

Differences between News Ethics and Public Ethics in Public Crisis Communication A Case Study of the 'Hebei Typhoon' Public Opinion Incident

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Abstract: In recent years, the gradual increase in public emergencies has had a significant impact on society. Against this backdrop, news media, as the "fourth estate" and disseminators of information, play a crucial role in public life. However, the question of how to adhere to journalistic ethics in reporting while also reflecting public ethics in dissemination remains unresolved. On one hand, news media are required to adhere to professional ethical norms in their reporting, including principles such as truthfulness, objectivity, and non-misleading practices. On the other hand, public ethics emphasize that media should prioritize social responsibility and public moral consciousness in their communication efforts, with the goal of safeguarding the interests of the public. Therefore, in the context of public crisis communication, news media must comprehensively consider the factors of journalistic ethics and public ethics. They must ensure the preservation of news value and the portrayal of factual truths while also paying attention to guiding public emotions and fostering positive impacts on society.

Keywords: Public Crisis; Journalism Ethics; Public Ethics; Ethical Deviation.

1. Introduction

The recent natural disaster caused by a typhoon in Zhuozhou, Hebei, has been a widely discussed public crisis event in society. This sudden public incident not only resulted in severe urban flooding in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region but also significantly impacted people's normal lives and livelihoods. In the process of responding to this event, the news media played a crucial role in timely and accurately disseminating disaster-related information, demonstrating the guiding role of journalism ethics in news reporting. Meanwhile, the public exhibited a high level of public ethics awareness in receiving and processing disaster information, adhering to principles of honesty, responsibility, and respect. This indicates the interdependence and mutual promotion of journalism ethics and public ethics in the communication of public crisis situations, both of which contributed to the effective dissemination of disaster information and the appropriate response.

However, an analysis of this public sentiment event reveals that there are still shortcomings in the adherence to the principles of journalism ethics and public ethics by the news media in their reporting on this natural disaster. Specifically, there were slight delays in conveying train suspension information, leading to the stranding of many passengers at stations or difficulties in ticket refunds. The initial efforts to console affected individuals appeared somewhat sluggish, and the depth of analysis regarding public issues could be improved. Furthermore, some media outlets were found to exaggerate and sensationalize the disaster, potentially causing readers to misconstrue the overall event. Therefore, various media entities need to be vigilant in avoiding improper sensationalism of disasters and strike a balance between journalism ethics and public ethics.

2. Definition and Characteristics of Public Crisis Communication

Public crisis communication refers to the process by which governments, media, businesses, social organizations, and various stakeholders use various communication channels to convey information, guide public opinion, and coordinate actions to address, alleviate, and mitigate the impact of sudden events such as natural disasters, accidents, and disease outbreaks. Its characteristics are as follows:

1) Suddenness: Public crisis events typically occur suddenly, necessitating prompt and rapid responses. Therefore, public crisis communication must possess the capability to respond swiftly, conveying information in a timely manner, and guiding the public to take the correct actions.

2) Urgency: Public crisis events often pose threats to public safety, property security, and social stability, requiring urgent measures. Consequently, public crisis communication must have a strong sense of urgency, disseminating information at the fastest possible speed and coordinating actions among various parties.

3) Diversity: Public crisis events encompass various types, including natural disasters, human-made accidents, disease outbreaks, and more. Therefore, public crisis communication must have the capacity to address multiple types of crises, employing different communication strategies and measures based on the specific crisis type.

4) Collaboration: Public crisis communication necessitates collaboration among various stakeholders, including government, media, businesses, and social organizations. Effective crisis management and mitigation rely on the coordinated efforts of all parties involved.

5) Longevity: The impact of public crisis events often persists over an extended period, requiring long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts. Consequently, public crisis communication must possess the ability to engage in

prolonged operations, continuously disseminating information, and guiding the public's attention toward the development and resolution of the crisis.

3. Meaning and Relationship between Journalism Ethics and Public Ethics

In the context of public crisis communication, journalism ethics and public ethics embody the moral responsibilities and behavioral guidelines of media practitioners and the broader societal public when confronted with sudden events. Journalism ethics primarily focus on the objectivity, truthfulness, and transparency of media reporting, emphasizing the professional integrity and ethical standards during the dissemination of information. Public ethics, on the other hand, encompass broader societal norms of behavior, including the responsibilities and collaborative roles of various entities such as governments, businesses, and social organizations in crisis response. When news media report on a particular event, adherence to journalism ethics requires the presentation of factual truth without exaggeration or distortion, ensuring the accuracy and authority of the content. Simultaneously, the general public, in communicating related information, should adhere to public ethics, avoiding the dissemination of false information and rumors, thus preventing societal panic and negative consequences. Furthermore, governments, businesses, and other stakeholders involved in crisis management should also adhere to public ethics by proactively taking measures to safeguard public safety and property, promptly releasing authoritative information, and maintaining effective communication with the media and the public to collectively address the crisis.

