

# The Communication Ethics of WeChat Public Platforms

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## Abstract

In the new media era, the information is updating each passing day. Although the official communication of college education is carried out efficiently by the platform of WeChat public account, it is interfered by its muddy information, the abuse of freedom of speech and rumors spreads. This phenomenon leads to the moral misconduct and the marginalization of the legal system. It is imperative to build the communication ethics and norms of Wechat public platform in Colleges and universities. The significance of the construction of the WeChat public platform communication theory and regulations from the perspectives of disseminating the correct orientation of public opinion is discussed in this paper, in order to improve the communication information literacy of netizens and meet the need of network supervision system, and suggest the path for exploring correlative strategy.

**Keywords:** communication ethics, WeChat, public platforms, media literacy

## 1. Introduction

The WeChat public platform in colleges and universities is the innovative and creative carrier of current college education. However, because of the rapid development of this carrier, many ethical constructions and legal systems cannot keep up with the rapid and rapid development of the Internet, resulting in the ethical anomic of cyberspace and the marginalization of legal system. Hence, communication ethics and legal construction on WeChat public platform in colleges and universities are urgent. Taking WeChat public platform "Guangdong Federation of Students" and "Youth League Committee of Jinan University" as examples, this paper analyzes the current situation of the dissemination of the WeChat public platform in colleges and universities, and also explores the communication ethics and regulations construction path of the current WeChat public platform.

## 2. The Current Situation of Communication of WeChat Public Platform in Colleges and Universities

The public platform of WeChat in colleges and universities is mostly the official operation number. The public number is created by the college, campus, university or municipal and provincial organizations. The main mode of operation is to promote the original ideological and political education by utilizing the relevant personnel of universities and college students to work together. Some excellent ideological and political education tweets are pushed or reproduced, which covers the latest hot news, ideological and political articles, the latest information of the Party and League, college students' daily life and so on. Its main features are as follows:

### *2.1 On the Content Selection, It Is Close to the Daily Life of College Students*

Ideological and political education work is carried out for the college students, correspondingly, the main audience of the WeChat public platform created for better ideological and political education in colleges and universities is also college students. This inevitably requires that articles pushed by the public account should meet the psychological needs of college students and be close to their daily life. For example, "Youth League Committee of Jinan University" pushed tweet "Your favorite CET-4 or CET-6 is coming again! ! ! ", using the public account as the platform to deliver the latest learning and examination information to students in real time. In addition, "Guangdong Federation of Students" pushed tweet which named "Stylistic Art Festival | Orienteering final list! Did your team advance?", taking the public account as a platform to promote recent or current student activities. In a way that contemporary college students can timely and effectively transfer the information of their closely related learning and activities, so that it is more in line with the psychological needs of college students, more close to the daily life of college students.

### *2.2 In Terms of Expression, It Caters to the Reading Habits of College Students*

In the new media era, visual factors become an important means to create, represent and convey meanings, which made it become the core elements of contemporary culture (Zhou, 2008). It is particularly prominent among contemporary college students, especially the emerging trend of network subculture "Emojis" (expression package), which not only has the mixture of vision and speech, but also has the compatibility of dynamic and static (Qu & Li, 2018). It is highly praised by contemporary college students. In order to better integrate into the life of college students and carry out ideological and political education work more effectively, the WeChat public platform of colleges and universities has increased the frequency of image use in tweets, and even started to make and use a large number of emojis. For example, "Guangdong Federation of Students" pushed a tweet to make the quotations of general secretary Xi Jinping into a "Emojis" which caters to the reading habits of College students, improves the acceptance rate of political and ideological dissemination, and makes the ideological and political education work more smoothly.

