

Research on Online Public Opinion in the Crisis of Low-reputation City Image - A Case Study of the Nanyang MD Music Festival Incident

Depei Kong^{1*}

¹ School of Journalism, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

Email Address

depeikong@163.com (Depei Kong)

*Correspondence: depeikong@163.com

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Abstract:

The 2023 Nanyang MD Music Festival theft triggered extensive discussions among netizens on social media, gradually becoming a city image crisis. Analyzing the emotional conflict of netizens behind the crisis is an essential reference for the governance of online public opinion in a low-reputation city image crisis. For example, this study used web crawler technology to collect 7499 netizen comment data related to the incident from the microblogging platform. The content characteristics, emotional tendencies, and differences of netizen comments in different regions were analyzed using text mining methods such as word frequency statistics, co-occurrence network analysis, LDA topic modeling, and SnowNLP sentiment analysis. It is found that emotions are straightforward to spread and amplify in cyberspace, triggering emotional conflicts and exacerbating online public opinion crises. Regional discrimination makes it easier for netizens' negative emotions to accumulate, thus forming public opinion crises. The formation of online public opinion is multidirectional, and there is a complex interactive relationship among the above three. Although the positive image of a city needs to be constructed for a long time, it is relatively fragile, and the positive image of a town is easily damaged by the combined effect of netizens' emotions, geographical discrimination, and public opinion crisis. To better deal with public opinion crises, this paper proposes emotional management measures such as using the good deeds of residents as communication elements, enhancing "city immunity", and exploring and disseminating the city's strengths.

Keywords:

Online Public Opinion, Geographical Discrimination, Emotional Analysis

1. Introduction

On October 3, 2023, the campsites of the Midi Music Festival in Nanyang City, Henan Province, China, were hit by a large-scale theft incident, and the relevant

entries quickly topped the Weibo hot search list, causing Nanyang to face a vast city image crisis. [1] Henan Province, where Nanyang is located, is relatively economically backward, and there have been rumors that the quality of people in Henan is relatively low. The number of thieves and scammers is relatively high, which has led to a generally negative city image of Henan in the eyes of outsiders.

In the city crisis of Nanyang caused by this Midi Music Festival incident, the conflicts on social media were particularly intense. Critics believe this theft incident further confirms the stereotypical image of low-quality Henan people, negatively impacting Nanyang's city image. However, the opposition critics believe that this criticism is an overgeneralization, and they oppose "regional discrimination" and try to reverse and maintain Nanyang's city image.

Negative urban events such as collective theft are relatively rare but not uncommon. However, when such incidents occur in Henan, they have caused a massive stir on the Internet, and the reasons behind this are worth exploring. This study mainly focuses on the Weibo comments during the Nanyang public opinion crisis, hoping to explore through content analysis: what are the Weibo netizens' emotions towards Nanyang? What are the reasons behind the differentiation of Weibo netizens' emotions towards Nanyang? What insights does this incident bring to the response and resolution of urban crises? These are also the core issues this article will explore.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Urban Crisis Research

In recent years, the study of public opinion on urban crises has gradually become a research field of increasing attention, and its importance is becoming increasingly prominent. With the development of technology and closer social connections, risk has become a norm in modern society [2], and the practical result is a crisis. "Crisis" means that all parties within an organization unanimously believe that the organization's behavior is untimely, thereby destroying the expectations for the organization [3]. Placed in the context of a city, people's understanding of the city comes from the collective actions of urban residents and their perception of the values of the residents [4]. Therefore, the negative actions of urban residents may exacerbate the risk of urban crises. At the same time, social media is an important arena for the spread of urban crises. Due to its convenience, social media has become an important channel for the public to obtain information during crises [5]. Some scholars from the perspective of public opinion management believe that social bots influence the spread of information and emotions on the network [6].

