

## Lawyers' "Self-Promotional Hype" in Extrajudicial Statements and Its Regulation under Professional Ethics

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**Abstract:** Lawyers are an indispensable part of the modern judicial system. Their out-of-court speech not only helps to safeguard the rights and interests of the parties, but also may shape public discussion and promote public supervision of justice. The business promotion and public expression through out-of-court speech is not in itself a violation of professional ethics. However, in the self-media environment, another type of problem has become increasingly prominent: lawyers do not mainly focus on the facts of the case, the focus of the law or the interests of the parties, but use the public expression outside the court to imply special relationships, package personal identities, and manufacture network traffic to expand personal influence or contract business. This article defines such behavior as "self-hype" in lawyers' out-of-court remarks. This is different from the case of illegal speculation handled according to law in the main threat case, and also different from the improper business promotion that mainly disturbs the order of the legal service market. The essential feature of "self-hype" is to use professional identity and public communication channels to transform out-of-court speech into a tool for personal fame and profit. Taking the Tianjin' police sister-in-law lawyer' dispute as the starting point, this paper identifies common forms of self-promotion, including identity packaging, special relationship hints, absolute or exaggerated propaganda, and shaping personal image through public events. Such acts not only mislead potential parties, distort the competition in the legal service market, but also violate the core professional obligations of lawyers, damage the reputation of the legal professional community, and violate the credibility of the judiciary. China's current norms contain a number of applicable provisions, but there are still some problems, such as the dispersion of the focus of the norms, the unclear standards for the

identification of misconduct, and the lack of coercive power of local self-discipline rules. Therefore, this paper proposes to establish an independent identification standard for "self-hyping" behavior in the lawyer's out-of-court speech regulation system, and form a collaborative regulation through internal audit of the law firm, supervision and punishment of the legal association, and professional ethics education.

**Keywords:** Lawyers' Extrajudicial Statements; Self-Promotional Hype; Legal Professional Ethics; Public Confidence in the Judiciary

### 1. Introduction

In December 2025, a criminal defense lawyer from Tianjin caused controversy by publicly disclosing the identity of his "police spouse" on social media and mentioning that his spouse was handling economic criminal cases at the Municipal Public Security Bureau. The core dispute is about the chance of misleading effect when a lawyer shows family ties with professional identity; even if the tie is true, such presentation could make potential clients mistakenly believe the lawyer has special perks, special contacts, or can sway the case's result; so the issue concerns not only personal information truth, but also whether lawyers can use a relative's official post in an institution to pull in business with that institution's authority. The dispute did not involve out-of-court defense work, and the lawyer gave no legal advice on any specific case; she also did not answer bad press to protect her client; the main issue was whether a lawyer may bring a family tie with an official in the justice system into personal marketing, and whether this kind of self-promotion communicates a background related to her profession or hints at special access. If a lawyer knows that the public could take the wording as meaning she is "well connected," "able to talk with authorities," or "able to get things done," and yet still uses it as a selling

point in self-introduction, the problem is not just an unsuitable promotion method; it reaches the ethical boundary for lawyers' public statements outside court.

Through four aspects—the speaker's professional role, the time and place, the publication method, and the statement's content—Chen Shi looks at this question and defines a lawyer's out-of-court statements in criminal cases as public remarks made outside the courtroom about a case being handled [1]; Han Xu points out that, even though lawyers' out-of-court speech is a kind of citizen's free expression, lawyers should be more careful because this speech has features that set it apart from common public comments: it can serve a checking and gap-filling function, carries weight and trustworthiness, may mislead or provoke, and often involves guesswork and value judgments [2]; therefore, lawyers' out-of-court comments should not be viewed as ordinary online speech, since their professional position can make the statements appear more authoritative, spread further, and cause misunderstanding more easily.

This discussion has two important sides; from the theoretical side, three things that studies have long mixed up can be separated—discussing cases, promoting a business, and marketing oneself; on the practical side, we can handle the growing hype on lawyers' social media, such as image packaging, chasing web traffic, vulgar attention-seeking behavior, and hints of special connections; lawyers do need space to speak and promote their work in suitable ways, but the legal field is not like a common business brand, so speech that chases internet traffic may not meet ethical standards, and publicity that raises client questions is not always proper.

