
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Comparative Study on the Effectiveness of Official Media Coverage and Self-Media Communication of a Friction Event in Tangshan, China Based on Framing Theory

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ABSTRACT

On June 10, 2022, an attack at a barbeque restaurant in Tangshan, China, triggered considerable public concern on the Internet and drew the utmost attention from departments responsible for relevant matters. The case advanced swiftly and yielded the best possible outcomes with the collaboration of numerous parties. The 2022 restaurant attack in Tangshan is a successful illustration of how the interaction between new mainstream media and self-media supervision of public opinion can contribute to the resolution of social issues. It can provide references for the efficient resolution of future social issues. Based on the framing theory, this research studies the highly-searched posts by netizens and People's Daily's official posts on Weibo through comparison and content analysis. After analyzing the reporting rules, focuses, and impacts of both official and self-media, it is concluded that the new mainstream media and self-media public opinion supervision each have their own benefits and drawbacks. The two complement one another in revealing social issues, thereby boosting cooperation between the government and the people, which is helpful for enhancing the effectiveness of the departments responsible for related matters and supporting the harmonious development of society.

KEYWORDS

Framing theory, official media, supervision of public opinion by self-media, event process.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

On June 10, 2022, an attack at a barbeque restaurant in Tangshan, China, sparked widespread outrage and attention from the public on the Internet. Considering the dissemination process of this incident, the supervision of public opinion via self-media on Weibo, WeChat, and other social platforms and new mainstream media reports complement one another to ensure the open, fair, and transparent resolution of this attack. The Public Security Bureau has also arrested all suspects in a timely manner, which has largely satisfied the public's and official media's expectations. It can be noted that the tight interaction between the official media and public opinion monitoring via self-media provides an impetus for swiftly handling this event. Despite appearing to be a minor civil case, its practical importance cannot be understated. Under the interaction of new mainstream media reporting and self-media communication on social platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, the follow-up on the resolution of social problems and incidents is relatively successful. It is also a test of public opinion coping strategies. Although there are still adjustments to be made for various media outlets, their reports can nevertheless serve as references for the future efficient resolution of social issues.

1.1.1 How the Attack Developed

According to an official post in the People's Daily, a man named Chen and his companions assaulted several ladies at a barbecue restaurant in Tangshan at 2:40 a.m. on June 10. They then quickly fled the scene after the crime. Lubei Branch of the Tangshan Public Security Bureau lied that the police were deployed to the area within five minutes after receiving the call when in reality, it took 29 minutes. On the afternoon of the tenth, the surveillance video went viral, eliciting widespread outrage from the public. In addition, it garnered the attention of related departments. All suspects were arrested and brought to justice. At the same time, the deputy police chief of Lubei District and other public officials were investigated for serious violations of laws and discipline.

1.2 New Extension of Mainstream Media

The term "new mainstream media" is a modern derivative of "mainstream media" that emphasizes the transformation and upgrading of media. In contrast to traditional media communication, mainstream media is no longer restricted to newspapers, radio, or television. It begins to operate in new forms, such as web portals, Weibo, and WeChat, as the Internet evolves. All major government media outlets have their own online platforms for communicating with the public, such as the official accounts of "People's Daily" and "Southern Weekend" on Weibo. As the times demanded, new mainstream media emerged. It combines the functional characteristics of both new media and mainstream media. The fundamental qualities are analyzed as follows:

a) Facing the general public, spreading mainstream culture and values

The new mainstream media has the widest range of middle-income groups as its main audience. Its primary objective is to promote and publicize mainstream culture and export mainstream values, aiming to demonstrate the charm of a powerful nation and establish itself as a news mouthpiece.

b) Mainly reporting current affairs

The mainstream media mainly reports serious news, which insists on the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party on major issues, setting a model for the media industry.