In previous related studies, scholars have mainly studied urban crises from the perspectives of administrative management, public management, and tourism management. Graham et al., from the standpoint of administrative management, proposed that the government can use social media to communicate with citizens and thus solve urban crises [7] or construct local discourse to cope with regional crises [8]. Vallaster, from the perspective of public management, believed that the collective actions of Munich refugees would damage the city's image and bring crises to the town [9]. From the perspective of tourism management, Qiu interpreted the city's identity crisis and believed that excellent cultural heritage could reduce the impact of negative information [10]. In urban crisis events, compared to traditional media, online public opinion is more easily influenced by personal experiences and

perspectives, and presents emotional characteristics. Therefore, this study starts from the standpoint of emotional theory to study online public opinion in urban crises.

2.2. Urban Crisis and Emotional Conflict

Emotions are related to people's thinking, behavior, and other aspects [11]. Social media is a powerful tool to promote user interaction and can expand the scope of information dissemination during crisis events [12], and at the same time, spread the emotions in the text. Emotions can be positive or negative, and user interactions can lead to high emotional involvement. Some scholars have analyzed the emotional transmission patterns of Twitter user samples, believing that low-sensitivity groups are more easily affected by negative emotions [13], and these users will further spread negative emotions after being affected [14]. Social networks have expanded the scope of emotional dissemination, and negative events are more likely to trigger negative emotions from netizens, so more low-sensitivity groups will be affected.

Mercer J believes that emotions have social characteristics, that is, all identity identifications depend on social emotions [15]. The sociality of the city is reflected in the distinction between local and non-local people in the population. Seremetakis proposed that emotions can allow people to contact and interact with space [16]. Berrens (2016) discussed the influence of emotions on the perception of the city, believing that the establishment of emotional relationships is based on events. [17] Local people have richer emotional practices in their cities [18], so local people are more likely to develop positive emotions towards the city. The city is a cultural object shared by local people, and the gathering of positive emotions is easy to cause emotional resonance, thereby shaping media discourse [19].

This study explores the following questions through the presentation of online public opinion content in the Nanyang MD Music Festival theft incident:

RQ1: What kind of dissemination controversy did the Nanyang MD Music Festival incident cause on Weibo? What was the heat of public opinion?

RQ2: What kind of content interaction did Weibo netizens exhibit in the Nanyang MD Music Festival incident? What are the characteristics of this interaction?

RQ3: What kind of emotional conflict is reflected in the comments of Weibo netizens in the Nanyang MD Music Festival incident? What are the differences in the emotions of netizens from different regions?

3. Material Collection and Research Methods

3.1. Material Collection

This study selected Weibo as the data source platform. After the Nanyang MD Music Festival theft incident occurred, the relevant topic quickly accumulated over 100 million views on Weibo, with more than 100,000 topic interactions, and a large volume of blog posts and comments. Compared to other social media platforms, Weibo has certain guarantees regarding the quantity and quality of comments and has a relatively large advantage.

In addition, Weibo is currently one of the social media platforms with the largest number of daily active users in China, and the content posted by users is mainly text-based, which is convenient for data collection. Furthermore, Weibo has the function

of a public sphere, including encoding and geographical functions [20], which can accurately locate the target objects and facilitate sample collection.

This study selected 28 blog posts containing keywords such as “the police have arrested some thieves” related to the incident. The blog post publishers include official media, online influencers, and the music festival official. The blog post types are news reports or official announcements, without emotional bias. This study used Python to crawl the comment text, username, posting time, and IP address data in the comment sections of the above blog posts. A total of 8,523 initial data points were obtained. Due to the uneven quality of the initial data, it was denoised through deduplication and removal of null values, and finally 7,499 valid data points were obtained.

3.2. Research Method

Sentiment analysis analyzes people’s opinions, emotions, and other aspects of an entity [21]. Therefore, sentiment analysis can be used to identify the emotions contained in the content [22]. Social media not only disseminates text but also the emotions carried in the text. For example, the emotions contained in user comments on an event or interactions between users are often abundant.

This study analyzes the data using word cloud diagrams, PMI word co-occurrence network analysis, LDA topic model feature analysis, SnowNLP sentiment analysis, and manual coding. It explores the different focus areas and emotional tendencies between Henan netizens and netizens from other regions during this event.

3.3. Sample Extraction and Coding

This study categorized the netizen IP addresses into Henan IP and IP from other regions.

To better analyze the comment text of netizens from different regions, this study used SPSS to conduct random sampling and extracted 20% of the comment text from Henan netizens and 20% from netizens in the other areas, which two trained coders then coded.