## **2. Conceptualizing and Distinguishing Self-Promotional Hype in Lawyers' Extrajudicial Statements**

### **2.1 Self-Promotional Hype as a Form of Misconduct in Extrajudicial Statements**

In this article, the term "self-promotional hype" in lawyers' out-of-court statements is described as a kind of conduct; public channels—like social media accounts, short videos, livestreams, and promotional materials—are used by a lawyer, and the main purpose is to gain personal business benefits or grow personal social

influence; the publicity that is spread by the lawyer tends to be exaggerated, misleading, carries hints of special connections, or receives too much packaging, and this publicity is centered on the lawyer, rather than on case facts, legal issues, or the professional services themselves. In the article, the idea is treated as having four parts; first, the main aim is to boost personal impact, attract followers and web traffic, or get clients; second, it is carried out in public communication spaces outside court; third, the content is exaggerated, false, misleading, or centered on personal connections, and this could make the public or potential clients believe the lawyer has special resources that go beyond work skills; fourth, the focus of promotion is the lawyer's own professional image, and it shifts away from legal issues and service ability, moving toward personal identity, labels, and stories, rather than case facts, legal reasoning, or other professional services. We should understand this behavior within the wider structure of lawyers' out-of-court remarks; such speech is not against the law or wrong in itself; as long as they stay within the rules, lawyers are allowed to provide public legal education, to respond to unfavorable publicity about a client, and to describe their practice fields and professional experience; the main problem is that ethical trouble appears when out-of-court expression stops focusing on facts, evidence, law, and the client's proper interests, and instead puts the lawyer forward, packages a personal identity, and creates personal internet traffic.

The Tianjin dispute over a "police-spouse lawyer" shows this risk; the lawyer never openly said she could "use connections," yet just by putting her husband's official job in the profile, possible clients could be led to think so; for an ordinary person, police economic crime investigation units hold much specialized knowledge and strong enforcement power, especially in economic crime cases, so when a lawyer places a relative's identity as an economic crime investigator into an account profile, the information is no longer just a neutral description of work background, but is turned into a trust-building signal when people look for legal help. People do not build trust from legal analysis or practical ability. Instead, trust comes from the carry-over influence of a justice-system official's position, so the ethical problem of this behavior is not about whether

actual interference in a case happened; rather, the problem is that the lawyer's public out-of-court statement created the impression that a special channel could exist, and this misleads potential clients, disrupts the normal operation of the legal-services market, and goes against the basic principle of judicial fairness.

## **2.2 Distinguishing Self-Hype from Legitimate Extrajudicial Advocacy**

Self-hype must first be distinguished from legitimate extrajudicial defense advocacy, which may be justified. Yi Yanyou and Ma Qin argue that freedom of extrajudicial advocacy by defense lawyers is more appropriately understood as part of the defense rights of persons subject to criminal prosecution: such advocacy is an intrinsic component of the right to a defense and also overlaps with freedom of expression [3]. In China's judicial practice, lawyers sometimes use extrajudicial statements to respond to prejudicial publicity, expose procedural illegality, or protect clients' lawful rights and interests; such conduct is not automatically hype. Han Xu likewise recognizes that, when lawyers' rights are restricted or legitimate demands receive no response, a "deficit of rights" in the courtroom may be compensated for through speech in the public sphere. When the defense right is not well protected in court, the imbalance between prosecution and defense can be helped by lawyers' out-of-court statements [2]; so not every public statement made by a lawyer should be labeled as self-hype, and the key question is whether the statement helps the case facts, the legal issues at hand, and the client's lawful interests; out-of-court statements should not be easily put into the self-hype category if the facts are clear, the scope is needed, the language is held back, and the aim is to protect the client's lawful rights and interests. But when the attention turns to the lawyer's education, fame, success rate, public image, or growth of followers, or when the lawyer again and again uses a case's popularity to build a personal hero image, the speech has already moved away from the proper purpose of out-of-court advocacy.

