

Original Paper

Characteristics and Development Trends of Network Mass Incidents in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

With the leapfrog progress of mobile internet technology, the network mass incidents in colleges and universities are increasingly concerned by many parties. The characteristics of network mass incidents in colleges and universities include the particularity of participants, the diversity of inducement causes, emotionalization and irrationalization, the non-confrontational nature of event and the extensive range of impact. With social development, the potential trends of future network mass incidents in colleges and universities include the probability and quantity of occurrences will further increase, the breadth and intensity of impact will be further enhanced, the organizational form will become more complex, the coping strategies of management department will affect the development trend of the event, the increase in uncertainty brought by the development of new technologies.

Keywords

Colleges and universities, Internet, Mass incidents, Development trends

1. Introduction

According to the 52nd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by CNNIC in August 2023, as of June 2023, the scale of China's Internet users reached 1.079 billion, and the Internet penetration rate reached 76.4%, among which the scale of mobile Internet users reached 1.076 billion, accounting for 99.8%. The internet has become the main channel for people to access social

information and participate in social activities. Under the situation of “everyone is We-Media”, a huge public opinion field has been generated. Internet’s leapfrog development also led to frequent occurrences of network mass incidents.

Colleges and universities are huge fields, where peer groups with active minds and dense activities are concentrated. College students have high similarity in psychological characteristics, life experience, learning experience and other aspects, so they also have high in-group identity. As the most dynamic and influential important Internet users at present, college students are highly sensitive to group interests and various social events. They are easily affected and induced by various factors, leading to the occurrence of network mass incidents.

College students are at the key stage of shaping their values. With the frequent occurrence of network mass incidents in colleges and universities, their negative effects on students’ physical and mental health, the damage to campus management and teaching stability, the derogatory reputation image of colleges and universities and the impact on social stability have been widely concerned. Faced with network mass incidents, colleges and universities are often affected by the lack of specialized personnel, the absence of rules and regulations, the poor emergency response and coordination mechanisms, resulting in poor effectiveness. Studying the characteristics and development trends of network mass incidents in colleges and universities are of great value to deeply explore the nature of network mass incidents, and helps to enhance the response and supervision level of relevant departments.

2. The Connotation of Network Mass Incidents in Colleges and Universities

At present, the academic circle has not reached a consensus on the concept and definition of mass incidents, network mass incidents, and network mass incidents in colleges and universities. In general, “mass incidents” are usually triggered by certain social conflicts of interests. It is a temporary and clustered behavior of organized or unorganized crowds, often with certain scale, sociality and action. “Network mass incidents” are related to “mass incidents” in a species-genus relationship. Compared with traditional mass incidents, the involvement of online media is a significant feature. Participants try to cause impact and achieve goals through the internet. The speed of aggregation, dissemination, change rhythm, and impact are far beyond that of traditional mass incidents, often leading to the negative emotions of the public opinion field.

The “network mass incidents in colleges and universities” are not separate from “mass incidents” and “network mass incidents”, but a unique type and branch of them. At present, there is no consistent opinion in the academic circles about its connotation. Some scholars believe that the main body of the mass incidents in colleges and universities is college students, but “college students” clearly cannot represent all of this field in colleges and universities. The word “college” itself includes the specific place, background, rules and regulations, participating subjects, and impact boundaries of mass incidents. Based on the academic research and implementation feasibility considerations, “network mass incidents in colleges and universities” can be expressed as: the cluster events that are mainly

participated by college teachers and students, express relevant interests and opinions related to college education and management, take the Internet platform as the main carrier, and cause certain social impact or potential impact.

3. The Characteristics of Network Mass Incidents in Colleges and Universities

3.1 The Particularity of Participants

The network mass incidents in colleges and universities occur in the specific field, and the main body of activities is also clear, that is, college students and staff are the main participants. This group mostly has a certain level of knowledge. They pay more attention to social hot spots and are more inclined to express their personal views and opinions in the cyberspace. Students are the core subjects of mass incidents in colleges and universities. They have strong abilities to adapt to new things, and have strong curiosity for various things and hot events. However, their ideological concepts and psychology are still immature, and they are more prone to be induced by network information, thus participating in and promoting the generation and spread of network mass incidents. In addition, graduates, alumni and other subjects closely related to the management of higher education have also become important participants in the network mass incidents in colleges and universities.