After the coding was completed, this study conducted reliability testing on the extracted samples, and the Cronbach’s α coefficient was 0.993, which meets the general reliability requirements and can be further analyzed.

Subsequently, the extracted samples were manually coded based on whether the emotional tendency is aggressive, the attack target, and whether the content recognizes regional discrimination. The coding values correspond to different emotional tendencies and content combinations. The coding rules and statistical results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Table of coding rules and statistical results.

Emotion	Content	Coded assignment	Coding results (Henan IP) (N=272)	Coding results (Nonlocal IP) (N=1251)
Emotional attacks on locals	Agree with regional discrimination in content	-2	14.34% (N=39)	46.68% (N=584)
Emotionally neutral (helpless)	Agree with regional discrimination in content	-1	12.13% (N=33)	14.07% (N=176)

Emotionally neutral	Content neutral	0	15.44% (N=42)	15.83% (N=198)
Emotionally neutral	Against with regional discrimination in content	1	17.28% (N=47)	3.68% (N=46)
Emotionally attacking non-native	Against with regional discrimination in content	2	28.68% (N=78)	10.71% (N=133)

Note: Sentiment could not be assigned to some of the texts, including 12.13 per cent (N=33) for Henan IP and 9.03 per cent (N=113) for non-local IP.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Public Opinion Hotspot Analysis

According to Weibo topic data, as of October 31, 2023, topics such as “Nanyang MD Music Festival theft incident led to regional attacks” have accumulated over 200 million views. These topics quickly attracted attention after the incident and reached a discussion peak from October 4 to 8, 2023. As shown in Figure 1, the online heat during this period was 1728, with a peak value of 2886. After the 8th day, the public opinion heat gradually dissipated.



Figure 1. Baidu search index change.

From the comment data in Table 1, of the 28 blog posts crawled in this study, 18 had more than 100 comments, 2 had more than 1000 comments, and the average was about 268 comments. The MD theft incident received widespread attention from Weibo users.

In addition to crawling the comment text, this study also crawled the IP addresses of the users who posted the comments. In theory, IP can be equated with the user's location, but the situation varies greatly. However, considering the limited nature of virtual IP, this study uses IP to represent the location. Through content analysis, the extracted sample IPs were filtered. Most of the users who commented on this incident were from provinces or regions outside of H Province. Of the 7,499 comments crawled, 6,207 were from non-Henan IP, accounting for about 82.8%, while Henan IP accounted for about 17.2%.

Table 2. Crawling Weibo comment data.

Blog code	Comment volume	Blog code	Comment volume	Blog code	Comment volume	Blog code	Comment volume
0	267	7	58	14	398	21	148
1	72	8	46	15	1362	22	84
2	64	9	128	16	359	23	143
3	37	10	38	17	82	24	321

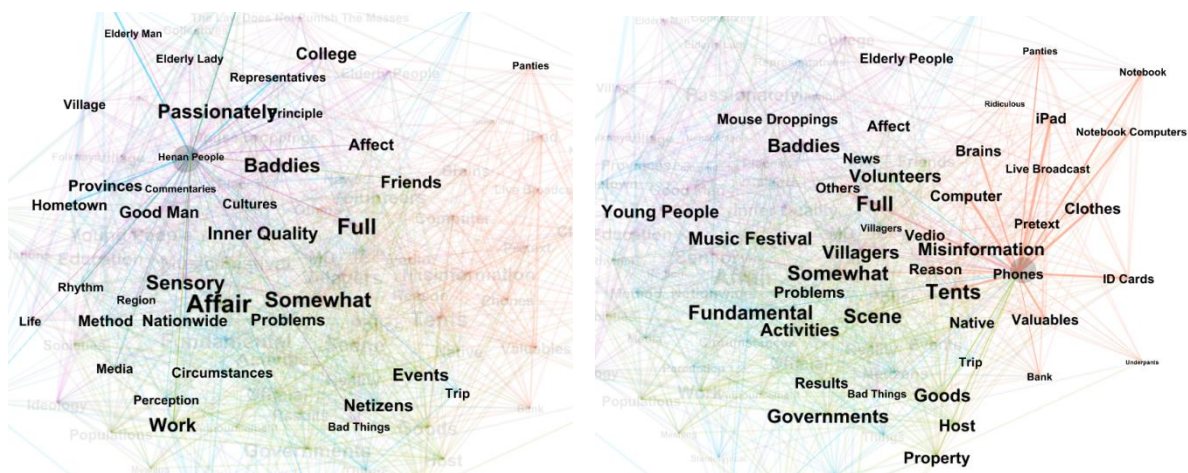
4	360	11	161	18	322	25	1122
5	179	12	253	19	93	26	213
6	40	13	244	20	325	27	580