## **2.3 Distinguishing Self-Hype from Improper Business Promotion**

To get a clear definition of self-hype, we first need to sort out how it is connected to improper business promotion; the two are closely tied, yet

they are not the same thing. Because self-hype and improper business promotion overlap a lot, their close but not identical relationship must be sorted out so that self-hype can be clearly defined; when a lawyer uses social media to attract client inquiries and work by inflating personal credentials, hinting at special ties, calling oneself an expert, or making absolute claims, such acts could be both improper business promotion under professional advertising rules and the out-of-court self-hype this article discusses; for example, the Hefei Lawyers Association and the Zhejiang Lawyers Association have documents that clearly ban false or misleading publicity on social media [4,5], and in this overlapping space, self-hype often appears as improper business promotion. Even with this overlap, though, it is wrong to treat self-hype as simply a smaller part of, or the same thing as, improper business promotion; if the two are lumped together, some special ethical problems get missed—problems that go far beyond just business promotion and sit at the very heart of a lawyer's work duties; the two ideas can be told apart from three sides: the focus of the rules, the purpose, and the usual forms they take.

First, the focus of the rules is different; improper business promotion rules mainly look at conduct from the angle of order in the legal-services market, and their key concerns are keeping competition fair and preventing consumers from being misled, while the thing they regulate is the act of getting business itself. The self-hype idea put forward here starts from professional ethics, and its main worry is whether a lawyer has misused the trust the public gives to professional status, turning public speech inside and outside the courtroom into a show put on for personal fame or gain. In other words, improper business-promotion rules ask if a specific way of bringing in clients is fair and not misleading, while the self-hype concept asks if the conduct weakens the dignity, carefulness, and respect for a fair court that the legal profession demands.

Second, the aim is not limited to getting business; improper business promotion has a fairly clear goal, directly or indirectly bringing in clients, while the aims of self-hype are more varied and not so obvious. A widely-known case or public event can be used by a lawyer to build an image of being "unafraid to speak," "a champion of the people," or "the voice of

justice"; the main aim here is not necessarily to find work, but to gather personal reputation, attract followers, and build up professional status; even if that reputation later brings in cases, the driving force is still that reputation itself, not the need to get work at once, and when the space of public discussion is turned into a personal stage, this goes against the professional role a lawyer should play, even if it does not directly set off the rules about business promotion.

Third, the common forms are not just about business promotion; improper business promotion mostly takes place in ads, account profiles, and other places directly tied to getting clients, but self-hype works on a wider stage and can get into a lawyer's legal commentary on any public event or case; for example, a lawyer commenting on a high-profile event not related to any case they handle may on purpose use heated and divisive words to gain traffic and attention, and the focus then shifts from legal analysis to personal performance; this case-leveraging self-hype is hard to capture with traditional business promotion rules.

In sum, self-hype and improper business promotion are not simply one inside the other, but rather partly overlapping groups; they cross over in actions like false publicity and hints of special connections, but are different in what rules worry about, the range of purposes, and where they usually show up; self-hype has its own ethical weight that goes past market order and touches the basic duties of how lawyers should act, and it also comes in forms that business-promotion rules cannot fully cover; these features make it both needed and valuable for thinking to define and regulate it as its own idea.

## **2.4 Distinguishing Self-Hype from Legitimate Business Promotion**

Lawyers are allowed to promote what they do; in the modern market for legal services, clients need public information to pick a lawyer, and lawyers need to make their practice areas known; proper promotion should focus on professional skills, which means explaining legal issues, informing people about how cases are handled, describing practice areas, showing past cases in a standard way, and giving rule-following descriptions of services; the dividing line between proper promotion and self-hype is fairly clear, because proper promotion lets the

public see what a lawyer can do and how the work will be done legally, while self-hype leads people to believe the lawyer has special connections, a strong personal image, or unusual internet power; proper promotion depends on facts and professional ability, but self-hype uses labels and hints to create false trust; the Zhejiang Lawyers Association's own rules state that lawyers and firms must share statements, works, and information on social media in a professional and careful way that fits their standing; these rules also say that any legal content put out under a lawyer's or firm's name should be true, correct, fair, careful, and sensible, and should not mislead the public [5]; in this way, the requirements draw a basic line between proper promotion and self-hype.