1.3 Definition of Supervision of Public Opinion via Self-media

With the growth of convergence media and short-video platforms, including Weibo, Kuaishou, and Douyin, the public has a variety of channels through which to express themselves. Therefore, the supervision of public opinion via self-media has become not only an essential aspect of public opinion supervision but also a significant channel for the public to express their views and pay attention to social events.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Review of Framing Theory

Two scholars in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University, Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman believe that the term "framing," as used by communication scholars and political scientists, typically refers to two situations: "First, a frame in communication or a media frame refers to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker (e.g., a politician, a media outlet) uses when relaying information about an issue or event to an audience. Second, a frame of thought or an individual frame refers to an individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation. Unlike frames in communication, which reflect a speaker's emphasis, frames in thought refer to what an audience member believes to be the most salient aspect of an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Based on previous theoretical studies, it is easy to find that the majority of western communication scholars consider that the media frame and individual frame are pervasive in the communication process and have a significant impact on the communication effect. With the rapid growth of the Internet, self-media communication has developed, giving rise to a diversified range of communication subjects. By comparing the official posts of the "People's Daily" and trending posts by self-media on Weibo, we discovered that due to differences in the design of the communication framework and the subject of communication, there are differences in the content, post frequency, narrative perspective, etc., resulting in different communication effects on individuals. On the basis of the aforementioned theories and experiences, this research analyzes the communication frameworks of official media and self-media, links various media communication frameworks and individual frameworks to establish intertextuality and proposes related arguments.

2.2 Framing Theory and Agenda-setting Theory

Scholars have debated the relationship between framing theory and agenda-setting theory because of their close relationship. The first point of view is that the frame is that the subject of communication purposefully selects one or several events from multiple events to become the focus of the public and repeatedly reinforces them, so influencing people's thoughts and behaviors. According to the second point of view, the frame is that the communication subject screens and integrates many influencing factors in an event reconstructs the original event, and presents it to the audience. In the process of receiving the event, the

audience only receives the tip of the iceberg, which exacerbates the misunderstanding in secondary communication and creates a divide between the objective world and the media narrative (Qiao, 2011).

What happened in Tangshan initially appeared to be a local affair but eventually sparked a national debate. When an event was disseminated by several subjects from diverse narrative perspectives and directions, more details of the incident and its follow-ups were provided to the public, thereby generating distinct communication frames. The event was then extended to include diverse and valuable discussions on social issues, exerting diverse impacts on the individual frame and comprehensive communication effects. We conduct data analysis on the official media frame and the self-media frame to examine how the frame affects individuals' cognition and decision-making regarding the Tangshan attack, with the goal of identifying additional ways to strengthen the interaction between the new mainstream media and self-media public opinion supervision in the future in order to promote the resolution of social issues.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Selection Scope and Objects

Based on the framing theory and using the attack at a barbeque restaurant in Tangshan as a case study, we extracted a total of 18 follow-up posts published by the People's Daily on Weibo between June 10 and June 21, 2022. Trending topics on Weibo have always been hotly debated by netizens, and they reflect the attitudes, tendencies, and concerns of the self-media and netizens to some extent. Consequently, we simultaneously gathered 23 original posts published by self-media from trending topics on Weibo (10–21 June 2022) related to the attack.

3.2 Selection of Research Objects Through the Attention of Netizens

There are some overlaps between official Weibo reports and self-media reports among the hot topics related to the attack in Tangshan. Moreover, there are evident disparities between the content of self-media from different viewpoints on the same topic. For the sake of research efficiency, the authors will omit the content of official media reports forwarded by self-media and instead select 1-2 original self-media posts with the highest attention from netizens from the day's trending topics for research and analysis, which will be more representative and typical.

