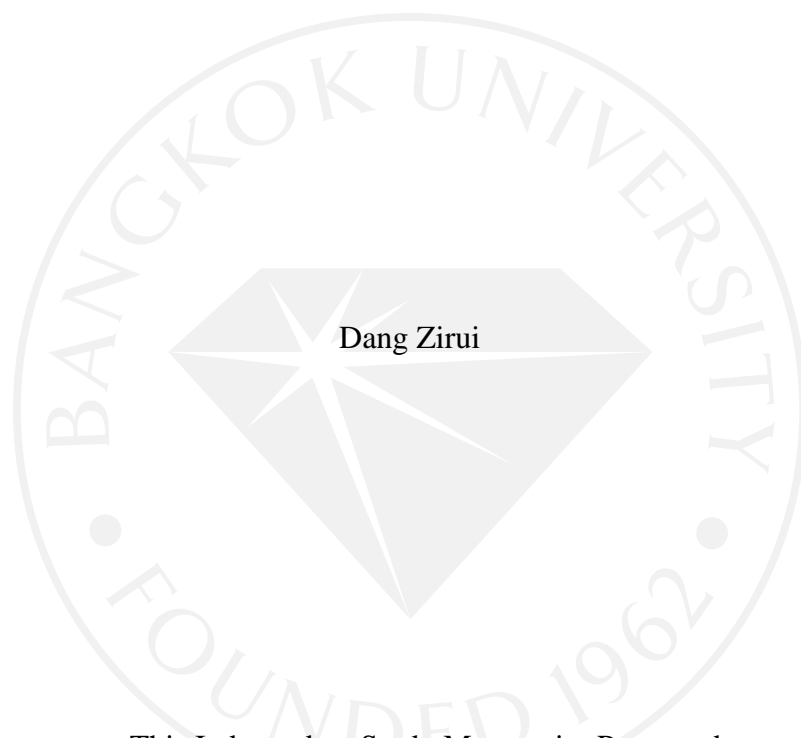


AN ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S RUMOR SPREADING PROCESSSS VIA SINA WEIBO



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This Independent Study Manuscript Presented to
The Graduate School of Bangkok University
in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

With the proliferation of internet, people tend to use it in diverse aspects in the daily life. However, due to the unique features of the internet, there are a large range of rumors spreading freely and rapidly on many networking sites in the internet and one of the well-known platforms of social networking in China is Sina Weibo, a most frequently-used social media for Chinese people. Therefore, how the rumors spread and what factors contribute to the spreading of rumors are worthy to discuss. In this thesis, one of the top 10 rumors regarding Chinese people's daily life in 2014 spread in Weibo would be chosen as the case to examine the process of rumors communication. In order to specifically discuss the main topics about rumors proposed, several posts containing the rumor would be specially displayed as the data for analyzing. In addition, in the analysis part the elements involving in the *Interactive Model*, the development in the spreading process and how the various elements contributing rumors spreading in every process are the focuses.

Keywords: Rumor, Spread, Weibo

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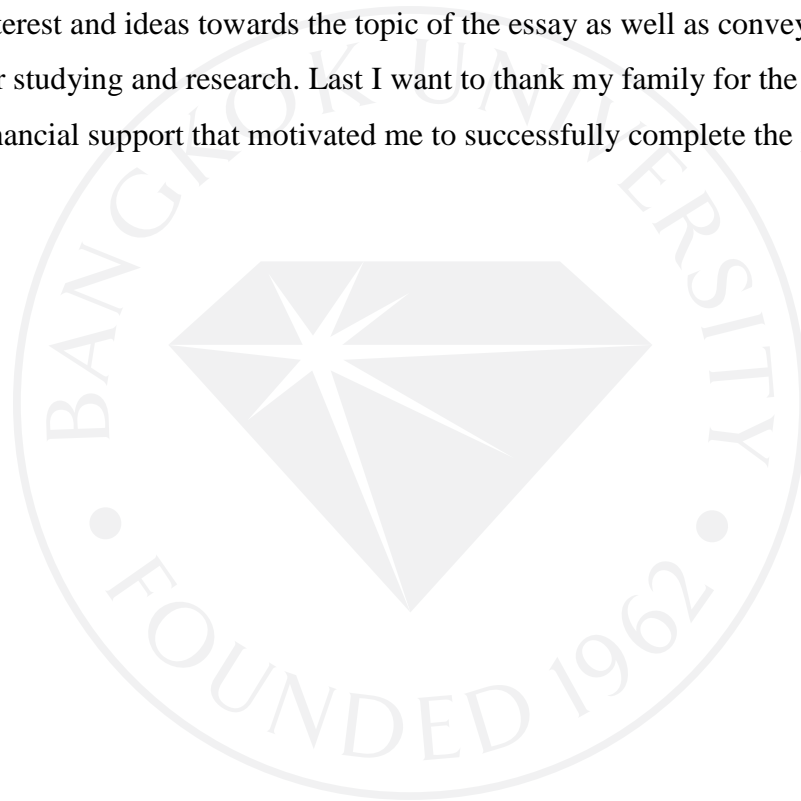


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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the rush hour in China, if you choose the public transportations like metro or city bus as means of commuting, it is interesting to find that almost every passenger on the public transportation stickily look at their phone. By utilizing their mobile equipment, some of the people check their emails from work, watch videos like TV shows or American seasons that has been already downloaded to the portable device. Besides, the other part of them check their micro-blog always Sina Weibo – to see whether there is any fresh news or anything recently happened to their friends, new gossips about the celebrities who they follow and also some hot issues or breaking news nearly occurred.

As Internet was invented in the 1960s in the U.S.A firstly for military use and from the early 1990 it was firstly utilized for normal institutional and personal use, it has experienced an unexceptional growth ever since, especially in China. According to a statistical report issued by China Internet Network Information Center in 2012 (Cnnic.net.cn), population of netizen in China has risen by 56 million from 2011-2012 while the penetration rate increased by four percent. By the end of June, 2012. The total number of Chinese netizen has reached 528 million, making up 39.9% of the whole population in China and the average time that an individual Chinese spent on Internet has extended from 18.3 hours per week to 19.9 hours per week from 2010 to 2012. Additionally, the report has pointed out that by the end of June, 2012, more than half of Chinese netizens were the users of Chinese micro-blog websites, reaching 273 million.

Another element promoting the usage of micro-blogs is the rapid technological advance of smart phones with the development of wireless networking set up for the mobile device use. Since the increasingly spreading impact of micro-blogs along with the improvement of some features of the mobile phone like convenience and portability, almost all micro-blog websites have designed their own apps which can be installed on phones to meet the requirements of sharing, growing and querying global information anywhere and anytime. Take one of the popular social medias, the micro-blog invented and operated by Sina.com – Sina Weibo – as an example, on the

one hand it developed a third-party application on 28th, July 2010, just around one year after its appearance. On the other hand, the original installment of those apps on smart phones also stimulated the phone owners' willingness to register and become active on the micro-blogs, which propelled the development of the micro-blog as well.

Among all the micro-blog websites used by Chinese netizens, Sina Weibo is the best-know, most popular and most -frequently used one. By the end of December 2012, Weibo has had 503 million registered users while maintaining 100 million messages every day (Ong, 2013). Sina Weibo is a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook with more features than Twitter, which was launched by SINA Corporation on 14th, August 2009 (Rapoza, 2011) with the original function of message, private message, comment and re-post. According to the Wikipedia of Sina Weibo, "a user can post with a 140-character limit, mention or talk to other people using "@User Name" formatting, add hashtags with "#Hash Name#" formatting, follow other users to make their posts appear in one's own timeline, re-post with "//@User Name" similar to Twitter's retweet function "RT @User Name", select posts for one's favorites list, and verify the account if the user is a celebrity. URLs are automatically shortened using the domain name t.cn like Twitter's t.co. Official and third-party applications let users be able to access Sina Weibo from other websites or platforms. Hashtags differ slightly, using a double-hashtag "#Hash Name#" method, since the lack of spacing between Chinese characters necessitates a closing tag. Additionally, users are allowed to insert graphical emoticons or attach own image, music, video files in every post. Comments to a post can be shown as a list right below the post, the commenter can also choose whether to re-post the comment, quoting the whole original post, to commenter's own page. Unregistered users can only browse a few posts by verified accounts. Neither unverified account pages nor comments to the posts by verified accounts are accessible to unregistered users."

Some of the Weibo's features might be the reasons why it is so popular with the netizens. The start of the popularity was due to the effect brought by the celebrities. As mentioned of the Weibo's feature above, all users could freely issue messages to the public, choose the accounts to follow unless the user made some settings to protect their privacy. Therefore, the celebrities might send out some

information and the users especially the fans of some celebrities could easily witness their recent state, which is more convenient for the celebrities to attract more fans as well as to enhance the fans' loyalty towards the celebrities. Additionally, there is an identification policy of Sina Weibo, meaning that when the famous person or origination who have past the verification, they would be granted with a colorful V (referring to the '*verified account*') to prove their identities that have been true identities by verifying system. Therefore, following these accounts of colorful V met the curiosity from the normal people because these public figures were willing to share and expose their daily life on it. Secondly, the functions of *comment* and *forward* offered a platform to the users to interact with the bloggers.

