

# Public Empowerment and Correction of Misinformation under the Effect of Social Media -- Take Twitter as an Example

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**Abstract:** Each iteration and upgrade of mobile communication technology is considered an epochal leap, bringing about dramatic changes in the field of communication. From simple SMS text to graphic text, from social networking sites to social media, the changing shape of the media has created a whole new business of the media industry. Technology empowerment and the development of the media industry are closely intertwined. Technology is breaking the media industry's information monopoly and changing the communication landscape in the form of "empowerment". By analyzing two media events, this paper aims to verify whether social media provides new ways of empowering the public and correcting misinformation, thus breaking the monopoly of information in the media industry, changing the communication landscape, and providing an innovative impetus for changes in the communication system.

**Keywords:** Public empowerment; Correction of misinformation; Twitter; Social media; Reshape context

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## 1. Introduction

This article aims to use cognitive constructivism to verify whether social media provides new ways of empowering the public and correcting misinformation through an examination of the cases of the Wall Street Occupation (WSO) and the Boston Marathon bombing. This essay discusses the more familiar social media channels and uses cognitive constructivism to absorb new information into existing knowledge and modify and adapt the existing knowledge framework <sup>[1]</sup>, to further discuss the relationship between social media and public empowerment, and correction of the misinformation.

## 2. Description

### 2.1 Public Empowerment in the Context of Twitter

Empowerment, or providing power to the powerless, is the core of social change and development <sup>[2]</sup>. The sign that a person is empowered is when he or she can influence to strengthen meaning, to shape people's views on community issues or to help others; these are all manifestations of empowerment. Following the logic of collective action, the empowerment movement often has iconic leaders and a fixed frame movement model. This is in stark contrast to movements supported by social media; these movements are unique because of their horizontal structure, without leaders, the occupation of the Wall Street movement being a case in point. Empowerment movements supported by social media are driven by the proliferation of individual action frameworks. This diffusion manifests as individuals spreading their consciousness through social media and internalising group ideas, resulting in more inclusive groups. The final authorized action is not control or deterrence, but more like a grant of resources. As control of resources increases, the social capital in the 1e community will also increase, so its dependence on external activities will increase <sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, the media-led empowerment movement spread to the whole of society. Relying on Twitter, individual users can create a current hot hashtag and share topics with other users to promote the first phase of conscious integration. In the second stage, the aggregation effect on Twitter will gradually form an online community. Each user in the community is an independent individual, and they are all given their own responsibilities to prepare for realistic empowerment movements. Lastly, each user of the community orderly changed from online campaigns to real-life campaigns. In campaigns, users can also exercise their rights granted by the media, such as to send petitions and initiate signature activities. Therefore, in the media environment of Twitter, the empowerment movement of the online media can promote a reified movement while giving users the right to participate.

### 2.2 Correcting Misinformation in the Context of Twitter

Misinformation or factual misunderstanding refers to an objective belief or the existence of incorrect information. The prevalence

and persistence of misinformation are often related to motivational reasoning, which is an individual's ability to protect his existing attitude. Thus, people will think that information consistent with their inherent beliefs is more reliable than that which is inconsistent. This idea extends to the network environment and people find that ideas that often lead to differences are soon abandoned by people. Since motivational reasoning plays such an important role in people's processing of network information, it also plays a key role in correcting wrong information. Taking Twitter as an example, given the fragmentation and complexity of the network environment, an erroneous message may last for a long time without contradiction <sup>[5]</sup>. In addition, the mainstream media's coverage of misinformation and rumour can stimulate people to find more information on Twitter, but if the search for such information is not based on the desire for accurate information it may lead people to make decisions based on low-quality information sources. However, there are several methods for correcting misinformation that apply to social media. As far as Twitter is concerned, the background mechanism strongly withdraws the misinformation may effectively reduce misunderstanding and the spread of misinformation, although such methods depend on a source of corrective information and political maturity. But one point that cannot be ignored is that these methods have not been tested in social areas such as Twitter, so it is impossible to determine whether its corrective power will be greater than the spread of misinformation.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1 A Public Empowerment Campaign on Twitter— Occupy Wall Street**

