

Research on ideological and political education of adolescents from the perspective of cybersecurity

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Abstract: Without cybersecurity, there is no national security. In the era of “Internet +”, cybersecurity issues are directly linked to the safety of a country’s ideology. As the nation with the largest adolescent netizen population in the world, China has seen the Internet become the primary tool for young people to study, socialize and entertain themselves. Yet hostile forces at home and abroad, negative cyber opinion, harmful online culture and the communication patterns of new media all pose serious challenges to ideological and political education for Chinese adolescents. This paper analyzes the major problems in such education under the perspective of cybersecurity and offers corresponding countermeasures: improving adolescents’ network literacy, strengthening the construction of mainstream media favored by young people, expanding the ranks of cyber commentators and volunteers, cultivating specialized online ideological-political workers, effectively supervising new media, perfecting relevant laws, improving cyber-governance institutions, and building an international cooperative system for Internet governance. The aim is to inspire practical activities of adolescent ideological and political education and to safeguard the healthy growth of young people.

Keywords: cybersecurity, adolescents, ideological and political education

1. Introduction

The Internet has exerted a profound influence on the economy, politics, culture and every other sphere of social life. China has now become a veritable cyber-power. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, by the end of December 2014 there were 277 million Chinese netizens under the age of 25—42.7 percent of the country’s total online population and 79.6 percent of all Chinese adolescents—making China home to the largest cohort of young Internet users in the world. In the era of “Internet Plus”, the spread of smart phones and the rise of new digital media have turned the Internet into an indispensable part of teenagers’ daily lives. While it greatly facilitates their study and social interaction, it also exerts a subtle but powerful influence on their values and world-views. Consequently, cybersecurity has become an urgent issue. It encompasses not only the security of hardware and software, but also the safety of data and information, together with the attendant problems of cyber-culture, cyber-opinion and cyber-literacy. Cybersecurity is therefore intimately linked to national ideological security and increasingly affects the effectiveness of ideological and political education among adolescents.

2. Cybersecurity challenges to youth ideological-political education

Thanks to the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee, the overall state of cybersecurity in China is steadily improving. Yet as the country’s reform deepens in an all-round way and mobile-internet technologies advance at break-neck speed, new characteristics have appeared in the nation’s cyberspace. These developments present four major challenges to ideological and political education for young people.

2.1. Hostile forces block youth from mainstream ideology

Ideological-political education is the main channel through which young people internalize the mainstream ideology; any threat to national ideological security is therefore a direct threat to this educational task. Leveraging their dominance of the Internet, Western powers routinely practise a “soft-landing” of culture, using online platforms to infiltrate developing countries including China and

turn cultural penetration into an instrument of control. Domestic and overseas actors that reject China's mainstream ideology exploit the relative openness of cyberspace to manufacture rumours aimed at social instability. Through websites, social media, e-mail and instant-messaging they spread seditious stories, host harmful information on overseas servers and concoct falsehoods that slander the socialist system and state power, all with the goal of preventing adolescents from embracing the core ideology and, ultimately, of undermining national security and the socialist order.

2.2. Negative cyber-opinion undermines education impact

Online opinion is casual, biased and voluminous; adolescents with limited media literacy are easily swayed. Because their values are still forming, prolonged exposure to negative cyber opinion can produce moral confusion, blurred ideals, cold moral sentiment, deviant behaviour and a diminished sense of social responsibility. Rumours and smear campaigns are hidden among billions of posts, linger for years and can be retrieved by a simple search. Even a minor negative episode, once amplified, can offset the positive effects of painstaking ideological education.

2.3. New media dilutes ideological-political influence

We-media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat and news apps form relatively "closed" communication circuits; government voices were slow to enter these spaces, so their educational impact is weakened. The 2014 China Adolescent Internet Behaviour Report shows that 60.1 % of young netizens trust online information, are highly Internet-dependent and possess only weak cybersecurity awareness. In the mobile era a single micro-blog or WeChat post on politics, economics or culture can "go viral" within minutes and shape teenagers' opinions. Because technical, legal and ethical oversight of these new channels is still being perfected, their very existence reduces the efficacy of conventional ideological-political work .

2.4. Harmful cyber-culture harms youth development

The openness, interactivity and quasi-anarchic character of online culture, together with imperfect cybersecurity governance, allow the co-existence of constructive and destructive, mainstream and fringe, refined and vulgar content. New applications such as webcasts, video blogs and short-form videos have multiplied and spread pornography, violence, money worship, hedonism and extreme individualism. Illegal operators at home and abroad use video chat-rooms for obscene performances, exploit search-engine loopholes to circulate banned material, and insert violent or pornographic scenes into web games and entertainment shows aimed at teenagers. This deluge of harmful culture assaults China's cyber-cultural security and injects instability and discord into ideological-political education for the young.

3. Cyber-safe education counter-measures

In the "Internet-plus" era, cybersecurity has become the key word in building China into a cyber-power. Ideological-political education for adolescents must therefore face up to existing cybersecurity problems, strengthen publicity and guidance, and adopt active measures to maximise benefits and avoid harm. This is not only an integral part of the Party's ideological work, but also a major issue confronting educators today. President Xi Jinping has stressed that "we must innovate and improve online publicity, follow the laws of cyber communication, extol the main melody, unleash positive energy, vigorously cultivate and practise the core socialist values, plan according to the trend, act in response to the trend and move along with the trend, so that the entire society will work together to keep cyberspace clean and bright."