Different netizens' comments in the Nanyang MD Music Festival event have different focuses, generating different discourse systems.



Based on the analysis of word frequency, it is found that the high-frequency words are mainly “music festival”, “people from Henan”, and “region”. This indicates that in addition to focusing on the event itself, netizens’ discussion also centered on the “regional discrimination” against the Henan province.

Furthermore, the analysis of the network relationship reveals that the above high-frequency words are primary nodes in the network propagation, and they serve as the center of a radiating expansion. The keywords related to the theft incident, such as “mobile phone” and “elderly”, are closely connected, reflecting the relevant stolen property or the identity of the thieves, forming a subset of the event element relationship network. The keyword “people from Henan” is associated with words with regional discrimination connotations, such as “quality”, which reflects the regional prejudice of netizens from other regions towards Henan.



4.2.1. Topic Clustering

To uncover the topics involved in the netizen comments on the Nanyang MD incident, this study categorized the comments into those from Henan and other regions. Through Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), we identified eight topics for each of the Henan and other regions' comment texts, with 8 keywords per topic. By reading through all the keywords and texts across the topics, we determined the specific categories of the topics, as detailed in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3. *Clustering of comment threads from other regions.*

Topic	Keywords
Attacks on festival organizers	Things, culture, laptop, hometown, locals, live, bad, attitude
Tells of his own misfortune in Henan	region, hometown, quality, place, bad people, enthusiasm, university, bandits
Against stirring things up	Villagers, misguided, scene, official, announcement, festival, police, video
Waiting for official information	question, comment, society, lawless, outrageous, blogger, life, media
Stereotypes of Henan	impression, folkways, facts, stereotypes, rat droppings, manhole covers, elderly, quality
Attacks on thieves	Henanese, nationwide, netizens, rural, underwear, thoughts, objects, wallet
Describing the relevant elements of the incident	Mobile phone, tent, computer, tablet, clothes, moncler, laptop, cash
Attacks on netizens in Henan	ethos, bad people, manhole cover, alarm, quality, bad things, impression, rat droppings

In summary, the interactive content of Weibo users exhibits diverse characteristics. The same topics across the two regions include descriptions of the elements related to the theft incident, criticisms of the thieves, and comments opposing regional discrimination or spreading rumors.

Aggressiveness is another major feature of Weibo users' interactions. The key difference is that most comments from users in other regions mainly attack the regional discrimination against Henan. The targets of the attacks include the thieves, H province, and others.