This is a public empowerment movement dominated by social media, such as Twitter. The initial protests were called for by the Canadian magazine *Adbusters*, which inspired Occupy Wall Street (OWS) on September 17, 2011. Activists at the time occupied Zuccotti Park in midtown Manhattan. Income inequality and wealth inequality were the focus of the Occupy Wall Street protests. News of the movement was disseminated rapidly, mainly through digital technology, and within weeks, dozens of local Occupy collectives emerged across the United States and elsewhere. According to the *New York Times*, the autumn 2011 protests eventually led to a "media frenzy" that some critics compared to that of the Arab Spring revolution in the Middle East and North Africa, which were also similarly "spurred by social media"<sup>[6]</sup>. Protesters posted their joint written statements on major websites, and New York's Occupy Wall Street protesters outlined their grievances, explaining that they, "gather together in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice," regarding how, "corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments". In August of the same year, the slogan of the protesters, "We are the 99%", which alludes to their views and attitudes and was promulgated via the internet, helping to publicize the movement. The phrase refers directly to income and wealth inequality in the U. S., where wealth is concentrated in the top 1% of earners.

Using the cognitive constructivism approach to promoting the campaign on Twitter reflects what protesters see as shaping the civic empowerment necessary for changing current policies. Since the campaign's first protest poster, Twitter has quickly become the most connected technology platform used by Occupy Wall Street. As the movement grew, users engaged with Twitter for a variety of purposes, bypassing the traditional media and promoting their criticism of contemporary capitalism. Users have put Twitter at the centre of their protests, with some protesters being portrayed by the mainstream media as revolutionaries. From the point of view of protesters using Twitter to define the success of this movement, the OWS movement culminated in a, "leaderless horizontal structure," and highlighted, "Twitter empowers the people." It reinforces the radical democratization process for the benefit of, "the 99 percent". Similarly, Twitter empowers people to express their voices in the social media environment and bravely pursue equal rights. In the context of the social movement, Twitter provides protesters with an effective means of communication, connecting the aggrieved population and establishing a power base that allows them to spread their ideas in the process of pursuing change, while encouraging others to participate in empowerment action.

#### **3.2 Correcting Misinformation on Twitter? —the Boston Marathon Bombing**

Misinformation can be considered as rumours prior to confirmation, and rumours are defined as, "informally improvised news," often accompanying disasters and other crisis events. Twitter, in particular, has proved able to cover crisis events on the Internet before traditional news media. On April 15, 2013, two explosions occurred near the finish line of the Eastern Boston Marathon in the United States, killing three people and injuring 264 people <sup>[7]</sup>. Three days later, the FBI published photos and surveillance videos of the two suspects, and sought the public to help identify them via the media platform. The result was a wave of speculation on Twitter, with the public beginning to identify the bombers from the photos from the scene. Soon after, the US police identified the suspects as two brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and arrested them. In the process of arresting the two suspects, the complexity of information on Twitter led to the spread of misinformation. One of the most typical cases is that people mistook a college student for a bomber. Some Twitter

users said Sunil Tripathi, a 22-year-old college student, was very similar to one of the suspects.

Meanwhile, one of Tripathi's high school classmates also commented on Twitter that Tripathi looked similar to one of the suspects. Following this, many Twitter users, including some traditional media, reposted this message. In this case, the propagation of erroneous information takes different forms and is also compressed into a shorter time window. Tweets related to Tripathi were sent at a rate of 1 to 3 per minute, most of which were speculative. Within 30 minutes, the items of false information had jumped from 40 at the beginning to 4690. The next morning, the news on Twitter quickly caught the attention of the police. The police announced the name of the real suspect on the Internet, and according to the investigation, Tripathi died several weeks later<sup>[8]</sup>.

In order to explore Twitter's ability to correct misinformation, it is necessary to look at the research problem from a different perspective, which is in line with the theoretical demands of constructivism. One view is that in the Twitter media environment, people will always think that they are less affected by misinformation than others. Under the influence of the third-person effect, secondary comments and forwarding took place, so that the erroneous message was spread twice. Another argument is that Twitter does not control misinformation and that the efforts at correction are less forceful than the communication. This is inseparable from the platform's own reaction mechanism and emergency strategy, and the public's self-correcting ability can also help Twitter to correct misinformation

## 4. Conclusion

By describing two cases, this essay analyses whether social media, represented by Twitter, offers new ways to empower the public and correct misinformation. In terms of public empowerment, social media undoubtedly provides a new way. People use Twitter to convey their voices, express their ideas, look for like minded people, and strive to fight for their rights in real life. However, the ability of social media to correct incorrect messages requires a critical perspective on the issue. Social media can use official accounts to forcefully withdraw erroneous messages or delete the source of misinformation, but the effect of this specific action is much smaller than the effect of the original transmission. Therefore, social media is yet to do enough to be seen as offering a new way to correct erroneous information.

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