3.2 The Diversity of Inducement Causes

The inducing factors of network mass incidents in colleges and universities are involved in all dimensions of university management and education, including teachers' morality, academic research, student management, logistics services, campus security and other events related to students' own interests. In recent years, several high-profile incidents have gone viral on the internet, including the "Rat Head vs. Duck Neck" incident at a certain college in Jiangxi, the "Real-name Complaints of Unequal Aid Distribution in Universities" incident at a university in Tianjin, and the case of 11 graduate students at a certain agricultural university who filed real-name complaints against their supervisors for academic fraud. These events involve multiple parties such as student-school conflicts, teacher-student conflicts, and student-student rivalries, often with strong topicality that easily attracts attention and discussion, leading to the emergence of mass incidents.

3.3 Emotionalization and Irrationalization

The network mass incidents in colleges and universities often show a certain irrationality, which is closely related to the particularity of the participants. Any single individual usually only has partial information and publishes opinions based on subjective assumptions and standpoints without knowing the full picture of the event. This can easily lead to rumors, creating a situation where "it takes only one mouth to spread rumors, but it takes a lot of effort to dispel them." The knowledge structure of students and their interest are subjective influencing factors of the evolution of college network public opinion. College students are the main group of We-Media platforms. They are not only the creators of network mass incidents, but also the publishers and commentators of network public opinion information. However, their ability to screen network information is still weak. Under the influence of conformity

psychology, they are more likely to be influenced by other subjects on the network and take actions emotionally. In addition, college students have prominent personalities. Affected by the anonymity and concealment of the Internet itself and psychological factors such as “the law does not blame the multitude”, they are more likely to be instigated when expressing their demands in the network environment, and are more likely to take drastic measures such as publishing inappropriate statements, inciting, spreading rumors, etc., leading to the irrational and emotional situation.

3.4 The Non-Confrontational Nature of Event

As an well-educated group, college teachers and students usually do not take extreme violent acts to declare their demands, but tend to maintain their reasonable rights through peer groups or network public opinions. Therefore, in terms of nature, network mass incidents in colleges and universities are often a way for university teachers and students to demand their rights and interests and a pure expression of emotions. They form clusters out of concern for campus construction, dissatisfaction with the lack of student-centeredness, and emphasis on safeguarding students' interests. They are not intended to disrupt management order and are therefore non-confrontational in nature. Under the influence of public opinion of network mass incidents, sometimes it can help to promote the proper handling of the relevant issues, and it is conducive to improving the management to some extent. The attitude towards college network mass incidents should not be entirely resistance and boycott. We need to study and judge its rationality, and actively deal with it using legal thinking.

3.5 The Extensive Range of Impact

From the above cases, it can be seen that the influence of network mass incidents in colleges and universities is not limited to the campus, but has extended to the whole society. Colleges and universities are relatively closed places, although to some extent keep distance from society, but all sectors attach great importance and attention to them. In the Internet age, the distance between colleges and society has been greatly shortened. College teachers and students are closely linked with many areas of society. The mass incidents that occur in colleges and universities make all netizens become participants and discussants. Under this circumstances, network mass incidents in colleges and universities not only affect the campus, but also may cause great concern in the broader social level, forming a huge public opinion field, bringing profound impact on government decision-making, social public opinion and so on. Network mass incidents in colleges and universities often form public opinion in a short time. The dissemination of public opinion on the internet in colleges and universities has the characteristics of frequent application of social media, fast transmission speed, diversified transmission carrier and ways. If there is no timely and appropriate intervention and response, it may cause more widespread social group conflicts.

4. The Development Trend of Network Mass Incidents in Colleges and Universities

The frequent occurrence of network mass incidents in colleges and universities highlights the great power of the Internet in the dissemination of public opinion and online and offline transmission. With

the development and evolution of society and Internet technology, network mass incidents in colleges and universities will also show new development trends.

4.1 The Probability and Quantity of Occurrences will Further Increase

The source of mass sentiment is values and social expectations. With the rapid development of the Internet, the college teachers and students have been paying more attention to social issues, and the topics and fields involved are becoming more extensive, including education, social issues, international politics, personal rights and interests, etc. The interests and demands of the events are also becoming more diverse and complex. With the advancement of science and technology, the popularity and influence of Internet platforms will continue to increase, which will provide a broader space for the dissemination of network mass incidents in colleges and universities, greatly increasing the probability of occurrence. It has been found that expressing opinions and demands on the Internet and forming public opinion pressure can prompt problem solving more quickly than offline to a certain extent, which will inevitably lead to more and more teachers and students choosing to initiate actions such as reporting through the Internet to resolve conflicts of interests. These factors have led to the number of network mass incidents in colleges and universities increasing year by year, and will continue to increase.

