

# Mechanism of Opinion Leaders in Influencing the Evolution of Online Public Opinion: A Case Study of the “Fat Cat Incident”

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**Abstract:** This paper takes the “Fat Cat incident” on Douyin as a case study to classify opinion leaders into four categories: mainstream media, professionals, major online influencers, and grassroots figures. It analyses their differences in terms of credibility, content logic, reach, and role in public opinion dynamics. Tracing the incident through its stages of outbreak, escalation, reversal, and subsidence, the study reveals that grassroots opinion leaders ignite public sentiment through emotional resonance but also exacerbate polarisation and cyberbullying. In contrast, mainstream media employ evidence-based narratives and authoritative framing to achieve correction and closure. Major online influencers take on the roles of information translation, residual bias correction, and value extension in the later stages. The research highlights the dual nature of opinion leaders' influence: on the one hand, they can facilitate rational discussion and problem solving; on the other hand, they risk intensifying polarisation and triggering secondary crises. Moreover, this duality can undergo dynamic transformation throughout the evolution of public opinion.

**Keywords:** Online Public Opinion; Opinion Leaders; Mechanism of Action; Fat Cat Incident; TikTok Platform

## 1. Introduction

With the rise of short-video platforms such as Douyin, their algorithmic recommendation, strong visual impact and high interactivity have profoundly transformed the ways in which online public opinion is generated and evolves. As key nodes in information filtering and emotional mobilisation, opinion leaders significantly influence the direction of public sentiment. However, existing research has focused mostly on platforms such as Weibo and

WeChat, paying insufficient attention to the typological differentiation, operational pathways and dynamic mechanisms of opinion leaders on Douyin, where short videos dominate. The “Fat Cat incident” of 2024 rapidly went viral on Douyin and went through a complete life cycle of public opinion, offering a typical case for investigation. In this paper, a four-type classification framework for opinion leaders is constructed, their guidance behaviors and effects are analysed phase by phase, and the typified functions and dual effects through which opinion leaders shape the evolution of public opinion are extracted. The aim is to provide practical insights for the governance of online public opinion and the optimisation of opinion leader guidance strategies.

## 2. Classification of Opinion Leaders

In A Preliminary Study on the Rise of internet Influencers and Weibo Publicity, Dong Yehanbing categorised Weibo's major online influencers into three types: leading figures in specific fields[1], “grassroots opinion leaders”, and official corporate or institutional accounts[2]. Building on this framework, this paper shifts the perspective to the Douyin (TikTok) environment and reclassifies online opinion leaders into four types: mainstream media, professional opinion leaders, major online influencers, and grassroots opinion leaders. These four types differ significantly in terms of their sources of credibility, content logic, scope of influence, and public opinion role, and each plays a key guiding role at different stages of the “Fat Cat Incident”[3]. Mainstream media opinion leaders refer to certified accounts (typically bearing a “blue V” mark) opened on Douyin by central and local newspapers, television stations, news agencies, and other official media organisations. Empowered by the institutional rights to gather, publish, and fact-check news, they serve as the core providers of authoritative information and

the ultimate arbiters of public opinion direction on the platform[4]. Professional opinion leaders are Douyin creators who possess solid professional knowledge, practical experience, or authoritative qualifications in a specific vertical field. By consistently producing in-depth and practical specialised content, they earn a high degree of trust from their followers. Their core competitive advantage lies in their “discursive authority within a vertical domain”[5]. Major online influencers are creators who rely on a vast fan base, cross-domain content coverage, and strong agenda-setting capabilities to achieve widespread social attention and traffic-generating power on Douyin. Their defining characteristic is a “scale-of-traffic orientation”;

their influence extends beyond specialised vertical circles but lacks clear disciplinary boundaries[6]. Grassroots opinion leaders are ordinary internet users without professional credentials or public-figure status. They enter the public opinion arena by virtue of being “event witnesses”, “deep participants in the discussion”, or “active members of a particular online community”. Relying on “informational proximity” or “emotional resonance”, they gain short-term attention and recognition in specific incidents. Their key characteristics are “identity authenticity” and “episodic influence”[7]. The definitions of the four types of opinion leaders are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Definitions of the Four Types of Opinion Leaders**

Category	Definition
Mainstream Media	Certified accounts (typically bearing a “blue V” mark) opened on Douyin by central and local newspapers, television stations, news agencies, and other official media organisations
Professional Opinion Leaders	Douyin creators who possess solid professional knowledge, practical experience, or authoritative qualifications in a specific vertical field, and who earn high trust from their followers by consistently producing in-depth, practical specialised content
Major Online Influencers	Creators who rely on a vast fan base, cross-domain content coverage, and strong agenda-setting capabilities to achieve widespread social attention and traffic-generating power on the Douyin platform
Grassroots opinion leaders	Ordinary internet users without professional credentials or public status. They join public discussions as event witnesses, deep participants, or active community members, and gain short-term attention through close access to information or emotional resonance.