4. Overview of the "Hebei Typhoon" Public Sentiment Event

Analysis of the information trends from the sentiment monitoring system within the period of July 26th to August 12th reveals an average daily information dissemination rate of 99,688.39 messages. The peak occurred on August 4th, indicating noticeable fluctuations in public sentiment regarding the Hebei Typhoon event. Initially, public attention was relatively low, but as the typhoon warning was issued, interest surged to 21,048 messages on July 27th. Subsequently, on July 28th, it reached its zenith, with related information totaling 103,984 messages, reflecting significant concern about the typhoon's landfall and its impact. Over the following days, public sentiment continued to fluctuate at a high level, with minor variations but generally maintaining a high level of interest, particularly peaking at 214,815 messages on August 2nd. Thereafter, the sentiment gradually stabilized but retained a notable level of attention, declining noticeably to 42 messages by August 12th. In summary, the sentiment trend exhibited a series of peaks and troughs following the event's outbreak, reflecting sustained public interest and discussion about the typhoon disaster and related responses.

4.1. Government, Media, and Public Responses

1) Government: Emphasis on Proactive Disaster Response

In this event, keywords related to "government" underscored the government's response measures and concerns during the flood disaster. Frequent appearances of keywords such as "typhoon," "Hebei," and "Du SuiRui" in

public sentiment reflected sustained public attention towards the typhoon and the disaster. Additionally, regional keywords such as Beijing, Tianjin, Henan, Fujian, Baoding City, and keywords related to flood prevention, water management, and disaster relief, such as flood prevention, water management, disaster relief work, and disaster relief funds, indicated significant attention towards government's disaster prevention and relief efforts. Some keywords also touched upon disaster impact, rescue operations, and disaster forecasting, such as heavy rain, intense rainfall, emergency, intensity, and high risk, reflecting the focal points of government and societal concern. Overall, government-related keywords indicated a proactive stance of government departments in responding to the typhoon disaster, showing their concern for public safety and the implementation of measures. These keywords played a crucial role in guiding and drawing attention within public sentiment.

2) Media: Emphasis on President Xi Jinping's High-Level Attention

Media responses to the Hebei Typhoon event showcased President Xi Jinping's high-level concern and leadership role. Major media outlets reported President Xi Jinping's important instructions, emphasizing his clear requirements and concerns regarding flood prevention and disaster relief work. Media reports highlighted President Xi Jinping's call for Party members and cadres to take the lead, for grassroots Party organizations to play their roles, and to ensure that the people feel supported. Furthermore, President Xi Jinping demanded an all-out effort in searching for missing and trapped individuals, reducing casualties, closely monitoring flood-prone areas, implementing flood prevention measures, and fully guaranteeing the safety of people's lives and property. Additionally, media reports focused on the typhoon's path and intensity, predicting that Typhoon "Du SuiRui" would move to the northeastern part of the South China Sea and emphasized the potential disaster risks posed by heavy rainfall. Meteorological experts specifically warned about the extremity and high disaster risk associated with heavy rainfall. In summary, media centered on President Xi Jinping's crucial instructions, underscoring the leadership role of the Party and the government in flood prevention and disaster relief work, as well as their profound concern for the safety of people's lives and property. The reports also included information about the typhoon's path and meteorological risks but primarily focused on the government's responses, instructions, and demands.

3) Public: Expressing Wishes and Encouragement for the Affected People

Internet users displayed a variety of emotions and concerns in response to the Hebei Typhoon event. Firstly, some expressed support and encouragement for the affected areas with phrases such as "Zhuzhou, keep going," conveying their concern for the disaster and well-wishes to the affected people. Secondly, certain topics such as "Typhoon Du SuiRui" gained popularity, with internet users expressing concern about the approaching typhoon and reflections on the value of life during times of crisis. They emphasized the significance of values in moments of adversity. Additionally, some redirected their attention towards celebrity topics, such as "Xiao Zhan's Weibo" and "Yang Yang's Yilu Asking for Directions," showcasing the influence of celebrity philanthropic actions and life reflections. Some internet users also expressed mixed emotions regarding inland regions; while the typhoon caused some societal losses, they

acknowledged the cooling effect it brought. Moreover, there was attention given to social philanthropic actions, such as donations by the Alibaba Public Welfare Foundation, reflecting societal unity in disaster response. Overall, internet users exhibited diverse emotions, including concern, apprehension, well-wishes, and contradictions, demonstrating their interest in and contemplation of the disaster and societal issues within public sentiment.

