Public Opinion Management of Public Crisis Events in the New Media Era — Taking 3.21 China Eastern Airlines Flight Accident as an Example

Longyun Li

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai 200093, China

Abstract: In the era of new media, press conferences and TV news are no longer the only channels for information exchange. Communication software, major public accounts, online forums and other ways have become the channel of the masses to have their voices to be heard. After the occurrence of public crisis, public opinion based management becomes a link that the government is required to attach importance to. Positive public opinion management can greatly reduce the negative impact of public crisis events. Therefore, the authority, accuracy and timeliness of information disclosure become the key factors. The government, the media and the masses should form a multi-management subject, which can be led by government with multi-party mode to control the trend of public opinion. In addition, the government should uphold the people-oriented concept, and do a good job in psychological counseling for the victims' families, witnesses, rescue workers and other groups to prevent intensified public opinion. In the new media era, the government should be candid and relative, take the initiative, give positive guidance and interact well, so as to form a good ecological environment for online public opinion, improve the handling efficiency of public crisis events, and thus promoting social solidarity and enhancing the ability of the government to handle some issues.

Keywords: public crisis event, public opinion management, air crash, new media era

The occurrence of public crisis is generally endowed with public threat, uncertainty and urgency.[1] With the development of new media, the government has transformed from the one-way dissemination of open information to the information receiving by the public through the media. The public also gives feedback and raises new demands to the government through online media, forming two-way communication. In this process, ambiguous remarks may arouse controversial discussions, resulting in the rapid spread of negative public opinion and hindering the process of handling public crisis events.

Effective control of the trend of online public opinion is the basis for providing guidance to the government, society and the masses to form a good interaction, while providing favorable support for the image of the government. Therefore, it is necessary to further improve the management methods of online public opinion in public crisis events to form a better and harmonious online public opinion environment, and thus promoting the development of public crisis events in a positive direction.

1. Contradictions in public opinion in handling of public crisis events by government in the era of new media

After the occurrence of a public crisis, it is destined to become the focus of public opinion. When the government announces the news to the public, truth should be maintained by the government, besides, the government should also consider the image of the government itself, so as to maintain dignity and gain positive evaluation from the society. Although there are emergency plans as a support, in the actual operation process, public opinion will still gain momentum and spread to form different degrees of positive or negative impact. This paper will take the flight accident of China Eastern Airlines on March 21 as an example to further elaborate the contradictions in public opinion in the government's handling of public crisis events in the era of new media. It mainly includes three aspects: information disclosure, information lag and information interpretation.

1.1 Blind area of information disclosure

About 30 hours after the March 21 China Eastern airlines flight accident (Hereinafter referred to as the "Accident"), the National Emergency Response Command Center held its first press conference in Wuzhou, Guangxi. It explains the movements of the plane before the crash and the time when contact was lost. Due to the lack of information, part of the public opinion ferment, some people suspected hijacking or mechanical failure and so on. Until the fifth press conference, on March 25, officials said communications had been normal before the flight disappeared and the crew had not hung out any

emergency codes. Thus, there are blind spots in the scope of public information. It is necessary to monitor the development and changes of public opinion to find problems in time and supplement them. How to timely summarize the problems and information that need to be disclosed after the occurrence of public crisis remain the key factor. In the face of such emergencies, their emergency plans should not only focus on rescue plans, but also pay more attention to the control and management of public opinion to reduce the spread of rumors.

1.2 Hysteresis by dynamic information

In emergencies like public crises, timeliness and synchronization of information release are very important. But in the actual situation,hysteresis of information leads to the negative development of public opinion in many cases. In the era of new media, the speed of information dissemination is at extremely fast level, and hysteresis of information leads to the hindrance of information update.Due to hysteresis of information, the previous erroneous information is easy to be spread and cause negative public opinion.

The number of victims initially announced after the crash was 133 (123 passengers and nine crews). Discrepancies and inconsistencies in the numbers have led some to doubt that the information released is wrong. The truth is that one passenger changed his reservation and didn't get on the plane. The number of people was later used by some individual media as a tool to attract traffic and focus in media. The hysteresis of information brought by the dynamic development of the event leads to the negative development of public opinion. Confronted with this situation, it is necessary to timely discover and follow up the dynamic, correct the wrong information in time and make the corresponding explanation. Official data and event dynamics need to be synchronized as much as possible to avoid trouble and loss due to hysteresis of information.

