Analysis of Age and Gender Differences in the Chongqing "Fat Cat" Incident

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Abstract: Taking the Chongqing "Fat Cat" incident as the starting point, this study aims to analyse the behaviour pattern of opinion leaders in news events, explore its impact on public opinion and cognition. The present study collects data through questionnaires, and analyses the public's attention to the event, initial attitude, cognitive change, etc. from the perspective of age and gender differences. The study found that young people (especially 18-25-year-olds) pay attention to events early, have deep emotional investment, change their attitudes, and rely more on the comments of online opinion leaders and family members; men are more inclined to obtain news through TikTok based on factual evidence, and have less suspicion of potential manipulation; women are more sceptical about "fat cats", feeling sister's speech and emotional content more sensitive, believing that the reversal of the incident has a greater impact on social trust. This research provides a reference basis for public opinion monitoring, crisis public relations and other fields.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of information explosion, KOLs play an increasingly critical role in news dissemination, public opinion guidance, and shaping public cognition. Analyzing their behavioral patterns helps comprehend the mechanisms of opinion formation, predict trends in public discourse, and provide references for relevant authorities in formulating strategies for opinion guidance. However, existing researches on KOL predominantly focuses on their influences and characteristics, with limited empirical studies on their behavioral patterns, particularly in the context of news events.

This study aims to address this gap and enrich the theoretical framework of KOL. Additionally, the findings can be applied to fields such as public opinion monitoring, crisis public relations, and brand marketing, assisting institutions in better identifying, guiding, and leveraging the influence of opinion leaders.This study is based on the "Chongqing Fat Cat Incident": "Fat cat (Mr. Liu)" committed suicide into a river, and he accused his girlfriend "Tan Zhu" obtaining money under false pretences before his death; the KOL "Fat Cat's sister" quoted this point and carried out cyber-violence to Tan Zhu including making up rumours and exposing Tan's privacy. Eventually, the police convinced most of the discussions on Tan are fake. Meanwhile, the authors analyze the "behavioral patterns of KOL in events," addressing the following key research questions:

1.What are the behavioral patterns and distinctive characteristics of opinion leaders in news events?

2.How do the dissemination patterns of opinion leaders and audience cognition evolve?

3.Can opinion leaders influence public opinion? If so, through what specific behaviors?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The authors conducted a search for relevant academic papers on this topic. On Google Scholar, there are approximately 7,500 journal articles. When limiting the searches to publications before 2021, only around 1,200 articles remained, indicating a decline in academic attention to this subject.

The author first reviewed several research papers on opinion leaders. The following section presents a comprehensive analysis of the reviewed studies.

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In the study by Wu, Zhao, and Gao（Wu et al. 2019), the researchers examined the identifications and influences of KOL on Weibo during the 2018 vaccine incident, incorporating the life cycle characteristics of public opinion events. The event was divided into four stages: outbreak (initial surge in public discourse), heated discussion (sustained debate with participation from key opinion leaders (KOLs)), decline (controlled moderation of discourse), and residual (stabilized attention with focus on official investigations). The study integrated user attributes, network features, behavioral traits, and textual features to construct a comprehensive indicator system, mitigating biases from single variables. Methodologies included user feature extraction, cluster analysis (using K-means algorithm), and time-lag correlation analysis to assess the impact of opinion leaders' emotional tendencies on public sentiment. Findings revealed distinct differences in public opinion hotspots and network structures across stages, with media-type opinion leaders maintaining consistent influence while individual self-media and unverified users exhibited stage-dependent variability. Neutral and negative sentiments from opinion leaders preceded public sentiment shifts, whereas positive sentiments lagged. Other researchers also concentrate on the impact of KOL on Weibo as well (Liu, 2020; Ma, 2022). In addition, Previous studies also examine the impact of KOL on public opinion (Chen & Wang, 2023; Nian & Zhang, 2005; Shen et al., 2023; Yu, 2018). Compared to other studies, this study offered a more holistic approach to identifying opinion leaders, particularly grassroots influencers, and explored their role in opinion guidance. Limitations included a single-case focus and lack of model validation across diverse public opinion events, suggesting future research should expand to multi-event, multi-platform analyses for greater generalizability.

Wang and Long （ Wang & Long, 2024) investigated KOL on Douyin (TikTok) and their political commentary videos, employing speech and text sentiment analysis to empirically assess the impact of opinion leaders' emotional tendencies on netizen sentiment. Control variables included gender, account type, follower count, video themes, and user interactions. A convolutional neural network (CNN) and panel regression model were used for analysis. Results indicated an inverted U-shaped relationship between opinion leaders' emotional tendencies and netizen sentiment, with no significant effect on sentiment polarization. Heterogeneity tests showed male opinion leaders and hosts exerted stronger emotional influence, while intermediate netizen groups were more susceptible. The study innovatively combined speech and text sentiment analysis, providing nuanced insights for online public opinion governance. Limitations involved imperfect sentiment classification accuracy, limited temporal scope, and unaddressed confounding factors, warranting future research with expanded samples, optimized models, and extended timelines.