As known to the majority of Chinese people, there is a relatively strict censorship in the internet while the censorship chiefly focuses on some public information concerning sensitive details regarding government or political issues. However, it has been said by TIME.com (2015) that compared to other Chinese media formats, such as the TV news program and newspaper and other forms on the internet like some comments under a piece of news or the posts presenting in the forums, Weibo services are seen as allowing greater freedom of speech. Therefore, the topic we discussed here – the rumors spreading over Weibo – is a typical phenomenon can be witnessed in Weibo.

Although as mentioned the information in Weibo has been strictly censored, the Chinese government seems to merely take the issues involving political factors as the priority when conducting the censorship in Weibo. Therefore, owing to its special features in interaction of communication and exchange of messages, Weibo is gradually becoming a platform of spreading rumors especially which are not concerned about politics so it offers a large range of opportunities for those kinds of rumors to be speeded. According to description about the functions of Weibo, firstly, there are great many chances for the users in Weibo to communicate and interact with others whether they are strangers or acquaintances since the users could follow and be followed by anyone without any restrictions. Secondly, due to the various forms of interaction such as *forward*, *comment*, *like* and even *secret messages* which is like instance messages sent between two users. Because of the function of efficient and high-frequency interaction and communication in Weibo, it is essential to adopt

the *new communicative model* to research the issues relating to China's rumors in Weibo regarding daily life.

In 1954, Schramm proposed a new communicative model to illustrate the communication or interaction between a sender and receiver, which is called *Interactional Model of Communication*. Unlike the previous one which described the communication as a linear process which is based on the study on the radio and telephone technology came up by Shannon and Weaver (1949). Besides, they also adopted the same model to explain the process of passing through the information through other different media, which was called *linear model of communication*. However, *Interactional Model of Communications* a two-way one, meaning that communication transmits not only from sender to receiver and also from receiver to sender. In this mode, a person performs the role of both sender and receiver during the interaction. Therefore, it is clear that to study the communication or spreading of rumors in Weibo, the theory of *Interactional Model of Communication* should be adopted.

As to the rumor, it was explained as “a tall tale of explanations of events circulating from person to person and pertaining to an object, event, or issue in public concern” according to Peterson, W. & Gist, N. (1951). Additionally, Pendleton (1998) conducted another study on the rumor conducted by in 1998 with the research across sociology, psychology, and communication studies and then gave a wide variety definition of rumor. From his point of view, in the range of social sciences, a rumor not only involves some kind of statements whose veracity is not quickly or ever confirmed. In addition, some scholars have identified rumor as a subset of propaganda. It also has been recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary (Coleridge, H, 1989) that rumors are also often discussed with regard to "misinformation" and "disinformation" (the former often seen as simply false and the latter seen as deliberately false, though usually from a government source given to the media or a foreign government). Rumors thus have often been viewed as particular forms of other communication concepts.

One of the significant cases of broadcasting in Weibo is about “end of the world in 2012”. This rumor originated from an ancient Mayanism, whose Mesoamerican Long Count calendar showing that December 24th, 2012 would be the

end of the human world. And also, along with a film issued in November 2009, which is a film presented all around the world, telling a story that on the day of prediction from Mayanism, there comes a large range disasters including earthquake, tsunami etc. to make the majority of human beings extinct with only a few survivors. Due to the long-term broadcast of the rumor and the real special effect adopt in the film, the spread of this rumor in Weibo reached a posting and forwarding summit after the film release.

On January 14th, 2015, a large range of official accounts of mass media with authority like CCTV News, People's Daily in Sina Weibo posted a summary of top 10 rumors of life in 2014, referring to the wrong information on normal people's daily life. As to the topic chosen in this study, the focus will be concentrated on the rumors regarding life for the following reasons. Firstly, since it was posted by the bloggers with authority, those rumors had been confirmed to be the prominent and widely-spread ones throughout the whole year. Secondly, because these rumors were closely connected to the daily life, Weibo users were always paying more attention about those content. That is to say, those posts were the life details of the average people so that it attracted more attentions than the posts in other aspects.

In the paper, the top 10 rumors regarding Chinese daily life in 2014 has been selected as the cases to exam the flow of rumor process of my inspecting into the cases that the rumors regarding Chinese people's daily life and how the interactional communication process that embedded into the communicating process helps the spreading of the rumors in the platform of Sina Weibo. And through analyzing the process, paper is aimed to answer the question what are the elements in the whole communication process and how they contribute to the rumors spreading in Sina Weibo.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the early years of researching on the rumors, there are many studies came from psychological approaches. For example, Robert Knapp (1944) published a well-known study regarding rumors, in which he illustrated the analysis of more than one thousand rumors during World War II which were presented in the Boston Herald's "Rumor Clinic" Column. In his study, he defined rumor as "a proposition for belief of topical reference disseminated without official verification". So according to his definition, rumor can be regarded as a special case of informal social communications, involving the forms of myth, legend, and current humor. Knapp additionally identified three basic characteristics that apply to rumor: firstly, "they're transmitted by word of mouth"; secondly, "they provide information about a person, happening, or condition; and lastly "they express and gratify the emotional needs of the community". In his definition and the features of rumors, the emphasis was put on transmission (word of mouth, which then was heard and reported in the newspaper); on content (since "topical" means its domain is public issues); and on reception (it is not only comprehended in individual but more community or social terms). Based on the study from the newspaper column, Knapp then give three types of rumors, including: 1. pipe dream rumors (reflect public desires and wished-for outcomes); 2. bogie or fear rumors (reflect feared outcomes); 3. wedge-driving rumors (intend to undermine group loyalty or interpersonal relations). Through the study, Knapp also found that negative rumors were more likely to be spread than positive rumors. These types also differentiate between positive (pipe dream) and negative (bogie and wedge-driving) rumors.

At that time, much research on rumor from the aspect of psychology. The focus was especially on how statements of questionable veracity (absolutely false to the ears of some listeners) circulated orally from person to person. Scholarly attention to political rumors is at least as old as Aristotle's Rhetoric. However, not until recently has any sustained attention and conceptual development been directed at political uses of rumor, outside of its role in war situations. Almost no work had been done until

recently on how different forms of media and particular cultural-historical conditions may facilitate a rumor's diffusion.

In 2006, Harsin introduced the concept of the "rumor bomb" as a response to the widespread phenomenon of rumor communication in contemporary relations between media and politics, especially within the complex convergence of multiple forms of media, from cell phones and internet, to radio, TV, and print within political communication studies. He started with the widespread definition of rumor and then treated it as a particular rhetorical strategy in current contexts of media and politics in many societies. Additionally, he concluded an extensive definition of "rumor bomb" into a political communication concept with the following features: "1. a crisis of verification – a crisis of verification is perhaps the most salient and politically dangerous aspect of rumor; 2. a context of public uncertainty or anxiety about a political group, figure, or cause, which the rumor bomb overcomes or transfers onto an opponent; 3. a clearly partisan even if an anonymous source, which seeks to profit politically from the rumor bomb's diffusion; 4. rapid diffusion via highly developed electronically mediated societies where news travels fast. What's more, Harsin locates the "rumor bomb" within other communication genres, such as disinformation (intentional false information) and propaganda, as rumor has been viewed by others. However, he distinguished it from these concepts as well, since disinformation was often associated with government, and propaganda was a widely different concept used to describe attempts to control opinion.

A rumor bomb could be regarded as owning some features of these general concepts, but rumor bombs happened in very particular cultural and historical conditions. They were not about mouth-to-ear interpersonal rumors as much rumor research has been interested in. They began in a rapport between deliberate "disinformers" and media, whether TV news, talk shows, newspapers, radio, or websites. They then circulated across these media.

Harsin also distinguished the rumor bomb from other more general concepts of rumor by emphasizing changes in politics, media technology, and culture. As studies by him, rumor in politics has always existed, but recent changes had created an environment ripe for a new kind of political rumor: a new media "convergence culture" where information produced on the internet can influence the production of

media content in other forms; new media technologies and business values that emphasize speed and circulation that combine with entertainment values in news, political marketing, and public craving of tabloid news that mirrors other entertainment genres.

After knowing about the development of rumor regarding the concept of communication, to study the way of rumor spreading in Chinese Sina Weibo, it is significant to notice the present situation of Chinese social networks first. In March 2013, two researchers King-wa Fu and Michael Chau conducted a study about the situation of the Chinese micro-blog space. Their aim was to gain representative and reliable figures of the Chinese micro-bloggers since numerous micro-blogs have been noticed by the whole world due to their huge impact on both social and political surroundings. To achieve their goal, they adopted random sampling approach as the research method, meaning that during the research, they randomly collected data from the service provider while 29,998 micro-blog accounts' profile and their pattern of usage were the study subject within a solid study period lasting for seven days. In the analysis part, it was found that 57.4% of the accounts owned empty timelines. In contrast, 12,774 non-zero statuses samples comprised 86.9% accounts which did not make original post within a week study period along with 0.51% composed twenty or above original posts and 0.45% posted more than forty in that study period. The study additionally found that a small group of bloggers created a large number of contents to draw other netizens' attention since about 4.8% of 12,774 users made more than 80% contribution in the original posts and 4.8% of the accounts' posts were reposted or received comments more than once. The study reveals the fact that in the micro-blog space, there might be a large quantity of "zombie" accounts existed according to their active degree though it is difficult to distinguish them from the authentic accounts with no activities. However, it is significant to notice that a very small proportion of micro-bloggers is the leader for creating and broadcasting information or messages. The fact gives the inspiration that when the rumors were posted from these accounts, it is more likely to be fast spreading in the micro-blog space.

