Population - Negative - Growth Era: How Media Can Serve As An "Amplifier" for Public Policies

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Abstract:

With the total population of China experiencing a negative growth for the first time in 2022, as many as 61 countries and regions worldwide are facing the dilemma of population contraction, along with problems such as intensified aging, which pose a severe challenge to economic and social development. Against this background, the role of media as an "amplifier" for public policies is of vital importance. Through precise dissemination, the media can transform complex policies into popular expressions, such as interpreting the key points of policies on fertility issues and the delayed - retirement policy in a visual form. By means of public opinion guidance, the media can respond to the public's concerns about policy implementation and build a bridge between policy - makers and the public to promote the two - way adaptation between policies and public needs. In the existing media environment, both newspapers and Internet videos have proved that the media can, through innovative communication means and enhanced policy interpretation, bring society together in the population - negative - growth era and provide strong support for the effective implementation of policies.

Keywords: Population negative growth, Media, Public policies, Amplifier, Precise dissemination

1. Introduction

According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China's total population decreased by 850,000 in 2022, marking the first negative growth since 1962 and officially bringing to an end the "demographic dividend" era that has lasted for decades. Meanwhile, by the end of 2023, China's average life expectancy had reached 78.6 years, which is significantly higher than the average level of the upper - middle - income countries defined by the World Bank and very close to the average level of high - income countries or the countries in the Organization for Economic Co - operation and Development. In China, the degree of aging is also accelerating. With the continuous decline in the total fertility rate, the

number of newly - born population has dropped from 18.83 million in 2016 to 9.02 million in 2023, and the net increase in population has dropped from 9.06 million to 0.48 million in 2021. By the end of 2023, the proportion of people aged 60 and above in the total population had reached 21.1%, far exceeding the 10% standard for an aging society defined by the United Nations. Such a drastic change in the population structure is bringing profound challenges to the fields of economic development, social governance, and public services.

In view of this, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the first meeting of the 20th Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission that population development is a major matter related to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and efforts must be made to improve the overall quality of the population to support the realization of modernization in China with high - quality population development. Population issues are fundamental and long - term issues concerning the healthy and sustainable development of the economy and society and the overall development of the country.

Against this background, the role value of the media as an "amplifier" for public policies has become even more prominent. As the communication scholar McLuhan put it, "The medium is the message." The media is not only a transmitter of policy information but also a condenser of social consensus. Through precise dissemination, the media can transform complex population - related policies into languages and forms that are easy for the public to understand, achieving a positive interaction of "policies serving the people". Therefore, how to give play to the public service function of the media during the population structure transformation period has become an important issue concerning the long - term development and social stability of the country.

2. The role of the media and its practical approach

In the context where population decline has become a global trend, all sectors of society are facing unprecedented profound changes. These real-world issues not only pose enormous challenges to economic and social development but also directly impact the lives of every citizen. Faced with these complex and long-term structural contradictions, governments have successively introduced a series of public policies in an attempt to "break the situation" of population transformation. However, the process from policy formulation to implementation is not smooth sailing. In particular, the public's misunderstanding of policies and the challenge of coordinating diverse social

interest demands may greatly reduce policy effectiveness. Against this backdrop, the role value of the media as a "public policy megaphone" has been endowed with new connotations of the times.

2.1 Policy Analysis and Interpretation

In the era of population decline, policy interpretation is no longer a simple information transfer but requires the media to transform complex policy content into materials understandable to the public. Experimental data from the Center for Communication and National Governance Research at Fudan University shows that using visual means such as dynamic charts and short videos can increase policy information retention by 47%. Existing policy interpretation methods include: -Visual Communication of Complex Text Policies which means presenting specific data on educational resource tilting in the "Three-Child Policy" through dynamic data charts, displaying the regional distribution of 5 million new inclusive kindergarten places added nationwide in 2023 through interactive interfaces, or disassembling the age adjustment curve of the "delayed retirement plan" through animation demonstrations. Second is Case-Based Presentation to Bridge Policies and Real Life: This "a picture is worth a thousand words" communication method breaks through the text barrier of policy points, enabling the public to better understand a series of national policies.

2.2 Correct Public Opinion Guidance

Genuine public opinion guidance requires building a two-way channel between policies and public opinion. According to establish a public discussion platform which allowing opinions from different groups to be heard. For example, in 2023, 《China Youth Daily》 launched a special column on "Fertility Outlook Survey," collecting 12,000 pieces of youth feedback through street interviews and online questionnaires. It was found that "high housing costs," "workplace gender discrimination," and "educational involution" were the top three factors for low fertility willingness. These data were compiled into the 《Youth Fertility Demands White Paper》 and submitted to relevant ministries, directly contributing to the inclusion of "linking youth rental subsidies with childbirth" in the policy reserve. Public opinion guidance is not merely about two-way information transmission; rather, it is more about resolving the public's misunderstandings about policies. When the public misinterprets policies, such as young people mistakenly believing that "delayed retirement = fewer jobs for young people," the media should provide positive guidance. For instance, collaborating with the press department to create a visual diagram of the

"employment market supply-demand model" to illustrate the strong demand for young people in the labor market.

2.3 Collaboration Among Media, Government, and the Public

In current policy communication, involving the public from the "implementation stage" to the "formulation stage" in advance. For example, when formulating pension distribution regulations, the media can launch activities like "I Propose to Pension Policies," setting up online voting, message boards, and offline symposiums to gather public suggestions. This emerging model can significantly enhance social support when policies are introduced.