1.3 Excessive interpretation of information leads to negative public opinion

After the official release of government information, media from all walks of life and the masses inevitably misunderstand and over-interpret it. Due to various restrictions, the official information released is subject to limitation, and some media or individuals over-interpret it in order to attract traffic. This kind of information, which has been processed twice or more,can spread easily on the Internet and cause panic. The government should refute rumors and respond in a timely manner. The paradox is that new information may be over-interpreted by the media and individuals. For example, after the accident, when the government responded to the problem on the number of people, some over-analyzed the motivation of the person who changed flight, which led to the disclosure of citizens' privacy. What is more, the intention of the captain was speculated by some people, holding that he was not professional enough. To this end, the official response at the press conference and clarify the pilots was in good health with complete flight experience. The crashed aircraft meets the maintenance standards for release and airworthiness requirements, and the weather on the route when the aircraft crashed was airworthy. In the face of negative public opinion caused by excessive interpretation, the government should respond in time, and relevant official media should make joint efforts to guide the positive development of public opinion pattern.

2. Diversified management of public opinion among the government, media and the public

With the development of new media, people showed gradual reliance on instant communication devices and news apps to obtain external information and interact with each other in real time. The emergence and development of new media has broken the one-way communication relationship between the government, media and the public, and the public is increasingly able to reflect their requirements to the government and society. In the specific situation of public crisis, the public proved strong power, so the government should play a reassuring role. This paper puts forward a "human society" model: The government is the brain, the media is the trunk, and the public is the heart. The human society formed by the three elements must be led by the government, cooperated by the media and well interacted by the public so that public opinion can develop in a positive direction.

2.1 Public behavior guided by the government

After the occurrence of a public crisis, the government will immediately release information to explain the situation and dispel the public's doubts.[2] The government is also a key department in guiding public opinion. After an accident, the government firstly confirmed the accident and then held a press conference to explain the situation to the public. Since then, more than 10 press conferences have been held according to the rescue situation and relevant investigation results. The government has solved the public's demands, reported the truth from facts, guided the public to respect and showed reverence to life,and thus the negative impact of flight accidents was reduced. The structure of scientific content of the government's voice includes: Rescue dynamics, solutions, public appeals and responses, the truth and falsity of rumors,

responsibility determination and so on. In addition, the government is required to maintain good interaction with major media and the public, so that the government becomes the key subject of public opinion management.

2.2 Collaborative voice of the Media to guide public opinion

In addition to the government's official media, large media organizations are also important outlet media, and the content they publish demonstrates great influence. China's major mainstream media are all official media under the management of Party committees at all levels, with high authority, which helps the government to speak out to a great extent. What needs to be paid attention to is whether some small media will be incited by the conflict of interests behind the public opinion.The management of the media can be achieved based on the supervision of the public and the help of the the policy on Internet security. In the information release of the accident, some we-media organizations is subject to access to information and were relatively weak in professionalism. They occasionally made false statements, such as speculating that the plane was hijacked.

This requires major media organizations to use their expertise to conduct timely detection and refute rumors among the public.[3] The common goal of the government and media organizations is to safeguard the interests of the public.In public crisis events, the government and media assume different roles. The government is the brain and the core. The media is the trunk, which is an important channel for transmitting authentic and reliable information to every public.

2.3 Free voice by the public with harmonious resonance

After the occurrence of public crisis events, the crisis, uncertainty and different degrees of impact on the society will pose certain pressure and psychological burden on the public. The Internet has become a window for the public to relieve psychological pressure, and the public will pour out their concerns, doubts and other different demands on the Internet. As the "heart", the public is the most important group in the whole society, which needs the most protection. The government should attach importance to the needs of the public. On the one hand, government should understand the current public views on the crisis and provide assistance within its capacity. On the other hand, it is necessary to find out deficiency in dealing with crisis events and constantly improve the social mobilization mechanism and relevant disposal measures. Media organizations are required to provide timely and effective responses to the public for the unverified authenticity of the public's vocal content on the Internet. The government advocates that the public is entitled to speak freely and resonate harmoniously.

After the accident, the public expressed their views on the cause of the crash and the rescue scene. Major media outlets monitor and detect individual unsubstantiated statements and take action to dissuade them. Under the joint action of the government and the media, the public gradually changed from "self-analysis" to "concern about the truth", and the direction of public opinion also shifted from "speculation" to "mourning, comfort" and other positive content. An open cyberspace, a free voice and a healthy new media network atmosphere are an important part of the government's credibility and credibility, and require the joint efforts of all sectors of society.

2.4 Timely response by government media to public demands with sound interaction

The government, media and the public play different roles in public crisis events, and the three need to make joint efforts to ensure the orderly and stable operation of society after public crisis events. As the heart of the whole human society, the public will present their appeals to the government in different forms through new media. The government and the media are required to pay attention to the signals sent by the public, respond to the public demands in time and solve the problems. After the flight accident, the relatives wanted to go to the site to offer condolences. After receiving the request, the government arranged travel arrangements for the relatives, epidemic prevention work and other matters, and provided pottery pots for the families to catch soil and take back home.