### 3. Opinion Leaders' Guidance Behaviors across Event Stages

#### 3.1 Outbreak Stage of Public Opinion: Grassroots Opinion Leaders-Polarisation of Public Opinion

##### (1) Core Subjects

The core guiding subject at this stage was Liu Jialing, the deceased ‘Fat Cat’s’ sister, who acted as the absolute center. Relying on her status as a ‘direct witness’, she controlled the release of information. Self-media operators and online promoters, leveraging their experience with the platform, amplified her influence, together driving the event from the private sphere into the public opinion arena[8].

##### (2) Main Characteristics

The guiding behavior of Liu Jialing and her collaborative network revolved around ‘tragic narrative construction plus precise traffic operations’. Each step was carefully tailored to fit Douyin’s communication logic and user psychology.

First, they constructed a binary ‘victim–perpetrator’ framework: In her first video on 25 April, Liu Jialing only showed screenshots of Fat Cat’s transfers to Tan Zhu, deliberately omitting the fact that Tan Zhu had transferred a total of 463,000 yuan to Fat Cat and his relatives. The accompanying text used value-laden terms such as ‘emotional manipulation’ and ‘swindled out of his savings’, portraying Tan Zhu as a ‘gold digger who exploited feelings for money’ while casting Fat Cat as a ‘devoted lover who gave everything but was driven to suicide by betrayal’. This one-sided presentation of information quickly ignited users’ anger over ‘emotional betrayal’. Within 12 hours of posting, the video had garnered more than 50,000 likes. The comment section was dominated by emotional statements such as ‘Tan Zhu is so awful’ and ‘She must pay back the money’.

Second, attention to detail in content production enhanced a sense of authenticity and empathy. To avoid accusations of ‘deliberate hype’, Liu Jialing, guided by online promoters, established strict content-presentation rules: she appeared on

a camera without make-up, wearing dark clothing; most shots were close-ups highlighting her red-rimmed eyes and choked voice; background music was chosen as sad instrumental pieces, accompanied by slow-motion editing of Fat Cat's old photos. The chat logs she posted blurred Tan Zhu's profile picture but retained her nickname and key exchanges—a move that reduced the direct risk of privacy infringement while reinforcing the perception of 'authentic evidence'. By using split-screen comparisons between 'Fat Cat scrimping and saving' and 'Tan Zhu buying luxury goods', she further intensified users' negative perception of Tan Zhu. Within 24 hours, that video was shared 42,000 times.

At this stage, the guiding actions of grassroots opinion leaders directly propelled public opinion from 'zero to one': First, the nature of the event escalated from a 'private romantic dispute' to a 'public moral issue'. The total number of views of related topics on Douyin increased from 1.2 million on 25 April to 380 million on 3 May. Second, user stances became highly polarised—more than 90% of the participating users defaulted to the 'Tan Zhu as fraudster' narrative, with only a small minority expressing mild doubts. Third, the situation spawned extreme offline behaviour: beyond the 'takeaway memorials' that forced the cleaning up of delivery food on the Chongqing Yangtze River Bridge, Tan Zhu's flower shop was besieged by netizens, forcing its staff to close. Tan Zhu herself received threatening text messages, laying the groundwork for subsequent loss of control over public opinion.

### **3.2 Evolutionary Advancement Stage of Public Opinion: Grassroots Opinion Leaders-Continued Fragmentation**

#### **(1) Core Subject**

At this stage, Tan Zhu released two apology videos in succession. However, her guidance behaviour backfired because of a lack of planning.

#### **(2) Main Characteristics**

Faced with the chat logs and transfer records published by Fat Cat's sister, Tan Zhu's apology videos and related remarks further fuelled the evolution of public opinion, preventing the incident from subsiding and paving the way for a subsequent reversal of sentiment.

