Content Analysis of Self-reported Cyberbullying Videos on Chinese Video Websites

Yubo Peng[1, *]

[1]The School of Music and Dance, Zhuhai College of Science and Technology, Zhuhai, Guangdong, 519000, China

*Corresponding author: 20150435638@mail.sdufe.edu.cn

Abstract:

With the rapid expansion of the scale of China's internet industry, the related issue of cyberbullying has become increasingly rampant. In recent years, it has even caused a series of serious public opinion events and begun to be unfavorable to the stable development of Chinese society. This study mainly explores the operation mechanism and laws of "cyberbullying" events in the Chinese internet environment through video analysis. This study shows that "cyberbullying" events in the Chinese internet environment are related to cultural background and era changes. At the same time, whether a "cyberbullying" event occurs is jointly determined by a series of factors including management systems, and it cannot be directly caused by a certain link. In addition, as research carried out through video analysis similar to interviews, this study also presents discussions and research on the behavior patterns and characteristics of the three groups of "bullying initiators" "bullying participants" and "bullying victims".

1. Introduction

As a populous country accounting for about 17% of the world's total population, China's internet industry has made vigorous development in both technology and user volume in the 40 years since it officially accessed the internet in 1994. In March 2024, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 53rd "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China". The report shows that as of December 2023, the number of Chinese netizens reached 1.092 billion, with a penetration rate of 77.5%. Among them, the number of video users reached 1.067 billion, accounting for 97.7% of the total netizens. Among the 24.8 million new users accessing the internet, 37.8% of users used online video applications for the first time when they accessed the internet for the first time [1]. It is worth noting that judging from the development and evolution of many hot events of public opinion on the internet in recent years, under the background of the arrival of the era of we-media, some video websites with the nature of we-media represented by (TikTok) are playing an increasingly important role in internet mobilization events [2]. At the same time, the differences in the

information literacy and educational backgrounds of individual internet users, as well as the influence of internet anonymity, all make irrational opinions spread rapidly on online social platforms represented by Weibo [3]. The huge population base combined with the uneven information and legal literacy among individual users undoubtedly provides a huge "greenhouse petri dish" for the phenomenon of cyberbullying to ferment and emerge. In today's era, the internet has become an important part of modern people's lives that cannot be separated from real life. Therefore, the impact of cyberbullying on its vast number of users is undoubtedly heavy and real. The "pink-haired girl incident" in 2022 and the "Liu Xuezhou's search for his relatives incident" in 2021, real events that occurred on the Chinese internet are all confirming that cyberbullying has an extremely bad impact on social order and the safety of the lives and property of the vast number of netizens. Therefore, analyzing past events, and researching and understanding their underlying logic is undoubtedly important and urgent.

2. Literature Review

In the internet era, the issue of "cyberbullying" has always attracted much attention. Its research fields involve multiple disciplines such as journalism, psychology, sociology, political science, education, and even law. The viewpoints mostly try to cut in with specific events to try to peek at the underlying causes and governance methods. However, up to now, the academic community still lacks an authoritative definition of the concept of "cyberbullying". Different from traditional violence that seeks to achieve personal goals by causing damage to others' entities, cyberbullying is usually based on internet communities and is the manifestation of traditional violence on the internet in terms of social interaction, relationships, psychology, and even the body. Compared with traditional violence, cyberbullying has more diversified forms of expression [4]. Some scholars believe that the causes of cyberbullying are mainly related to the reduction of speech publication and dissemination costs brought about by anonymity in internet communities, and the "temporary supreme power" generated in groups caused by the reduction of the cost of constructing "symbolic power" [5]. Some scholars also believe that this is related to the environment of "technology first and management lagging" in China's internet development and the "group polarization" caused by some special groups in this environment [6]. In fact, there have been a large number of studies and discussions on this issue in the academic community since the emergence of the Internet. In a large number of searches, the earliest research result about the term "cyberbullying" that can

be traced back is the article "Where Does Cyber Violence Come From" published by American scholar Petter Coffe in PC Week in 1999. Thus, on a macro level, only in terms of the research direction of "cyber bullying", the research results previously published behind it are undoubtedly rich, detailed, and sufficient. However, the research directions of most of these articles mostly take public opinion events caused by the one-sided reporting of the media as the research object and advocate that the media or opinion leaders dominate or even personally create the public opinion tsunami in bullying events [7]. This is to some extent lagging behind the current internet environment. At the same time, since China introduced the internet relatively late, compared with Western developed countries represented by Britain and the United States, China's research on social problems and their causes derived from the internet is undoubtedly relatively lagging. However, due to differences in basic national conditions, the research perspectives of Western countries on the issue of "cyberbullying" still mainly focus on cyber stalking and cyber harassment, mainly focusing on specific groups such as minors and women [8]. This is obviously different from the current social situation in China, so conducting research based on China's national conditions is also the focus of this article.

3. Methodology

This article mainly adopts qualitative research methods. It aims to achieve a multi-faceted understanding of the phenomenon of cyberbullying in China in the new media era by analyzing the character narratives, language expressions, and non-verbal expressions in the self-reported videos of witnesses, initiators/organizers, and participants of cyberbullying events on Chinese video websites. Combined with specific events and their backgrounds, it tries to understand and restore its occurrence process and understand the basic mechanism and operation laws of its operation.

