

Analyzing the Impact of Social Media Account Types on Public Discourse and Perception

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Abstract: In times when social media is the main way of communicating public discourse, especially on environmental issues, this study looks into the different types of social media accounts that affect public perception and interaction. The research examines this phenomenon against the backdrop of Japan's decision to release nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean. It is about the interactions and emotional impacts of official and influencer accounts on Chinese social media platforms. The research uses a combination of a user survey, interaction data analysis, and case studies to get the patterns of user engagement and trust levels linked with each account type. The outcomes show that influencers usually involve users in a deeper way because of the personalization and emotional connection; thus, they are more likely to change their opinion. On the other hand, the official accounts, although reliable, do not usually provoke a strong emotional response because they are very formal and institutional in their communication style. News platforms are a compromise between being trustworthy and stabilizing public opinion by providing real and balanced information. Research demonstrates that the type of social media account greatly influences public engagement and discussion; therefore, tailoring strategic communication approaches to each account's strengths is crucial for effectively managing public opinion during environmental crises.

Keywords: Social Media Impact, Public Perception, Emotional Engagement, Communication Strategies, Environmental Controversy

1. Introduction

In the era of social media, the type of account publishing the information affects information dissemination and user reactions. The aforementioned statement highlights the diversity in the attitudes and responses of social media consumers to the same message, whether it originates from official or influencer accounts, as evidenced by varying levels of interaction data like likes, comments, and shares. This trend becomes more pronounced when hot topics and situations of public importance reach social media platforms. For instance, On August 24, 2023, Japan declared an action to unload purified nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean, which sparked a tremendous public response worldwide [1]. Considering the unique geographical proximity between China and Japan, this event has found a place for discussion on Chinese social media. The previous studies investigated some specific social media account types and their impact on information sharing. Based on social information processing theory (SIP), Tseng dedicated his

research to the role of account credibility in user trust and engagement [2]. Furthermore, Li conducted a multimethod study on user trust and credibility in terms of social media accounts [3].

Nevertheless, despite extensive research on the various sorts of social media accounts and their effects, the evolving nature of heated events and the dynamic social media landscape have presented new challenges for research. The radioactive wastewater release in Japan has generated distinct dynamics and consumer reactions, necessitating further investigation [1]. The characteristics and impact of official and influencer accounts in this specific context have not been thoroughly studied.

As a result, the goal of this study is to fill a research gap by investigating the following research question (RQ): What are the differences in the way official and influencer accounts interact, as well as the emotional effects they have when discussing the same contentious issue, such as Japan's nuclear waste discharge, on Chinese social media platforms? Examining this topic will provide insight into how the type of account influences user views, trust, and conduct in contentious situations. Understanding the discrepancies between official and influencer accounts allows social media managers and stakeholders to develop effective communication strategies and minimize the risk of damaging their reputation.

To address the research question, case study analysis was employed as an approach. The case study centers on the Japan nuclear wastewater discharge incident, providing a detailed examination of the phenomenon and its influence on user responses.

At the same time, a Chinese social media user survey will be administered to collect their perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions towards the contents that the official accounts and influencer accounts are rolling out. This study's findings will further contribute to the current literature regarding social media communication and provide some practical recommendations on how to control the information flow and users' interactivity during controversial events. The findings from this study will be beneficial to social media managers and policymakers in developing effective paths to trust, respect, and a positive user experience with respect to complex and sensitive topics.

2. Manuscript Preparation

Japan declared on August 24, 2023 that it would start releasing treated nuclear wastewater from Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. This move has led to heated debates and a lot of responses worldwide, with a focus in Chinese social media.

In order to further clarify people's attitudes and behaviors towards related events on different accounts, a questionnaire survey was conducted in this paper. The questionnaire contained questions about how often the subjects had the opportunities for extensive discussions, changes in their feelings toward subjects broadened as a result of these discussions, and also how individuals were influenced by the content they came across on Weibo. The survey was completed by the participants and the data were collected, from which a sample is analyzed to create a closer picture of social media's influence on behavior. Essentially, through the simple frequency analysis, the basic demographics such as gender and age of the respondents were count and the frequency of the responses to other surveys was also recorded.