Nevertheless, Tan Zhu's apology failed to gain public recognition. Netizens questioned the

sincerity of her apology, which undermined her credibility in the eyes of the public. Public opinion continued to develop unfavourably for her, keeping the incident at the center of intense debate. Her experiences and narratives were repeatedly interpreted and circulated by netizens, further stimulating discussion.

Second, in her apology, she insinuated that Liu Jie's "extreme behaviour" led to the breakup. This was criticised as "shifting the blame", yet she made no mention of having repeatedly accepted large-sum transfers from him.

Finally, Tan Zhu's apology videos were mostly posted late at night, and some of her accounts were accused of "riding the wave of popularity" or "paving the way for live-streaming monetisation". Although she claimed she would "sue the rumour-mongers", she took no actual action after the police statement, instead falling silent. She was thus perceived as having offered "an apology of mere expediency". Tan Zhu's actions guided public discussion of the incident and set the stage for the subsequent public opinion reversal and for Liu Jialing and others to face penalties.

At this stage, public opinion shifted from "one-sided condemnation" to "two-sided confrontation", although the overall balance remained tilted in favour of Liu Jialing. First, the discussion topics expanded from "Tan Zhu's fraud" to include "Tan Zhu lying", "AI-generated apology", "gender opposition", and other issues. The total number of views for related hashtags on Douyin rose to 620 million. Second, user sentiment became further polarised: users supporting Liu Jialing and those sympathising with Tan Zhu formed clearly opposing camps, while the remaining users remained in a state of "wait-and-see confusion". Third, the scope of online harassment widened. In addition to Tan Zhu and her family, netizens who spoke up for Tan Zhu were also attacked. For example, the local blogger "Chongqing Tan Dian Jun" (Chongqing Exploration Guide), after posting a video of the "flower shop closure scene", was denounced as an "accomplice" and forced to delete the video and disable comments.

### **3.3 Public Opinion Reversal Period: Mainstream Opinion Leaders-Temporary Pause in Polarisation and Localised Confrontation**

#### **(1) Core Subjects**

These include police statements and central

media commentaries. The police act as an authoritative body, while the central media possess agenda-setting capabilities. Official intervention shifts the event from moral judgement to legal procedures, and the evidence-chain-based narrative establishes the authorities as the sole credible definers of the truth[9].

## (2) Main Characteristics

### ① Government agencies: building a “factual narrative” centred on the chain of evidence

The Nan’an District Public Security Bureau of Chongqing formed a 30-person special task force. After 14 days of investigation, they constructed a complete evidence system and released information step by step on the Douyin platform to ensure effective guidance. On 11 May, they first issued a “Notice of Non-Indictment”, clarifying that “Tan Zhu does not constitute fraud” and briefly explaining that “the two parties were in a genuine romantic relationship, with economic exchanges going both ways”. On 19 May, they released a detailed statement, displaying the transaction details of both parties in a table format.

In addition, they simultaneously announced enforcement measures to strengthen the authority of the guidance. The statement explicitly listed three measures: first, banning Liu Jialing’s accounts across multiple platforms, including Douyin and Weibo; second, taking action against 235 rule-violating accounts—32 permanently banned, 203 temporarily suspended; and third, investigating more than 400 items of false information and summoning 12 netizens with severe violations for interviews. These measures were publicly disclosed in real time via the “Chongqing Nan’an Public Security Bureau” Douyin account, accompanied by the publication of a “List of Violating Accounts” and a “Clarification List of Rumours”, further enhancing the sense of authority.

### ② Mainstream media: multilevel interpretation, promoting “legal understanding + reflection on cyberbullying”

The mainstream media carried out a multilevel guidance strategy centred on police statements, consisting of interpretation, commentary and further extension, to form a communication matrix.

The People’s Daily Douyin account reposted the police statement within one hour of its release, adding a 20-second short commentary proposing

the “Three No Principles”. The “CCTV News” Douyin account produced a short video titled “Legal Interpretation of Financial Disputes in Romantic Relationships”, inviting a lawyer to analyse why the “Fat Cat’s transfers did not constitute fraud”.

The “Chongqing Release” Douyin account, in collaboration with the Chongqing Changjiang Bridge Management Office, released a video on the aftermath of the “takeaway tribute incident”, showing staff cleaning up the takeaways, and interviewed a manager who stated, “It not only pollutes the environment but also disrupts traffic order,” appealing to “rational mourning and rejection of extreme behavior”. The “Shangyou News” Douyin account interviewed a psychology expert who explained the “dangers of group polarisation” and analysed “why netizens engage in cyberbullying”, helping users understand the psychological mechanisms behind their own irrational behaviour.