### *2.3 On the Ideological Connotation, Conform to the Core of Ideological and Political Education of the Party and League*

Articles 5 and 6 of the Education Law of the People's Republic of China emphasize the importance of guiding socialist core values in education, which makes it one of the duties of college education to disseminate socialist core values and related ideological theories. Consequently, the ideological content of WeChat public platform in colleges and universities should conform to the core of ideological and political education and spread Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics or other traditional ideological theories. For example, "Youth League Committee of Jinan University" pushed a tweet in the form of minutes and insights to convey the spirit of Xi's inspection of Guangdong's important speech. Additionally, "Guangdong Federation of Students" push tweet which named "draw the key! Standard flag, emblem, song is coming!", leading college students to understand and learn the latest document issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, "Regulations on the Production and Use of Chinese Communist Youth League Flags, League Emblems and Group Songs".

## **3. The Significance of Communication Ethics and Regulation Construction in WeChat Public Platform**

### *3.1 The Need of the Correct Guidance of WeChat Public Sentiment*

In the era of new media, the public is increasingly dependent on the dissemination of new media information, especially the fragmented dissemination of information, which brings a large amount of information, but at the same time, makes the information mingle good and bad (Zhou & Wang, 2018). In a relatively private virtual environment, Wechat users receive information in an open, reliable and unguarded way. When a user receives an article in a circle of friends or public account, people tend to process the information based on their own experience judgment, and their understanding of the matter only stays at the perceptual level, instead of comprehensive rational thinking and verification. It causes users to be attracted by some seemingly credible content, even be cheated. As we all know, WeChat is based on the relationship established by acquaintances. WeChat friends have a high mutual trust, so when you forward those messages to your circle of friends, many information begin to spread rapidly along this "acquaintance chain" (Cheng, 2014). If the value of public account tweets produces the correct public opinion guidance and value communication, this feature of WeChat will become a power to promote it. However, if the value of tweets is unclear, marginal or even harmful, with the help of this feature of WeChat, its spread will be extremely rapid. Therefore, WeChat public sentiment is often unstable and is likely to have an extreme development trend. The development and spread of rumors not only hinder people's effective use of social media, but also may cause adverse effects on people or society if the

rumors are not controlled in a timely manner after release (Liu, Jin, Shen, Bao, & Qi, 2018), such as causing public misunderstanding or negative emotions, even raising the possibility of cyber-crimes and affecting social stability. For this reason, the ideological and political WeChat public account needs to carry out strict content checks to ensure that its public sentiment guidance and value dissemination is correct, and more should be word for word, to confirm that even the gray edge does not exist. In this way, the official WeChat platform of the campus will integrate the ideological and political education of college students with the new media, and truly realize the new education mode of "Internet + education" in the new era (Yang, 2018). And the construction of communication ethics and laws is like a content boundary and control standard for the operators of public accounts, which is helpful to reduce the phenomenon of multiple, miscellaneous, scattered and disorderly articles, and avoids the impact on the ideological concepts of college students. It better guides WeChat popular opinion, disseminates correct values, and better carries out ideological and political education.

### *3.2 The Need of True Free Expression*

As Voltaire advocated, "I will defend to the death your right to say it." (Stephen, 2017) Everyone has the need and right to free expression, and freedom of expression is one of the constitutional rights of citizens of the People's Republic of China, so do many other countries. But what exactly is true free expression? Can we imagine that under the guise of freedom of expression, we can make statements that slander, insult, defame others, or even incite civil unrest and harm society and the country? Obviously, the freedom of expression is not completely unrestricted, and it without boundaries cannot achieve true freedom of expression. Therefore, we need to use moral and legal rules to draw a boundary, to allow some "freedom" to maintain the social order and national harmony on which we live, and to protect ourselves from the abuse of the right of expression by others. For us in the era of "We Media", this need is particularly urgent. In China's legislation, there are relevant norms and restrictions on citizens' right to exercise freedom of expression. These norms are mainly reflected in laws and regulations such as the Constitution, Criminal Law, Civil Law General Regulations, and Security Administration Punishment Law (Gao & Hong, 2018). In the era of network, these norms are also applicable to restrict the right of free expression of online speech. Internet expression is not only characterized by immediacy, interaction and decentralization, but more importantly, Internet freedom of expression has the value function of promoting social supervision, democracy, equality and openness. It provides a relatively convenient channel for netizens to publicize their right of free expression (Wang & Zheng, 2011). That's why hiding behind our anonymity, we can express ourselves more freely without any burden. But it is also because of the existence of virtual identity, when people abuse the right of expression, cross the line of speech, and produce adverse consequences, it is more difficult to determine their identity and call to account. The Wechat public platform is more so. Because of it, when the content of public account violates laws and regulations, its responsibility identification and investigation will be even more difficult. The handling of the tweet is usually only remove it or close the public platform, but difficult to fall to the person who pushed it. Therefore, it is extremely important for public accounts to build the communication of ethics and legal. Regulating speech in accordance with the law is not only a safeguard for the rights and interests of others, but also a protection for those who speak.