After collecting the data, the results showed that with very high percentages of influencer and news platform posts receiving engagement on social media, there exists a clear discrepancy in the levels of trust, hence showing the complex manner by which account type shapes public discourse. The survey revealed that 77% of people in the chosen area preferred to remain within their own communities and to perform and patronize local businesses rather than go to a destination outside the area. They got the idea that media fashioned their real behaviors by reading social media discussions about the environmental problem and the number was 38%. Trustworthy account revealed that although official brand account almost equally trusts to some extent, the influencers had a swaying effect on public opinion with a slightly higher trust rank.

It is evident from the social media discourse that the nature of account whether it is an influencer account, official brand account, or news platform plays a great role in shaping audience perception and reaction. This prompted discussions by the accounts of about 61.64% of the Weibo users, with about 63.61% reporting a change in subjective attitude towards the wastewater discharge after the influencer's engagement. Particularly, the encounter raised an adverse attitude for 58.36% of the subjects. Frequency analysis of the report's trusts evaluates different account type trust levels, observing that in general, neutral views are the most prevalent where official brand accounts with moderate trust (42.95% is rated as "neutral"), and influencers slightly higher trust. Therefore, these influencers have the power to sway the public opinion more effectively.

3. Analysis

3.1. Reasons on Trust of Different Social Media Account Types

The variability of the impact of social media accounts on public perception is mainly due to the different functions these accounts perform in the dissemination of information. This influence is most visible in the context of sensitive issues like Japan's plan to discharge nuclear wastewater. On social media platforms, there are primarily three types of accounts: those of the influencers, the official brand accounts, and the news platforms. Influencers are masters at establishing personal relationships and emotionally creating stereotypes, therefore making complex issues more manageable for the public. The official brand accounts, which typically provide structured, formal information without a personal touch, tend not to elicit strong emotional reactions. The public regards news platforms as credible sources, demonstrating their reliability and helpfulness. They provide balanced and factual information, which helps moderate public reactions by providing detailed and reliable information.

The survey results of this research show very clearly how these different accounts influence user reactions. Influencers have a significant impact, as evidenced by the fact that 61% of survey participants reported a shift in their views to a more negative perspective after reading their content. This means that influencers are the best at organizing public opinion. On the other hand, the official brand accounts only managed to reach 62.3% of all the participants who had the same opinion; they simply did not express it as strongly as 58%. 69% indicates a negative shift in attitude. This lack of emotional engagement is a sign of the formal nature of their communication. On the other hand, news platforms have the potential to reach a larger audience (70.82%), with 61.64 percent of these respondents expressing a more positive or neutral attitude. This is a testimony to the trust and respect that these platforms have, which is of great importance in calming down public emotions during crises.

These account types' distinct impacts primarily stem from their varying levels of credibility. Tseng's research proves that credibility is a major factor in user engagement and trust on social media [2]. Furthermore, Li and Suh prioritize credibility in social media environments, asserting that credible accounts foster trust, thereby enhancing the depth and significance of interactions [3]. Regarding the Japanese nuclear wastewater problem, credibility is a crucial factor in shaping a public opinion that is more enlightened. News platforms, widely regarded as the most reliable, effectively shape public opinion, while influencers, despite their ability to attract attention, may lack the authoritative weight to alter views solely based on facts.

Every type of account has its own advantages and disadvantages. Influencers are the cause of fast and deep emotional reactions, but they may lack the depth of the facts. The official brand accounts are the ones that publish real and accurate information, but they usually do not manage to make a connection with the audience on an emotional level. The news channels, which are a mix of emotional engagement and factual depth, usually give the most comprehensive view and, hence, help to keep public sentiment stable during crises. This kind of understanding is critical for policymakers, social media managers, and public health officials trying to make social media work for them [4]. Through

the unique features of each account type, they are able to design complex communication strategies that not only provide the public with information but also control emotions during environmental and public health crises.

