

Research on College Students' Network Expression—From the Perspective of Conflicting Expression*

Huang Yi-ning, Liang Jia-qi, Li Shi-yue
Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China

With the flourishing of the network community in colleges and universities, problems such as anomie of expression and conflict of discourse are exposed constantly, which has led to many online public opinion incidents. Therefore, avoiding conflicting expression has become one of the important tasks of college builders. This paper summarizes the evolution trends and internal mechanisms of conflicting expressions through a five-year participant observation of a college network community. On this foundation, this paper points out that the role orientation of individuals restricts their participation in conflict expression, while avoiding conflicting expression requires online and offline integration and mutual consultation between colleges and students to maintain community order.

Keywords: conflicting expression, evolution trend, role identification, mutual consultation

Introduction

With new media developing rapidly, online communities are also booming. Nowadays, online communities of college students have not only become an important vehicle for propaganda and education, but also provide more diverse and liberal space for students to express themselves. However, the openness of network is also very likely to trigger discourse conflicts among individuals or groups. In addition, college students are still too young in value selection and emotional control, adding instability to the normal order of the online community.

Therefore, conflicting expression has become one of the important issues that need to be solved urgently by college online community managers. Based on this, this study attempts to conduct participant observation and interviews with a QQ group in a university of central China to explore the evolution trend of conflicting expressions of college students' online communities and their important influencing factors, in an attempt to provide feasible proposals to mediate conflicting expressions in this kind of online communities.

* **Acknowledgement:** This study is the phased research result of General Project of the National Social Science Fund of China "Research on Virtual Video Community under the Background of Participatory Culture" (Project No. 18BXW101). It is also the phased research result of the project "Research on the Expression and Guidance of College Students' Online Community in the New Era" supported by the "Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities" of Central China Normal University (Project No. CCNU19ZY0031). The article was also funded by the "Central China Normal University Youth Research Center Project".

Huang Yi-ning, G.M.A., lecturer, School of Journalism and Communication, Central China Normal University.
Liang Jia-qi, undergraduate, School of Journalism and Communication, Central China Normal University.
Li Shi-yue, undergraduate, School of Journalism and Communication, Central China Normal University.

Double Peak Growth: The Evolution Trend of Conflicting Expressions of College Students' Online Communities

The research object selected in this paper is an online community consisting of 113 students and two teachers. Therefore, according to the participants, the conflicting expressions in the community can be divided into three categories: First, the conflict between teachers and students, which focuses on the teacher's words and deeds, the content of courses, etc. Second, the conflict among students, which is less harmful; the third is the conflict between students and schools, which involves a wide range, and students have the strongest negative emotions.