## **2.5 Distinguishing Self-Hype from Improper Case Hype**

The legal profession already has express rules governing improper case hype. Article 1 of the All China Lawyers Association's Rules on Prohibiting the Improper Hype of Cases (Trial) states that the rules are intended to prevent lawyers from affecting the lawful handling of cases through improper hype and similar means, and to preserve an honest and fair practice environment, the profession's public image, and judicial impartiality. Article 4 lists, among other conduct, manufacturing public pressure through joint petitions, open letters, online mobilization, or campaigns of support; disseminating distorted or misleading publicity or commentary through traditional or social media; and hyping misleading, false, or speculative information [6]. The regulatory focus of improper case hype is thus to prevent lawyers from influencing case handling through public opinion. It is concerned with the integrity of case procedures, case information, parties, and case-handling authorities. Self-hype, by contrast, need not be tied to a pending case. It can occur in an ordinary account profile, the homepage of a short-video channel, livestream solicitation scripts, promotional posters, or copy prepared by third-party marketers. In the Tianjin "police-spouse lawyer" controversy, the central issue was not the disclosure of information about a particular case, but the use of a familial relationship with an official of a justice-sector authority to package the lawyer's personal image. The conduct may indirectly affect public trust in the judiciary, but it is not a

paradigmatic instance of case hype.

The two categories may nevertheless intersect. A lawyer may use a high-profile case as an occasion for highly emotional commentary that appears to discuss the case but in substance cultivates an image of being "unafraid to speak," "a champion of the people," or "the embodiment of justice." Guo Zhili distinguishes proactive opinion-building from reactive response in defense lawyers' extrajudicial statements. Proactive opinion-building occurs when a lawyer publicly comments on a represented case before the prosecution or a third party does so, with the aim of creating an opinion environment favorable to the defense and thereby influencing the court's decision [7]. When such opinion-building becomes separated from the client's interests, being used instead to grow the lawyer's personal name, it turns from case hype into self-hype.

### **3. A Type Analysis of Self-Promotional Hype in Lawyers' Extrajudicial Statements**

#### **3.1 Identity Packaging: Manufacturing Trust through Special Status or Relationships**

The type of self-hype that packages personal identity is the most direct and easiest to spot, and it involves using language that is exaggerated or absolute, hinting at special relationships, or making claims that depend on a supposedly unique status; common forms include describing oneself with phrases like "number one in the country," "the leading lawyer in a certain field," "the strongest criminal defense lawyer," or "a lawyer who always wins"; implying special ties with police agencies, prosecution offices, courts, or judicial administration bodies; bringing in clients by mentioning "inside resources," "connections in handling cases," or "being personally familiar with leaders of a certain office"; and turning the fact that relatives, classmates, or friends work in justice-system institutions into a promotional highlight, the underlying logic here being to turn professional status or private relationships into symbols that act as trust cues in the market. The Tianjin "police-spouse lawyer" dispute serves as a clear case of self-hype that packages personal identity; no direct promise of case results was given by the lawyer, but on her profile, along with being a lawyer, she mentioned a family connection to a police officer in the city's public security department

who handles economic crimes; a person involved in a criminal case could easily read this wording as showing that the lawyer holds inside information or private ways to communicate; rules of professional ethics must not be kept to the speaker's own account, they also need to weigh the real chance that the publicity will mislead an ordinary person; even if the lawyer claims that people took her meaning the wrong way, as long as the words can lead a reasonable person to believe a special tie is there, the wording still goes against the duty to be careful, truthful, and restrained in lawyer promotion.

Identity-packaging self-hype does harm because, in a basic way, it changes how people judge legal services; it puts claimed connections in place of work skills as the ground for competition; normally, a client picks a lawyer by looking at ability, experience, effort, and communication; but when lawyers grab attention with labels like "police officer's sponsor," "court resources," or "connections in the prosecutor's office," the rivalry in the legal services market is turned into a fight over imagined ties; this kind of act misleads clients; it also builds a false belief that personal ties can shape case results, and that hurts public trust in the justice system.