3.3 Summarization of the Frame and Content of Reports

According to (Chen, X. Y., & Liang, H. B. 2022), we get inspiration from research methods. Using the literature reading analysis method and the statistical method, the authors respectively summarize and compare the sample content of popular self-media reports and "People's Daily" posts, analyze the reporting rules and concerns of both official media and self-media, and summarize relevant findings in the following table in the order of report subject, keywords, specific contents, number of reports, and attention:

Table 1 People's Daily's follow-up report on subjects and narrative frameworks after the attack in Tangshan

Report Subject	Keywords	Specific Contents	Number of Reports	Attention
Lubei Branch of Tangshan Public Security Bureau	Picking up fights/ violent assaults /criminal suspects/ crimes	Tangshan police announced the latest progress of arresting suspects and the health condition of the victims, etc.	7	Comments: more than 570,000. Likes: more than 8,322,000.
Fengnan District Public Security Bureau, Tangshan City	Extortion/ threats/ violent smashing	Tangshan reported that the suspect who extorted the cake shop was arrested.	1	Comments: 4017. Likes: over 40,000.
Guangyang Branch of Langfang Public Security Bureau	Criminal suspects/ arrest	The attack in Tangshan was handled by Langfang Public Security Bureau./ Nine suspects of the attack were arrested by Langfang police.	2	Comments: more than 20,000. Likes: more than 298,000.
Luanzhou Public Security Bureau	Assault/ illegal detention	Tangshan announced that 4 people involved in illegal detention in bars were arrested.	1	Comments: 5,009. Likes: 61,000.
Tangshan City	Social security improvement/ "Thunderstorm" special operation	Tangshan announced ways to report to the "Thunderstorm" special operation.	4	Comments: more than 54,000. Likes: more than 1 million.

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Hebei Provincial Public Security Bureau	Public officials suspected of violating laws and disciplines	The director of Lubei Branch of Tangshan Public Security Bureau and others were investigated.	3	Comments: more than 10,000. Likes: more than 2.44 million.
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Table 2 Self-media reports and narrative frameworks of trending topics on Weibo after the attack in Tangshan

Report Subject	Keywords	Specific Contents	Number of Reports	Attention
Several suspects and female victims at a barbecue restaurant in Tangshan	Men beating women/ males behaving like hooligans	Surveillance video shows several men beating were women.	2	Comments: 346,000. Likes: 3.52 million.
Suspects of the attack	Suspects' methods of violence/ involvement in gangsters/ numerous criminal records/ multiple crimes combined punishment/ sentencing	The attack in Tangshan involves 9 suspects, among whom at least 3 have criminal records.	6	Comments: more than 20,000. Likes: more than 50,000.
Journalists from Beijing Youth Daily	Distorted facts in reports	Jin Xing condemned journalists for falsely claiming the harassment and the attack as normal chatting between men and women.	3	Comments: more than 10,000. Likes: more than 20,000.
General public	Females: shocked/ powerless/ freedom to dress/ boxing. Males: protect women/ call the police/ stop the fight	People on the street were interviewed about their opinions and feelings about the attack in Tangshan.	1	Comments: 473. Likes: 14,000.
Witnesses	Violence/ calling the police/ kicked in the head/ perpetrators fled the scene	Audio and video recordings of witnesses were collected for evidence.	4	Comments: more than 10,000. Likes: more than 50,000.
Guangxi University/ Li Zhi from the reality show <i>If You Are the One</i>	Domestic violence/ pictures proving his domestic violence against his wife, Tang Ping	Tang Ping stated that she was abused by her husband, Li Zhi.	1	Comments: 8232. Likes: 126,000.
The proprietress of the barbecue restaurant in Tangshan	Cyberbullying/ was sent flowers and mourned as if she were dead by netzines/ accused of not helping stop the attack/ under attack	The proprietress of the restaurant hoped that everyone could behave rationally and not hurt the innocent.	1	Comments: over 2000. Likes: over 110,000.
Rumormongering Weibo accounts	One dead, and three seriously injured in the attack/ started the rumor that a victim died in hospital	Weibo accounts that posted about the attack in Tangshan were shut down.	4	Comments: over 20,000. Likes: over 40,000.
A journalist from Guizhou	Police brutality /detained for no reason/ being searched/ severely abused	A journalist from Guizhou was detained for no reason by the police from Airport Road Police Station.	1	Comments: more than 5000. Likes: more than 10,000.

The above two tables represent the narrative frameworks of the official media and the self-media, respectively. Research reveals that despite the fact that the two have different focuses in terms of media perspective, public perspective, and communication path, they promote each other and contribute positively to the incident's resolution.