Since the rumor is confined within the content of the micro-blog, it is worthy examining and evaluating all the content in those social networking. There are many studies on the content of micro-blog, no matter of Twitter or Sina Weibo etc. In a

study conducted by André, Bernstein & Luther (2012) demonstrated an evaluation of the content on a popular form of micro-blog, Twitter. In this study, researchers firstly designed a website to collect top corpus of the followers on daily Twitter updates. Through examining over 43,000 voluntary ratings, the researchers found that there were nearly 36% tweets which were evaluated as worthy for reading while 25% were not with 39% were the middle between the two types. The results reveal that users of micro-blog tolerate a large amount of less-desired content when compared with what were in their feeds. That is to say, the study suggest that users attached more importance to sharing information or random thoughts than mere updates about the themselves or the present situation. In the conclusion part, the researchers summarized two directions from the results The first direction was about the technical intervention, meaning that it was the implications designed that made what was valued, or reduce or repurpose what was not. The second direction was about social intervention. That is to say that the content of micro-blog helped to inform users about perceived value, audience reaction and emerging norms, but ultimately let users themselves to control of what they were sharing and what was seen.

However, there are some studies exactly on how and how fast the rumor broadcast on Internet, such as Sina Weibo. Doer, Fouz & Friedrich conducted a research in 2012, mainly concentrating on the reason why the rumors spread at a such high speed on internet (Doer, Fouz & Friedrich, 2012). In their study, the main focus was to analyze how a piece of news spread in social networks like micro-blog. From their perspective, social networks have changed the way people take collective actions especially the existence of social network helped to accelerate the spread of information, or rumors. In order to find out the elements contributing to the high speed of information they stimulated a rumor spreading process on the existing large social networks. And they also put an example that a rumor started at a random node of Twitter network reaches 45.6 million averagely of the total 51.2 million members within just eight rounds of communication. Additionally, they made their analysis based on an abstract modal called preferential attachment graphs by Baraba and Albert (1999) to illustrate the fact that the rumor spread faster in social networking than through other channel and they abstract to the reason to that in social networking, the rumor can reach to larger communicative or potential partners who less

communicated face to face directly. It partially explained why in the social networks rumor spreading were extremely fast even though the process of broadcasting was not organized.

In order to examine the whole process and the factors that contribute to the spreading of this rumor, the *Interactive Communication Model* will be adopted for the following analysis. In 1949, communication was described as a linear process by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver who concentrated their study on the radio and telephone technology and develop a model to explain the process of passing through the information via different media, which was named *linear model of communication*. In their study, there are several factors in the process – a *source*, meaning a transmitter who sends a message to *receivers*, the person who receive the message and make sense of the message. In their study, all of the communication take place in a pathway to communicate.

Because the linear model indicates that a person is only a sender or receiver, it is a narrow view of the participants in the communication process as firstly the model presumes that there is just one message in the process of communicating. Secondly, because there is no definable begging or ending through the whole process of communication. Lastly, actually in the communication process, listeners are not always passive since the listeners can make a confirmation when they are in heated arguments with others. As a result, Schramm (1954) came up a proposal to examine the relationship between a sender and a receiver, which is called *Interactional Model of Communication*. (figure 1). In this type of communication, communication is a two-way one, meaning that communication transmits both from sender to receiver and from receiver to sender. In this mode, a person performs the role of both sender and receiver during the interaction.

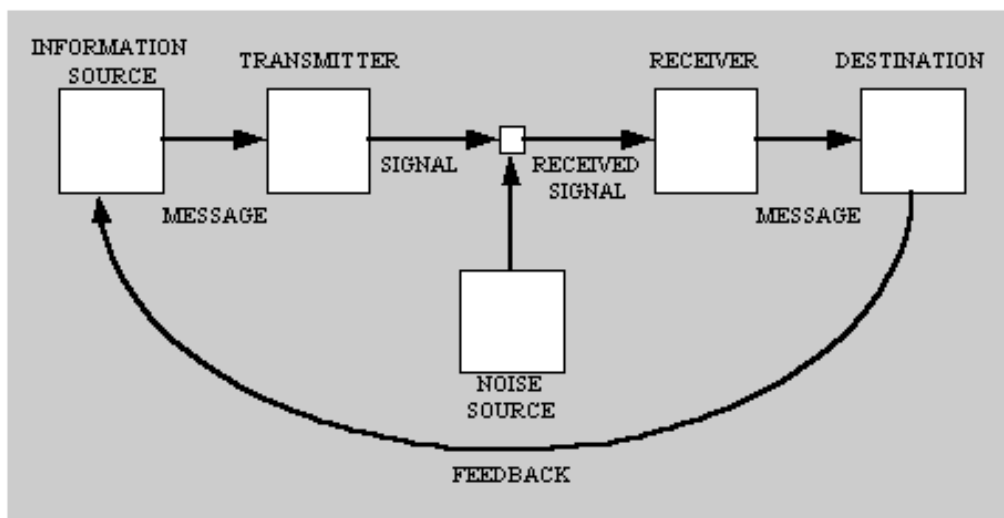


Figure 1: Interactional Model of Communication

According to the figure 1 and combined with the way of information spreading in Weibo, the analysis below would be done in these following points. Firstly, the sources of information send out the message to the receivers. However, because of in the whole process of spreading there might be some sources of noise which might somehow influence the effect of the receivers. Moreover, an important part in the model is *feedback*, which is equal to the interactional or communicative ways in Weibo. Hence, the analysis is mainly based on the following perspective that *the features of senders and receivers, social networking as the communicative channel, the traits of content and the characteristics of the communicative effects*.

To analyze the factors or elements contributing to the fast spreading of rumors in Sina Weibo, it is essential to firstly check the features of Sina Weibo as a relatively new social networking website. Based on the definition of Sina Weibo, it mainly has the following characteristics. According to the Morris and Ogan Merril (1996), firstly, as the most prominent feature of communication in internet, interaction is also the largest feature in Sina Weibo. Unlike the traditional mass media whose communication is always one-way because the mass media has the dominant position in communication in the past, the information in internet involves mutual communication and interaction, which is more like the information exchange. Therefore, every user in the internet is equally to other people from the aspect of information communication since all the people here are not only the audience, but also the broadcaster. In Sina Weibo, after following other bloggers, one blogger then

could receive the post that contains information from other blogger. In the spreading process, the blogger is the receiver, or what we called audience. Meanwhile, the blogger has other bloggers who follow the blogger and then become one of the fans. Blogger sends out the information as the spreader, the fans are the receivers. Moreover, there are other functions like comment, forward, private mail, reply and so on to support the smooth communication and interaction between the users, or bloggers in Sina Weibo.

Secondly, since the process of registering as a blogger is easy because as long as the user has an e-mail account or a telephone number, he will own an account in Sina Weibo so the information in Sina Weibo is always random and not well-organized. Generally, due to the interference of the gatekeepers of the mass media or the effect of agenda setting, it is normal that the information has already been distorted or reoriented before it reaches the audience. That is to say, the information has been totally changed to a new thing. On the contrary, the information in Sina Weibo, because of the decrease of the influence from the gatekeeper, is more like what it primitively is. Moreover, some of information even shows to the public in terms of original appearance.

Anonymity is the third feature of the communication in Sina Weibo. According to the rule set by Sina which has been mentioned above, any normal people is able to register an account in Sina Weibo by e-mail or telephone number. In China, a citizen can get the e-mail number and telephone number without any proof of the true identity, so it is impossible for Sina Weibo to check the private information and to gain the factual identity of a normal blogger. Based on the entering rule in Sina Weibo, it is easy and reasonable for a person to have an account that is irrelative to the person and even have more than one account, meaning that there is no responsibility for an individual to send out or spread any information on the platform. Technically, communication in Sina Weibo provides the netizens with an opportunity of invisibility that the bloggers are able to express themselves without the interruption from the outside surrounding as well as the real responsibility that brought by free speech. Although thanks to the anonymity the bloggers could freely speak out their personal view without any pressure from the climate of opinion, anonymity also precipitates the users lose the responsibility to the society and the ability of self-

control. With the fast development of Sina Weibo, there are increasing issues exposed to the public. The disappearance of the user's social responsibility caused by the feature of anonymity of Sina Weibo is a crucial factor leading to the spreading of rumor.

Last, the communication in Sina Weibo has been gradually development to a real-time way of information exchange. With the prosperity of Sina Weibo, the way of posting information is not confined with the channel of web-page but the apps on mobile phone, message etc. Hence users could both receive and broadcast regardless of the place and time. Meanwhile, the fans actually are able to gain the information spontaneously from the same blogger. What's more, with the function of '@' the blogger could remind anyone in the Weibo to receive the information and share with them, which largely increase the speed of spreading information. However, due to the curiosity that the human beings have, the feature of real-time is a double-edged sword. As the updates of information in Sina Weibo become faster and faster because of this feature, a blogger may spend less time in carefully reading and analyzing a piece of post. This is significant for rumor spreading since when receiving a rumor, the blogger tends to believe the post without any second thoughts.