Table 4. *Topic clustering of netizen comments in Henan.*

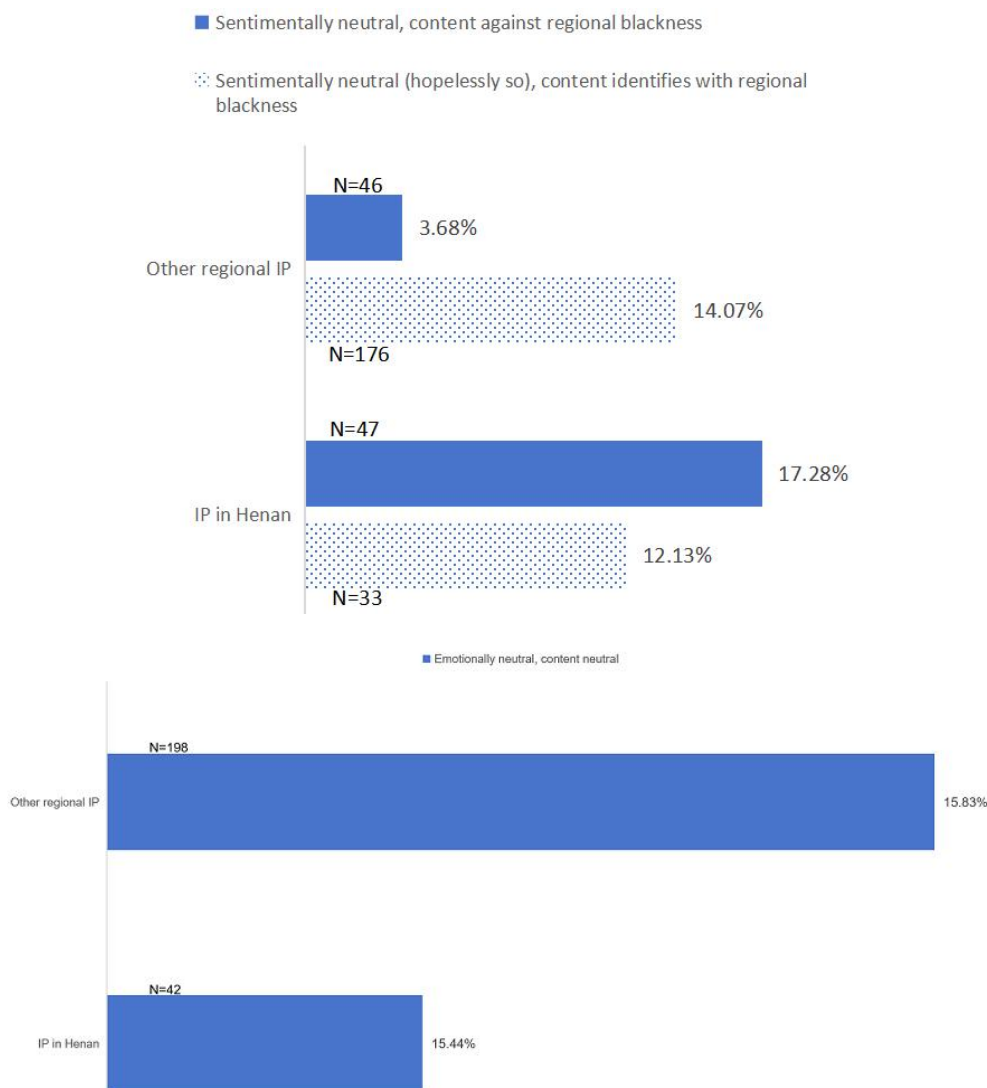
Topic	Keywords
Denying stereotypes of generalizations	Media, impressions, good people, stereotypes, events, places, traditions, quality
Waiting for official information	MIDI, official, announcement, police, festival, rhythm, volunteers, government
Against regional discrimination	Henanese, problems, rhythm, friends, scene, media, representatives, good people
Apologize to non-local netizens	Comments, villagers, quality, news, rhythm, recognition, representative, mistakes
Slamming the burglar	Hometown, old man, Henanese, rat shit, quality, bad guy, outrageous, smearing
Describe relevant	Mobile phone, netizen, computer, cash, tent, friend, volunteer, tablet

elements of the incident	
Local efforts to prepare for the festival	Music festival, representative, hometown, preparation, experience, tent, volunteer, villager
Acknowledging mistakes	Area, rural, quality, rhythm, place, hometown, problem, Henanese

The text from the Henan region also has aggressive themes, but the targets are different. Words like “rat shit” appear multiple times, indicating that Henan region netizens are angered and disappointed by the negative impact on the city caused by this incident. Besides this, the topics of Henan region netizen’ comments are diverse, including both apologetic and anti-regional discrimination themes.

4.2.2. Reflection of Emotions

This study used SnowNLP to perform sentiment analysis on the comment texts, defining positive sentiment as a score greater than 0.7, neutral sentiment as a score between 0.5-0.7, and negative sentiment as a score less than 0.5. The overall emotional tone of netizens from Henan region and other regions is predominantly negative, at 59.2% and 58.8% respectively.