3.2. Reasons on Attractiveness of Different Social Media Account Types

The formal and bureaucratic communication style of official social media accounts often limits the level of trust and involvement among users. This style, though authoritative, does not always click with the general social media audience, which increasingly prefers personal touch and emotional involvement.

Official accounts appear to the public as very formal and cold in communication, which naturally results in a medium level of public trust. Even though these accounts typically provide accurate and trustworthy information, their lack of personal touch often hinders deeper communication with their users. People may view the official accounts' professional demeanor as dull and unappealing, resulting in a perceived disconnect between the account and its followers. This distance can be a barrier to the creation of the strong relational bonds that are the foundation for trust and engagement.

The SIP theory is the one that explains why the official accounts have problems. The theory suggests that users can compensate for the lack of social presence in formal and institutional computer-mediated communications by using more attractive and emotional language. Nevertheless, official communications usually do not have these personal and emotional elements that are so common in influencer communications. The research has revealed that personalization in online messaging can narrow the gap in social presence, thus dramatically increasing levels of trust and engagement [2].

3.3. Reasons on Emotional Connection

The emotional influence of various account types on user behavior is clear evidence of the vital role that emotional connection plays in successful social media communication. The influencer accounts have been known to create strong emotional relationships with their followers, in contrast to the official accounts, which communicate in a more detached style.

Influencers often employ narrative and storytelling methods to craft an impactful message for their followers. Influencers skillfully weave information into captivating narratives that elicit powerful emotional reactions and profoundly impact public sentiment and behavior. Society's response to sensitive issues, such as the discharge of nuclear wastewater, particularly reflects this. The involvement of influencers increases the likelihood of a change in their audience's attitudes and behaviors. When people emotionally connect to a message or cause, they are more likely to act or adopt new views.

The theory of emotional contagion provides a framework for how digital communication can transfer emotions and influence human reactions [5]. This theory outlines that emotions felt by one person can be "contagious" to others, who then become equally emotional. In the social media context, influencer-shared emotive content can elicit extreme emotional reactions from followers, which may later result in behavioral changes. Research works have provided substantial data to support this theory, demonstrating that influencers' emotive content can lead to increased emotional engagement and even behavioral changes among their followers [5, 6].

However, the official versions are less successful in evoking the same amount of emotion from the audience. These accounts' relatively formal and impersonal communication style may create an institutional barrier between the institution and the individual user. Official accounts are considered more reliable sources of information, but the absence of emotions makes them less powerful to influence public sentiment and behavior as influencer accounts. By adding elements of storytelling

and personal relationships to their communication while remaining professional, official accounts can make their messaging more emotional and enable better user engagement. Official accounts can humanize their communication and show empathy towards their audience, thus enabling them to create stronger emotional ties with their followers. This can be achieved by demonstrating personal life and other stories of those in the institution, using a less formal and relatable tone, or directly addressing the concerns and feelings of their audience. In doing so, official accounts can generate a more powerful presence on social media and effectively influence user behavior.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Reinforcement of interaction with Influencer's Profiles

In today's digital age, environmental advocacy on social media wields a huge influence on public opinion, especially in matters concerning the environment. The cognitive environment is overflowing with content, necessitating attention-grabbing content that not only responds positively to appropriate ideas but also inspires thoughtful actions. In this regard, influencers are specific people who have influence and endearment for their followers, and hence they can use their unique ability to engage their followers on a personal level as a means of effecting environmental advocacy.

Instead of celebrities, social media stars, also known as influencers, serve as healthy prospects for advertisers due to their close-knit lifestyles, the positive sentiments of their followers, and their perceived credibility in the public eye. In this regard, influencers acting wisely and casually at the same time help to bridge the gap between their audience and complex environmental issues [7].