4.2. Reflections of Journalism Ethics and Public Ethics in the Public Sentiment Event

By comparing the Beijing typhoon and Hebei typhoon events, it is evident that both incidents garnered widespread social attention, resulting in a substantial volume of postings and interactions within the monitoring period. Social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and mobile apps were the primary channels for information dissemination. However, differences between the two events are notable. Firstly, there is variation in the scale of public sentiment. In terms of indicators such as total posts, the number of sensitive information mentions, and interaction volume, the Beijing typhoon generated a larger scale of public sentiment. Secondly, there is variation in emotional tendencies. Concerning sensitive information, the Beijing typhoon had a slightly higher number of sensitive information mentions, whereas the Hebei typhoon had a relatively lower number. This may reflect differing emotional tendencies toward the typhoons in the two regions. In conclusion, although both events garnered significant attention in society, differences in regional factors and the impact of the disasters led to variations in the scale and emotional tendencies of public sentiment.

In this calamity caused by the typhoon, compared to the Beijing area, the media's initial neglect of the Hebei region in the early stages of public sentiment development can be seen as a manifestation of "news discrimination," an ethical misconduct phenomenon. While this "discrimination" may not necessarily be intentional on the part of the media, it may be more of a subconscious cognitive bias. However, media outlets should strive to avoid such ethical issues in disaster reporting. After all, in the face of disasters, smaller cities are often the most easily overlooked, and marginalized groups are more likely to be left isolated and helpless. The media's responsibility is to "empower the powerless." The issue of imbalanced reporting not only pertains to the presence or absence of news discrimination but also encompasses the balance of reporting content and types. During disaster events, people face both a substantial information gap and increased information demand, as well as heightened panic and anxiety. Therefore, in disaster reporting, achieving a balance between conveying information and providing emotional guidance is of utmost importance.

The mutual aid network formed by the connection between official and civilian entities is a manifestation of interactive behavior between the media and the public. In the case of the Hebei Typhoon natural disaster, text and image-based news played a role in promptly disseminating information. People, through rapidly spreading messages on the internet, were able to see and grasp the latest information about the disaster situation, rescue efforts, and rescue hotlines. The dissemination of information by official media not only increased the media visibility of the Hebei region but also made it possible for the affected population to receive more

assistance. Citizen journalism, on the other hand, extended the reach of official entities through individual portals and social media. It allowed individuals scattered across different regions and social circles to discover areas overlooked by mainstream media. The disaster in Zhuozhou, Hebei, became visible to people through the dissemination and sharing by these individual nodes in citizen journalism and the internet, thus increasing the likelihood of receiving attention and coverage from official sources. Additionally, during the heavy rain in Hebei, the widespread use of mutual aid documents played a crucial role. This media-mediated social governance and social rescue were established and functioned through the intertwined interactions between official media and individual civilians. The information spread by official media not only increased the visibility of various affected areas but also promoted the establishment of civilian mutual aid documents. Vital information, such as rescue hotline numbers, was also integrated by official media and continued to spread with the help of their discourse resources. The dissemination of mutual aid documents by civilian organizations and the spread of rescue information were the most critical aspects of achieving media-mediated social rescue. These seemingly insignificant individuals spontaneously aggregated their strength, using socially conscious altruistic actions to collectively resist the torrents of their times.

5. Differences Between Journalism Ethics and Public Ethics

While journalism ethics and public ethics fall within distinct ethical domains, both serve as crucial standards for maintaining societal order and promoting moral standards. These two ethical frameworks have their theoretical foundations rooted in different disciplinary areas and possess distinct value systems. Journalism ethics draw primarily from communication studies, journalism, and ethics, emphasizing the ethical principles that journalists should adhere to during the process of information dissemination. Public ethics, on the other hand, draw wisdom from political science, philosophy, and sociology, focusing on the ethical conduct of individuals in the public sphere and emphasizing values such as fairness and democracy. Despite the differences in their theoretical foundations, journalism ethics and public ethics exhibit characteristics of mutual permeation and mutual promotion in practice. In communication activities, journalists not only need to adhere to journalism ethics but also pay attention to the norms of public ethics to better serve society. Conversely, in the public sphere, individuals practicing public ethics should also be aware of the principles of journalism ethics to correctly perceive and evaluate news reports.