4. Media Perspective: Official Media and Self-media Reports Contribute to the Resolution of Friction Incidents

4.1 Analysis of the Framework and Content of the Follow-up Reports of "People's Daily."

1. Starting from a legal standpoint and contacting the Public Security Bureau immediately for follow-up reports, the subject of the report is the law enforcement departments directly associated with the incident, thereby ensuring the timeliness, authenticity, and objectivity of reports. According to the sampling data, more than 75 percent of the report subjects concern the Lubei Branch of the Tangshan Public Security Bureau, Fengnan District Public Security Bureau of Tangshan City, Guangyang Branch of the Langfang Public Security Bureau and Hebei Provincial Public Security Bureau, etc. In addition, all the latest follow-up news and images were signed and stamped by the relevant public security departments before being swiftly tracked and issued by the official media, effectively and efficiently addressing the reasonable concerns of netizens.

2. From the perspective of the general public, reports concentrate on the legal actions of the responsible departments. The reported news is authoritative and broad, and it has a powerful guiding impact on the supervision of public opinion by self-media (Wang & Du, 2022). Using the keywords retrieved from the sampling data, it is possible to identify the following: follow-up reports on the arrest of criminal suspects, the special operation "Thunderstorm" for public security rectification, public officials suspected of violating laws and disciplines, etc. The majority of official reports emphasize the determination of the concerned departments to punish such incidents while directing the general public to perceive the high efficiency of the country's rectification, thereby enhancing the general public's awareness and sense of security.

3. People's Daily pays attention to other incidents similar to the Tangshan incident, aiming to find the source and correct the city's climate. Reports on the extortion incident of the Tangshan cake shop, the arrest of four people in the illegal detention case of the bar, etc., were released on the second day after the attack in Tangshan, with the launch of the "Thunderstorm" special operation and the release of ways to report. Several highly correlated events pushed the rectification of the entire city's climate and image. The exposure by the official media has attracted the attention of the responsible departments of each city.

4.2 Analysis of the Framework and Content of Weibo's Popular Posts of Self-media

1. According to the statistical classification of the table, it is known that the types and ranges of the identities of the report subjects are diverse. The material in the reports is layered and presented to the public in a manner that is more multi-dimensional. It can be seen from the sample data that, in addition to being consistent with official reports regarding the tracking of suspects, the voices of individuals with different identities, such as reporters who conducted interviews in Tangshan, the owner of a Tangshan barbecue restaurant, and witnesses, contributed to the event's richness. As a result, public discourse was not restricted to the condemnation of the perpetrators but also included doubts about the Tangshan Public Security Bureau and discussions on women's issues, thereby expanding the influence and discussions on social issues.

2. It has the tendency to spread at the individual level. The focus is on the personal experience directly or indirectly associated with the attack or the resulting social issues. The news reports are more specific and personal, which can quickly evoke the emotional resonance of the public, encouraging more problems to be identified and resolved. For instance, the impacted barbecue restaurant in Tangshan City was emptied. The restaurant owner's statement that she was unable to live a normal life due to cyberbullying elicited sympathy and understanding from netizens; the event prompted more social discussions on women's issues. Many female victims in similar situations bravely stood up and spoke out, such as victim Tang Ping, who stated on Weibo that she was harmed by her husband Li Zhi and attached detailed picture evidence, etc., sparking heated debates among netizens and eventually leading to her husband Li Zhi's dismissal.

3. There are numerous reports of content distortion. Due to the dissemination of falsehoods, 320 Weibo accounts that reported the Tangshan event were shut down. Some self-media accounts released false information, such as the victim's death in the hospital, one death and three critical injuries, in order to attract attention and generate traffic. It is quite easy to provoke the wrath of the masses and produce unnecessary panic, which is detrimental to the maintenance of network environment governance harmony.