### *3.3 The Need to Establish a Network Supervision System*

Driven by economic interests, many media pursue click-through rate, and cater to the audience's emotions by means of fact-based but deviating from the truth, so as to attract the audience's attention (Zhang, 2018), so the phenomena of generalizability, out of context, selective reporting and others are common. Furthermore, the virtuality, selectivity and contingency of media images sometimes limit people's views and cover up the truth (Zheng, 2015). In other words, the content is not entirely false, but it is by no means the "truth", and the half of truth is the hardest to distinguish. Such articles interfere with the audience's judgment of the real situation to a greater extent, arouse the audience's "passion" mood, and more easily incite the network public opinion to go to extremes. The WeChat public platform of colleges and universities represents the party, league and government to a certain extent, and the tweets posted on it are to a large extent the speech on behalf of authority. So the audience will be more likely to believe the content of the tweets without discrimination. If the content is distorted or steps into a gray area, it will have a greater negative impact on the audience, and form a vicious spread, or even damage the credibility of the party, the league and the government to a certain extent. Article 3 of the Regulations on the Protection of Information Network Communication Rights clearly defines the scope of exercise of the right to disseminate information networks. Article 15 of the Measures for the Administration of Internet Information Services also clearly lists many prohibitive norms of information providers. These norms have built a legal framework for new media communication in a more specific way, and "remedy" the disorder of the Internet to make it run in a more civilized and orderly way. Therefore, the establishment and improvement of network supervision system is very necessary and urgent. And network supervision also needs standards, which

is the dissemination of ethics and regulations.

#### **4. Suggestions on the Path of Communication Ethics and Regulations Construction of WeChat Public Platform in Colleges and Universities**

##### *4.1 Complete New Media Legislation and Build a "Rule of Law Network"*

With the rapid development of the Internet, the network specific legislation should also be improved, setting the legal boundary for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of speech. Some of the online phenomena, such as disorder and illegal crimes, use the Internet as a tool or method to carry out illegal and criminal activities, which can be dealt with and punished with existing laws. As for the new chaos caused by new media, it is worth studying whether special legislation is needed or not, but at least it needs to be perfected in details. For example, the issues related to the identification of safety responsibility in Ten Article of WeChat. As for the field of network that changes quickly, the implementation of the rule of law is not only at the legislative level, but also at the law enforcement and judicial levels. It is not enough to have laws to abide by. It is more important to make the law have to abide by, enforce the law strictly, and investigate and punish those who violate the law. Otherwise, legal provisions will be just words on pages, and the rule of law can't be started. To achieve effective legal supervision, it is necessary to implement the provisions of the National People's Congress Standing Committee's Decision on Strengthening Network Information Protection and the Decision on Maintaining Internet Security, and to enhance the operability of new media management. Therefore, we need to improve Internet legislation, from the constitution down to the perfect and detailed network system, we need to impose strict system regulation, strict network enforcement, fair network justice, and gradually build a "rule of law network" to allow the Internet to operate within the framework of the law. Colleges and universities should also rely on China's legal system norms, consciously build a network norms system, and carry out Internet legal education on the basis of policies (Fan, 2016).