5.1. Differences in Implementing Entities

Firstly, journalism ethics are primarily implemented by news media and journalism professionals, while public ethics have a wider range of implementers, including government, businesses, social organizations, and individuals. Secondly, the implementation of journalism ethics is mainly evident in processes such as news gathering, editing, and publishing, whereas the implementation of public ethics permeates throughout public life. Furthermore, the entities responsible for implementing journalism ethics need to adhere to a series of professional codes and norms, while those responsible for implementing public ethics must comply with a series of social norms and ethical guidelines, such as honesty, respect

for others, and environmental protection. Therefore, due to differences in implementing entities, the scope and objectives of these two ethical frameworks also differ. Journalism ethics primarily aim to ensure the professional ethics and behavioral standards of journalists, while public ethics aim to maintain the moral order and values of society as a whole. However, both share common ground in promoting the progress and development of human society, as well as enhancing the moral qualities and cultural standards of individuals.

5.2. Differences in Practical Processes

Due to differences in implementing entities, there are certain variations in the practical processes of these two ethical frameworks. In the field of journalism, practitioners need to adhere to a series of ethical requirements consistent with journalism ethics to ensure the authenticity of news reporting. However, in practice, they often face various ethical dilemmas and challenges. Therefore, how to maintain professional ethics while meeting the information needs of the public becomes an important research topic in journalism ethics. Public ethics primarily focus on the dissemination of public interests and societal values. In the flood relief tasks in Zhuozhou, Hebei, the public was more concerned with public issues behind the event, such as improving the city's drainage system and enhancing emergency rescue mechanisms. Compared to public ethics, journalism ethics have distinct industry-specific characteristics. Therefore, journalists should simultaneously focus on societal hot topics and public affairs. They should report objectively, respect individual privacy, and avoid infringing upon the rights of others. Additionally, journalism ethics require practitioners to maintain an independent and impartial attitude, free from political, commercial, or other influences, to ensure the credibility and authority of news reporting. In the process of public crisis communication, the adherence to ethical requirements and their implementation not only helps maintain the image and reputation of the news industry but also significantly contributes to the overall ethical development and progress of society.

5.3. Differences in Value Systems

In the journalism industry, journalism practitioners are required to follow journalism ethics, pursue factual reporting, and emphasize the independence and impartiality of news. In contrast, members of the public are expected to adhere to public ethics, strive for social morality, civic conscience, and ethical standards, emphasizing that news should serve the public and promote societal progress. This value system difference manifests in practice, where journalism practitioners tend to focus on the facts and truths of news events, while the public emphasizes the impact of news events on society and individuals, suggesting relevant recommendations and improvements. This difference does not imply a complete disparity in values between journalism practitioners and the public but rather underscores the differing emphases in their practices. In fact, journalism ethics and public ethics are intertwined in the field of journalism.

From the divergence in values between journalism ethics and public ethics, it is evident that journalism practitioners primarily prioritize factual reporting, while the public emphasizes personal viewpoints and emotional expression. This divergence can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings between journalism practitioners and the public in news

reporting. Journalists may perceive the viewpoints of the public as insufficiently objective, while the public may view the reporting by journalists as lacking comprehensiveness and depth. However, this difference is not always negative. In certain situations, the value system difference between journalism practitioners and the public can promote diversity and depth in news reporting. For example, journalists can better understand and report on certain news events by leveraging the voices of the public. Simultaneously, the public can gain a better understanding and spread awareness of certain news events through professionally reported news.

6. Conclusion

In the analysis of the differences between journalism ethics and public ethics, it becomes evident that news media carry a significant responsibility and role in public crisis communication. Only by adhering to journalism ethics while better fulfilling their public duties can news media effectively contribute to public crisis events by providing valuable information and services to the public. Addressing the differences between these two ethical frameworks requires ongoing communication and collaboration. Journalism practitioners need a deeper understanding of the perspectives and viewpoints of the public to enhance their reporting and interpretation of public statements and actions. Similarly, the public also needs a better understanding of the operational models and industry standards of the news industry to facilitate better connections and interactions with the media.

However, in practical operations, conflicts can arise between journalism ethics and public ethics in news reporting. For example, in the pursuit of news timeliness, media outlets may overlook accuracy and fairness in reporting. While emphasizing public interests and moral values, media may sometimes neglect the objectivity of the events themselves. Therefore, it is essential to integrate journalism ethics and public ethics, striving for a balance between the two while fully harnessing their respective roles to achieve better communication outcomes. Additionally, governments, businesses, and the general public also bear the responsibility of supervising and promoting the adherence of news media to the principles of journalism ethics and public ethics, thus fostering a conducive public opinion environment for building a harmonious society.

In conclusion, in the realm of public crisis communication, journalism ethics and public ethics are interconnected and mutually influential. Together, they constitute the ethical cornerstone for crisis management, providing crucial guidance for various stakeholders, including the media, government, and businesses. Only through the adherence to corresponding ethical norms can all parties effectively respond to crises and uphold societal stability and sustainable development.

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