The intervention of mainstream opinion leaders directly drove a fundamental reversal of public opinion: First, at the level of factual cognition, 82% of users accepted the conclusions that ‘Tan Zhu does not constitute fraud’ and that ‘Liu Jialing incited cyberbullying’, and the proportion of rational discussion in Douyin’s comment sections soared; second, at the emotional level, users’ sentiment shifted from ‘angry condemnation’ to ‘rational reflection’, with ‘oppose cyberbullying’ and ‘respect the facts’ becoming the dominant voices; third, at the behavioural level, cyberbullying effectively ceased, harassing phone calls to Tan Zhu and her family decreased, and police incidents around Chongqing Changjiang Bridge decreased; fourth, at the agenda level, the core of the public debate shifted from ‘morally judging Tan Zhu’ to ‘legal determination plus cyberbullying governance’.

## 3.4 Decline Stage of Public Opinion: Major Online Influencers-Fragmentation and Dissipation

### (1) Core Subjects and Functional Roles

The core guiding subjects at this stage are two types of major online influencers: first, those who participated in earlier discussions and have millions of followers in pan-social topics; second, newly involved vertical-field major influencers. Building on the authoritative conclusions of mainstream opinion leaders, these two types translate “legal determination” into accessible interpretations. Moreover, they

address remaining rumours and cognitive misunderstandings, guiding public opinion from “event settlement” to “value sedimentation”[10].

## (2) Specific Strategies and Content Characteristics of Guiding Behaviours

### ① Pan-Social Topic Major Influencers: Reviewing the Public Opinion Trajectory and Correcting Residual Misunderstandings

Major influencers such as ‘Guo+Community’, who had previously supported Liu Jialing, actively adjusted their content strategy at this stage, shifting from “riding the wave of popularity” to “rational review”:

Responding to residual rumours and reinforcing authoritative conclusions: In response to some users’ doubts that “the police favoured Tan Zhu”, they posted a photo of the “settlement agreement signed by Fat Cat’s father”, confirming that “the refund of 136,000 yuan is true”. This effectively dispelled lingering doubts, and under this video, the proportion of comments expressing “trust in the police” increased.

Unlike in the earlier stage of “chasing hot topics and trending rankings”, at this stage, influencers tended to publish content on weekday evenings, avoiding peak traffic hours. The video length ranged from 15–30 seconds to 3–5 minutes, with a focus on in-depth interpretation rather than emotional mobilisation. They no longer relied on hashtags to increase rankings but instead enhanced user engagement through “answering questions in the comment section”.

### ② Major Influencers of the vertical field: Extending the Value of the Issue and Promoting Cognitive Sedimentation

Vertical and social-observation vertical-field major influencers connected the event with professional knowledge, steering public opinion from a “specific incident” toward “general principles”:

Legal major influencers: interpreting legal boundaries in the incident and popularising rights-protection knowledge. Several lawyers elaborated on three legal points of contention in the Fat Cat incident: first, “whether money given as a gift voluntarily can be reclaimed”; second, “the consequences of leaking another person’s privacy”; and third, “the legal liability for online bullying remarks”. Their videos also provided practical advice such as “keeping proof of transfers during a romantic relationship” and “how to report cyber-bullying to the police”, becoming popular content for “legal education”.

Social-observation major influencers: Multiple videos exposed Liu Jialing’s team’s “traffic-manipulation chain”—“spotting a hot topic → ghostwriting content → buying traffic to gain followers → live-streaming for monetisation (not realised)”. They noted that “some self-media treat tragedies as a business, which is the root cause of the chaos in online public opinion”. Their videos also called on Douyin to “strengthen account audits for hot-topic events and crack down on traffic-buying and agenda-driving behaviours”. These videos attracted the platform’s attention, and subsequently, Douyin launched the “Hot-Event Content Review Guidelines”, explicitly prohibiting “using tragic events for hype”.

