

Analysis of The Mechanisms of Netizens' Emotional Communication Before and After Public Opinion Reversal: A Case Study of The Rosy Zhao' s Fake Assistance to Farmers

Tszwing Guo

Guangdong Country Garden School, Foshan, China

* Corresponding Author Email: guotszwing@gcgsedu.com

Abstract. This paper systematically examines the phenomenon of public opinion reversal through the case study of the "Rosy Zhao's Fake Assistance to Farmers". This study specifically examines the diffusion mechanisms of online affect and the differentiated roles played by various actors, investigating the transformation of online emotions from intense negativity to rational reappraisal, in response to evolving information. The study identifies three key stages in the public opinion reversal process, including the initial rapid spread of unverified claims, the role of media in amplifying or correcting narratives, and the persistent impact of information cocoons on prolonging biased perceptions. The findings highlight the critical impact of authoritative fact checking and responsible journalism in reshaping public discourse. This study significantly contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of online public opinion in the post-truth era and provides valuable insights for effectively managing digital communication flows and promoting a more informed and healthier online environment.

Keywords: Network Public Opinion; Collective Emotions of Netizens; Dissemination Mechanism; Rosy Zhao; "Fake Assistance to Farmers" Incident.

1. Introduction

Cyberspace has become a central platform for the dissemination of public opinion. However, it also presents significant challenges, particularly in the form of "public opinion reversal" incidents. The prevailing mood in public life can change dramatically when important facts come to light. This phenomenon demonstrates that the resonance of emotions in online discourse often exceeds the credibility of the media. The recent case of "Rosy Zhao's Fake Assistance to Farmers" is just a typical example, from an initial negative assessment to authorization clarification, to a reversal of public opinion and accountability to the media. The dynamics and stage of this reversal of perception are analyzed case by case.

Previous studies examine the effect of algorithmic personalization and emotional contagion in accelerating the spread of unverified claims during the initial phase of viral events [1, 2]. This often leads to what scholars' term "emotional priming", where affective responses outweigh factual analysis in early public discourse. Recent case studies of reversal events reveal consistent patterns that the reversal process typically progresses through identifiable stages of crisis initiation, emotional amplification, corrective information dissemination, and eventual consensus reshaping [3]. This staging reflects the continued relevance of classic crisis communication theories while accounting for new media dynamics. A key development in recent literature is the focus on platform-specific mechanisms. While these studies provide valuable insights into opinion reversal, there remains insufficient attention to the micro-level interactions between different actor types, particularly how official media, influencers, and fan communities shape reversal trajectories through their strategic communications. This study addresses these gaps by examining the "Rosy Zhao's Fake Assistance to Farmers" incident through a multi-actor framework, with particular focus on the temporal dynamics of emotional shifts and the strategic communication patterns that facilitated the ultimate opinion reversal.

2. Overview of Case

2.1. Research Subject

This study takes the “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident in 2025 as the research object. Rosy Zhao, a famous actress in Mainland, China. During the live stream, she recommended an apple juice she was drinking to the audience and stated that it was a product from an agricultural aid initiative. This declaration prompted a large number of fans and some netizens to rush to purchase the same apple juice, while fans simultaneously began extensively promoting her supportive act for the agricultural sector.

2.2. Course of Events and Outcome

A significant public opinion incident unfolded on August 13, 2025, when Qianjiang Video, an official media entity, alleged on Weibo that the agricultural aid certificate associated with Rosy Zhao's promotion was counterfeit. This accusation, encapsulated in hashtags like “Fake Charity Farming” quickly trended as netizens widely shared the news, with majority sentiment condemning Rosy Zhao as hypocritical and motivated by profit. Facing the backlash, Rosy Zhao publicly questioned Qianjiang Video’s journalistic ethics in a live broadcast. The court of public opinion shifted dramatically that same night after Red Star News repudiated the story, causing an instantaneous reversal in the prevailing narrative.

3. Analysis

Online social networks play an important role in spreading information on a large scale. Information diffusion occurs when information flows from one individual or community to another, and relevant models are widely used in research to understand this phenomenon [4]. Nowadays, different netizen tends to accept more emotional information than rational one, thus netizen is highly consistent on emotional tendency. In the “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident, netizens’ emotions were notably activated. Throughout the process of emotional expression, the incident was transformed into diverse informational forms and redistributed via social sharing. As time progressed and content dissemination expanded, additional relevant information came to light, enhancing the informational richness of the discourse and stimulating further discussion as well as collective resonance. When the overwhelming number of entries related to “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” appeared in netizens’ field of vision, they were easily misled and, due to herd mentality, perceived the information as accurate. Therefore, in recent years, many similar public opinion reversal incidents have occurred, making netizens aware that information, on the internet, can be deceptive and conclusions should not be drawn prematurely. The truthfulness of information requires netizens to judge for themselves. We will examine the mechanisms of emotional dissemination among netizens before and after the public opinion reversal using the “Fake Assistance to Farmers” case as our primary example. Specifically, the period preceding the public opinion reversal is characterized by emotional activation and diffusion, while the period following the reversal involves a return to rationality and demonstrates the impact of information cocoons.