4. Results

Regarding the mechanism and operation laws of cyberbullying in China, the first finding of this research is that the deep victims of cyberbullying in China often have similar thinking habits - fearing conflict and ruminating. Taking the videos of self-media video producer, Mr. Q, and former economic investigative journalist, Mr. S, as examples. When the narratives of their videos enter the memory stage, they both show unnatural emotions such as "nervousness" and "constraint" that are different from the non-memory stages of the same video. Their tone is

lowered and speech speed is accelerated. Mr. Q clearly stated in the video that he fears conflict. After experiencing cyberbullying, he gradually began to fear opening the comment section of his film and television review content until he no longer produced film review content. Mr. S, after clearly stating that he understands the legitimacy and legality of the actions that got him into cyber violence, still chose to withdraw from the journalism industry where he had been working hard for many years. At the same time, both of them also have the habit of ruminating. Mr. Q and Mr. S both said in the video that after experiencing cyberbullying, they often fall back into the fear and self-doubt of the events they experienced many years ago, which have a long-term and irreversible impact on their lives and physical health.

In the second, we can see that, the direct initiators of cyberbullying in China often have similar experiences - being depressed in real life, lacking recognition, and longing for "being recognized," "being seen," and "being accepted." Taking W, C, and J who have implemented cyber violence against others as examples, from the videos of the three people, we know that the situations of the three people when implementing cyberbullying against others are respectively: being in a state of long-term campus bullying; both J and C are unemployed, and J's relationship has broken down. At the same time, in the self-narratives of nearly 20 perpetrators of cyberbullying including the three people, almost all narrators said in the video that they were in a stage of depression and lack of recognition in real life when implementing bullying. It is worth noting that all three people showed timidity and shame when recalling, but when mentioning that they implemented cyberbullying against others, their tone and volume suddenly increased. W said that he clearly knew his illegal behavior, but because the number of views and likes of the posted video continued to increase, he chose to continue making and posting videos of the same content. C said in the video that at that time he "was like a general, leading a group of soldiers to carry out justice." H felt excited after seeing the increase in comment data under the attack remarks.

Thirdly, participants in cyberbullying in China are more inclined to vent and satisfy their personal emotions rather than attacking different views. Taking the self-narrative video of short-video blogger Miss H as an example, Miss H inserted some screenshots of comments under her attacked video in the self-narrative video. It is worth noting that combining the screenshots of the self-narrative video and the content of the comment section of the original video that Miss H was attacked, the number of personal attacks and slut-shaming comments accounts for more than half of the total number of comments, and has noth-

ing to do with the reason for the controversy caused by Miss H's attacked video. In Miss H's self-narrative, she mainly explained the controversial part and also expressed her puzzlement and helplessness at the large number of personal attacks and slut-shaming content in the video comment that has nothing to do with erotic elements.

In the last law, among the organizers of cyberbullying in China, there are some who originated from former victims. Taking the post-bar owner X and self-media blogger R as examples. Different from the clearly classified "bullies" and "bullied," X and R, as well as the post-bar users and fans who, according to their narratives, implemented cyberbullying against others together with them, are difficult to simply classify as "bullies" and "bullied." In the self-narratives they released, they are in the position of victims of "being harmed by cyberbullying," but they can use cyberbullying to replicate the suffering they once experienced on others on the grounds of "counter-attacking" or "helping." In the videos, both X and R describe themselves as victimized and vulnerable. But it is worth thinking about that there is completely no fear and post-traumatic rumination like Mr. Q or Mr. S during their narration. On the contrary, they are not at all shy about their behavior of cyber-violence. R even told in the video about methods and operation processes of how to peek at others' real information through the internet.

5. Discussion

Throughout the entire investigation and research process, it can be found that cyberbullying behavior generated in China's internet environment has traces to follow. The many commonalities revealed in the nearly forty videos selected and analyzed in two groups are not only the unity of the human nature background in psychology but also the historical inevitability brought about by China's rapid development into "reform and opening up." As a huge cultural aggregate that is relatively independent of Western developed countries, China's special cultural environment, huge population base, rapid rise, and rejuvenation jointly create the unique internet environment on this land [7]. Therefore, whether it is analysis, research, or governance, it should be carried out based on the term "China's internet environment," and then follow the cultural background, secular moral concepts, individuals and groups, psychological characteristics, and other points to find the way.