2.4 Technological Empowerment

Implementing a targeted communication strategy to achieve "one key opens one lock". For instance, the media launched a series of animations on Bilibili titled "Survival Guide for Negative Population Growth", using imaginative plots like "If China's population decreases by 300 million in 30 years" and interspersing youthful expressions such as "Birth reward points can be exchanged for game skins", enabling young people to understand the current era's background. In terms of regional differences, the media produced a data feature on "Population Outflow and Industrial Transformation" for the old industrial base in Northeast China, analyzing the impact of labor loss on the manufacturing industry. Customized for the Pearl River Delta region, it uses short videos in Cantonese to explain the connection between points-based household registration and birth subsidies. In some policy communications, the media will also achieve immersive communication through current technological means such as VR/AR.

3. Challenges and Opportunities

In the tide of population decline, the media's role as a "public policy megaphone" has become increasingly critical. However, fulfilling this mission is not without obstacles, facing both challenges from the communication environment and public cognition, while also embracing development opportunities brought by technological innovation and upgraded social needs.

3.1 Challenges Faced by the Media

3.1.1 Difficulties in Building Credibility

The public's doubts about policies have a knock-on effect on media trust. In issues such as fertility support policies and delayed retirement that directly concern the public's own interests, the state pursues long-term benefits while the public seeks short-term gains, creating a contradiction. For instance, when young people are skeptical about whether "fertility subsidies can cover the cost of raising children", if the media only emphasize the "benefits" of the policy in their coverage while ignoring the actual difficulties faced by individuals, it will instead reinforce the sense of detachment that "the policy has nothing to do with me". Moreover, the proliferation of online rumors and false information has increased the difficulty for the public to distinguish reliable sources. If the media fail to promptly and accurately debunk such rumors, their own authority will be weakened.

3.1.2 Can the Communication Effect Reach Expectations

Policies related to negative population growth often involve complex social logics, making it difficult for the general public to understand. Even if the media use visualization and case studies as communication methods, there may still be problems of "information overload" or "interpretation bias". If the media lack in-depth explanations when interpreting policies, the public will find it hard to truly understand the logic behind the policies, which may significantly reduce the communication effect.

3.1.3 Conflict Between Traffic Logic and Public Value

In the new media environment, some media, in pursuit of traffic, overly exaggerate the anxiety caused by negative population growth, such as using eye-catching headlines like "Population Collapse" to attract attention. This greatly deviates from the rational and objective principles of public policy communication. Such behavior not only damages the media's credibility but also may mislead public perception, intensify social panic, and disrupt the smooth implementation of policies.

3.2 Opportunities for the Media

3.2.1 Technological Empowerment Expands Communication Boundaries

Technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, VR/AR provide new possibilities for policy communication. For example, through big data analysis of the public's focus and blind spots regarding policies, precise communication can be achieved; by developing interactive news products, the public's sense of participation and depth of understanding of policies can be enhanced. These technological means can significantly increase the interest and effectiveness of policy communication.

3.2.2 Growth in Social Demand Highlights Media Value

Negative population growth has triggered a wide range of

social issues, involving multiple fields such as economy, education, healthcare, and elderly care. The public's demand for policy interpretation and information consultation is continuously rising. This provides a broad space for content production for the media. Whether it is in-depth reporting, expert interpretation, or public opinion collection, the media can become an important bridge connecting the government and the public through high-quality content output, strengthening their role in social governance.

3.2.3 Policy Emphasis Promotes Synergistic Development

The government's emphasis on policy communication is increasing, and it is increasingly inclined to establish cooperative mechanisms with the media. For example, media are invited to participate in public opinion surveys during the policy formulation stage. This collaborative model not only helps the media obtain authoritative information resources in advance but also promotes their in-depth participation in social governance, achieving a win-win situation for both social and commercial value.

4. Conclusion

In the context of negative population growth, the media has transcended its traditional role as a mere "megaphone" and has become a "super glue" that connects policy texts with social reality, mediates various interests, and unifies social consensus. Whether in policy interpretation or in positive dialogue during public opinion guidance, the media builds bridges for social interaction and transforms complex policy provisions into warm experiences for the people through diverse practices. Existing cases of media communication of public policies have already demonstrated that only by deeply integrating policy communication with public needs can the "megaphone" not only convey voices but also stir up the resonance of the entire nation in responding to population challenges. In this transformation concerning the future of the country, every voice of the media is adding bricks to the edifice of social consensus, pushing policies from "paper plans" to "real scenarios", and ultimately achieving a virtuous interaction between population and development.

Looking ahead, as more and more policies require media

communication and interpretation, the media needs to build new models that adapt to the development of policies in the current era. On the one hand, by establishing strict content review mechanisms and fact-checking systems, public trust can be restored. On the other hand, by deeply integrating with cutting-edge technologies such as big data, new scenarios for policy communication can be created - such as using virtual anchors to answer policy questions. At the same time, cross-border cooperation with the government, universities, and social organizations should be strengthened to form a closed loop of "policy formulation - communication and promotion - effect feedback". Only in this way can the media truly become a "powerful megaphone" that unifies social consensus, promotes policy implementation, and contributes to national development in the era of negative population growth, contributing communication power to the sustainable development of population and society. 2024

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