At this stage, the guiding behaviors of major online influencers facilitated the “differentiated dissipation” of public opinion and “value sedimentation”. Specifically, first, public opinion heat gradually decreased; the daily view count of related topics on Douyin began to decrease on 19 May, with significantly reduced user participation. Second, cognitive value expanded: users learned about “legal knowledge of property disputes in romantic relationships” and “digital literacy” through influencer content. Third, the platform’s ecology improved: on the basis of influencers’ suggestions, Douyin adjusted its “recommendation mechanism for hot events”, reducing the recommendation weight for content that “drives agendas and hypes tragedies”. Fourth, residual controversy remained manageable: Only a small number of users continued to question “details of the incident”, but this did not form a large-scale public opinion wave, and overall, public opinion moved toward rationality and calm.

## 4. The Role of Opinion Leaders in Public Sentiment Evolution

As a core variable in the evolution of public opinion on Douyin, opinion leaders differ in type, determining the differentiation of their guiding functions, and their behavioural strategies directly influence the direction and nature of public opinion[11]. Taking into account the five-stage evolutionary trajectory and the specific guiding behaviors of various types of opinion leaders, their impact on the evolution of public opinion is analysed from two dimensions: “typified functions” and “dual effects”[12].

#### 4.1 Grassroots Opinion Leaders

**Initiators and Polarisers of Public Opinion: Establishing the Initial Public Opinion Tone and Driving Polarisation.** When grassroots opinion leaders rely on the identity advantage of “event witnesses” and the guiding logic of “emotional resonance”, they become the “first driving force”, moving public opinion from the private sphere to the public eye. Their core role operates along the complete chain of “agenda setting–emotional intensification–action mobilisation”, directly establishing the initial public opinion tone of the incident.

##### (1) Agenda Setting: Transforming Private Disputes into Public Issues

During the nascent stage of the "Fat Cat Incident", grassroots opinion leader Liu Jialing, relying on her status as a direct family member, gained first-hand information and quickly filled the information vacuum left by authoritative sources. At the same time, she selectively constructed a binary narrative of "infatuated victim – swindling perpetrator", transforming a private tragedy arising from a romantic dispute into a public moral issue of "emotional manipulation plus financial fraud". Her account skyrocketed from a few hundred followers to nearly three million within ten days. Her core video received 182,000 comments and 44,000 reposts. The hashtag #FatCatIncident generated over ten million views within 72 hours, successfully propelling the event beyond its original circle.

##### (2) Emotional Intensification: Polarisation and Confrontation of Group Emotions

During the outbreak phase, Liu Jialing intensified emotions through three means: tragic details (make-up-free appearance, sobbing voice, slow-motion editing with sad background music); exposure of private information (publicising Tan Zhu's work address, residential community, Douyin account, etc., leading to over 60% of comments calling for "doxxing" and boycotts); and comment section manipulation (using sock puppet accounts to steer sentiment, enlisting relatives and friends to show support, deleting rational critical comments), thereby suppressing dissent and fostering a one-sided outcry. At the same time, Tan Zhu's inappropriate response (appearing with make-up, failing to mention the money transfers, implying the deceased was volatile) further intensified the antagonism. Public opinion shifted from a single-voiced

condemnation to a two-sided confrontation, falling into a dilemma where "emotional argument outweighed factual discussion".

##### (3) Action Mobilisation: From Online Denunciation to Offline Extreme Behaviour

Liu Jialing and her team, using tragic narratives coupled with calls to action, translated emotions into real-world actions: on 3 May, the call for a "takeaway tribute" led to 94.6 tonnes of delivered food being cleared from the Chongqing Yangtze River Bridge, forcing the involved Huàláishì (Wallace) branch to rectify its operations. Tan Zhu's flower shop was besieged by netizens, and she and her family members received death threats and doxxing. Police incidents around the bridge surged, fully demonstrating the impact of emotionally charged guidance by grassroots opinion leaders on real-world public order.

#### 4.2 Mainstream Media Opinion Leaders

Mainstream media opinion leaders, backed by official credibility and evidence-based narratives, intervene at the critical point of public opinion spiralling out of control. Through a combined strategy of “legal determination – authoritative interpretation – closed-loop regulation”, they end polarising dynamics and reframe the discourse around a “facts-first” framework.

##### (1) Legal determination: replacing emotional narratives with chains of evidence.

A 30-person special task force from the Nan'an District Public Security Bureau in Chongqing used a complete chain of evidence to restore the truth: transaction records confirmed a genuine romantic relationship between the parties, ruling out fraud by Tan Zhu; it also established that Liu Jialing had leaked private information, colluded with online manipulators to ghostwrite posts, and purchased traffic to incite cyberbullying. The police announcement video garnered over 500 million views within 24 hours, with online comments shifting towards rational discussion, completely dismantling the earlier “tragic scam” consensus.

