

# **Two-step communication and the role of opinion leaders in emotional mobilization: a qualitative analysis model of China's Wechat emotional mobilization capabilities based on grounded theory**

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## **Abstract**

Emotional mobilization refers to the strategic use of emotions, facilitated by various communication mediums, to engage and influence individuals or groups in a way that elicits specific emotional responses and drives them towards particular actions or attitudes. In recent years, the pervasive phenomenon of emotional mobilization on the Internet has emerged as a significant factor, bearing potential consequences for social stability and cohesion due to the proliferation of irrational expressions. In the Chinese context, WeChat stands as an indispensable all-encompassing social media platform, exerting substantial influence on various stakeholders. Within the realm of online emotional mobilization, two primary actors take center stage: the audience and the media. Due to their social location and resource advantages, both of them are more likely to touch public emotions and gain support. Audience groups frequently encounter challenges when it comes to critically evaluating public discourse. They often fall under the sway of opinion leaders and media outlets, effectively becoming passive recipients, which may give rise to an “illusion of spontaneous emotional outbursts.” The decoding of meaning within this context becomes a pivotal factor, ultimately giving rise to the desired communication effects (Hall & Xiao, 2018). Drawing inspiration from Lazarsfeld’s two-step flow communication theory, which highlights the selective transmission of information from mass media to opinion leaders and then to the broader audience, this study explores the intricate role of emotional mobilization within both the audience and the media realms, employing WeChat as a noteworthy example. This investigation delves into the specific communication processes and categorizes strategies for network emotional mobilization, all rooted in grounded theory. One category pertains to

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utilizing public opinion to shape emotions and establish a collective emotional tone for the given event. The other category involves employing diverse communication methodologies to infuse energy into network emotional mobilization, thereby enabling the transformation of negative emotions into sustained motivation for audience participation in online collective actions.

**Keywords**

emotional mobilization, audience and the media, two-step flow communication theory, communication mediums, grounded theory.

**Bio**

Song Jian, from the School of International Journalism and Communication at Beijing Foreign Studies University in China, ranked first in the school's annual comprehensive test last time. He participated in the New Media Communication Program at the University of Southern California's School of Journalism and Communication and won the best paper award. The main research directions are the impact of new media on the mobilization of online emotions, the guidance and disturbance of artificial intelligence on online public opinion, the interdisciplinary study of artificial intelligence deep learning and humanities and social sciences. As a regular member of IAMCR, Song Jian has participated in many meetings of the society and made speeches at the meetings with remarkable achievements. Author of works such as "The New Era of AI under Information Psychological Warfare and Identity—ChatGPT Research Based on Grounded Theory".

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