In the model, there are some elements that is not included in the normal model but also play important roles: *noise, feedback and field of experience*. *Noise* could be regarded as a significant factor. The concept of *noise* was firstly come up when in the concept of *linear model of communication*, which referred to the distortion in a channel which was not intended by the informational source. In the theory, there are four classification of noise, which included *Semantic noise* (relating to the slang, jargon or specialized language used by individuals or a certain group of people) *Physical, or external noise*(the stuff outside the receiver), *Psychological noise*(a communicator's prejudices, biases and the predispositions when receiving the message) and *Physiological noise* (the biological influences on the communication process). In addition, in the theory of communication the general meaning of encoding includes the communication between people the methods via text, graphics, data, audio and video, color and other symbols. So it is worthwhile to study on how a receiver decodes the message he gets except for the effect borough by the noise. According to the *Cultural Studies* conducted by Hall in 1980, when individuals

receive information from others they tend to compare what they received with what has been already in their minds, the whole process is called *decoding*. Additionally, decoding also indicates to the signal communicated via the channel to restore the information. The study pointed out that the receivers always compare the message with their perceptions, thoughts, and past experiences as well. More important, Hall also proposed how decoding working in the media system and he also identified that there are three positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional. As the consequence, the audiences are always having the ability to avoid being overwhelming by the dominant ideologies but the information that is received by the audiences is often part of a subtler campaign.

Moreover, in the whole process, one essential element is *feedback*, which means the response to a message. Feedback can be verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional. In this mode, feedback helps communicators to learn if their message has been received and what the extent that is achieved by the receivers. That is to say, in this model, *feedback* happens after the reception of a message instead of taking place during the message itself.

The last feature of the interactional model is one people's *field of experience*, which means how a person's culture, experience and the influence others' ability of communicating with other people. In this model, every person brings a unique *field of experience* and these experiences would to some extent effect on the people's communication. Although like the linear model, the interactional model also received a large range of criticism from the scholars since the model indicate that a person acts as sender while other acts as receiver in the whole process of communicating so when the action happens at the same time, such as the face-to-face conversation, the model is not fitted enough to explain the issue. However, since the case studied here is taking place in the Internet situation, there is always a gap of time between the senders and the receivers, the theory could be adopted for analyzing the case.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

On January 14th, 2015, a large range of official accounts of mass media with authority such as CCTV News, People's Daily and China News.com etc. in Sina Weibo posted a summary of top 10 rumors of life in 2014, referring to the wrong information on normal people's daily life. As showing below, it is the image of the post from China Nws.com (figure 2).

The top 10 rumors will be briefly introduced in the following part but the paper will merely focus on the rumors regarding bean sprouts.



Figure 2: Original Version of Post from China News.com

Chinesenews.com

[The top 10 rumors regarding life in 2014, have you been cheated?] Are the eggs with the white surfaces more nutritious? Is Chlorine, a kind of chemical material, in mineral water carcinogenic? Are edible tree fungus and solid form of pig blood able to clean the people's lung? Those are the rare knowledge in the daily life but since they are sometimes seemed to be right, normal people always get confused. However, there is only one truth. Let's see the top 10 rumors regarding daily life and make account of how many times you've been cheated by them. Please forward to these people haven't known these yet!

14/01 14:27 From Weibo.com

Favorite | Repost 229 | Comment 15 | 43

Figure 2: Translated version of Post from China News.com

As told by the content of the words, the post mainly involved the rumors concerning about every citizen's daily life in China. The further explanation of the post will be given in the following part. The contents of the rumors are:

1. (In total 522,510 posts) The first rumor is that *"the eggs with white eggshell are more nutritious than other kind of eggs"*. However, it is provided by the scientists that the eggshell formed lastly in bringing the egg into being, so the color of eggshell actually makes no difference in containing notorious ingredients.

2. (In total 493,518 posts) The second one is that *"edible tree fungus and solid form of pig blood are able to clean the people's lung"*. This information had been defined as one of the rumors because edible tree fungus and solid form of pig blood were digested by people in the stomach while the dust was breathing into the people's lung, which is to say that the food can't go into the breath system to help cleaning the lung.

3. (In total 476,445 posts) *"Chlorine, a chemical material found in mineral water, is carcinogenic"* is the third rumor. The experts claimed that using chlorine in mineral water is a usual and safe method to kill bacterium and it was

classified into the “third carcinogenic class”, meaning that it could rarely do harm on the human’s health.

4. (In total 491,012 posts) The fourth rumor is that “*eating okra is a treatment of diabetes*”. According to the medical specialists, there are not enough nutrients contained in okra so that it was merely a normal vegetable which had no effect on healing diabetes.

5. (In total 483,518 posts) The fifth rumor is that “*bean sprouts had been injected with some harmful substances like hormone which would be carcinogenic, abnormal and extremely lead to the precociousness of children as well as other serious results*”. Afterwards, the rumor has been clarified by the experts that these substances were plant hormone that were helpful in increasing the yield of the plant.

6. (In total 464,892 posts) The sixth rumor is that “*oxygen-enriched water could give the drinker more oxygen*”. It is then proved to be rumor as the oxygen can only be breathed into the body through the respiratory system while the water on the contrary goes into the body via digestive system.

7. (In total 425,874 posts) The number seven rumor is that “*the enzymes contained in fruits were able to detoxify and made people look younger and prettier*”. Then it was claimed by the scientists that the function of Fruit enzymes was similar to that of alcohol, which means that it made no difference with what the alcohol did to human body.

8. (In total 399,914 posts) “*Eating pears is carcinogenic*” is the eighth rumor while it then was corrected because the study from American Cancer Society showed that there is temporarily no effective and efficient treatment to cancers.

9. (In total 330,013 posts) The ninth rumor is that “*Wet paper towel is toxic*”. However, it has been proved that the materials contained in wet paper towel were the substances that were largely used in many other aspects of daily life, referring that it couldn’t do any harm to human body.

10. (In total 310,708 posts) The last rumor is that “*Radiation of mobile phones may burn the surface of skin*”. This rumor has then been corrected. The experts claimed that the main cause which led to the scald on the skin was the “*low temperature burn*”. When the phone was continuously used for more than one hour, the external temperature might reach 49 degrees centigrade which could burn the skin.

Through listing all the top ten rumors about life, it actually could tell what are the things gaining the largest attention from the Weibo users. There are eight rumors regarding “what the people usually eat”, including the daily food they like and the water they drink. And also, it is obvious that the food issues which always relate to the healthy problems gain more attention from the users in Weibo since it can be told that the rumors regarding cancer is the most attractive issue to the bloggers in Weibo.

However, due to the words limitation of the paper, the main focus to analyze one of the top ten rumors reported. Through study how the features of micro-blog as a social networking and internet accelerate the spreading speed of the rumor in Sina Weibo, it is easier to find the proper method to avoid the rumor broadcasting in present social networking website. The case of ‘poisonous bean sprouts’ which belonged to the top ten rumors is selected for analysis. The main content of the wrong information was about the substances in it. It was said that some bean sprouts had been injected with some harmful substances like hormone which would be carcinogenic, abnormal and extremely lead to the precociousness of children as well as other serious results. However, these suspicious substances were then proved to be the plant hormone that could regulate the bean sprouts’ growth and development and then were helpful in increasing the yield of the plant. Moreover, since those substances did no harm on the human’s health, they were the legal materials in the food.

One of the important functions in Sina Weibo is *search*, meaning that when users type some key words of one post, then all the posts containing the key words will be listed below the research bar piece by piece except some of the posts which are locked by the users themselves. By opening every piece of the posts, it is evident to know all the information of the post, including the exact time and date of sending post, the content of the post along with the pictures if there are images to state and explain the issue further, the number and the content of both comments and forwards from other users, which means the interaction between the users etc. Thus what can be done firstly is via the function of ‘research’ to type the key word 毒豆芽(poisonous bean sprouts) and 激素(hormone) in the bar, and then filter all the posts by the length of time from January 1st, 2014 to December 30th, 2014 since it had been concluded as

the top ten rumor about life in 2014. However, since the posts containing the key words may refer to other content such as the some reports for the issue, the alert or alarm from the authorities and problems of some bean sprouts which are really harmful to human's health as they were injected with the genuinely poisonous martial that could do bad to the body. The figure 3.1 blow demonstrate some examples represented by the search function after typing the two key words.



毒豆芽 激素

2014-01-01 00时~2014-12-31 23时 × 返回 重新筛选

盖心冯文亮 ✓

陕十大有毒害食品曝光：硫黄熏出白亮粉丝、羊杂碎中检出罂粟、鸡爪中双氧水超标、黑窝点加工假药、酱油白糖制作假蜂蜜、辣椒面里掺苏丹红、工业卤冰制售毒豆腐、工业松香加工猪头肉猪蹄、用生长激素生产毒豆芽、购买“高仿”名酒出售案。#冯文 <http://t.cn/RZzgyhT>

2014-12-27 23:38 来自 记事狗微博系统

收藏 | 转发 3 | 评论 2 | 点赞 3

洪峰 ✓

新华网西安11月14日电（记者杨一苗）陕西曝光曝光的十大有毒有害食品案：硫黄熏出白亮粉丝、羊杂碎中检出罂粟、鸡爪中双氧水超标、黑窝点加工假药、酱油白糖制作假蜂蜜、辣椒面里掺苏丹红、工业卤冰制售毒豆腐、工业松香加工猪头肉猪蹄、用生长激素生产毒豆芽、购买“高仿”名酒出售案。【食品安全！】

2014-12-27 12:45 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 23 | 评论 7 | 点赞 6

Figure 3.1: Examples represented of the search function

杀手美眉 ▼

还能吃点什么呢？蔬菜有农药化肥，**毒豆芽**，蛋类有苏丹红，肉类有病猪死猪，禽类都是养殖场**激素**催生的，水里有抗生素，空气有雾霾，我该如何存在！！！！！！！！