#### **3.2 Case Leveraging: Building Personal Reputation through High-Profile Cases or Public Events**

Compared to self-hype that packages personal identity, the kind that uses cases is harder to spot, and it gets mixed up more easily with proper out-of-court speaking for a client; usually it does not say directly that the lawyer is skilled, rather, it builds a personal image by using public events, well-known cases, and how society feels; a lawyer might share famous cases over and over, post commentary full of strong feeling, use language that splits people, or attack court bodies or the other side, all to draw attention; what seems like caring about the public is, in truth, a way to gather personal fame; the key difference from lawful out-of-court advocacy is whether the lawyer's speech still serves a client's lawful interests in a specific case and stays focused on facts and legal matters; as Yi Yanyou and Ma Qin note, what should be blamed is twisted or misleading promotion, not lawful public advocacy [3]; once the focus moves from protecting a client to

creating the lawyer's own public face, and the client's difficult position becomes stuff for making personal web traffic, this conduct can be called self-hype.

### **3.3 Traffic-Driven Marketing: Substituting Social-Media Reach for Demonstrated Professional Competence**

Self-hype driven by web traffic mostly takes place on social media that are fast-paced and emotional, like short-video and livestreaming platforms; special ties are not directly hinted at by this hype, instead, attention is grabbed with exaggerated headlines, stories that are full of strong feelings, rough language, or by making people worried on purpose; for example, tough legal questions can be dressed up as "a secret your lawyer will tell you," "do this and the other party will go to prison," or "three sentences that will make the police drop the case"; case stories and client experiences may also be shared by lawyers in a way that is openly meant to be fun or shocking

This pattern brings a danger: it changes the way legal work is done by turning out-of-court statements from professional speech into a product that creates web traffic; a similar thing, named "legal influence" by Song and Rogers, is when lawyers use their legal knowledge and professional standing to build a following online and turn audience loyalty into business profit or cultural value, and they also note that platform rules and business needs limit this activity [8]; to meet platform rules and audience feelings, lawyers may on purpose simplify legal rules, overstate legal results, and create conflict, and so they produce a steady stream of unprofessional and inaccurate content; what the public gets is not careful and sensible legal knowledge, but a non-professional narrative shaped by the logic of web traffic; over time, this both makes the legal profession look less serious in the eyes of the public and weakens lawyers' own commitment to working professionally.

## **4. Professional-Ethics Harms of Self-Promotional Hype in Lawyers' Extrajudicial Statements**

### **4.1 Erosion of Lawyers' Professional Ethics**

A lawyer's professional duties are built on loyalty, honesty, carefulness, and independence; these values are slowly worn away by self-hype.

First, honesty is broken: a wrong impression that a special channel could exist is made when a lawyer builds trust by hinting at special ties or packaging personal identity, and even if the facts are not exactly false, the public gets tricked, and the well-grounded trust that legal services must rest on is weakened. Second, it breaks the duty to be careful; as Han Xu points out, lawyers owe a higher duty of care than ordinary people when they speak outside the courtroom [2], but self-hype does the opposite by purposely raising emotion, making reasoning simpler, and creating conflict just to get traffic, which does not match the careful and sensible way lawyers are expected to speak. Third, it makes independence and loyalty less steady; a lawyer's loyalty should be pointed toward the client's lawful interests, not toward their own traffic numbers; in criminal defense work, Wang Yinglong's loyalty model with legal force also puts the client's lawful rights and interests at the center, while accepting the limits of public interest and stating that clearer rules are needed when these two clash [9]; when lawyers get too taken up with building a personal image and hinting at relationships, marketing aims may take hold of both professional judgment and market behavior, and this weakens the independence that lawful advocacy calls for. In short, what self-hype does is turn professional identity into a product and tune it for web traffic. As a result, the public no longer sees a careful, rational legal worker, but rather an online seller, who goes after hot topics and grabs attention, and in doing so twists the very sense of what it means to be a legal professional.