Furthermore, by partnering with environmental organizations, influencers can ensure that the content is not only captivating, but also correct and relevant. This coordinated strategy intensifies outreach, increasing the impact of the messages and demonstrating greater environmental concern among the public. Eventually, what matters most for all of these initiatives is how closely influencers getting involved can stick to their personas, and how believable and trustworthy they are while bringing the brand along. Indeed, this serves as a potent tool to counteract and mitigate environmental issues stemming from digital influences that aim to alter public behavior and attitudes towards the environment.

4.2. Increasing the Credibility of Official Accounts

To address the attractiveness issue with the official accounts, consider rebranding them to convey a more informal and non-formal communication style. The stories lose the authoritative voice typical of the official communicative style and start establishing themselves as a communication tool capable of fostering better connections among the audience and being well-received by it.

Thus, one of the major issues that they should deal with is exhibiting a formal but friendly tone in their writing. The officials can incorporate real-life testimonies from former employees of brands and institutions into their narratives, extending beyond mere facts and figures. To humanize their communication and put forward the people behind the brand would be a way to get a customer-friendly and easy-going look. It will, in turn, appeal to the target group you have in mind.

Studies have shown that this approach improves the social presence of official accounts and builds trust and interaction among followers [8]. Using narratives and storytelling devices in the official version can make an official account much more engaging and memorable, which can, in turn, result in greater trust and a stronger bond with the respective public.

To achieve this, official accounts may think of employee spotlights, behind-the-scenes content, and user-generated stories that show the people behind the organization. These types of stories, in turn, make the institution more real and human. Consequently, they foster greater trust and participation [9].

4.3. Making the Emotional Effect Stronger by Content Strategy

Developing a content strategy that aligns with the emotional narratives of social media advocates while maintaining factual accuracy is crucial for maximizing the emotional power of social media. Balancing storytelling and fact enables organizations to produce content that achieves an emotional connection with the target audience, driving real engagement and behavioral change.

Using stories that help people agree with the facts is one effective way to reach this goal. By weaving data and statistics into a story arc, organizations can make difficult information easier and more memorable for their audience. This method enables them to connect the emotional void between mere facts and human stories, which motivate decisions and changes.

Studies have shown that narrative-based approaches work in user engagement and behavior influence [10]. An organization can achieve greater persuasive power by exploiting the force of storytelling, thereby ensuring that the audience remembers and acts upon the relevant information.

To execute this strategy, organizations must partner with experienced storytellers and content creators who can create emotionally relevant stories that represent their brand identity and communication goals. Carefully crafting such stories should emphasize the human face of the issues under consideration, while also providing clear and accurate information on the topic at hand.

5. Conclusion

The growing influence of social media on public opinion, particularly with controversial matters like Japan's decision to release nuclear waste into the Pacific Ocean, prompted this research study. The study focused on examining the distinct impacts of several types of social media accounts, including influencers, official brand accounts, and news sites, on the dissemination of information and user responses. The investigations were conducted using a combination of user surveys, analysis of interaction data, and case studies to see how different account types were impacting public discourse and perception. The findings unequivocally demonstrate the critical role of account type in shaping user participation, trust, and response in environmental issues.

The research fills the gap by proving how various social media account types affect public opinion in the case of environmental crises. It broadens the knowledge of social media dynamics by pointing out how personalization, formality, and perceived credibility affect user engagement and trust. On the other hand, it suggests that social media managers and policymakers should realize that a successful communication strategy should be based on the kind of account that is delivering the message. The strategies should make use of the emotional impact of influencers and the credibility of news platforms to create informed and balanced public debates. Furthermore, the official accounts should strive to show the human side of their communications in order to build trust and engagement.

The major limitation of this study is that it concentrates mostly on Chinese social media platforms, which may not be the real picture of global social media dynamics. Furthermore, the cultural differences between China and other countries may influence the emotional impact of the content, thereby limiting the global applicability of the findings.

To make the findings more general, future research should touch on a wider variety of social media platforms and cultural contexts. The next step would be to conduct research on the specific content strategies that can increase both engagement and factual accuracy.

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