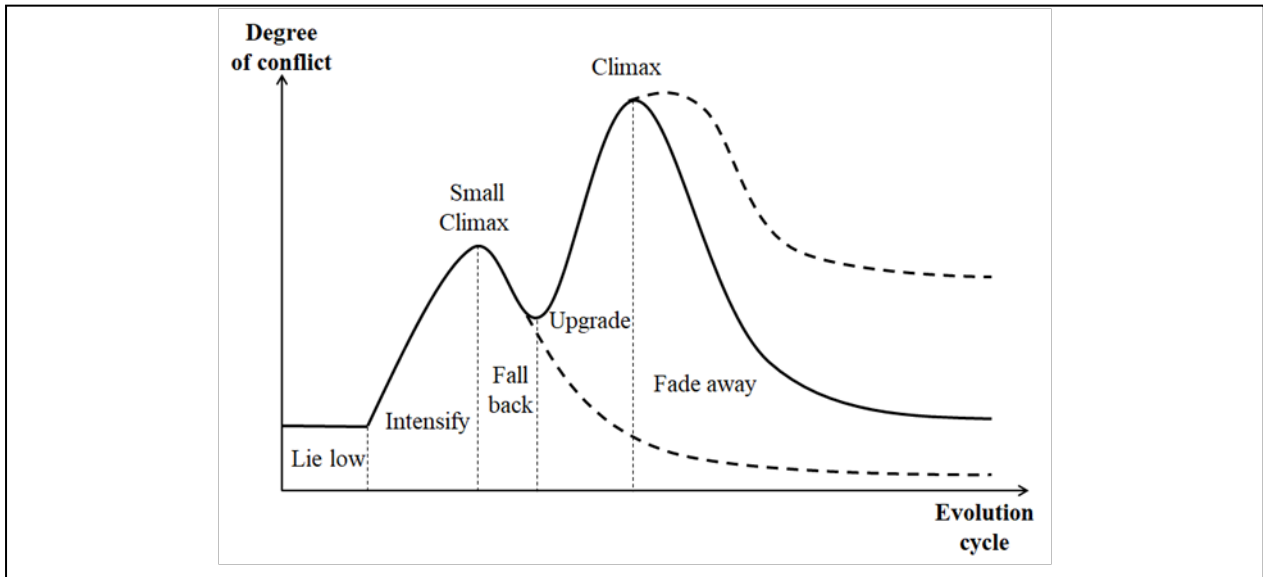


Figure 1. The evolution trend of conflicting expressions of college students.

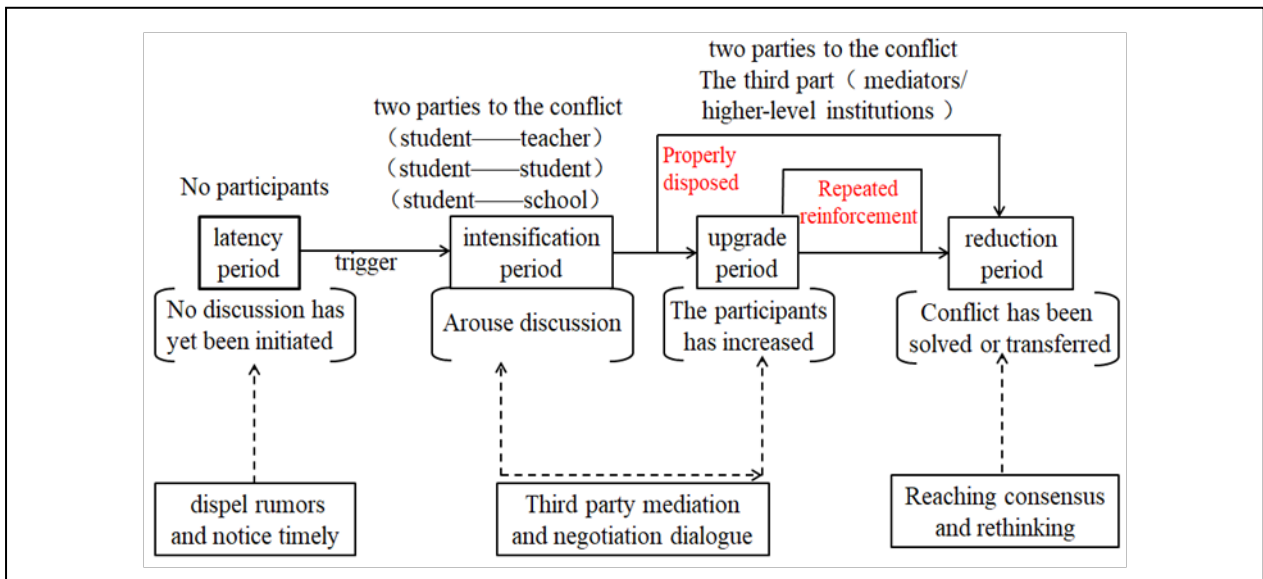


Figure 2. The internal mechanism of conflicting expressions of college students.

Through the analysis of conflict expression cases in this community, this study summarizes the evolution trend and internal mechanism of conflict expression in college students' online community, and finds that it has

a “double peak” growth trend. It often experiences a short fall and a second upgrade (see Figure 1), and the process can be divided into four periods: latency period, intensification period, upgrade period, and reduction period (see Figure 2).

Firstly, the cause of conflict expression can be called “trigger”. In this community, campus daily and learning examination topics are most likely to become “triggers”. Among the daily topics on campus, those related to school rules, regulations, and student affairs are prone to cause conflicts. While among the learning and test topics, the conflicts focus on discussion and evaluation of students' performance. When the trigger is triggered, the conflict will be soon ignited or intensified and finally enter the period of intensification.

In the intensification period, the participants are usually the two parties to the conflict. At this time, the evolution of the conflict has two paths: One is that the parties handle the conflict appropriately through discourse negotiation to reach a settlement; the other is that the parties adopt a confrontational way to reject the settlement.