4.2 The Breadth and Intensity of Impact will be Further Enhanced

In the era of We-Media, people can easily participate in online life and instantaneously participate in event discussions on platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin. Each independent individual can become a producer and disseminator of information, which greatly enhances the fermentation speed and influence of online public opinion. A small event may attract a lot of attention in a short time and even cause national discussions. Online mass incidents are no longer limited to the virtual space, but gradually extend to the real society. The interaction of online and offline transmission continuously expands the impact scope of events. Network mass incidents in colleges and universities may no longer be limited to campus, but form cross-border issues involving schools and even the social level, which have a deeper impact on society. At the same time, these mass incidents are often accompanied by fierce public debate, different views collide on the Internet, easy to cause extreme emotions to spread, produce a series of chain reactions. All these will further increase the difficulty of supervision.

4.3 The Organizational Form will Become More Complex

Colleges and universities are the arenas where all kinds of ideas gathered and communicated. Some forces continuously carry out the infiltration of ideas and culture among countries, and colleges and universities are their main targets. They use gender confrontation, political and economic issues, distorted individual cases, negative interpretation of social problems to spread rumors, create chaos, disrupt public order, so as to achieve their political purposes. The organizational forms of network mass incidents in colleges and universities are becoming increasingly diverse, covert, and politicized. There are both spontaneous actions and collective actions organized and planned by opinion leaders. Some

events may seem disorganized, but there may be certain organization and planning behind them, and there are forces manipulating public opinion and seeking private interests. College students are not yet mature, and they are more likely to be misled, which further increases the complexity of the events. Relevant institutions need to be vigilant against external infiltration and maintain national ideology and cybersecurity.

4.4 The Coping Strategies of Management Department will Affect the Development Trend of the Event

With the increase and complexity of network mass incidents in colleges and universities, the difficulty of handling them will increase accordingly, and the supervision and intervention of relevant departments will necessarily be further strengthened. Their attitude and response to emergencies will have a direct impact on the evolution of the events. In the case of “Rat Head vs. Duck Neck” mentioned before, the school and the market supervision bureau have evaded responsibility and fooled the masses, leading to the intensification of the incident; in the case of 11 graduate students at a certain agricultural university, the school’s timely response and proper arrangements for students and other measures helped to maintain the school’s reputation. In view of the frequent occurrence of network mass incidents in colleges and universities, whether government departments, colleges and other managers can take reasonable measures to strengthen the monitoring, early warning and response of the incidents is crucial. Management departments need to timely grasp the dynamic development of events, take effective measures to quell the situation, and avoid the deterioration and escalation of events. For example, it is necessary to guide the trend of public opinion by releasing official authoritative information in a timely manner, avoid panic and rumors from spreading, strengthen network security management, combat online rumors, etc. Whether the measures taken are appropriate or not will greatly affect whether the incident continues to spread or can be controlled.

4.5 The Increase in Uncertainty Brought by the Development of New Technologies

At present, policies implemented by regulators, such as strong real name system, has a certain constraint effect on the spread of online mass incidents. With the continuous innovation of science and technology, the ways and means of the spread of network mass incidents in colleges and universities are also evolving. Web3.0 is a “decentralized” Internet based on blockchain technology, and its core feature is encryption and stronger anonymity. The application of emerging technologies such as blockchain, anonymous communication, and generative artificial intelligence makes it more difficult to track and identify the organizers and participants of network mass incidents, which brings new challenges to the management department, and also makes the development of network mass incidents more intricate. In addition, there is a great uncertainty about how managers can fully utilize new technologies to monitor and respond to events, reducing the risk of network mass incidents.

5. Conclusion

In general, network mass incidents in colleges and universities need to be fully recognized and effectively responded to. The government, colleges and universities, and all sectors of society should

strengthen cooperation, build a sound management system and response system, enhance the education and guidance of college students. In the face of complex mass incidents, relevant departments should constantly optimize response strategies, improve the level of online public opinion guidance, and promote the network environment towards healthy development.

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