2014-12-27 11:09 来自 荣耀3X畅玩版

收藏 | 转发 | 评论 | 1

府谷公安 ▼

【辨识“毒豆芽”】看**豆芽**秆，自然培育的豆芽菜，芽身挺直稍细，芽脚不软、脆嫩、光泽白，而用**激素**、**抗生素**催产的豆芽，则芽秆粗壮发水，色泽灰白。看**豆芽**根，自然培育的豆芽菜，根须发育良好，无烂根、烂尖现象，根须长，而用**激素**、**抗生素**催产的豆芽，则根须短、少根或无根。

2014-12-17 16:17 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 | 评论 | 1

绿国鑫源生物科技有限公司 ▼

毒豆芽是指在**豆芽**生产过程中非法添加对人体有害的工业原料、**激素**、农药、化学、兽药、抗生素等，从而改变**豆芽**生产周期和外观，增加**豆芽**产量，最后流入市场销售的**豆芽**，因其添加的很多物质都对人体有害，故称为**毒豆芽**。左侧是**毒豆芽**。



2014-12-10 18:25 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 2 | 评论 2 | 2

Figure 3.2: Examples Represented of the Search Function

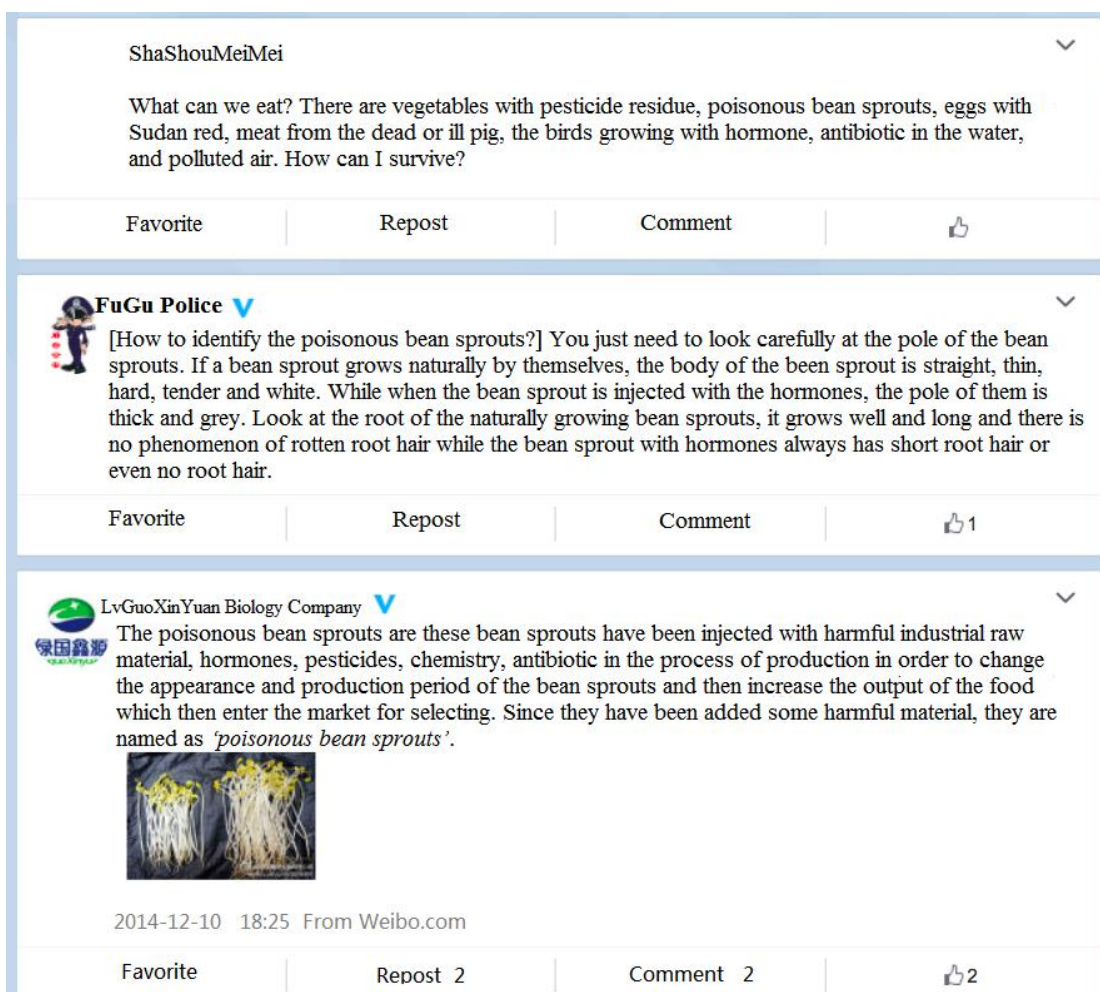


Figure 3.2: (upper is the original version while lower is the translated version)

To analyze the posts, the features of broadcasters, of channel for spreading, of the content in each post, of the effect and impact of communication will be the main focus in the following part of analysis, combining with the theoretical framework demonstrated below.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

Combining the data collected in Sina Weibo with the theoretical framework illustrated above, the analysis here will mainly concentrate on the four viewpoints: *features of the post senders contributing to the communication in the social networking; characteristics and difference of the spreading channel between the traditional media and Sina Weibo; properties of the content spreading regarding the two types of content in Sina Weibo; additionally, the traits of the communicating effects.*

4.1 Features of Senders and Receivers

In the study of the *Interactive Model of Communication*, senders or the resource of a piece of information is the man who produces the message. In order to examine the features of the senders more precisely, there are two main traits will be illustrated in the following points.

- *Untraceable sources.*

According to the chart 1 illustrated below, during the whole year of 2014, there are total 483,518 posts which containing *poisonous bean sprouts* and *hormone* to spread the rumor regarding bean sprouts. Among those sources, only 34% users were certified by Sina Weibo (source from the verified users) which could be treated as reliable sources. As mentioned above, any individual can register and then get their account by verifying the telephone number or the email address which rarely require the identity information from users. Therefore, the system used by Sina Weibo enhances the anonymity which was able to cover the identities of the users in reality. Additionally, it is not complex and difficult to pass the verification system set by Sina Weibo because the users may only need to offer some documents via the internet instead of being checked in person by it. Because of the system it adopted to

verify their account, it is obvious that there might be a large range of sources from the verified users that are also anonymous.

Table 1: Source of the different types of users

	<i>Number of the item</i>	<i>Proportion of the total number</i>
<i>Source from the verified users</i>	<i>164,274</i>	<i>34%</i>
<i>Source from normal users</i>	<i>319,122</i>	<i>66%</i>
<i>Total number of source</i>	<i>483,518</i>	<i>100%</i>

As a result, it is free for many sources since every individual may have the awareness that they weren't responsible for any comment or statement they posted in Sina Weibo since there is no constrictions and rules to confine the range of behaviors, which resulted the rumor spreading.

Meanwhile, as the most-frequently used function is *forward* or *re-post*, rumors usually realize via spreading by continuous forward. Although in the system of Sina Weibo, the origin of source will be marked and showed in the post, the source could not be proved to be the origin of the rumors. For instance, there is a post used by many accounts which mainly illustrated how the poisonous bean sprouts were produced with a link to a report in www.12369.org. However, it is worth noticing that the report in that website also use the anonymity of the internet, which was not able to trace back to people in charge of the reliability.

- *Changeable Roles of Senders and Receivers.*

The former parts introduced some features of Sina Weibo and one among the characteristics is that every individual could be followed and meanwhile follow other accounts as well. The unique property forms the most distinguishing feature from the other conventional channel of communication that the roles of the senders and

receivers are easily changeable. Besides, the function that assists the variation is the *forward* function in Sina Weibo which is easily and continually for the senders to use.

In the whole communicating or broadcasting process, one of the vital elements is *feedback*, referring to the response to a message. In this case, both the functions of *comment* and *forward* are the ways of receiving *feedback* or interact between the senders and receivers. As consequence, the factor of *feedback* helps communicators to learn if their message has been received and what the extent that is achieved by the receivers. That is to say, in this model, *feedback* happens after the reception of a message instead of taking place during the message itself. Thus the platform of Sina Weibo is actually help the rumors deeply and vastly communication or spreading more continually, quickly.

And also, since the changeability of the identity between the senders and the receivers, so the two identities might have the same features in the process of communication in this social networking so only the identity sender has been examined in this part.

4.2 Social Networking Website as the Communicative Channel

Channel in the study proposed by Schramm means the platform that the signals, or the messages and information sent by posters are adapted for transmission. In this case study, the social networking website are the channel in the whole process of communication.

- *Multiple-level and Highly-interactive means of communication*

Based on the theory -- *interactional model of communication* -- proposed by Schramm (1954), there are two ways of communication in the internet virtual world, indicating the message from the senders to the receivers and the receivers to the senders, which makes the communication in the networking unique from the other channel of communication.

Fundamentally speaking, Sina Weibo is a platform for social networking so the effect of it is more likely to assemble the traditional inter-personal communication in the ancient period. Unlike other mass media, the interaction between the different users is able to realize via the functions like *comment*, *forward*, *@ (mention other users to read the piece of post)*. Due to the theory of *interactional model of communication*, *feedback* refers to the behavior that the receivers give back to the senders as an additional part. In this case, the senders can clearly note the feedback from the receivers and via the further communication by the function of comment, it actually enhances the effect of the feedback in the whole communication process. Also, not only the function of comment has the function, while the other functions of re-post and mention other people could also provide the opportunities for the both senders and receivers to do more communication and more feedback to each other of what they have received and to check whether they have got the true information instead of the noise of the message to avoid the misunderstanding in the communication progress.