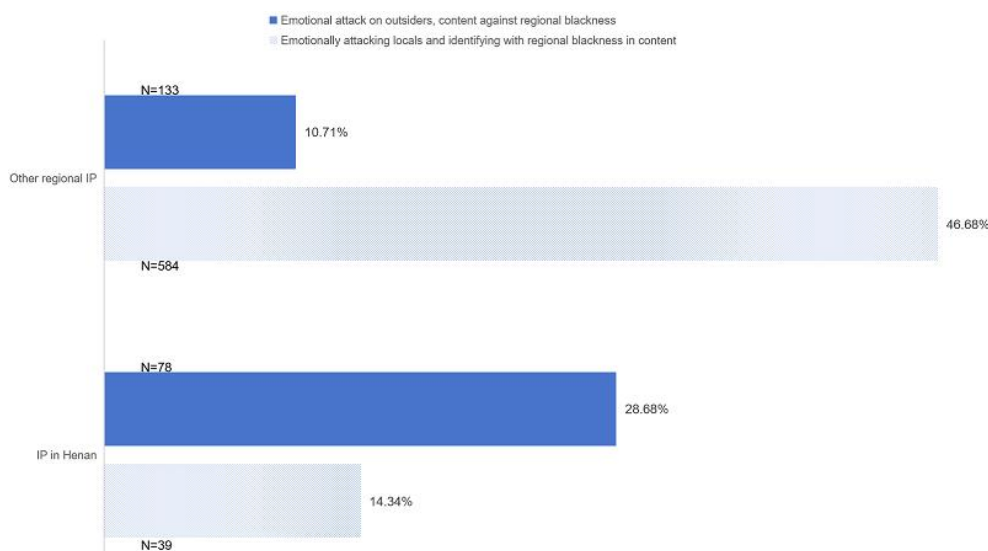


Figure 4. Sentiment statistics results.

To further classify the emotions of the netizens, this study randomly sampled 272 and 1251 comments from Henan region and other regions respectively. Combining the sentiment scores, the expressed emotions in the texts, and the content, the samples were coded into 6 categories, as detailed in Figure 4.

Looking at the statistics, 60.75% of netizens from other regions endorse regional discrimination, and 46.68% attack local people. In contrast, 45.96% of Henan region netizens oppose regional discrimination, and 28.68% choose to fight back. The proportion of neutral emotions is roughly the same, with representative views such as “Punishing the thieves is the key”.

Some netizens from other regions are more rational, reflecting on the city’s image construction by analyzing this phenomenon, such as “For a place to progress, it needs not only to reach high but also to make up for deficiencies”. There are also those who defend Henan region netizens and oppose overgeneralization.

Examining the comments of Henan region netizens, they express disappointment about the incident and acknowledge the mistakes, as well as fight back against regional discrimination to defend the image of Henan province, such as “While seeing the shortcomings, please do not ignore our strengths and efforts”.

Overall, the emotions of the netizens are predominantly negative, accounting for about 54.8%. Looking at the neutral-leaning comments that oppose regional discrimination, 17.28% of Henan region netizens hold such views, compared to only 3.68% of netizens from other regions. Although the similar or same sentiment scores may appear difficult to clearly explain the obvious emotional differences on the surface, combining the regions of the netizens and the specific content of the texts, the emotional attitudes reflected in the comments from different regions exhibit significant differences.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Social Media in Urban Crisis

City image is a composite, involving not only economic and cultural aspects, but also people’s subjective feelings and evaluations of the city. Regional discrimination

can have a negative impact on urban development. This study focuses on the analysis of the Nanyang MD Music Festival, finding a complex interactive relationship between netizens' emotions, regional discrimination, and the urban public opinion crisis, where regional discrimination is not only a specific manifestation of netizens' negative emotions, but can also exacerbate those negative emotions. The accumulation of negative emotions can further amplify the impact of the urban public opinion crisis. Additionally, the negative online image has the potential to be infinitely amplified when facing a public opinion crisis.

