A Study on the Internet Public Opinion of Major Sports Event Game Abandoning—A Case Study of the Game Abandoning of China National Table Tennis Men's Team

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Abstract. As a new way of social existence, the network society has brought a lot of benefits to people's digital survival, but also poses new changes to the spread of emergencies on the network. On the great social concern caused by the pulling out of the Chinese national tennis team (hereinafter referred to as the national table tennis team incident), this paper explores the internal relationship between the network public opinion and social mentality on the incident from the perspective of psychology. Moreover, it deduces the paths produced and evolved in the network communication, and proposes targeted countermeasures and suggestions in three aspects, namely, social mentality, social mood and social behavior.

Introduction

As a large-scale public event closely related to politics, economy, society, religion and other aspects, sporting events exert influence on the interest of all social sectors and different social groups. Coupled with the intense and confrontational characteristics of sports, the event is full of contingencies and variables, which is far higher than other social activities in both event organization and risk control. ¹ Since the Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry to Promote Sports Consumption, the growth of sporting events has developed by leaps and bounds. It is noteworthy that, at the same time of the booming sporting events, the frequency of sports event crisis also increases in correspondence. The forms and characteristics of a variety of new media in the era Web 2.0 makes the spread of sports event crisis show a more complex situation. The failure of timely and effective response will cause huge economic and image losses to the event organizer, crisis-related sports organizations and athletes and even the government and the country.

Review of the National Table Tennis Team Incident

As the China Table Tennis Association announced the retirement from office of Liu Guoliang, the former head coach of the national table tennis team, the three backbone players in the table tennis men's team, Ma Long, Xu Xin and Fan Zhendong chose to pull out the game in the second round of men's single of 2017 International Table Tennis World Tour China Open held on 23 June, and there were fans holding the banner of retaining Liu Guoliang and making slogans. Later, the three players together with the coaches Ma Lin, Qian Zhijian microblogged the words, "At this moment, we cannot concentrate on the game, just because we miss you, Mr. Liu Guoliang". After being forwarded and reported, the incident caused a great sensation in the sports circle and even the community. In a short time, the public opinion was angry of the injustice for Liu Guoliang and moved by the right of righteousness of the men's team, who challenged the authority for the sake of their coach. At the meanwhile, Gou Zhongwen, the director of the State Sports General Administration, was universally condemned. As a result, the incident gradually escalated to an event of network public opinion.
The Network Public Opinion on the National Table Tennis Team Incident

China's scholars have put forward three general expositions on the network public opinion. First, the special type of social public opinion, which describes the network public opinion as the media or netizens' opinion or comments released via Internet with a certain influence and tendency on a focal issue or social public affairs. The second is the netizens' political attitude, which holds that the network public opinion is the netizens' attitude on the rulers and their political orientation on the occurrence, development and changes of public opinion. It also stressed that the core of public opinion is the netizen's social and political attitude. The third is the social mentality and emotional reflection theory, which regards network public opinion as the reflection, performance and release of social mentality and emotions on the Internet, and is the collection of netizens' cognition, attitude, emotion and behavior on some social stimulus events through the Internet. This paper holds that the third view more scientifically summarizes the network public opinion on the national table tennis team incident. That is, it is the reflection of the netizens' social mentality and emotion, as well as the collection of netizens' cognition, attitude, emotion and behavior on some social stimulus events through the Internet.

The Internal Relationship Between the Network Public Opinion and Social Mentality of the National Table Tennis Team Incident

Since 1980s, "social mentality" has frequently appeared in China's academic discussion and the mass media. From the keyword retrieval in CNKI, we can learn that in the past decade, there were more than 100 articles and over 400 articles since 2011 involved in this world, indicating that the issue of social mentality receives increasing concern. Professor Ma Guanghai believes that social mentality refers to the sum of emotions, social cognition and value orientation associated with the specific social operation or the process of social changes extensively existing in a variety of social groups within a certain period. It is a dynamic part of social psychology. This conclusion reveals the internal relationship between social mentality and network public opinion. Currently, China is in the period of institutional transition and social transformation, which inevitably brings about the intensification of social stratum differentiation. Consequently, the contradiction between the diversity of interest demands and the interest-centered contents will be further exacerbated. Similarly, the intensified differentiation of social stratum together with the diversity of interest demands will inevitably bring a number of representations of social mentality. Under such circumstances, the stimulus of sudden economic and political events on social mentality will lead to the formation and diffusion of negative public opinion. Moreover, the orientation of social mentality reflected in the network negative public opinion and the diffusion of public opinion will trigger new economic and political events. In short, the netizens' social mentality has a profound influence on the development of network opinion, while the expansion of negative public opinion will intensify the out of control of netizens' social mentality.