So evidently, the interaction among the senders and receivers may directly result to enlarge and enrich the rumors, which is more persuasive from the perspective of a receiver. Here is an example of how the interaction enhanced the communication of rumors in figure 3.



Figure 3.3: Example of the content of a various forms constitute a price of rumors.



Figure 3.3: (upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

This is a post from Sina News of Guangdong Province. The content is regarding a workshop of producing the poisonous bean sprouts by employing hormone while the workers in that workshop were arrested later. Below the content and picture of the post, it shows that 24 users made the re-post of the news and 9 users made comments on it. It is interesting that the people who made the re-post would soon become the new sender of the piece of information, which didn't appear in other form or platform of traditional media.

4.3 Traits of the content

Although this factor is not one of the main focuses in the interactive model of communication, content is still able to influence the process of communication so the content of the post or the message in the terms of many forms of communication is Weibo spreading. As a result, it is very essential to conduct some research on it for.

As introduced in the former parts, it has been ruled by Sina Weibo that every post may only carry up to 140 number of words. In this way, the special rule requires that the senders select the information on a basis of brevity and stressing on the theme that is of most essence and importance. In this part of analysis, chart 2 demonstrates the proportion of every kinds of contents of the rumor regarding spinous bean sprouts, including the words with links that refers to other information resources, with multimedia like pictures and videos, with a long blog that is still a hyperlink which is able to contain more than 140 number of words to fully illustrate the information,

form of re-post the original post, a combination of two or more than two forms of content and a form with merely words.

Table 2: Proportion of Every Kind of a Contents

	<i>Number of post</i>	<i>Proportion of post</i>
<i>Post with links</i>	<i>14,506</i>	<i>3.0%</i>
<i>Post with multimedia</i>	<i>104,540</i>	<i>21.6%</i>
<i>Post with long blog</i>	<i>3,968</i>	<i>0.8%</i>
<i>Repost</i>	<i>44,584</i>	<i>9.2%</i>
<i>Combination of two or above forms</i>	<i>17,890</i>	<i>3.7%</i>
<i>Post of mere words</i>	<i>297,847</i>	<i>61.6%</i>
<i>Total number of post</i>	<i>483,518</i>	<i>100%</i>

From the chart, it can be told the following points of features regarding the content of the spreading rumor in Sina Weibo.

- *Finitude of Words in Every Post*

From the chart 2, it can be told that Because of the rule set by Sina Weibo, about 62% of users choose the form of mere words to issue their post to stress their themes and intensions in the posts. However, because of the defining length of each post, the senders manage to simplify the information and emphasize on the main theme and main ideas, which accelerate the editing rate of handling a piece of information so that this could also enhance the effectiveness of broadcasting. And the other reason of using pure form of words instead of others might be due to fast pace of sending the information to achieve the fast sending to the followers. With the other functions in Sina Weibo mentioned above, the functions of comment, repost and mention offer some additional opportunities for the senders to do more persuasion through other modes of content.

- *Diversity in forms of content in post*

Although there is a strict restriction of the number of words set by Sina Weibo, when the posters want to issue the written word, it is allowed that they could post the information along with the multiple media that refer to pictures, videos or audios etc., long blogs that is a special form like the articles in previously well-known mode of blogs with no limit of words, pictures that containing the words to summarize the whole stuff the poster want to express, links of the website of words or multimedia following the 140 words and so on. By adopting a large variety of methods rather than mere the form of written words, the information would be more convincing for the audience, in particular the post with some reference from the authorized mass media which are always gain the belief from the normal audience.

As mentioned before, in the whole process of spreading or broadcasting, all the symbols needed firstly to be transferred into some various forms of information, like pictures, text, audio, video etc. Different forms of information are allowed in Sina Weibo because the multiple media are the main components in the internet. With the advance of the technology, people could even utilize phone as a platform to access to diverse forms of information. Meanwhile, because the fast pace of modern life, most of the users tend to be attracted or fascinated by the information presented through the means of multiple media rather than mere form of words text.

Additionally, the chart 2 also suggest that the highest-proportion forms of the content in the case of the life rumor when the users issue their posts is the mere written words. However, in order to increase the credit of their information, one-fifth of the posts that involve the spreading rumor of daily life contain the written words with the mufti-media, such as the forms of pictures and videos and more than one-third users choose combined forms of content rather than the form of mere written words.

In the figure 4 is an example of the content of a various forms constitute a piece of posts. In the figure, there are two posts that both adopt a combination of modes to demonstrate their information. The sender of the upper one employed the content of the long blog to break the limit of number of words to further illustrate the detailed information to enhance the credibility of his information. While the second

post, along with the multimedia – form of picture – to immediately catch the attention of the audience to focus on what it is about.



Figure 4: (upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

- *High Rate of Repetition in Content*

In Sina Weibo, the function of *re-post* or *forward*, a way of spreading is similar to *copy-paste* as we usually do. Generally speaking, the users only need to kick the button of *forward*, then the information would be sent to their own followers or audience without any changes. In addition, the way of using this kind of function has been a extensive-used and widespread mean to communicate. In fact, there is a area in Sina Weibo especially for denying rumors and from the other cases of rumors more than those rumors regarding daily life, the function of forward, which is for the users to re-post other information, has been the highest-frequently used method for spreading information.

Since function of *forward* or *copy-paste* is a convenient as well as a effective approach of communicating, the senders can not only save their time and consume less energy and spirit, but also accelerate the rate of spreading. The means of *copy-paste* greatly lower the possibility of deleting and changing in the perspective of content so the function of *forward* leads to the high similarity of the content of information. Figure 5 below is an example to illustrate the similarity of the content of the rumor about the poisonous bean sprouts in Sina Weibo.

毒豆芽 激素

2014-01-01 00时~2014-12-31 23时 ×
返回 重新筛选

盏心冯文亮 ✓

陕十大有毒害食品曝光：硫黄熏出白亮粉丝、羊杂碎中检出罂粟、鸡爪中双氧水超标、黑窝点加工假药、酱油白糖制作假蜂蜜、辣椒面里掺苏丹红、工业卤冰制售毒豆腐、工业松香加工猪头肉猪蹄、用生长激素生产毒豆芽、购买“高仿”名酒出售案。#冯文 <http://t.cn/RZzgyhT>

2014-12-27 23:38 来自 记事狗微博系统

收藏	转发 3	评论 2	👍 3
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洪峰 ✓

新华网西安11月14日电（记者杨一苗）陕西曝光曝光的十大有毒有害食品案：硫黄熏出白亮粉丝、羊杂碎中检出罂粟、鸡爪中双氧水超标、黑窝点加工假药、酱油白糖制作假蜂蜜、辣椒面里掺苏丹红、工业卤冰制售毒豆腐、工业松香加工猪头肉猪蹄、用生长激素生产毒豆芽、购买“高仿”名酒出售案。【食品安全！】

2014-12-27 12:45 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏	转发 23	评论 7	👍 6
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毒豆芽 激素

2014-01-01 00时~2014-12-31 23时 ×
返回 重新筛选

ZhanXinFengWenLiang ✓

The top ten poisonous food in ShanXi has been exposed, they are the fine vermicelli processed by sulphur, the poppy in the sheep giblets, chicken pawls with extensive hydrogen peroxide solution, the fake medicine produced by a unregistered workshop, the fake honey made from the soy sauce and white sugar, spice powder with Sudan red, poisonous tofu with industrial brine, the pig meat processed by the rosin for industrial use, the bean sprouts growing by hormones and the sales of fake brand wine. <http://t.cn/RZzgyhT>

Favorite	Repost 3	Comment 2	👍 3
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HongFeng ✓

Based on the report of XinHua News by the journalist Yang Yimiao, The top ten poisonous food in ShanXi has been exposed they are the fine vermicelli processed by sulphur, the poppy in the sheep giblets, chicken pawls with extensive hydrogen peroxide solution, the fake medicine produced by a unregistered workshop, the fake honey made from the soy sauce and white sugar, spice powder with Sudan red, poisonous tofu with industrial brine, the pig meat processed by the rosin for industrial use, the bean sprouts growing by hormones and the sales of fake brand wine.

Favorite	Repost 23	Comment 7	👍 6
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Figure 5: (upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

Both two posts showed in figure 4 are the information stating the *ten cases of crime in Xi'an relating to food safety issue* and the two post has the 90% similarity in

the aspect of content. And also, the upper post has 3 repost while the second one has been reposted 23 times, meaning that there are total 25 posts among the number of 458 is the exactly the same as the two posts in figure 4, make up about 5% of the randomly-picked post. As to the cause of this situation, the netizens theoretically spend little time in thinking profoundly about the meaning or the deeper indication hidden in the information so that they tend to re-post others' post or directly copy from the post they have sent.

- *Combination of Factual Information and Rumors*

Another traits of content in this case is that the rumors were always put in the factual information. Take one of the posts which received a large range of attention sent from People Daily, one of the most authoritative and popular official accounts for example (figure 6).



Figure 6: (upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

In this post, it firstly told a fact that two mills which produced poisonous bean sprouts had been destroyed by the local police and two workers had been arrested by the police. Then it explained the reason why the poisonous bean sprouts were harmful is that the hormone injected into the plant could do damage on the human's health. The results of the poisonous bean sprouts were then corrected by the experts to that the hormone was only contribute to the growth of bean sprouts instead of affecting on human body. As analyzed above, because the information in the post was about everybody's daily life, the followers' interests were easily aroused. Therefore, factual information contained in the post could increase the credibility and meanwhile the rumor involved was also delivered to the followers.