As time goes by, the number of participants increased and the conflict entered an “upgrade period”. In this stage, the participants are not only the parties to the conflict of the stakeholders, but also the unrelated third parties, including “mediators” and higher-level institutions. Conflict mediation effect is closely related to the reputation of mediators. If the mediator's own reputation is high, it can alleviate the overall situation of public opinion and play the role of opinion leaders. Conflicts can also be resolved or transferred into the “reduction period”. On the contrary, if the mediator's own reputation is low, it is not only difficult to resolve conflicts, but also easy to cause recurrent intensification and vicious circles of conflicts.

Role constraints: Factors Affecting College Students' Conflicting Expression Participation

Members' role orientation will directly affect their participation in conflict expression. The study finds that in this community, self-identification often enables some members to assume the role of “coordinator” for mitigating conflicts, guiding topics from irrational to rational, and members who tend to be managers or opinion leaders are accustomed to standing out actively when the conflict occurs. An interviewee who held a key community position said:

I will clarify the core position of both sides before mediating a problem. If the starting point of them is the same, then no problem; if not, people will know each other's view better, and the conflict will be resolved naturally.

On the contrary, the marginalized groups with less participation in the community tend to remain silent in the conflict. Another interviewee said:

Most of the time, I choose to look on the atmosphere and occasionally relax the atmosphere. I might choose to talk to my roommates in the dormitory instead of speaking in the QQ group.

The role expectation theory holds that each individual bears the expectation of other members or the entire group (Hu, 1987). The more important the role is, the higher the expectation of the community will be. The “administrator” and “opinion leader” should meet the needs of other members for information and maintain a good communication channel. If the opinion leader fails to meet the expectations of other members, the role gap and role conflicts will arise. Besides, the normative perspective holds that people “obeying the rules is the result of the internalization of the values of cultural factors such as ethics and morality” (Chen, Ni, & Zou, 2008). Individuals need to conform to certain role norms and be restricted by discourse rules, which can also

explain why members in this community have the right to express anonymously and there will be conflicts, the topic expression can still be carried out in an orderly manner within the controllable range.

Conclusions

The study finds that, from the perspective of the causes of conflict expression, the lack of timely response to members' appeals and the lag in dealing with student affairs are the main factors causing students' dissatisfaction. From the perspective of the form of conflicting expressions, anonymity is the main form of expression by most members. The development of anonymous functions in the social environment greatly reduces the perceptibility of expression risk, but the use of large-scale anonymity also reflects the lack of identity of member groups, which is also a deep crisis in conflicting expression.

It can be seen that avoiding conflict expression means to enhance the effectiveness of student affairs handling, and on this basis to strengthen the sense of identity and belonging of member groups. Specifically, it can be divided into the following two paths to achieve:

Online and Offline Integration to Prevent Conflicts

Conflicting expression online is the appearance of problem. The essence of the problem lies in the unequal information resources between the school and students as well as the poor communication. The establishment of the network community in colleges and universities cannot fundamentally solve the problem of information exchange. Therefore, it is necessary to make up for the shortcomings of the network community through online and offline integration, and prevent conflicts in advance. Opening "question box" and using other ways to collect students' opinions and suggestions can be also useful, and then college community managers can adopt the way of orientation and regular discussion to understand the relevant demands of students and deal with them in a timely manner.

Mutual Consultation and Co-governance to Maintain Community Order

When conflicting expressions occur, college community managers and students should adhere to the concept of "mutual consultation and co-governance", and establish the appeal expression mechanism and contradiction handling mechanism. Furthermore, strengthen the media literacy education of college students and cultivate students' sense of responsibility through public lectures. At the same time, student opinion leaders can also play a necessary role in expressing the demands of the group. In the face of some collective conflicts, the student opinion leaders should assume the responsibility of hosting the situation and make rational use of the network community administrator. Permissions limit conflicts to a manageable range and provide improvements to make community administrators' work more targeted and to maintain the emotional and community order of members.

References

- Chen, Y., Ni, C. Q., & Zou, J. (2008). Research on the theories of information communication in network community. *Library and Information Knowledge*, (2), 70-75.
- Dong, Y. Y. (2018). Investigation and analysis of the present situation of university students' network expression in micro-era. *Daqing Social Sciences*, (5), 104-109.
- Hu, E. G. (1987). A preliminary study of the role theory and the relationship between teachers and students. *Educational Theory and Practice*, (6), 36-39.
- Hui, G. J. (2008). Discussion on "opinion leaders" in university students' QQ group chat. *Journal of Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications* (Social Science), (1), 41-45.