### **4.2 Disruption of Order in the Legal-Services Market**

Lawyers are allowed to compete; but this competition should rely on work skills and service quality, self-hype, by pulling in clients through exaggerated publicity, hints of special ties, and image packaging, puts honest lawyers at an unfair disadvantage; look at the difference between a lawyer who carefully writes legal articles, offers public legal education, and clearly states services, and another who says they are "well connected," "know how the inside works," or can "make the problem go away"; this second lawyer, by creating an information gap and playing on public worry, can get web traffic and possible cases faster and more directly; this way, competition among

lawyers is steered away from improving skills and toward making up marketing stories, and away from building client trust and toward stirring client fear; it not only harms lawyers who follow ethical rules and work honestly, but also deeply throws off the normal working order of the legal services market, a market that should stand on professional trust and open information.

#### **4.3 Damage to Public Confidence in the Judiciary**

Self-hype does many kinds of damage, and the deepest of them is that it weakens public trust in the courts. Publicity that hints at special ties is very damaging, because it can make people believe that cases get special treatment through personal connections, inside resources, or social position; even when no real meddling takes place, as these hints spread widely, the feeling of unfairness in the courts grows stronger, and the public may wrongly come to believe that law and facts do not decide results, and that ties and resources decide them instead.

Lawyers speak with the weight of their professional role, so their words naturally come across as expert and trustworthy; the misunderstanding and harm caused by lawyers' self-hype, then, are more serious than the harm from everyday online rumors; the All China Lawyers Association has rules that clearly say lawyers' public speech must not hurt the profession's image or its dignity [6]. Zhang Guoquan also stresses that lawyers' hype can weaken trust in the results of criminal cases [10]. This kind of behavior directly erodes public trust in the fairness of legal procedures and in the authority of court decisions, a trust that a law-based society simply cannot do without.

### **5. Difficulties in Applying the Existing Regulatory Framework**

#### **5.1 National Rules Focus Primarily on "Case Hype"**

A first problem stems from the main national rule, the Rules on Prohibiting the Improper Hype of Cases (Trial). This rule starts from the idea of a "case" and aims to prevent lawyers from using public opinion hype to affect the lawful and fair handling of specific cases [6]; yet, as shown above, a great deal of self-hype is not linked to any particular case. When a lawyer constantly hints at special connections in a

personal profile or keeps doing traffic-chasing marketing through livestreams, the rules on improper case hype cannot be applied with precision because there is no clear case link. Regulators must instead rely on business-promotion rules, social-media initiatives, and professional-conduct norms. The relationship among these instruments is unclear, which can produce inconsistent identification standards. In the absence of a strong and direct national rule, self-hype falls into a regulatory gap.

#### **5.2 Local Self-Regulatory Instruments Have Limited Enforceability**

In recent years, local lawyers' associations have begun to regulate lawyers' use of social media. The Zhejiang Lawyers Association's self-regulatory convention provides that lawyers' associations at all levels may, as circumstances warrant, conduct warning interviews, order rectification, and take other measures against lawyers and law firms that unlawfully or improperly operate social-media accounts, so as promptly to eliminate adverse effects; conduct causing serious consequences is to be addressed in accordance with law and applicable rules [5]. The Hefei Lawyers Association's initiative similarly states that the municipal association will, depending on the circumstances, conduct warning interviews or order rectification when law firms or lawyers operate social-media accounts unlawfully or improperly, and will address conduct causing serious consequences in accordance with law and applicable rules [4]. These local associations have responded constructively to the challenges created by social media, and their instruments perform important educational and warning functions. However, the official authority and enforcement power of these rules are still limited; most of them are called "initiatives" or "self-regulatory conventions," and they mainly contain provisions that express hopes or general principles; warning interviews and orders to make corrections may work for small violations, but for self-hype that has already caused serious misleading or large harmful social effects, the rules often do not explain how gentle suggestions should lead to formal investigation and discipline; the absence of clear procedural steps and enforceable guarantees also weakens the power of local rules to scare people when the bad behavior keeps going and is driven by profit.

