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Analysis of the phenomenon of network "moral judgement" and response strategy

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Abstract

With the rapid progress of Internet technology, the trend of "moral judgement" in cyberspace is becoming more and more significant, which has far-reaching and complicated effects on the protection of individual rights and interests, the maintenance of social peace and the guarantee of the impartiality of the judicial system. This article aims to analyse the phenomenon of online "moral judgment" from the unique perspective of ideological and political pedagogy, focusing on the ambiguity and internal conflict of online norms, the anonymity of the online environment and the effect of group behaviour it triggers, as well as the mapping of class conflict in cyberspace during the stage of social transformation. On this basis, the article further proposes a series of targeted response strategies and measures, aiming to provide a solid theoretical cornerstone and practical guidance for the harmonious construction of network ecology.

Keywords: moral judgement; online public opinion; phenomenon analysis; response strategy

1. Introduction

Currently, despite significant achievements in building a positive online ecosystem, moral confusion pervades the cyberspace, giving rise to numerous instances of online "moral judgments" that transcend factual bases and legal frameworks. These phenomena not only disrupt public value recognition and judgment but also pose severe challenges to the fair execution of laws, thereby profoundly threatening social stability and harmony.

2. The Concept of Online "Moral Judgments"

2.1 Online Moral Judgments vs. Cyberbullying

From an ethical perspective, online "moral judgments" refer to the moral evaluations made by internet users regarding the actions of individuals involved in specific incidents through various means such as comments, likes, and shares. This form of moral evaluation is a typical manifestation of moral judgment from a bystander perspective. Such moral judgments create a

powerful moral drive within public opinion, compelling relevant individuals to adhere to normative ethical standards. When these "moral judgments" overstep boundaries and infringe upon others' legitimate rights, potentially escalating into aggressive actions, their negative consequences may become evident. The concepts of "online moral judgment" and " Cyberbullying " are often confused in practice and need to be clearly distinguished. In simple terms, the differences between online moral judgments and online violence primarily lie in quantity, motivation, and methods of implementation. Cyberbullying typically involves a large number of internet users who participate collectively, forming a certain scale, whereas online moral judgment represents individual evaluations of news events conducted by a single person on the internet. From the perspective of the motives of the actors, cyberbullying originates from an intention to threaten or harm specific targets through online media. In contrast, participants in online moral judgment are more often motivated by personal emotional venting, lacking subjective cognition and failing to foresee the potential harm their words may inflict on the targeted individuals. When examining the means employed by these actors, cyberbullying tends to adopt extreme and aggressive methods, whereas online moral judgment relies more on expressing opinions and verbal criticisms. Given that its motives are gentler than those of cyberbullying, the means adopted by online moral judgment are correspondingly softer and more indirect.It can be said that the essence of online violence is group polarization triggered by moral judgments. Online violence is a form of moral misconduct, with its fundamental mechanism being what Locke referred to as "the law of reputation," which essentially acts as a moral constraint.

With the popularity of social media platforms, the phenomenon of moral judgments has intensified, becoming a prominent feature of the online space. Particularly during the widespread dissemination of socially controversial events, the diversity and incompleteness of information sources often lead to biased and extreme evaluations by netizens, potentially misguiding public understanding of the truth.

2.2 Online Moral Judgments vs. Moral Judgment

Moral judgment, as an introspective and evaluative activity, is rooted in the internalized moral norms and principles of individuals. It systematically assesses external events, individual behaviors, and sequences of group actions to determine whether these actions align with established moral standards and to what extent they achieve this alignment.

When an event suddenly enters the public eye, every individual concerned with the matter forms a moral judgment at a subconscious level. The construction of this judgment is deeply influenced by various factors, including personal growth trajectories, educational background, cultural literacy, and value systems. Even when faced with the same event, differing perspectives and positions among individuals can lead to entirely different conclusions. People have the right to hold their opinions and express their value judgments in appropriate contexts. Public opinion not only profoundly impacts the event itself but can also evaluate the moral aspects of events or individuals; this evaluation is what we refer to as "moral judgment." Such judgments often carry strong public sentiment, significantly influencing how the public perceives events or individuals and potentially affecting the development of events and the fates of individuals involved.