##### (2) Authoritative interpretation: multi-tiered dissemination to lower cognitive barriers and guide rationality.

National and local media formed a coordinated network to translate official conclusions into accessible language and value guidance. People's Daily's Douyin account released a short commentary advocating the “three no's principle”, stressing that “cyberbullying is not

justice". CCTV News, in collaboration with legal professionals, produced an analysis titled *Legal Interpretation of Financial Disputes in Romantic Relationships*, referencing Articles 657 (gift contracts) and 266 (fraud) of the Civil Code to explain why "voluntary gifts do not constitute fraud". The video received 420,000 likes, with comments such as "educational" and "correcting previous misunderstandings" predominant. The local media outlet Chongqing Release highlighted the environmental and traffic hazards of "takeaway memorials", calling for rational mourning, thereby steering users from emotional venting towards reasoned understanding.

(3) Closed-loop regulation: severing the chain of negative communication.

The guidance from mainstream media opinion leaders was reinforced by enforcement measures forming a closed loop: police banned Liu Jialing's accounts across multiple platforms, deactivated 235 rule-breaking accounts, investigated and dealt with over 400 pieces of disinformation, and interviewed 12 individuals who had committed serious violations. These actions directly cut off the sources of harmful information: harassing calls to Tan Zhu and her family dropped by 90%, police incidents near the Chongqing Yangtze River Bridge fell from an average of 23 per day to just 3, cyberbullying effectively ceased, and the polarised public opinion situation was fundamentally contained.

#### 4.3 The Dual Nature of Opinion Leaders' Influence

From the overall evolution of the "Fat Cat Incident", the influence of opinion leaders on public opinion is not unidirectional but rather a coexistence of "positive value" and "negative risk", which exhibits dynamic transformation characteristics at different stages. This duality is embodied in the following dimensions:

(1) Positive Guiding Value: Mainstream media opinion leaders set agendas such as "legal characterisation" and "cyberbullying governance", steering public opinion from "emotional confrontation" towards "factual discussion"; internet influencers promote a "social reflection" agenda, extending the conversation to institutional improvement. Professional opinion leaders' vertical popular science enhances public awareness of "love-related property disputes" and "group polarisation". Over 60% of users gain

knowledge of legal matters and digital literacy through such content, resulting in lasting cognitive gains. At the same time, authoritative intervention and regulatory measures curb cyberbullying, thereby preserving social order and real-world stability.

(2) Negative Risks and Hidden Dangers: Grassroots opinion leaders' one-sided information, tragic narratives and privacy breaches directly trigger group polarisation and online violence. Tan Zhu and her family, as well as netizens who spoke up for her, are attacked, creating "camp-based opposition". Some internet influencers' early "emotional bandwagoning" amplifies emotional antagonism, leading to secondary risks such as the spread of gender opposition – among the 235 violator accounts, a few are involved in such incitement. The false narratives and traffic-driven stunts of grassroots opinion leaders like Liu Jialing undermine public trust in "event witnesses/relatives". In subsequent similar incidents, the proportion of users questioning "statements from relatives" rises, impairing the effective expression of genuine appeals.

(3) Dynamic Transformation of Duality: The positive and negative influences of opinion leaders shift as events evolve and their own strategies adjust – some internet influencers, initially amplifying negative emotions for traffic, later turn to rational interpretation, becoming a positive force; the intervention of mainstream media opinion leaders converts the negative impact of grassroots opinion leaders into positive value. This demonstrates that through standardising guiding behaviour and strengthening platform regulation, the influence of opinion leaders can be steered from "negative risk" towards "positive value".

#### 5. Conclusion

The four types of opinion leaders assume distinct roles at different stages of the "Fat Cat Incident" public opinion evolution. Their guiding behaviors influence public sentiment through a process involving "information filtering—emotional mobilization—cognitive shaping—action advocacy." Meanwhile, their dual impact underscores the need to "regulate grassroots opinion leaders' conduct, strengthen the authority of mainstream media, and guide influential online figures to speak rationally," thereby fully leveraging the positive value of opinion leaders while mitigating negative risks

and fostering a healthy online public opinion ecosystem.

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