Randall Collins (2004) believes that emotions can influence the interactive behavior between groups [23]. Emotional transmission has solid diffusion and amplification characteristics in the online space. In the discussion of the Nanyang MD Music Festival incident, once netizens recognize a certain viewpoint or emotion, it will quickly spread on social media. In addition, netizens from different regions have experienced intense emotional conflicts on social media. Emotional transmission theory reveals that emotions can be continuously transmitted and accumulated through social networks, and the opposing conflicts of different emotions of netizens can also be triggered and amplified in the online space.

The public opinion crisis triggered by the Nanyang MD Music Festival was essentially an amplified interpretation by netizens based on their existing stereotypical impressions of the Henan region, which was then continuously propagated through the internet. Furthermore, the IP addresses on social media concretized geographical spaces in the virtual world, strengthening the separation between local and non-local people, causing netizens' emotional responses to become more intense, and further compressing the space for rational discussion, thus making emotional conflicts more likely to occur.

Just like a city's economic development, building a city's image has a cumulative effect. It is a long-term process involving a wide range of social activities, cultural events, and other forms of promotion. However, it also has a certain degree of fragility. As observed in this study, a negative event that quickly spreads on social media can cause significant damage to the city's image and may even instantly destroy the positive image built up over the years.

At the same time, when a crisis occurs, the negative image of the city is infinitely amplified, not only in terms of the sheer volume of the increase but also in the intensification of negative emotions. Particularly in this study, negative emotions dominated, forming a unified online public opinion [24]. The online public opinion discussion of the event is dynamic, but multidirectional. Once triggered by the crisis event, negative information and comments will quickly gather and spread, forming a public opinion storm. The theft incident at the Nanyang MD Music Festival was just the trigger. Still, the long-accumulated negative city image and the emotional resonance of the netizens were what plunged it into a public opinion crisis.

5.2. Emotional Governance of Low-Reputation Urban Crisis

When dealing with urban public opinion crises, the Nanyang MD Music Festival case provides valuable experience for urban public opinion management. Especially for cities with a long-term relatively negative image, in the face of crisis events, managers not only need to adopt a more proactive attitude and quick and practical strategies, but also need to consider the long-term image construction and

improvement of the city as well as the rebuilding of public trust, to gradually turn the relatively negative situation of the city's image.

First, city managers should guide residents in constructing the city's image and use this as a transmission element to break the stereotypical impression of H Province held by outsiders. The city's image is not just about buildings' cold, modernized appearance but, more importantly, its residents' quality. Residents are the ambassadors of the city's brand [25], and their every action is relevant to constructing the city's image. Publicizing the good deeds of residents can help break the long-standing regional discrimination against Henan by outsiders.

Secondly, when facing crises, some cities can maintain a stable image or quickly recover after the crisis. In addition to factors related to the economic foundation and public recognition, it is also closely related to the city's crisis management capabilities and public trust. The combined effect of these factors forms a strong "urban immunity", allowing the city to withstand the impact and quickly get back on track. For example, the Singapore government is usually able to effectively control the flow of information and public emotions through moral communication [26] after a crisis occurs, thereby minimizing the negative impact.

For the long-term construction of the city's image, tailored strategies must be adopted. The deep historical and cultural heritage is an advantage for Nanyang in establishing a positive city image. It can explore and utilize its unique cultural resources to construct and strengthen its city image.

6. Research Shortcomings and Prospects

6.1. Research Shortcomings

This study mainly adopted the content analysis method. Although it can effectively extract and analyze textual data information, the interpretation of the data is relatively subjective and may be biased, limiting the research's breadth and depth. Secondly, this study takes the Nanyang Music Festival incident as a single case study, and the generalizability and applicability of its conclusions are limited. The causes and processes of public opinion crises in different cities vary, and it is difficult to fully reflect the complexity and diversity of urban public opinion crises in a single case study.

6.2. Future Prospects

Future research should consider adopting a multi-case analysis method, exploring the key influencing factors, and finding commonalities by comparing the online public opinion crises faced by different cities. Comparative research of multiple cases can enhance the generalizability of the conclusions and provide a richer and more in-depth theoretical basis for related crisis research. In addition, future research can also consider using experimental methods to test the effects of different public opinion-handling strategies. By constructing experimental environments and simulating public opinion crises, comparing the effects of varying response plans can provide more precise policy tools for urban public opinion crisis management.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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