### **5.3 A Regulatory Gap between Rules on Extrajudicial Statements and Rules on Business Promotion**

As explained above, self-hype lies between two regulatory regimes: rules governing extrajudicial statements and rules governing business promotion. The former focuses on the effect of speech on adjudication and judicial impartiality; the latter focuses on the effect of advertising on market order and consumer rights. Self-hype implicates both regimes but does not fit comfortably within either. The immediate result of this overlap is fragmented regulatory reasoning. Lawyers' associations in different localities, or different departments within the same association, may reach different conclusions about the same conduct because they adopt different analytical perspectives.

## **6. A Professional-Ethics Regulatory Framework for Self-Promotional Hype**

### **6.1 Establish an Independent Test for Self-Promotional Hype**

The first step in resolving the present difficulties is to establish, at the normative level, an independent, clear, and operational test for self-hype rather than relying exclusively on existing frameworks for case hype or improper promotion. On the basis of the preceding analysis, the test should contain three progressively structured levels.

First, a formal criterion: whether there is excessive packaging centered on the lawyer personally. Review should ask whether the center of gravity lies in professional matters such as case facts and legal analysis, or instead focuses excessively on the lawyer's education, experience, success rate, distinctive status, or relationships with judicial authorities. When publicity moves away from a professional description and makes personal labels its main selling point, it should be given a closer look.

The second point is about the main test: can the speech make the public believe that the lawyer has special resources or can promise a certain result; self-hype is not always a direct lie, and what matters is whether the way the information is put together and shown is enough to make a normal, ordinary possible client think that "this lawyer has connections" or that "hiring this lawyer will solve the matter"; even if it is true that a family member works for a case-handling

office, putting that fact clearly into business promotion is still misleading.

Third, an additional standard is: does the lawyer create personal web traffic in a way that is separate from legal issues; when a lawyer taking part in public discussion keeps using over-the-top headlines, emotional attacks, or purposely makes use of hot events, and turns public events into tools for growing a personal account, this pattern moves away from the basic ethics of public expression by legal professionals; Han Xu's proposed rule against self-hype points out specific signs of this worry; a lawyer may do self-hype by using the social effect of a case to promote himself or herself through out-of-court statements - for example, by stressing personal education, practice experience, taking part in big cases, success rates, or personal contribution to a case; by giving repeated or non-stop out-of-court statements when there is no need; by sharing information on many platforms, including platforms run by others, just to pull public attention; or by putting down other lawyers while lifting oneself up [2]; this offers a direct ground for building independent identification standards.

### **6.2 Build a Coordinated Mechanism of Internal Review, Professional Oversight, and Sanction Enforcement**

Regulation of self-hype should not rely only on discipline that comes after the fact; a system with three levels of working together should be set up: law firms handle prevention at the front, lawyers' associations keep watch in the middle, and at the final stage sanctions are actually enforced. First, law firms' managerial responsibility should be strengthened. Law firms are the primary institutional managers of lawyers' professional activities. National and local rules already require them to establish internal systems. The All China Lawyers Association's rules require law firms to perform their managerial duties strictly, establish sound internal management systems, prohibit their lawyers from engaging in improper case hype, and correct problems promptly when discovered [6]. The Hefei Lawyers Association's initiative likewise requires law firms, as necessary, to establish internal management mechanisms and strictly supervise statements, works, and information issued by the firm and its lawyers through social-media platforms [4]. The Zhejiang Lawyers Association's self-regulatory



convention similarly provides that law firms should establish internal management mechanisms as needed and supervise the compliance of social-media statements, works, and information published by the firm and its lawyers [5].

Law firms should create basic compliance-review mechanisms, proactively reviewing lawyers' public account profiles, promotional posters, and livestream scripts, and maintaining a clear red-line list. Second, lawyers' associations should exercise both professional guidance and oversight. Lawyers' associations should not be only disciplinary bodies; they should also put out professional standards and keep databases of case types; by regularly releasing typical discipline cases, such as those involving hints of special ties or personal image-building through famous cases, they can provide the profession with clear and predictable guidance; finally, a clear, uniform, and enforceable disciplinary process must be set up for conduct that crosses clear red lines, and penalties need to be serious and effective; this will overcome the current pattern of many proposals but few punishments, and ensure that the rules work in real practice.