In recent years, the normalized development trend of network public opinion crisis originated from the emergence of various social contradictions. The exposure of social contradictions is first manifested through the bad social mentality. As a "barometer" for the stable development of the community, social mentality features popularity and diffusion, which is the premise of the network public opinion (especially the negative network public opinion). The emergency of the national table tennis team incident detonated the enthusiasm of the netizens. The rapid convergence of the network information results in the torrent of public opinion, if the appeal of netizens cannot be responded or their emotion cannot be comforted, it is prone to lead to offline community events. In this sense, the network public opinion can be described as the results of the netizens' externalized social mentality by means of "special" network language, network behavior. In the rapid development of the Internet today, the network has become the current distribution center for public emotion venting. The social emotions triggered, accumulated, evolved by the national table tennis team incident were spread and

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diffused in the Internet. The results of different opinions explored or discussed by the mass may be that the views of the minority of people are concealed, may also produce the phenomenon of group polarization, or the collision of a variety of views, resulting in the increasingly sensitive incident of the national table tennis team, and then result in the network public opinion crisis on this issue.

**Analysis of the Bad Social Mentality Caused by the National Table Tennis Team Incident**

The overall tone of social mood in our country is positive, but at the same time we should also pay attention to the profound adjustment of social interest relationship brought by the reform and opening up. The division and combination of social strata make the social mentality always in the process of continuous adjustment, adaptation, differentiation and change. Meanwhile, the constant social events lead to the decrease of social sentiment and control points. In social life, some "reverse social emotions" are worthy of vigilance. For example, people are pleased with issues which should be sympathized, admire the acts which should be angry with, praise behaviors which are supposed to be condemned. In the virtual community of Internet, the social mentality reflected by the network public opinion is the real focus on the real social mentality. The emotions revealed by netizens actually show their true inner world. The comprehensive view of the public opinion of the national table tennis team incident mainly reflects three bad social mentalities in the virtual network community.

The first is the poor social mentality which is lack of faith: Chinese scholars usually include the lack of faith as one of the "modernity" phenomena. At the same time of demonstrating the great achievements of "modernity" development, the reform and opening up also reminding of us that the development of "modernity" will lead to the risk of bad social mentality caused by the lack of faith. The tense relationship between "morality and reality" has been prominently externalized as the "questioning mentality" and "anxiety mentality". On one hand, the state of anxiety is originated from the excessive pressure of social competition, thus resulting in group anxiety. On the other hand, the prominent issue of livelihood will also trigger people's anxiety. After meeting the basic needs of food and clothing, the demand for security is becoming more and more prominent. Nowadays, the Chinese people are lack of consistent social identity on the legitimacy and integrity of the authoritative and competent departments, and have a strong sense of welfare damage, social injustice and questioning on the public power on many social issues. The danger of questioning the authority consists in that, at the same time of rejecting the public opinion guidance and social mobilization of the authority department, the gate for rumors and other false information is open on the other side. After the occurrence of the national table tennis team incident, to attract attention, some media people rejected the professional conduct of being neutral and objective to make biased report. In the absence of a clear understanding of the incident, some table tennis fans crazily forwarded gossips according to individual preferences.

The second is the bad social mentality in lack of knowledge, "the group is not good at reasoning, but eager to take action" is the main manifestation of bad social mentality in lack of knowledge. After the national table tennis team incident, the event of Liu Guoliang's retiring from the office continues to ferment. The network public opinion unanimously condemned the State Sports General Administration and the public opinion was guided to "bureaucracy." As described by the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, "under the set conditions and only under these conditions, a group of people will show new features. For people gathering in group, their feelings and thoughts will turn to the same direction, their conscious personality disappear and form a kind of group psychology." In the group psychology, people's intelligence is weakened, and their personality is weakened in correspondence. Heterogeneity is engulfed by homogeneity, the quality of unconsciousness prevails. This will cause everyone to think in the same direction, thus losing the ability to think independently and the ability to tell the true from the false.

The third is the confrontational and hostile bad social mentality. At present, this kind of bad social mentality is collectively embodied as hostility to the rich and the officials. The study of American
sociologist Merton's study on the hostility to the rich shows that it actually belongs to the dislocation of "reference group". And British scholar Townsend blamed the hostility to the official as "social exclusion." Wang Junxiu, an associate researcher of the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out that when people are dissatisfied with their current situation, these with similar feelings will produce similar thoughts and emotions, gradually form the polarization of groups and show a common response. After the national table tennis team incident, many netizens criticized Gou Zhongwen, director of the State Sports General Administration had little understanding of sports and made bland command; there are also media denounced that he acted like a fool and played politics, a typical outsider's administration. Some even asked him to take the blame and resign.\textsuperscript{12}