3.1. Emotional Proliferation: Media-Driven Fractal Dissemination

Media frequently utilize emotionally charged narratives to capture the attention of internet users, employing personalized text, images, videos, or audio to depict events and evoke empathy through a heightened sense of individuality and conflict. Qianjiang Video was the first and only media outlet to explicitly allege “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” and present its evidence. Subsequently, an increasing number of influencer accounts began publishing content with hashtags such as “Official Debunking: Rosy Zhao’s Charity Company Receiving Ambassador Title” and “Rosy Zhao’s Charity Company’s Ambassador Certificate Is Fake” aiming to stir up netizens’ sympathy. At the same time, individual users initiated large-scale discussions using related hashtags. The synergy between

mainstream and social media sustained public attention, ultimately generating a phenomenon-level trending effect.

Through the comprehensive integration of online and traditional media, the channels for disseminating information and emotions have multiplied. Modern society is inseparable from mass communication platforms and the dynamics of public opinion. Netizens can instantly access information regardless of their location or device, thanks to the integration of omnimedia. Simultaneously, technological advancements have expanded the reach of information and facilitated the spread of public sentiment. Even though Qianjiang Video only posted about the incident on Weibo, numerous self-media accounts spontaneously reposted and shared related content on other social platforms such as Rednote and Douyin (Chinese Tiktok), drawing greater attention to the event. As fans defending their beloved celebrity, antis seizing the opportunity to smear, and ordinary netizens unaware of the truth engaged in intense discussions and even heated arguments, the visibility of the incident escalated further. Emotions such as sympathy, ridicule, and anger intertwined, accelerating the fission-like spread of collective sentiment.

Media coverage invariably plays a significant role in such incidents, serving as a critical catalyst for the activation, aggregation, and dissemination of public sentiment. As observed in the “Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident, numerous official media outlets disseminated reports without conducting independent verification, thereby inadvertently misleading uninformed netizens. The widespread perception of authority associated with these official sources led the public to assume that the coordinated coverage must reflect factual reality. The sheer volume of misinformation unequivocally amplified collective emotions, as repeated exposure to consistent yet unverified narratives intensified public affective responses.

3.2. Emotional Amplification

The propagation of emotional information in cyberspace exhibits exceptional speed and broad coverage, characterized by a unique integration of both chain and tree transmission patterns. While chain propagation operates through sequential one-to-one forwarding, tree propagation enables more efficient one-to-many dissemination, resulting in significantly wider reach and accelerated diffusion. In reality, emotional information transcends these conventional models and evolves into a many-to-many radial structure, akin to light radiating omnidirectionally, where multiple sources simultaneously emit and receive information. This network-based diffusion mechanism supports decentralized, multi-directional sharing that generates extremely rapid spreading, enormous information volumes, and highly interactive feedback loops.

In this incident, both official media outlets (such as Qianjiang Video) and anti-fan groups played crucial roles. Contemporary users frequently express their opinions on social platforms. They often seek out like-minded individuals for discussion, whether in the comments of official media or through their own posts. As a result, a series of negative hashtags began to proliferate across multiple platforms. These tags included “fake charity farming”, “fraud”, “exaggeration”, “ban” and “self-inflicted consequence”. They quickly became strongly associated with Rosy Zhao. This form of multi-directional public interaction radiated collective emotions in a many-to-many pattern, significantly amplifying the spread and impact of sentiment.

3.3. Emotional Subsidence and Rational Return

As the incident unfolded, netizens’ emotions faded and subjective emotional venting decreased, enabling them to notice details that had previously been overlooked. The calm and rational return of emotions is a complex and gradual process, which mainly relies on the effective release of information and the rational guidance of the media to jointly help the public emotions from the high-intensity negative state to rationality and stability. In the case of “Fake Assistance to Farmers”, a state media outlet called Red Star News was the first to present a different view and provide supporting evidence. The report clarifies that the charity certificates are indeed genuine but issued to a company,

not an individual, debunking the “fake charity” narrative once and for all. Meanwhile, platforms such as “People’s Cultural Tourism” and “China.com” have publicly praised this innovative model of public welfare support. The full release of information reduces public speculation and uncertainty, thus reducing the intensity of negative sentiment. As the facts became clear, public attention gradually shifted from emotional outbursts to rational analysis of the incident itself. Some netizens argued that Rosy Zhao had indeed contributed to agricultural support, albeit through an innovative approach. Expressions of negative emotion decreased, while constructive and reflective discussions increased. Under the sustained and rational guidance of the media, the court of public opinion transitioned from emotion-driven reactions to rationality-led discourse, allowing negative sentiments to gradually settle [5]. Public discussion of the event became more diverse, marking the end of the emotional propagation phase.