The psychological rescue experts led the team to carry out psychological evaluation and counseling for relatives, witnesses and rescue teams. In the process of public opinion management, there will inevitably omissions by the government. The government relies on the masses, trusts the masses and serves the masses. In the past, the public had no channels to approach the government, but now the government can understand the needs of the public. What is important for the government is that the government can combine its words and deeds, and timely respond to the public demands, improve and optimize the public opinion based management system, so as to form a good public opinion environment.

3. Improvement of the public opinion management methods of public crisis events

Public opinion management can be made based on the unilateral efforts of the government and the cooperation of multiple subjects. First, the government releases information to the public in a timely, active, accurate and multi-channel manner to meet the public's need for information. Second, the government takes a people-oriented manner and develops good interaction with the public. Third, they show sincere apologies in their accountability. Due to the sudden and urgent

nature of public crisis events, the government should turn passivity into initiative and act actively to become the information channel for communication between the media and the public. Therefore, in public opinion management, the government should not only solve the demands raised by the public, but also corresponding help from the perspective of the public can be provides with considerations on the needs of the public. Through reasonable attention, the public is required to form a good harmonious, social unity of public opinion pattern.

3.1 Government initiatives

As the core subject to handle public crisis event, the government should be timely, accurate, authoritative and active. Governments that take the initiative to disclose information have good credibility and can enhance the public's sense of security. Within 30 hours of the accident, the government held a press conference to announce the progress of the investigation into the crash of the China Eastern Airline and answer questions from all sectors of society. Over the next 10 days, more than 10 press conferences were held, in which timeliness, initiative and authority of the information were demonstrated. In addition to providing emergency rescue and investigation of the causes of accidents, the government has also made efforts in psychological assistance, with psychological assistance teams providing 1,286 family members with psychological counseling and 3,947 psychological evaluations.

The reporter manually covered the identification cards of the crew scattered on the ground, protecting the privacy of those on board to guide people to respect life. On the third day after the accident, the committee office of the State Council, emergency management department jointly issued the notice that all localities and departments and units were required to take 3.21 crash as the warning. We must be fully aware of the seriousness and complexity of workplace safety under the impact of COVID-19, resolutely overcome paralysis and fluke mentality, comprehensively investigate and rectify potential safety hazards in all industries and sectors, and resolutely curb the occurrence of major accidents. Under the initiative of the government, a bridge of trust has been built between the government and the public, laying a good foundation for the pattern of public opinion.

3.2 People-orientation by government

In public opinion management, the government should uphold the "people-oriented" concept, do a good job in media release and auditing, and an open and tolerant attitude should be maintained to public opinion. When managing public opinion, it is necessary to set the bottom line, improve the rules and regulations of new media accounts, such as silence and closure. Besides, community conventions of major media can be improved. The legal knowledge of the Internet of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Public Security Administration and Punishment should be popularized among the public.

When cracking down on rumors, we should give priority to the releasing motivation of rumors, understand what the public really wants to know behind rumors, and provide timely and effective information to the public. For example, photos of flight crew members circulated online after a flight accident were later proved to be fake. The government should not only see the spread of public opinion caused by rumors on the surface, but also exert its role as the brain to explore the deep causes. In a second briefing, the government told the public that the pilots were in good health and had a complete flight experience, adding that China Eastern airplane had sufficient capacity and would not be affected by the grounding of some planes. It is the key for the government to do good work to always uphold the people-oriented concept and discover the problems behind public opinion.

3.3 Positive accountability and sincere apologies

In crisis events, it is very important to confirm the subject of responsibility. Except for large-scale natural disasters, other types of public crisis events all involve the subject of responsibility. While accountability is executed, we should pay attention to the rigor of responsibility identification. The public has special expectations for the negative situation and accountability of crisis events. The government is required to understand the public's psychology and conduct report in a objective and fair manner. Besides, introductory accountability based statements are avoided.

In addition, the government should make a sincere apology without concealment of any improper handling of the crisis. The public will be disappointed by a government with inaction,cheats, and a lack of responsibility.instead, the public will offer trust to a government that makes sincere apologies, acts promptly, and does its best to solve problems. For example, in this accident, within a few hours after the crash, the authorities released the confirmation report of the crash without cheating, which made pattern of the public opinion to develop towards positiveness from the beginning. Later on, the compensation for relevant family members was carried out in an orderly manner, and there was no disturbance of family members on the new media network. In a crisis, accountability and apology can greatly stabilize public sentiment and build a good relationship of trust.

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