mind; they could move Mount Tai. We should strengthen confidence against internet rumors, and build an iron wall to resist internet rumors with the joint efforts of all sectors of society so that internet rumors have no breeding ground.

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