4.4 Characteristics in Communicative Effects

- *Effect of Misleading and Large Range of Impact*

The period of spreading rumor that is examined here is the time between January 1st, 2014 and December 31st, 2014. Without any denial from the authorities, the rumor spreads in Sina Weibo throughout the whole year.

As analyzed above, it is simple and convenient for a normal people to register an account in Sina Weibo. Because of the individual difference in the degree of personal education and scientific awareness, the posters of the rumor lack the logical judgment towards the information demonstrated in front of them. And also, due to the property of the rumor that is largely close to the daily life, the majority of the users who get the information tend to trust the information they've received.

Because of rumors' the strength in misleading, it has to some extent influenced the users' real life. As it is reported that the *bean sprouts* had been injected with some *hormones* that lead them to be poisonous, there was a trend in China to use some machine to produce the home-made bean sprouts during that period of time, which can be told by the figure 7 below.

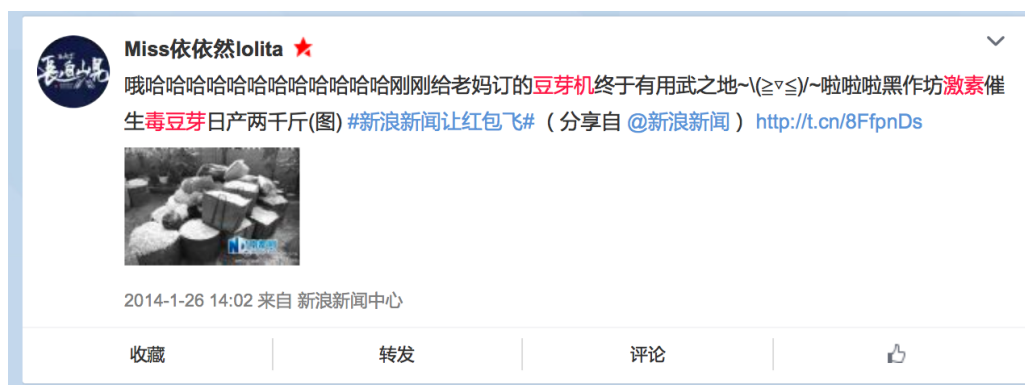


Figure 7:(upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

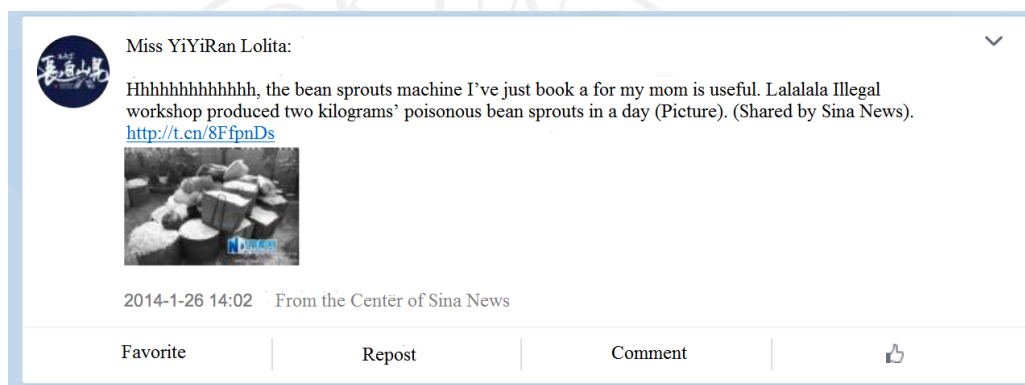


Figure 7:(upper is the original version and the lower one is translated version)

In the post, it is written that *finally the bean sprouts machine bought for mum could be useful now* with a link of the news from Sina News that relates to production of bean sprouts in the unqualified workshop.

- *Interaction with the Traditional Mass Media*

With the popularity of the internet and networking website, it is normal for the traditional mass media – newspaper, TV news program etc. – to make or produce news relating to the phenomenon or the issues in the virtual world, and then when publishing in the traditional mass media, the news from the internet would have been posted back in internet again.

Yangcheng Post, a traditional newspaper with a large range of audience in Guangdong Province issued a piece of news whose title was called *激素加上抗生素 日产一吨毒豆芽* (*hormone and antibiotic make the output of a tone of poisonous*

bean sprouts in January 26th, 2014 to reveal the phenomenon about a workshop producing the poisonous bean sprouts. In the paper vision of the newspaper, the journalist in the media utilized four pictures in the article and the editor in the media even put the news in the front page of the newspaper just under the headline – the most significant piece of news for that day’s paper – which represents the importance of the issue. Additionally, the media like Xinhua News, Huaxin Metropolitan Newspaper and so on. Besides, as mentioned about the features of the content that spread in Sina Weibo, the audience of Sina Weibo tend to use the hyperlink from the traditional mass media to increase the credibility to persuade the followers of one’s account.

Because of the authority that the traditional mass media has established so far, the method they adopted is to spread or broadcast the issue itself instead of finding whether the bean sprouts produced by the workshop is really poisonous. As a result, the interaction between the information in internet networking and traditional mass media actually enhance the spreading of the rumor involving daily life.



Figure 8: News about poisonous bean sprouts in Hua Xi Metropolitan Newspaper



Figure 8: News about poisonous bean sprouts in Hua Xi Metropolitan Newspaper (upper is the original version of news title and the lower one is translated version)

Via the results from the analysis of the selected messages involving rumors in Weibo, the research questions proposed in the chapter one could be answered from the four perspectives we analyzed above.

There are plenty of reasons to explain why the rumors can be relatively freely spread in Sina Weibo. Firstly, because of lacking effective users' verified system, there is no limitation of having a Weibo account. Plus, as there is no record of the users' private information, it is clear that the users in Weibo would feel no responsibility of speaking out or spreading the information in the social networking website. Secondly, as mentioned before, Weibo offers a large range of opportunities of interaction between the users whether they are strangers or acquaintances so the rumors could be communicated or spread through the different ways except for just post the messages. Thirdly, Weibo is a platform provides the users with a variety of forms of post message, such as pure text, pictures, video and so on. Therefore, when a user could not be convinced by a rumor in a form of word text, he or she might be persuaded by a link from other website or a long video because the rumor in these forms might seem more persuasive and more like a truth.

What's more, part of traditional media like TV news or newspapers today pay more attention to the information or messages in internet than before. Based on the perspective of closely following the new trend or news happened most recently, they tend to directly use the messages without any confirmation in order to issue the news in the shortest time. Hence the desire of sending out the newest information from the traditional media, they would edit the information in their broadcasting channel. As a consequence, the senders in Weibo might again use the link from traditional media to persuade their receivers and as we analyze above, the receivers would be easily convinced by the news from traditional media as they represent the authority in the common sense.

4.5 The Process of Rumor Spreading

After detailed analysis of the unique features of Weibo in the process of communicating rumor of poisonous bean sprouts, it is significant to examine how it spreads from the beginning to the climax and then fading away.

As the rumor has been listed as the top 10 rumors in 2014, the earliest post involving the information of poisonous bean sprouts in 2014 appeared on the date of January 24th. There are three different senders of the original posts which claimed a "fact" that the poisonous bean sprouts which had been injected with hormone and might lead to some diseases (figure 9).



新浪福建 

【**闽清查扣上千斤**毒豆芽** 会使女性生理发生改变**】近日，闽清县查获涉嫌制售“毒豆芽”作坊两处，查扣涉嫌添加“AB粉”的“有毒”豆芽共计890公斤。长期食用添加“AB”粉的豆芽，会使儿童发育早熟、女性生理发生改变、老年人骨质疏松等，有致癌可能  目前公安机关已立案侦查。海都

<http://t.cn/8Fc9uWY>



2014-1-24 14:34 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 33 | 评论 27 | 5



Sina News in Fujian Province

[Minqing seized thousands of pounds of poison bean sprouts which would enable female physiologic change] Recently, Minqing County seized two suspected mills of selling "poison bean sprouts" and swooped total 890 kilograms of adding AB powder" toxic "bean sprouts. Long-term consumption of added "ab" powder of bean sprouts, will enable early child development, women in the physiological changes, the elderly osteoporosis, carcinogenic potential at present. The public security organs have been placed on file for investigation



2014-1-24 14:34 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏 | 转发 33 | 评论 27 | 5



广州公安

#警方通报#【激素投入培养池"白白胖胖"毒豆芽】往豆芽培养池里加入防腐剂、增白剂、漂白粉等违禁添加剂，一天加工2000余斤毒豆芽！若超量摄入，易使儿童早熟、女性生理改变，甚至会致癌、致畸。近日@广州增城公安 捣毁两个生产、加工毒豆芽的黑窝点，抓获2名嫌疑人。戳图看如何辨别毒豆芽↓



2014-1-24 16:02 来自 人民微管家

收藏 | 转发 302 | 评论 22 | 15



Guangzhou Police Official

Police informed # [hormone into the training pool "plump" poison bean sprouts] via pouring in the bean sprout cultivating pool with preservatives, whitening agent, bleaching powder, etc. , a mill processed more than 2000 pounds of poison bean sprouts one day! If excessive intake, easy to make children early-maturing, female physiological changes, even carcinogenic, teratogenic. Recently, the @ Zengcheng public security in Guangzhou destroyed two production and processing of poison bean sprouts black dens, arrested 2 suspects. Stamp chart how to distinguish poisonous bean sprouts down



2014-1-24 16:02 来自 人民微管家

收藏 | 转发 302 | 评论 22 | 15

Figure 9: Three different senders of the original posts



Figure 9.1: Three different senders of the original posts

(the upper one is the original one and the lower one is translated version)

The three senders are respectively the Sina News in Fujian Province, Police of Guangzhou City and Things Happening around Fujian Province, which all of them are the verified accounts mainly facing their own districts. According to the translation version, it can be seen that though the news is true, the results of eating those poisonous bean sprouts have then been claimed not true. In all of the posts, the hormone which has been injected into the bean sprout could do harm to the human body while in the post containing top 10 rumors of 2014, the hormone was proved to help the growth of the plant instead of having no effect on human body. However, since it is true that the illegal mills had been destroyed and two suspects had been arrested, the factual information plus the rumor of results brought by poisonous bean sprouts could easily confuse the followers of the users.

