Affecting Public Opinions via Social Media – Opinion Leaders Use of Weibo

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzed opinion leaders’ use of Weibo to investigate their online behaviors, and to see if gender and fields of expertise will affect opinion leaders’ use of Weibo. The study will help people to better understand how opinion leaders in China use Weibo for their daily information consumption and communication, and will give us suggestive answers to the question of how to use Weibo to spread information effectively. Through online observation and content analysis, this study categorized the general online behavior patterns of opinion leaders’ use of Weibo, and found that gender is positively correlated to the externality of the tweets and the aggressiveness of the tweets, while fields of expertise is negatively correlated to tweets’ popularity. The study contributes to the current literatures by bringing new understanding to agenda setting theory and the concept of gatekeeping in the digital age, and the findings may help us better understand how opinion leaders in China consume and communicate information on Weibo, from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, and shed light on the influence of opinion leaders’ gender and fields of expertise on their communication behavior on Weibo.