3. Impacts of Online "Moral Judgments"

3.1 Impact on Individual Psychology and Behavior

The phenomenon of online moral judgments exerts a profound influence on individuals, which cannot be overlooked. On a psychological level, online moral judgments, due to their intense emotional nature, impose immense psychological pressure on those being judged. This emotional style of judgment not only directly harms the mental health of the judged individuals but may also indirectly trigger a crisis of social trust, posing potential threats to social harmony and stability.

From an individual perspective, online moral judgments often compel those being judged to take extreme measures. In recent years, a series of extreme cases driven by online violence have been shocking. The frequency of such extreme behaviors reveals the negative directional influence of online moral judgments on individual behavior. Furthermore, online moral judgments harbor the risk of inducing moral cognitive confusion in individuals. The anonymity and virtual nature of online spaces render moral standards ambiguous and prone to conflict. Individuals caught in the vortex of online moral judgments often feel perplexed about what constitutes justice and what is erroneous, leading to moral dilemmas in real life. This confusion in moral cognition not only erodes the foundation of individual moral judgment but may also subtly undermine the overall moral fabric of society, resulting in far-reaching negative effects.

3.2 Impact on Social Opinion and Moral Concepts

The impact of online moral judgments on the domain of moral concepts undoubtedly represents a significant challenge faced by modern society. When individuals express moral judgments on online platforms, they often lack direct face-to-face interaction and immediate feedback, weakening the constraints of traditional social norms on individual behavior. For instance, actions such as online exposure and the invasion of personal privacy, along with rampant cyberbullying, not only severely violate individual rights but also openly challenge the social moral order.

These behaviors exacerbate societal division and opposition, leading to the distortion and deviation of moral concepts. When the public witnesses or participates in these extreme behaviors, they may gradually blur their understanding of moral boundaries, even considering unlawful actions as legitimate moral appeals in certain situations.

Moreover, the proliferation of online moral judgments may lead to the blurring and chaos of moral standards. In a diverse online world, conflicting moral concepts and value systems collide and merge, making it difficult for the public to form unified and clear moral evaluation criteria when confronted with complex and changing moral situations, thereby negatively impacting the moral climate of society as a whole.

3.3 Impact on Judicial Independence and Fair Judgment

Online moral judgments serve as a "moral court" within the internet, potentially creating public pressure that interferes with judicial independence and fair judgment. In the face of complex online incidents, some netizens tend to rely on personalized moral beliefs and emotional inclinations to construct the "truth" of events, conducting non-professional "judgments" without having more detailed facts than professional judges.

Specifically, when the judicial process advances with rigor and complexity, the final judgment may significantly differ from what some netizens expect based on simplistic moral logic and emotional resonance, leading to strong feelings of moral frustration. Driven by these emotions, they may attempt to rewrite established facts through waves of public opinion, seeking to reassess judicial judgments or even overturn them through public sentiment.

More seriously, some netizens may vigorously criticize the verdicts of courts and judges. Such behavior not only damages the credibility of the judicial system but also intensifies the social trust crisis, potentially leading to public disregard and disrespect for legal rules. In the long term, the negative effects triggered by "moral judgments" will have immeasurable adverse impacts on social order, the spirit of the rule of law, and the stable development of society as a whole. In constructing a healthy online ecosystem, we must be vigilant against and effectively curb the phenomenon of "moral judgments" that exceed legal boundaries.

4. Causes of the Phenomenon of Online "Moral Judgments"

4.1 Ambiguity and Conflict of Moral Standards

A deeper analysis of the roots of the phenomenon of online moral judgments reveals that the underlying reasons stem from the ambiguity and conflict of moral standards. "Moral ambiguity" refers to the uncertainty in social moral norms and value standards, or the difficulty social individuals face in distinguishing between good and evil values, leading to unclear moral consciousness. The fragmented and incomplete nature of information dissemination in online spaces exacerbates this issue, making individuals more likely to make subjective and partial moral judgments about others without sufficient understanding and rational analysis. This lack of clarity in moral standards often plunges online moral judgments into disorder and chaos.