3.1. Boost youth cyber-literacy for ideological growth

Weak cybersecurity awareness is a prominent problem in China's mobile-internet age, and education in this area is still generally lacking. Raising young people's cyber-literacy is therefore an essential solution. Cyber-literacy embraces the ability to recognise, obtain, analyse, process and create information online, as well as cyber-ethics. In particular, the capacity to analyse information and the observance of cyber-ethics are crucial: the former enables adolescents to screen, judge and resist spam and harmful data, while the latter requires them to abide by ethical norms when acquiring, using, processing and disseminating

information, so as not to harm society or infringe the legitimate rights of others. Both capacities provide moral support for cultivating and practising core socialist values. Schools and universities should therefore offer lectures and public-service activities on cybersecurity, teach adolescents the latest achievements in the Sinicisation of Marxism, and integrate core socialist values into every stage of ideological-political education in an institutionalised and long-term manner, so as to raise overall cyber-literacy.

3.2. Build youth-friendly mainstream media to widen education channels

At present, Sina, Sohu, Tencent and their omnimedia platforms are the main sources of daily information for young people. On the one hand, we must actively guide and use these safe mainstream outlets and their new-media platforms to release positive information, produce cartoons, entertainment programmes and other products that appeal to adolescents, employ discourse that fits their psychological characteristics, and disseminate positive energy through micro-videos, micro-films and public-service advertisements, so as to occupy the educational high ground. On the other hand, we should rely on relevant channels of these portals to answer adolescents' questions, keep track of their cyber-sentiment in real time, establish healthy communication mechanisms, safeguard online opinion security and provide reference data for government and school opinion-management work.

3.3. Grow cyber-commentator & volunteer corps to keep education in lead

In the Internet era, relying solely on professional educators is far from enough to safeguard online opinion security and keep adolescents' cyberspace clean. Online opinion security is an important part of cybersecurity. To keep abreast of opinion trends and ensure that young people grow up in a healthy online environment, we must enlarge the corps of cyber commentators and volunteers, enabling more people to lead public opinion and counteract erroneous ideas. We should earnestly implement the Guidelines on Strengthening the Construction and Management of Online Culture issued by the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, train a contingent of high-quality cyber commentators, and, on portals, forums and new-media platforms popular with adolescents, speak out on hot social topics in youth-friendly language that conveys positive energy. Since it is unrealistic to expect ordinary netizens to become commentators or volunteers overnight, every Party member, government official, student cadre and parent should be encouraged to join the volunteer ranks. Party and youth organisations should be fully mobilised, young Party and League members should be inspired to "step forward", and all should work together to safeguard online opinion security.

3.4. Train specialist online educators to reinforce the corps

President Xi has stressed that talent is the key to building a cyber-power; a dedicated workforce is therefore the organisational guarantee for improving online ideological-political education for adolescents. The "Internet-plus" era imposes higher requirements: educators must master both the theory of ideological-political education and high-level cyber-literacy. At present such professionals are scarce; most government and school staff in charge of online education lack specialised training. To keep the initiative in ideological work, we must build a corps whose members are politically reliable, proficient in network technology, well-grounded in theory, familiar with the laws of cyber opinion and expert in both the Internet and youth education. Governments should therefore intensify in-service training, universities should create double-degree programmes in software engineering and ideological-political education, and incentive systems with broader career paths should be introduced to attract more talent into the field.

3.5. Tighten new-media oversight for scientific management

Harmful online content has migrated from websites and forums to mobile new-media, especially Weibo, WeChat and QQ—the "strong-tie", semi-closed platforms most used by adolescents. As smartphone use among teenagers rises year by year, the state must strengthen information monitoring of these apps. On the one hand, big-data systems should track posts by influential Weibo accounts and WeChat official accounts; online entertainment, cartoons and anime must be more strictly vetted; and content in friend-circles and Q-Zones should also be supervised. On the other hand, the regulatory system itself must be improved: material rewards and volunteer monitors should encourage reporting, an

early-warning mechanism should be created, and websites or individuals that spread harmful information must be severely punished so that adolescents can use the Internet correctly and safely, scientific management of education is reinforced and a healthy, civilised online environment is created.

3.6. Boost cyber-governance and law for higher education quality

Safeguarding cybersecurity and building a cyber-power require both deeper institutional reform and a sound legal system to guarantee ideological-political education for the young. While tightening new-media supervision, governments at all levels must raise their awareness of online education, set up specialised agencies and teams for adolescent cyber education, and weld education, IT, public-security, propaganda, news-media, Party and Youth-League departments into a single force. A co-operative institutional framework supported by clear laws and penalties for cyber-crime should be constructed, punishments for online offences increased and the order of Internet communication ensured, forming a new pattern of joint governance. This will lay the foundation for China's participation in the international Internet-governance system and elevate the scientific level of youth ideological-political education.

3.7. Forge global Internet-governance ties to better the IPE climate

At present, many illegal websites are still hosted on overseas servers. To completely eradicate this "tumor," China must "go global" and actively engage in international cooperation. As the Internet is an international platform, we must step out of our borders by hosting or participating in various international Internet conferences, carry out extensive international collaboration, and build an international Internet governance system based on mutual respect and trust. This will effectively safeguard national cybersecurity and thereby improve the overall environment for online ideological and political education for adolescents.

4. Conclusion

At a time when cybersecurity issues are increasingly prominent, ideological and political education for adolescents must keep pace with the times and continuously innovate. Only by strengthening cyber literacy training, value guidance, and rule of law education in a coordinated way can we help young people strengthen their ideals and beliefs, enhance their ability to distinguish right from wrong in the complex online world, and ultimately achieve healthy growth and well-rounded development.

5. References

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