### 6.3 Combine Regulation with Education

Not all self-hype is done on purpose. A good part of it can come from a weak grasp of new media by lawyers, or from a poor sense of what the rules require; Zhang Guoquan points out that lawyers may take part in hype "intentionally or unintentionally" [10]. For this reason, regulation and education need to work together; when the misstep is small or happens for the first time, corrective steps like cautioning talks, warnings, and required rule-following training should be put first, so that lawyers can spot the moral dangers hidden in how they act; but when the violation is willful and brings serious harm to the public, work-related punishment should be given, and this serves as a warning to others. Even more importantly, a unit on the right use of social media should be built into the training for lawyers' professional behavior in a planned way, and special care should be given to helping lawyers learn to spot the dangers that come from hinting at personal ties, from headlines that chase web traffic, and from making cases public. Lawyers need to understand that the line for out-of-court talk asks for more than just not telling outright lies, it also means staying away

from creating wrong impressions and keeping the dignity of the work safe. Chidume also believes that lawyers' involvement in social media is not inherently incompatible with professional ethics and should be regulated by clear, regularly updated best practices to fulfill their responsibilities to clients, the public and employers [11].

### 6.4 Regulate Self-Hype While Protecting Legitimate Extrajudicial Statements

Regulating self-hype in lawyers' extrajudicial statements must not become a simple restriction on extrajudicial expression as such. Such speech may be harmful, but it may also be necessary. Wang Yinglong argues that the legitimacy of lawyers' out-of-court statements should be judged using a combination of subjective and objective criteria. This includes examining whether the statements pose a substantial danger to the fairness of judicial proceedings, as well as their ethical implications, particularly whether they serve the legitimate interests of the client. Furthermore, he advocates for clearly defining prohibited and safe zones to provide clear guidance for lawyers' expression of their opinions [12]. Yi Yanyou and Ma Qin likewise propose, in order to constrain abuse of discretion and selective enforcement, a framework combining prohibited, safe, and transitional zones [3].

Based on these ideas, a model with three zones could be used by the rules that govern self-hype: a zone where actions are banned, a safe zone, and a zone that needs more care; in the banned zone, false promises, hints of special connections, breaking of privacy, and low tactics used to grab attention would be clearly stopped; the safe zone would keep proper speech safe, like fair descriptions of practice fields, lawful teaching of the public about law, and careful, sensible talk about cases; the zone that needs more care would apply to settings with more risk, such as showing example cases and giving opinions on hot events, and it would call for facts that can be checked, wording that is held back, and a steering clear of promises about results or hints of special ties.

With a model that separates situations into different kinds, regulators can aim at self-hype wrongdoing with more accuracy; at the same time, lawyers get a clear safe area for doing their professional work lawfully and for proper public speech; in this way, the unfair limiting

of professional rights, which can come from rules that treat everything the same, can be avoided.

## 7. Conclusion

Self-hype in lawyers' out-of-court statements looks like a marketing problem on the surface, but deep down it is a matter of professional ethics; lawyers are allowed to market their services, talk in public, and join public discussions through social media, but what they cannot do is turn ties with justice-sector bodies into selling points, use cases and clients' tough spots as material for personal web traffic, or put an invented public image in place of professional skills.

The Tianjin "police-spouse lawyer" dispute makes clear that the line for lawyers' out-of-court statements is not just about whether a statement is factually untrue; it also turns on whether the statement builds a wrong impression, hurts the dignity of the profession, or leads the public to think that personal ties can shape how justice is done; China's existing rules do give a starting point for dealing with lawyers' self-hype, but what is still needed are clearer ideas, identification standards that are more alike, and ways to put enforcement into action more effectively; future regulation should move past the narrow ban on case-hyping and clearly block misleading self-packaging that uses the lawyer's professional standing; only by bringing lawyers' out-of-court statements back to facts, law, and proven professional ability can the legal system protect proper expression and business promotion, while holding onto the good name of the profession and public trust in the courts.

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