Many times, netizens make moral judgments and accusations against individuals involved in events based solely on personal impressions or partial information without fully understanding the situation or conducting thorough investigations. The vagueness of moral judgment standards not only directly infringes upon the rights of the parties involved but also profoundly intensifies the turmoil and disputes within online spaces. Furthermore, the internet serves as a platform for diverse coexistence, gathering individuals with different cultural backgrounds, regional characteristics, and belief systems, leading to significant differences in moral concepts among them. This, in turn, exacerbates the divisions and conflicts between moral judgment standards, posing severe challenges to the harmonious coexistence of the online environment.

4.2 Anonymity and Group Effects

The anonymity inherent in online environments grants individuals the freedom to express their views and emotions. However, this freedom can also facilitate the spread of moral judgments. In a virtual space devoid of tangible identity constraints, individuals tend to express their inner emotions and pressures more freely, thus more readily immersing themselves in the tide of moral judgments. This anonymity makes it easier for individuals to lose their rationality and fairness in moral judgments, potentially leading to collective moral loss, where people may unjustly accuse or attack others. Such an anonymous environment diminishes individual accountability and self-discipline in participating in moral evaluations, further exacerbating the severity of online moral judgments.

Within groups, opinion leaders and active participants continuously interact and communicate, pushing certain moral standards or concepts towards extremism. This process exemplifies the phenomenon of group polarization, leading to broader and more intense moral judgments. Group polarization, also known as "risky shift," refers to the tendency of group decisions to be more extreme than individual decisions, leaning towards one extreme or the other. This effect often results in extreme and emotional online discourse, distorting what should be rational moral judgments. The phenomenon of group polarization can cause trivial moral issues to be exaggerated, triggering widespread controversy and in-depth discussions across society. This process highlights the unique role of group psychology in the online environment.

4.3 Reflection of Class Conflicts during Social Transition

Marx and Engels believed that morality does not exist in isolation but is closely linked to social and economic structures. "The moral views universally held by any society are profoundly determined by that society's mode of production and the will of the ruling class." Marx's view of morality emphasizes the close connection between morality and social economic structures, providing a perspective for analyzing moral issues from the roots of social economics.

The exacerbation of class conflicts leads some netizens to express their dissatisfaction with society through online "moral judgments." The increasing differentiation and conflict of interests between different classes make it increasingly difficult to address and alleviate these tensions effectively in reality. Consequently, some netizens turn to the relatively free and anonymous online platform to vent their frustrations and grievances regarding the current state of society through "moral judgments."

Specifically, in the online space, when a particular social incident touches on sensitive nerves related to class conflicts, it often rapidly attracts widespread public attention and discussion. At this point, some netizens, based on their class positions and interests, engage in strong moral evaluations and criticisms of the incident. They continually amplify the moral dimensions of the event by posting comments, sharing information, and participating in discussions, seeking to resonate and garner support from more individuals.

In this process of "moral judgment," netizens tend to simplify complex social issues into singular moral problems, attributing the conflicts of interest between different classes to the moral decay or degradation of one party. They use the banner of morality to label specific groups or individuals, further intensifying social divisions and opposition. It is important to note that this type of online "moral judgment," based on class conflicts, often lacks rational and objective analysis, with conclusions colored by strong emotional bias. It not only fails to effectively resolve real-world class conflicts but may also exacerbate societal tension and mistrust.

5. Strategies to Address the Phenomenon of Online "Moral Judgments"

5.1 Enhancing Public Moral Standards and Media Literacy

Kant once posed four questions: "What can I know?" "What ought I to do?" "What can I hope for?" and "What is man?" These four questions encapsulate the cognitive requirements of moral practice. Moral cognition serves as the foundation for the formation of moral views. Kant's moral philosophy profoundly elucidates the critical importance of individual moral self-discipline while advocating for universally applicable moral principles, offering invaluable guidance for

constructing accurate moral cognition in the virtual online realm and preventing blind conformity.