Different from the social foundation in Western and pan-Western countries where religion and society, culture, and politics are intertwined [7], China's cultural background is gradually constructed by the moral norms passed down from generation to generation since ancient

times. This social consensus abstracted from secular culture makes China, like most of East Asia, where the connection and interaction between individuals and society are extremely important. This not only enables the moral norms under traditional culture to play a greater role in group and social activities to achieve the stability of the social framework but also inevitably shows parts that still need to be completed in this era of information explosion. This article divides it into three parts for analysis: the two-sided influence on individuals and the need to complete and standardize in the present. For Chinese people, morality is a peculiar product between "faith" and "secular social norms," and is jointly maintained by "individuals" and China's national conditions of "acquaintance society." However, with the development of the internet and manufacturing level, the acquaintance society jointly constructed by small circles gradually turned to a more flattened modern social structure. [3] As the acquaintance society system and the traditional ethical economy gradually disintegrate, the social standard for "morality" gradually generalizes [4]. People on the internet are automatically divided into three types. The relatively less radical ones are tentatively called "the silent majority" [5]. Individuals who still adhere to "morality" and maintain this standard through long-term self-reflection mostly become victims like Mr. K and Mr. S, or "potential victims." They fear conflict and are good at self-attribution. When the supervision ability of the acquaintance society for other individuals weakens, they are in a weak position in public opinion and inevitably reduce the cost of making mistakes on the other side. On the contrary, for those individuals who were originally not good at self-admonishment, the supervision from the acquaintance society that was used to maintain their "morality" gradually disappears, coupled with the characteristics of early internet with high anonymity and immature relevant management regulations, the cost of attacking others on the internet continues to drop [3]. Inevitably, within a certain period of time, it creates a space for wild growth for such individuals represented by C, W, and J. At the same time, the contradiction between the need for rapid development of technology application and social economy and the social governance system and emerging social consensus means that while "morality" is gradually generalizing, the new governance system and social consensus are not yet perfect. Inevitably, while morality is generalizing, early internet users also misinterpreted freedom of speech as an "anonymous dictatorship" [4]. This creates the possibility for the emergence of "moral judgment" in the middle stage of China's internet development [9].

In terms of secular moral concepts, along with a series of conditions deduced above, "morality" is gradually dismantled from a set of common standards for maintaining the stable operation of society into fragmented dogmas. At the same time, netizens who have experienced a round of group de-individuation and polarization gradually become the main group of cyberbullying. Under the guidance of public opinion, more of the silent majority choose to put down their responsibilities and morality as individuals [10]. They join the cyberbullying system mainly constructed by C, W, and J in seemingly less radical ways such as commenting, forwarding, and liking, and begin to become participants in the moral judgment of Miss H in the comment section [9]. At the same time, it is worth noting that just as X and R can transfer the attack behavior they have experienced to other netizens who have nothing to do with them through the exclusion attack chain without any perception or even taking pride in it. Whether it is the perpetrators of cyberbullying behavior mentioned above or the participants, none of them can feel a sense of immorality on top of bullying behavior and even regard it as justice. This is not only the extreme behavior of bullies like W, C, and J who lose power in real life, lack a sense of identity, and lack the supervision of moral norms on the internet for "being recognized" "being seen" and "being accepted". It is also the imbalance of public opinion after the victims fear conflict and the carnival of public opinion after countless participants pour in under the guidance of the media after morality is generalized [9].

6. Conclusion

This research aims to understand the operation mechanism and basic laws of "cyberbullying" events in the Chinese internet environment. By analyzing the self-narrative videos of the initiators, participants, and victims of "cyberbullying" events on the Chinese internet, it is not difficult to find that "cyberbullying" events in the Chinese internet environment are different from those in the West. They are the products of the times of era changes and social and economic development and are to a certain extent influenced by traditional Chinese culture. Through the analysis of the self-narrative contents of the three types of people, it is not difficult to find that the problem of cyberbullying that has caused many public opinion events with huge impacts on the Chinese internet is caused not only by the one-sided violence of the initiators of bullying or the guidance of the media and the lack of relevant management regulations. Management systems, social consensus, the media, initiators of bullying, participants in bullying, and victims of bullying together constitute the emergence of cyberbullying events and also jointly constitute every appalling public opinion vortex in the past.

References

[1] China Internet Network Information Center, The 53rd "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China". 2024. Retrieved from http://www.cnnic.net.cn/n4/2024/0322/c88-10964.html.

[2] Ni Ming. Citizen's online resistance mobilization: From concept construction to reflection on related issues. Tianjin Social Sciences, 2017, (04), 82-86+107.

[3] Peng Liqun. Emotional mobilization and action logic of online collective behavior in the topic of microblog cyber violence. Chengdu University, 2023.

[4] Li Yuan. Irrational expression in virtual society. Fudan University, 2008.

[5] Li Tingting. Research on countermeasures for governing cyber violence of fan groups from the perspective of self-media. Xi'an Technological University. 2021.

[6] Deng Rong, He Kangxi. Looking at the fanatical demands behind cyber violence from "group polarization". Communication and Copyright, 2015, (05), 168-170.

[7] Stein Joel. How Trolls Are Ruining the Internet. Time, (2016).

[8] Nielsen, Maj Britt Dahl, Veronica Pisinger, Amalie Oxholm Kusier, and Janne Tolstrup. Prevalence of online sexual harassment and online bullying: a nationwide survey among high school students in Denmark. Frontiers in Public Health, 2024.

[9] Li Ningyu, Zhang Jiuhai. Analysis of the phenomenon of online "moral judgment". New Media Research, 2021, (18), 81-84.

[10] Gustave Le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind. Translated by Feng Keli. Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2004.