5. From the Perspective of the Public: The Supervision of Public Opinion by Self-media Promotes the Resolution of Violent Incidents

Safety is necessary for the dignity of every individual. As urbanization develops, the number of women living alone is on the rise. The inclusion of cities increases women's access to employment opportunities and living space. However, threats continue to exist, just as what happened in Tangshan. The incident resulted from the disclosure of netizens, which produced a commotion in the

same city that night and then obtained official aid in a very short period of time, thereby establishing a cooperative relationship between the government and the public concerning social security. The assault on the Tangshan barbeque restaurant is one of the few instances in which internet public opinion has pushed for official action. Following is an analysis of the positive role of public opinion supervision in this incident:

5.1 Efficient Dissemination of Self-media Public Opinion Supervision has Attracted the Attention of Official Media

On the evening of June 10, 2022, a guy was scolded for harassing a woman but failed, after which a video of him beating the woman was posted on Weibo. Initially, the video stirred Weibo discussions in the same city. Because of its immense popularity and controversy, it became a trending topic on Weibo for national public opinion. The self-media gradually formed a way of dual spreading horizontally and vertically.

The horizontal scope of public discussion encompasses numerous platforms. After Weibo shaped public opinion, numerous sites, including but not limited to Bilibili, Douban, and Zhihu, simultaneously had debates. Based on its essential traits, each platform carries out secondary dissemination in different manners. After the Tangshan incident became public, users of the video platform Bilibili posted a large number of videos to share their perspectives. Zhihu, which is famed for its 200–500-word essays, established "informative" communication from a more profound and rational standpoint. Various Internet platforms were intertwined and joined to build a content and public opinion network with rich and in-depth views based on the fast speed of communication.

In a vertical sense, public opinion creates a vertical discussion chain. It can be observed from the data in the table that the masses utilized the self-media platform to make their voices heard throughout this incident, which became a potent factor in the crisis's successful settlement. Initially, Weibo consisted primarily of the dispersed opinions of individual users, and the language lacked order. There has been an orderly flow of content from self-media bloggers and official accounts on WeChat in response to the agitation of public opinion, with accounts with a traffic foundation continuing to further spark discussions. Their posts were forwarded by the public and posted on WeChat, creating a re-voice in the private sphere. Small-scale and persistent "inside" attention on WeChat injected substantial stickiness into the spread, resulting in a benign closed loop.

5.2 Self-media Public Opinion Supervisions' Emphasis from a Single Issue to a Wider Range of Social Issues

In the era of Web 2.0, the biggest feature of self-media is that everyone can have "one minute" to be heard. The public gives generally unrestricted opinions about events on the website. The focus of public opinion on the Tangshan incident is different from that of the past, which was solely on the subject of the occurrence itself: the public creates associations through the subject of the incident, establishing emotional resonance by placing themselves in the subjects' shoes. Once the Tangshan incident was revealed to the public, it sparked the worries of innumerable women, as fears become actual when they are visualized. Conceptual rights are too abstract to be felt. Nonetheless, when they are focused on certain occurrences, every woman experiences living anguish. Even with the screen, the audience can still perceive the victims' suffering. As the "second sex" throughout history, women have always been stared at and otherized, and considered symbols (Song, 2022). This incident's exposure devastated and combined women's pain points. By accurately capturing fear and anxiety, the self-media reports convey to the audience the essential emotional value in a straightforward manner. Even in the comment section, the masses shared similar situations they had encountered. As a result of public opinion, this occurrence went beyond the superficial, causing people to feel, connect their emotional resonance and speak for every "her," thereby giving women hope.

5.3 Public Opinion via Self-media Questioned the Speed of Dispatching the Police, Promoting the Transformation of the Media Frame

The supervision of public opinion made the event leap forward.

First, the essence of the Tangshan incident was directly impacted by the public's question about police response time. Notable is the fact that this case's development is disclosed to the public in a digital format, allowing for real-time updates. The oversight of public opinion has encouraged the official media to investigate the occurrence and pay close attention to the precise repression of criminals by all sides. Various departments have conducted in-depth investigations into the Tangshan event, making it impossible for those behind the scenes to escape punishment.