Enhancing public moral standards and media literacy is a key measure to address the phenomenon of online moral judgments. In the digital age, the speed and scope of information dissemination online are unprecedented, directly influencing the health and harmony of online spaces through the public's moral judgment and media usage capabilities. Media outlets should adhere to principles of objectivity and fairness, providing comprehensive and truthful reporting on news events to furnish the public with a thorough understanding of the matters at hand. However, some journalists, in pursuit of greater news value, may inject personal biases into emotional narratives before clarifying the facts, leading to erroneous factual and value judgments that mislead netizens into engaging in "moral judgments." Therefore, internet users need to maintain a proactive mindset regarding online issues to mitigate social risks and avoid fostering anxiety and fear.

For young people, schools should establish dedicated courses on online ethics and media literacy, employing innovative teaching methods such as case analysis and simulation experiences to cultivate correct online values from an early age. Additionally, platforms such as online moral education seminars and activities promoting online civility should guide the public in establishing proper online ethical views and consciously practicing online civility norms.

5.2 Strengthening Legal Regulations and Online Supervision

To overcome the challenges posed by online anonymity and group effects, strengthening legal regulations and online supervision systems is particularly important. Morality and law are two means of regulating social order. Due to the rapid development and constant changes in online society, legal frameworks often struggle to keep pace with emerging social issues and conflicts, leading to a legal vacuum where certain online problems remain unaddressed.

To create a more orderly online environment, efforts should be directed toward improving relevant legal systems to clearly define acceptable online speech and establish inviolable boundaries. This includes implementing decisive and severe punitive measures against online violence to ensure a healthy and harmonious online space. Moreover, it is crucial to enhance supervision of online platforms, requiring them to review and manage user-generated content to prevent the spread of malicious speech. In recent years, a series of laws and regulations have been introduced in our country to specifically address and constrain the phenomenon of moral judgments in online spaces. Additionally, robust online supervision is essential; the government should strive to establish a comprehensive and efficient network regulatory framework, reinforcing oversight and management of various online platforms to ensure that any violations of laws and regulations are promptly identified, addressed, and sanctioned. Otherwise, strengthening the guidance of public opinion is also crucial. By enhancing the public's awareness and vigilance towards online moral judgment, we can guide them to view online events from a more rational perspective and avoid blindly following the group effect.

In addition, we can refer to and apply some analytical models to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanism behind the role of online anonymity and group effects in moral judgment. For instance, we can draw on the "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind" theory by French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, which explains how group effects influence individuals, causing them to lose independent thinking and become more susceptible to emotional drives within the group. This theory provides important theoretical support for us to comprehend the essence and causes of online moral judgment, facilitating the development of more effective

countermeasures.

5.3 Promoting Core Socialist Values

Core socialist values represent a moral framework that encompasses both individual and societal ethics. This includes advocating for national goals such as prosperity, democracy, civilization, and harmony, as well as promoting social values of freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, alongside fostering individual values of patriotism, dedication, integrity, and kindness. Specifically, various channels and methods, such as online education and public service advertisements, can be utilized to disseminate and promote these core values, guiding the public to consciously practice them in online spaces.

To create a positive and healthy online ecosystem, we can focus on several key strategies. The primary task is to strengthen the cultivation and construction of the online content ecosystem. We should actively encourage and support the creation of high-quality online cultural works that embody the essence of socialist core values, utilizing various formats such as micro-films, short videos, and online literature to vividly and concretely interpret the profound connotations and requirements of these values, effectively guiding a broad audience toward establishing correct value orientations. To deeply promote and practice the socialist core values and foster a positive and healthy online environment, we can focus on the following key strategies. Firstly, we should strengthen the cultivation and construction of the online content ecosystem. Efforts should be made to actively encourage and support the creation of more high-quality online cultural works that embody the essence of socialist core values, encompassing various forms such as micro-films, short videos, and online literature. These works should vividly and concretely interpret the profound connotations and requirements of the core values, thereby effectively guiding the vast majority of internet users to establish correct value orientations.

Secondly, we should plan and implement a series of online thematic activities centered on the socialist core values. By regularly hosting engaging online events such as essay competitions and photography exhibitions, we can stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of internet users, enabling them to deepen their understanding and identification with the core values through practice. At the same time, this will promote a dual enhancement of social responsibility and personal practical abilities.Also, we need to place online moral education in a more prominent position, especially by deeply integrating the socialist core values into it. This requires us not only to guide internet users to consciously abide by online moral norms and advocate civilized online behavior and rational expression.

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