Xiong and He (Xiong & He, 2013) analyzed Weibo repost networks under the “tiered electricity pricing” topic, proposing an improved Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search（HITS） algorithm (HITS-BOWR) incorporating repost frequency and follower count as weights to enhance opinion leader identification. Social network analysis via University of California at Irvine NETwork （ UCINET ） revealed that opinion leaders occupied critical nodes in information dissemination, with centrality scores strongly correlated to follower counts. The study addressed limitations of traditional PageRank algorithms in microblog contexts but overlooked sentiment analysis and broader topic validation. Future research could incorporate additional weighting metrics and expand topic coverage.

Liu and Liu (Liu & Liu,2017) studied community network structures and opinion leader traits on Zhihu (Quora-like platform), focusing on 1,765 users discussing vaccines. Social network analysis (SNA) via UCINET demonstrated sparse network topology with rapid information diffusion, where opinion leaders—often professionals—leveraged high-quality contributions to sustain influence. Findings aligned with existing literature on knowledge-sharing platforms but were constrained by single-topic sampling and cross-sectional study. Longitudinal multi-topic studies were recommended.

The present study derives the following perspectives:1. Factors Influencing Public Opinion in Emergencies:

All five studies underscored the role of KOLs in shaping public opinion. Wang Yijun and Long Miaomiao highlighted their dual function in information dissemination and opinion guidance, with emotional tendencies directly impacting netizen sentiment. Wu Jiang et al. further analyzed stage-specific behavioral patterns in healthcare incidents, while Xiong Tao and Liu Yunong emphasized network centrality. Collectively, opinion leaders' emotional valence, activity levels, network position,

and topic relevance were identified as key determinants.

The studies consistently demonstrated that opinion leaders significantly sway public sentiment during crises. Wang Yijun's inverted U-model suggested moderated positivity optimizes influence, whereas Wu Jiang's time-lag analysis confirmed emotional leadership. Limitations included narrow scopes and unvalidated models, calling for cross-platform, multi-event validation.

3 METHOD

3.1 Research Subjects and Samples

The research subjects are Internet users who are over 18 years old and have known or been exposed to the "Chongqing Fat Cat Incident". The questionnaire is distributed in the form of questionnaire stars through social platforms (such as WeChat groups, QQ groups, etc.), and the data collection time is from March to April 2025. Using the convenient sampling method, a total of 235 valid questionnaires were finally obtained. The samples covered multiple age groups and educational levels to meet the needs of follow-up analysis.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consists of five parts:

1. Basic information: including age group, gender, education, frequency of social media use, etc., a total of 4 items;

2. Information contact and the influence of opinion leaders: such as whether the opinion leader's speech changes his views, the main role of opinion leaders, etc., a total of 6 items;

3. Factors affecting the behaviour of opinion leaders: such as which opinions leaders' behaviours the respondents think are the most influential (such as publishing evidence, using emotional language, emotional guidance, etc.), a total of 2;

4. Changes in audience attitudes and cognitions: such as attitudes in the face of reverse news, whether they have been misled, whether they have been influenced by certain remarks, etc., a total of 4 items;

5. The causes and coping strategies of reversal news: for example, the interviewees think that the reasons for the reversal, whether it affects social trust, how to reduce the negative impact, etc., a total of 3 items.

Most of the questions are single-choice or multiple-choice questions. Some questions reflect cognitive changes and behavioural changes, and are analysed in the form of classification/ordered variables.

3.3 Data Collection Process

The questionnaire was released through the "Questionnaire Star" platform from March to April 2025. The questionnaire link was spread on social media, and the respondents voluntarily participated and filled in anonymously to ensure the authenticity and privacy of the answers.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

The data is analysed using questionnaire stars and spssau, mainly including:

Descriptive statistical analysis: statistics on the basic characteristics of samples and the frequency distribution of core variables;

Cross-analysis: explore the relationship between age, gender and other background variables and cognitive attitudes;

The above analysis methods ensure that the research conclusions are scientific, systematic and logical.

4 RESULT

4.1 Differences in Attention to the Incident

4.1.1 Age Characteristics

The group aged 18 and below demonstrated the highest level of attention, with 100% showing interest in the incident. Moreover, 36.36% followed the case during its early stages (the death of "Fat Cat" and the online rumor of deception), significantly higher than other age groups.The 19–25 age group also showed high overall attention (94.59%), yet 5.41% did not pay attention to the incident—making it the only young group with a noticeable proportion of disinterested respondents.