In the three posts, all of the users adopted the forms of picture and word text while two of them employed the links from other websites. According to the analysis

above, the usage of forms in both pictures and links would be more likely to increase the credibility and authenticity of the information. Additionally, it can be seen that there are relatively large amount of forwards and comments by the other users. Among the whole three posts, the largest forwards and comments appeared in the post by the Police of Guangzhou City which were 302 and 22 respectively.

Then because of the information then sent by a well-known official account name People Daily, the information arouses a large range of attention by the followers. People Daily, represents the most authoritative and most convincing media which received has been followed by other 45.39 million users in the social networking site (figure 10). What's more, in order to prove the factuality, the sender adopted the forms of picture and link as well. In the text part, although the focus of the post is a piece of news that an illegal mill had been destroyed and two suspects had been arrested, the last part showed a "fact" that the hormone which had been injected into the bean sprouts could result in early-maturing of children and change for the women's bodies. Also the final part is actually a rumor like the origin of the information.



Figure 10: The posy from people daily



Figure 10: Translated Version

As accounted above, there are total 483,518 pieces of information sent in the whole year of 2014 regarding the rumor of poisonous bean sprouts and chart 3 shows the exact number of posts throughout the whole year.

Table 3: The Exact Number of Posts Through the Whole Years

	Number of posts/ month	Proportion of posts/month
Jan.	53,134	11%
Feb.	4,835	1%
March	87,033	18%
April	19,341	4%
May	19,341	4%
June	43,517	9%
July	77,363	16%
August	38,681	8%
Sept.	29,011	6%
Oct.	48,352	10%
Nov.	24,176	5%
Dec.	36,681	8%
Total number	483,518	100%

And in the March and July, a number of 81 and 75 pieces of information respectively involving poisonous bean sprouts had been found, reaching the climax of the whole process of rumor spreading. Therefore, it can be inferred that the communication of rumor does not fade away and then disappear after reaching one peak but it could show up again with the advance of the rumor's spreading.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis of the spreading process of rumor in a typical social networking website Sina Weibo from every aspect of the *Interaction Model*, it can be sought out the element or features that is helpful to the rumor communication in Sina Weibo. Firstly, from the perspective of the origins of the information, because there is lacking of more reliable entering system in Sina Weibo, the identities of the senders of information are untraceable. What's more, one of the unique features of Sina Weibo is that the users could play both the roles of sender and receiver, the primitive source of one piece of rumor is hard to find out. Secondly, from the perspective of the content, unlike the traditional media, the information spreading in Sina Weibo might be in a variety of forms combing with text, multimedia, long blog, links and so on. As the multiple forms of the content could be more persuasive to the audience, it is also another element contributing to the rumor spreading. Also, since it is easy for the users to copy and paste the content from other users, there is a high rate of repetition of content in Sina Weibo. As a result, many users tend to copy directly from others without another thought of considering whether the information is true or not. Thirdly, the other element might enhance the credibility of the rumors is the interaction between the traditional media and Sina Weibo. It can be known from the analysis that as Sina Weibo is the most commonly used social networking website in China, many traditional media always seek for some news clues from it without any confirmation. Since it is generally acknowledged by the majority of audience that the traditional media such as newspaper or TV are more reliable information source compared with information in internet. Therefore, the interaction between the traditional media and Sina Weibo also bring more credibility of a rumor to the public.

Due to the drawbacks appearing in the nowadays Sina Weibo, it is essential to come up some methods or suggestions to solve these problems from these perspectives that mentioned in the analysis part above.

1. For the senders of one message, as they are the source of one post, their force of spreading a post is hard to estimate, mainly depending on whether they are the 'verified users', or whether they adopt some other reference to enhance the post's credit. What's more, because there is no other obstacle for the users to enter the website, they feel no pressure when releasing any information without credit or authority. And also, owing to the special properties that a poster in Sina Weibo has, it is essential for the government or the website to set and conduct some rules in verifying the genuine identity of the users. In addition, it can be told that in the vicinity of one-third posters who broadcasting the rumors are the source from the verified users, referring that those sources have already passed and achieved the requirement that set up by the verification system worked out by the website. To solve the situation, there should be some stricter rules in the process of verifying, plus some principles of punishment, such as identity cancelation or fine system to those verified users who have broken some rules set up by the verification system.

2. Due to the features of internet communication, interaction happens high-frequently in rumor communication because fundamentally the social networking is a kind of platform to communicate and interact with the others. And because the communication and interaction between individuals are depend on the individual needs, it is not possible to cut down the communication between the different user. However, the social networking website could adopt some policy or system to find the source and use the functions of comment, re-post or mention to state the truth of a piece of information and also through the user to communicate with the followers of the post sender.

3. When mentioned the content of the communication, as can be seen in the chart 2, the users adopt diversity of methods to spread their information, including the forms of words, pictures, videos, reference from other sites and other sources etc. Another trait of the content is that there is a high repetition in the posts sent by the posters, meaning that when they read the information representing in front of them, they tend to spend little time in thinking a second time about the truthfulness information before they make the decision to repost or send their post which directly copy from others' post. To avoid the situation regarding content of the post, it is necessary for the website to enhance the aspect of censorship in checking

the truthfulness of the information to make up drawback of the lack of thinking from the posters.

4. Since nowadays the internet has so large influence on the whole world so the traditional mass media has been greatly affected by the issues that occurred in the environment of internet. However, as the case above, without the self-review or self-control, the traditional media tend to ignore the steps of checking the information. In fact, because of the long-term management of the traditional mass media, those forms of reports like on the TV or in the newspaper are always the reprehensive of authority. Before the appearing of internet communication, the traditional mass media act as the gatekeeper of information, meaning that they usually select the information carefully. While in the Sina Weibo, the senders are the gatekeeper of information themselves, it is vitally significant for the users in that social networking website to establish some awareness of distinguish whether the information is true or not. Meanwhile, the government and the traditional mass media can act as the guide for the people via telling the scientific and normal life facts and quick responding to the incorrect information in order to improve the ability of judging.

5. As the government has a high credit and authority among all the netizens in that platform and there are already a large amount of official accounts existing in the social networking website. Because of their roles, when there are some rumors misleading the public opinion among the people, the official account of government can act as the role of guiding the direction of the netizens' opinion to a more positive way to reduce the unexpected or unpredictable influence caused by the false information and meanwhile to reduce the impact brought by the virtual world to the real world. In addition, the production, broadcasting and spreading of rumor are always caused by the unequal communication. The public normally can not make the correct distinguishing because they do not have the scientific sight of some issues. When the spreading of rumors happens, what the right thing for the traditional mass media and the government do is to trace the source of information and verify the truthfulness of that information instead of remaining silent through the whole process of communication. Because of the theory of *noise in interactional model of communication*, what the authorities' source to do is to make the true situation more

clearly to avoid the noise occurs in the progress of communication. Due to the response from these platform, the rumor would have been gone in a very short time since when the government and the mass media has the priority of stating the issue, the rumors could be cut off from the very start and lead the public opinion towards those organizations. As a result, the rumor might be easily erased from the stage of producing the information.

In China, with the development of Sina Weibo and the increasing number of rumors in this platform, the Chinese scholar are paying more attention to this issue recently. Luan Lingling in Anhui University conducted a research on the rumor's causes, communicative traits and the solution based on Sina Weibo in 2015. In her paper, through quantitative research, the author used the Tipping Point proposed by Malcolm Gladwell as the theoretical basis to analyze the rumor spreading process. Another paper composed by Ma Zhuang from Jilin University in 2014 is about a study in the rumor spreading in microblog. In his paper, via analyzing the producing process of the rumor, the forms of the spreading, the specialties of rumor communication, the dangers brought by the rumors and the precaution and measurements to control the rumors in micro-blog.

However, there are some drawbacks in this paper. Firstly, only one case was chosen to conduct the research. Secondly, the focus was put to analyze the elements in the *Interactive Model* in the broadcasting process instead of the steps throughout the whole study. Lastly, although the proposed solutions of dealing with the rumor spreading were listed in the paper, the existing methods to deal with the problem were not able to be found in the essay. Therefore, for the further study, the improvements will be mainly in those aspects. More cases will be chosen to do the examination to do more proof to the thesis of paper. Additionally, every stages and the whole process including the how and when the rumors come into being, reach the peak throughout the whole period fade away and then disappear from the public views will gain more attention in the research. At last, the current treatment to the communication of rumors will be presented to show the approaches of intercepting or deleting the rumors and the affection brought by the methods as well.

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