The Transformation Path of National Table Tennis Social Mentality

The rise of the Internet has put forward new challenges to the public opinion management and social sentiment. Modern social science research shows that, like rationality, emotions and feelings are one of the essential characteristics of human beings, and is the basic motivation of human behavior.\textsuperscript{13} Social mentality is the sum of emotional tone, social consensus and social value orientation of the whole society,\textsuperscript{14} it is a dynamic process and can evolve into a variety of "social acts" under the original motive of social interests.\textsuperscript{15} The emergence of social mentality is also a result of multiple factors. Social practice, social network and the study may form a social mentality. With the intensifying social simulation in a certain dimension, the social mentality will also gradually accumulate, and eventually change from a potential social mentality to social sentiments.\textsuperscript{16} The accumulation can only transform into social behavior by reaching a certain limit.\textsuperscript{17} The composition of these different properties will have different effects on social behavior. There are many channels of sentiment release in the community (new media is a channel of sentiment venting). And the degree of the smoothness of the venting channel determines the transformation results of the negative social sentiments. If there is no venting channel, social sentiments may evolve into extreme behaviors. But if the venting channel is smooth, the negative social sentiment may also be transformed into positive social sentiment and promote social development.

Figure 1. Social mentality evolution of national table tennis team incident.

In the virtual community of the Internet, the national table tennis team incident may build, generate, change and deposit social mentality, reflect the psychological mood and value orientation of virtual community members; at the meantime, the social mentality of this incident continues to provide
individual members with psychological field and public opinion background, thus potentially guide, induce and limit the individual's behavior. Therefore, the social mentality of the national table tennis team incident has a complex evolution mechanism. The bad social mentality of the incident added image stereotypes to the nature and parties of the event. Accordingly, these psychologies and emotions affect the rational judgment of netizens and prevail in the network social space, resulting in the netizens are controlled by irrational sentiments and form fixed emotions. With the development of the event, the psychological accumulation of emotions will become sensitive and anxious, if there is the forwarding and spread new events or some false statements, the long-depressed mood of many netizens will be lit immediately (As shown in Figure 1), therefore, whether the government or the relevant subject attaches importance to or timely intervenes in, making positive response and easing the degree of contradictions is the key to solve the problem. Accordingly, we can deduce the basic path of the social mentality transformation of the national table tennis transformation: it is impossible to eliminate the social emotions, but the "degree" of negative social emotions can be controlled via venting channels to reduce the conditions to transform into social behavior, thus controlling the negative social sentiments within a stable range.

Create a Network Environment for Equal Dialogue to Resolve the Network Public Opinion of the National Table Tennis Team Incident

In the 36th Collective Learning of Implementing Network Power Strategy in the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau held in 9 October, 2016, President Xi Jinping specially emphasized that leaders at all levels shall play the advantages of network communication interaction, experience and share, listen to public opinion, benefit the livelihood, solve people's worries and gather social consensus.” The president's speech is far-sighted, pointing out that the government is the dominant force in creating the network environment of "equal dialogue", which is an important way to solve the bad social mentality. In the era of Web 2.0, the psychology of netizens to master the right of discourse and the desire to participate in social management is stronger than ever. Neither dismissive attitude nor over-anxiety is in correct. Only by grasping the mainstream public opinion, understanding the characteristics of network group behaviors, the channel between "Chinese Dream" and group psychology can be connected.

The network public opinion of the national table tennis is both social expression and the stage of social game. In the face of the netizens' strong sentiments, the timely intervention and response of government is effective: first, the identification of the responsible parties ; second, reasonable definition of the responsibility division ; third, focusing on the network public opinions and making positive response to soothe and ease the public sentiment . China Table Tennis Association and National Table Tennis Men's Team made open apology on pulling out the game (2017-06-24);Liu Guoliang made open apology and explanation on the three table tennis player's pulling out from the game (2017-06-28);the China Table Tennis Association determined that the men's team pulling out from the forthcoming Australian Open Game, and announced in the official website that the main reason is the physical fatigue of the players due to continuous games and injuries (2017-06-29).The government's practices made the public aware of the sincerity and authority, thus looking at the problems in a more calm and objective way. The subsiding of the national table tennis team incident both maintains the image of the government and enhances the credibility of the government. The government's correct handling of the public opinion on the national table tennis team incident is a good example to effectively response to the public opinion crisis of large-scale sports events. At the same time, we should also see the negative impact of the incident network public opinion. The incident caused serious impact on the international image and integrity of the table tennis, which led to the spread of negative network public opinion to a certain extent. Different types of bad social mentalities have produced some negative impact on the aspects such as the rational behavior patterns under the context of rule of law.
In face of the current transition period of China, the dilemma of lack of norms and standard diversification and the negative impact caused to the healthy development of the society as a whole, the government should comply with the characteristics of network communication, grasp the initiative to guide the public opinion, actively create the network environment of "equal dialogue", which is conductive to resolve the negative network public opinion and maintain social stability.

References


Reference to a book:

[8] The word "modernity" is used to describe the state of "modernity". Habermas regards modernity as a program, an unfinished business. And Max Weber argued that "modernity" is planning human life by centering on "objective science, universal morality and law, and aesthetic art."

[9] The Pulling out of the National Table Tennis Is a Flap on the Face of the fans 2017-07-07