Second, public opinion promotes the transformation of the media frame by staying close to public needs, preventing misinterpretations in reporting, and innovating the entrance point for media reports. In his work *Frame Analysis*, the American sociologist Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of "frame" to cultural sociology. Goffman describes "frame" as the cognitive structure individuals employ to comprehend and interpret the objective external world. The generalization, organization, and interpretation of real-world experience depend on a particular frame that enables individuals to locate, perceive, comprehend, and summarize specific information. Therefore, reflecting reality and constructing meaning have become the responsibility and function

of the media. Regarding the frame, the public builds its own cognition in two parts: first, based on prior experience, and second, by developing knowledge of new things using the existing frame. Analysis indicates that self-media no longer focuses on a particular issue in agenda setting for the event but instead pushes public opinion toward gender issues. Based on this incident, public opinion supervision has made media coverage more reasonable and promoted the transformation of media coverage by focusing on the freedom and rights of women as independent individuals, emphasizing that women's rights must be protected by law, breaking the opposition between genders, and calling for equality between men and women.

6. Analysis of the Upgrading and Innovation Path of New Mainstream Media and Self-media Communication

6.1 New Mainstream Media Reports

a) Pay More Attention to Morality

The law is the foundation of human society. As social civilization advances, the spiritual requirements of the populace grow steadily. There is still a disconnect between the spiritual demands of the public and the reports of the mainstream media. The mainstream media must make additional efforts to determine how to effectively report news that satisfies the public's tastes.

b) Transform the Reporting Frame to Empower the Idea

How to characterize an incident is a crucial aspect of media coverage. With the advancement of spiritual civilization, the mainstream media must resonate with the public context, thereby altering the frame of media reporting. Using the incident in Tangshan as an example, after sorting the data, the most popular issue among netizens is how women may get a sense of security in the real world. This suggests that the Tangshan case is no longer an ordinary matter but rather a concern with the protection of women's rights and the achievement of gender equality. Therefore, when reporting, mainstream media should strive to demonstrate emotional care within an authoritative and accurate frame, focusing on the freedom and rights of women as independent individuals, demonstrating that women's rights must be protected by law, breaking the opposition between men and women, and advocating for gender equality.

c) Vivid Language Makes Concerns More Specific

Reporting language should be specific and humane, taking the feelings of the people into account. The official media should assume anti-crime and anti-evil responsibilities, fulfilling the most fundamental and straightforward wish of the people to "live and work in peace and happiness."

6.2 Self-media communication

a) Return to Rationality and Focus on the Truth

Everyone is a self-media creator and communicator in the Web 2.0 era; thus, returning to rationality is the top priority. Anger itself cannot solve problems. Instead, individuals should think and explore how to conduct effective dialogues and allow the conversation to return to the issue itself.

b) Keep Your Conscience and Break Free from the "Curse of Traffic"

Creators are easily shackled by traffic and even get obsessed. Keeping conscience is the bottom line and one of the basic requirements of creators, which requires them to rationally control desires, return self-media to the "self", and express opinions with attitude and thoughtfulness.

c) Distinguish between the Right and the Wrong, Improving the Internet Environment

Regarding the diverse perspectives on the Internet, people must have independent judgment. Be rational and avoid being used by others.

7. Conclusion

This paper begins with a discussion of the effective settlement of the Tangshan incident, followed by a comparative analysis of the frame of official media and self-media on Weibo to determine the effects of different media forms on communication. The Tangshan event covers the social issues of conflict and gender, making its investigation of typical cases highly valuable. With the rapid growth of the Internet, communication has also taken on new forms and paths. In addition to traditional media reports, the public participated in the incident's debate through self-media channels, thereby contributing to the successful resolution of the case. From the perspective of the media, official media and self-media have become meaningful two-way channels for event dissemination, forming intertextuality; from the perspective of the general public, self-media has widened the channels of public discussion, which is conducive to the effective supervision and resolution of problems. Diversity in the media is a concrete manifestation of cultural development. To demonstrate the power and attitudes of news communication, the media must empower ideas through an innovative transformation of frames and demonstrate humanistic concern.

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