##### *4.2 Strengthen the Consciousness of Gatekeeping and Establish the Network Supervision System*

First of all, WeChat public platform operators need to fully recognize their role characteristics, recognize the possible impact of their information dissemination behavior, eliminate violations of media ethics, reinforce the "self-check" awareness, and ensure the authenticity, objectivity and comprehensiveness of the content of dissemination from the root (Yan & Liu, 2014). Furthermore, the government should enhance the awareness of checking, gradually establish a network supervision system, timely disclosure of information, timely intervention and guidance. For example, clearly determine the standards of establishing Wechat public platform, screen and evaluate it randomly. For the public platform or tweet that violates ethics or regulations, the government shall comply with the article 8 of Interim Provisions on the Development Management of Public Information Services for Instant Messaging Tools and other relevant laws and regulations, depend on the circumstances taken the measures such as warning, restriction of release, suspension of updates and even account closure, and keep the relevant records and implement strict supervision.

##### *4.3 Improve the Ability of Information Discrimination and Verification, and Avoid Spreading Rumors*

The Internet is awash with information, from scientifically credible facts to irresponsible fabrications. For the WeChat public platform of colleges and universities, its college education work requires that it must have new media information literacy, high information discrimination ability, and must be resolutely excluded from false information. It is a basic quality requirement for not falsifying or not rumoring, and scientific rumors on the basis of understanding are further requirements. Even for real information, there must be a certain ability to verify, to ensure the true credibility of its "authenticity", and to break the possibility of the spread of false information from the source of communication. While for the general audience, they can choose their own information sources. For example, choose to read articles pushed by the more reliable official public accounts rather than unfamiliar personal accounts. In addition, the audience's own ability to identify and verify information is also crucial. Only when the audience can independently identify and seek evidence, think calmly, do not give partiality to one party, and do not start rumors or spread rumors, can truly eliminate the social harm brought by the spread of rumors. In other words, a rumor ends with a wise man (Bai, 2010).

##### *4.4 Guide and Educate the Public to Improve Media Literacy*

The background of the word media literacy is the public's blind dependence on media, even misunderstanding and misuse (Zheng, 2015). Some scholars have summarized it as "the public's ability to understand, judge, select, apply and criticize the media" (Huang, 2009). For new media audiences, improving their media literacy is particularly important for the construction of online rule of law. The supervision of regulators is always limited, no matter in number, time, scope or strength. However, operators' checks can only ensure that the content on

WeChat public platform that they operate is real and positive, and there is always a time when it is beyond their reach. Therefore, only when the media literacy of the public is improved, and the public can make their own judgment and even supervise and report, can they realize the ethical supervision and legal supervision to the greatest extent. Therefore, the government should actively guide the public to improve their media literacy and strengthen media literacy education. Colleges and universities should also set up a set of theoretical system, develop educational resources, carry out practical activities, and effectively improve the media literacy of college students.

#### 4.5 Strengthen Value Communication and the Publicity of Rule of Law

In the communication ethics and legal construction of WeChat public platform in colleges and universities, the core part is ethics supervision and legal supervision. The first thing to achieve effective ethical supervision is to fully cover the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics, so that the public can internalize them into spirit and externalize them into practice. Furthermore, the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics is used to transmit the correct outlook on life, values and worldview, to intensify the dissemination of values, and to achieve the effect of producing positive value impact at all times. It is necessary to implement the new media communication management regulations, increase the popularization of the law, build a socialist rule of law culture, and improve the rule of law and moral quality of the entire nation. When every netizen knows, understands and abides by the law in the cyberspace, everyone can become a supervisor, the cyberspace can be clear and clean, and the construction of communication ethics and laws must be successful.

### 5. Conclusion

Hitching a ride in the information age, the information is spread quickly and conveniently through the WeChat public platform. Taking college students as the main target audience, WeChat public platform of colleges and universities is close to their daily life in content selection, caters to their reading habits in expression, and conforms to the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics in ideological connotation. Yet due to the low threshold and low cost of network information propagation, there have been abuses of the right of free speech, rumor propagation and listening to only one side. Hence it is significant and necessary to mobilize all forces for the construction of communication ethics and regulations. Platform operators should strictly guard a pass and put an end to rumors. While relevant departments should pay more attention to constructing the network legal institution, strengthen the publicity and supervise prudentially to establish a clean network earlier.

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