Individuals aged 26–35 had the highest proportion of sustained attention throughout the incident (10.91%), with particular interest in the reversal phase (official police statement clarifying the fraud rumors), at 29.09%.

4.1.2 Gender Differences

Males showed slightly higher attention than females (98.61% vs. 96.70%). However, both genders focused most intensely on the early stage of the incident (males 35.42% vs. females 35.16%).

4.2 Initial Attitudes Toward the Incident

4.2.1 Age Characteristics

Younger respondents were more sympathetic toward Fat Cat. Among those aged 18 and below, 75.76% believed Fat Cat was a victim, which was higher than the average of other age groups (65%).Older respondents showed a more rational approach. In the group aged 46 and above, 9.09% chose to "wait for the official statement," higher than younger groups.

4.2.2 Gender Differences

Both genders demonstrated a high level of agreement: approximately 66% of males and 65.93% of females believed Fat Cat was a victim, indicating minimal gender impact.

4.3 Cognitive Shifts after the Incident Reversal

4.3.1 Age Characteristics

Younger individuals were more likely to change their views. In the group aged 18 and below, 51.52% "completely changed their opinion," significantly higher than the 27.45% in the 36–45 age group.The 26–35 age group was most sensitive to the reversal: 60% chose "completely changed opinion," and they relied more on the official police statement (38.18%) as the basis for judgment.

4.3.2 Gender Differences

Males were more accepting of the reversal: 55.56% "completely changed opinion," compared to 50.55% of females. Females expressed more doubt about Fat Cat's sister's statements (23.08% vs. 20.83% for males).

4.4 Influence of Opinion Leaders

4.4.1 Age Characteristics

Younger people relied more on online influencers. In the 19–25 age group, 59.46% believed online influencers had the greatest influence, higher than the 46 and above group (68.18%).Among those aged 18 and below, 42.42% were most influenced by emotional language.

4.4.2 Gender Differences

Males placed more trust in factual evidence (39.58% vs. 32.97% for females), while females were more sensitive to emotional guidance (41.76% vs. 40.97% for males).

4.5 Unique Impact of Fat Cat's Sister

4.5.1 Age Characteristics

The 36–45 age group was most affected: 66.67% initially believed the fraud story due to Fat Cat's sister's statements, a significantly higher rate than other groups.Younger individuals were more skeptical: 20.27% of the 19–25 age group said they did not follow her statements.

4.5.2 Gender Differences

Females paid more attention to statements by family members: 30.77% believed such statements affected their perception, higher than males (20.83%).

4.6 Impact of Opinion Reversal on Social Trust

4.6.1 Age Characteristics

The group aged 18 and below showed the lowest trust level: 63.64% believed the reversal reduced social trust, much higher than the 36–45 age group (37.25%).Older respondents were more pessimistic: 59.09% of those aged 46 and above believed trust had declined.

4.6.2 Gender Differences

Females were more sensitive: 54.95% believed social trust declined due to the reversal, compared to 45.83% of males.

4.7 Core Findings

For the young age group, they paid attention early, were deeply emotionally involved, and experienced strong changes in attitude after the reversal. However, they were also more reliant on online influencers and family members' statements. For males, they were more likely to use Douyin to access news (69.44% vs.

60.44% for females), were more easily convinced by factual evidence, but showed lower levels of suspicion toward potential manipulation (29.86% vs. 47.25% for females). For females, they were more sensitive to statements made by Fat Cat's sister and emotionally charged content, and they perceived a greater impact on social trust following the reversal.

5 CONCLUSION

Significant age differences: There are obvious differences in the attention, attitudes, cognitive changes and influencing factors of different age groups in terms of the Chongqing "Fat Cat" incident. Young people pay attention to the event early and have deep emotional investment. After the reversal, their attitude changes greatly, and they are easily influenced by the voice of online opinion leaders and families. The older group will be more rational than the young group, and show different focusses and attitudes in the development of events.

There are obvious gender differences: boys and girls are different in terms of information acquisition channels, the degree of dependence on the evidence released, the degree of attention to the "fat cat" sister's remarks, and the reaction dependence on social trust affected by the reversal of events. Men get more news from TikTok and believe in factual evidence; women are more sensitive to emotional content and the remarks of the "fat cat" sister, and believe that the reversal of the incident has a greater impact on social trust.

The research is of great significance: The results of this research provide an important reference for the official monitoring of public opinion, the crisis of brand public relations, and the authenticity of online information by netizens. Relevant institutions can formulate more targeted strategies according to the characteristics of different ages and gender groups to effectively guide public opinion, respond to crises, control the spread of public opinion, and control false public opinion.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order

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