3.4. Information Cocoon

Issues such as group polarization, information narrowing, and the segregation of differing groups arising from information cocoons pose potential threats to the virtual public sphere, cyberspace. In reality, cases where information cocoons have led to negative impacts are relatively common and increasingly widespread. Due to factors such as algorithmic recommendations and selective exposure to information, individuals can easily become trapped in information cocoons, where they are consistently exposed to similar types of information [6]. As a result, when an event undergoes reversal, some individuals may fail to access updated information, thereby maintaining their incorrect initial judgments of the situation.

After the reversal of the “Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident, Rosy Zhao’s fans repeatedly demanded that Qianjiang Video apologize for the impact caused by the false news while disseminating the truth. Due to the effect of information cocoons, many confused netizens remained unaware that the incident had been reversed. This made it difficult for the fans' emotions to settle, and their anger continued to accumulate. At the same time, information cocoons made it harder for some users to access alternative perspectives, limiting their understanding of the full picture. Some users, due to “position-based filtering” were exposed predominantly to one-sided information, while content from different angles was gradually excluded. However, as small groups intersected and ideas permeated different circles, audiences with similar viewpoints began to form emotional clusters. Individual users grew increasingly confident in their own predictions, often suppressing or ignoring outside opinions. Netizens might deny the reversal of the event due to a subjectively protective stance within fan communities, further reinforcing the information cocoon effect.

4. Suggestions

Through an analysis of the emotional dissemination mechanisms among netizens prior to the reversal in the “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident, the significant tension between new media and online public opinion, as well as between online public opinion and netizens’ emotions, has been validated. Some official media outlets have failed to uphold the principles of authenticity and accuracy. These outlets abandoned their basic journalistic standards in order to chase traffic. A coalition of 81 media accounts, led by Qianjiang Video, propagated the story on Weibo using the “Fake Charity Farming” hashtag. Furthermore, they published misleading reports without proper verification and at times intentionally inflamed tensions between groups. Although the internet and online platforms have provided media with new channels for dissemination, official media, as authoritative voices, should play a crucial role in providing the public with reliable and truthful information while guiding constructive public sentiment. In the digital age, official media bear an even greater responsibility to verify events and information, adhere to the principle of journalistic truthfulness, and publish information that is credible to the public. Only in this way can they contribute to the gradual improvement of the online environment.

Beyond official media, the dissemination of online public opinion relies heavily on individual users, as individuals are the starting point of emotional propagation. The convergence of individual emotions shapes collective online sentiment and public opinion. Therefore, to effectively guide online emotions in a positive direction, the most fundamental approach lies in enhancing the awareness and capabilities of netizens themselves. Unlike institutional media, comprehensive information is often difficult to obtain for individual users. Therefore, it is crucial to improve internet users' online engagement and critical thinking skills. This reversal offered a valuable lesson that independent critical thinking is important for information from official media as well. Individuals should avoid blindly following popular opinions, and prevent irrational emotions. For this reason, all internet users should strengthen their superior skills, be less quick to exercise their access to unverified information, and refrain from spreading inappropriate messages.

5. Conclusion

Through examining the “Rosy Zhao’s Fake Assistance to Farmers” incident, this study illustrates the mechanisms of emotional communication among netizens during the process of public opinion reversal. The case vividly demonstrates a clear trajectory, from the rapid ignition and viral spread of negative emotions driven by unverified accusations, to the pivotal reversal triggered by authoritative fact-checking, and finally to the gradual subsidence of sentiment and a collective shift toward rationality.

The analysis confirms that high-arousal emotions such as anger and sympathy spread faster than facts. Moreover, media outlets which pursuing traffic, and netizens operating within information cocoons strengthen this point. The reversal constitutes not only an informational correction, but also a complex recalibration of social emotion. Verified evidence, released by credible sources, compels a cognitive reassessment among the public. However, the reversed pattern does not simply return to a neutral state. Its characteristics always include doubts, anger to the original source of misinformation, and reflective public discussion.

This study highlights the enormous power and responsibility of the authority media in the digital age. Some rigorous media is essential to solve a crisis caused by other media through unprofessional behavior. In addition, information cocoons pose significant challenges, as they can delay or even prevent the acceptance of new, informed narratives on the part of netizens.

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