

Challenges and Innovations in Ideological and Political Education for College Students in the Micro-Public Opinion Environment

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Abstract: The micro-public opinion environment, characterized by information fragmentation, instantaneous dissemination, emotional contagion, and diverse values, has profoundly transformed the information acquisition patterns and cognitive formation processes of college students. It also poses new challenges and opportunities for innovation in ideological and political education (hereinafter referred to as “IPE”) for college students. Starting from the contemporary value of IPE for college students, this paper analyzes the logical connection between the micro-public opinion environment and IPE, thoroughly examines the core challenges faced by IPE in this context, and proposes specific innovative paths from four perspectives: content, methods, subjects, and mechanisms. The aim is to provide insights for enhancing the pertinence and effectiveness of IPE for college students in the micro-public opinion environment.

Keywords: Micro-public opinion environment; College students; Ideological and political education; Educational innovation

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1. The logical connection between the micro-public opinion environment and ideological and political education for college students

The micro-public opinion environment is not an “external field” independent of the realm of IPE but rather exhibits a deep logical coupling with IPE.

The micro-public opinion environment represents a “new frontier” for ideological and political education. Traditional ideological and political education primarily relies on established settings such as classroom instruction and offline activities. However, the micro-public opinion environment breaks free from the constraints of time and space, extending the scenarios of ideological and political education into college students’ daily social interactions and information browsing^[1]. Every instance of information reception and opinion expression by college students on micro-platforms is, in essence, a process of ideological interaction.

This makes the micro-public opinion environment a “vanguard position” that ideological and political education must seize. If ideological and political education fails to actively engage in this space, erroneous ideologies and negative public opinions will fill the ideological void.

The propagation characteristics of micro-public opinion and the cognitive traits of college students exhibit a phenomenon of “interactive resonance”. College students have a high receptivity to novel things and are enthusiastic about participating in interactions. Meanwhile, micro-public opinion disseminates through concise forms such as short videos, graphics, and topic discussions, aligning with college students’ information consumption habits. Conversely, the expressions of opinions by college students become a significant source for the generation and dissemination of micro-public opinion, influencing its dynamic trajectory^[2]. This “interactive resonance” underscores the necessity for ideological and political education to align with the propagation rhythm of micro-public opinion and the cognitive patterns of college students; otherwise, achieving the anticipated outcomes of ideological guidance will be challenging.

Ideological and political education serves as the “core anchor for mainstream values” in the micro-public opinion environment. The diverse manifestations of values within the micro-public opinion environment can easily lead to “value disorder”. One of the core functions of ideological and political education is to provide college students with a stable yardstick for value judgment by disseminating mainstream values. Simultaneously, it integrates mainstream values into the dissemination of micro-public opinion, mitigating the impact of erroneous ideologies, guiding micro-public opinion towards a positive and healthy direction, and fostering a constructive micro-public opinion landscape^[3].

2. Core challenges facing ideological and political education for college students in the micro-public opinion environment

2.1. Fragmented micro-public opinion information undermines the systematic nature of ideological and political education

One of the core objectives of ideological and political education is to facilitate the formation of a comprehensive and systematic ideological cognition and value system among university students. This requires a content system that is logically coherent and well-structured. However, most information in the micro-public opinion environment exists in a “fragmented” form: a short video clip, a brief comment, or a graphic typically presents only a single viewpoint or partial fact, lacking comprehensive background explanations and logical deductions. Such fragmented information can hinder university students’ systematic grasp of ideological and political content. For instance, in education on “patriotism”, traditional ideological and political classrooms would unfold according to the logic of history, theory, and practice.

In contrast, micro-public opinion tends to revolve around specific events in fragmented discussions, making it difficult for university students to grasp the profound connotations of patriotism from an overall perspective. This may even lead to one-sided understandings, thereby diminishing the systematic effectiveness of ideological and political education^[4].

2.2. Widespread dissemination of emotions in micro-public opinion weakens the rational guidance of ideological and political education

The micro-public opinion environment is characterized by “emotion-driven dissemination”: compared to rational viewpoints, content filled with strong emotions is more likely to attract attention and be shared, leading to the rapid spread of emotions in micro-public opinion. University students, with their relatively sensitive

emotional experiences, are susceptible to the influence of negative emotions in micro-public opinion, thereby forming a cognitive pattern where “emotions precede reason”.

The key to ideological and political education lies in employing rational analysis and logical reasoning to guide university students toward forming correct cognitions. When emotional generalization dominates in micro-public opinion, university students often overlook rational scrutiny of information and are more inclined to make judgments based on emotions. This results in the dilution of the rational guidance role of ideological and political education, even leading to a situation where “emotions overwhelm rational viewpoints”.

2.3. The values presented in micro-public opinion are diversified, posing a challenge to the development of mainstream value identification

The key task of ideological and political education is to promote the establishment of college students' identification with mainstream values. However, the openness of the micro-public opinion environment facilitates the rapid dissemination of various values. Some micro-public opinions package erroneous viewpoints in “seemingly legitimate” forms, advocating individualism under the pretext of “pursuing personal freedom” and spreading historical nihilism under the guise of “reflecting on history”. These viewpoints easily align with college students' psychological aspirations for “independent thinking,” thereby exerting a certain impact on their identification with mainstream values. The dissemination logic of “traffic first” in micro-public opinion enables some negative and vulgar values to spread widely due to their ability to “attract public attention”, further weakening college students' sense of identification with mainstream values and increasing the difficulty of ideological and political education in leading values ^[5].

2.4. The adaptability of educational subjects is inadequate, lagging behind the pace of micro-public opinion dissemination

As implementers of ideological and political education, the ability of educational subjects to adapt to the micro-public opinion environment directly affects educational outcomes. Some educational subjects exhibit obvious “inadequate adaptability” issues: a lack of understanding of the dissemination patterns of micro-public opinion, unfamiliarity with the operational logic of micro-platforms, and difficulty in actively engaging in educational activities within the micro-public opinion sphere. Their response speed to micro-public opinion is slow, micro-public opinion dissemination is instantaneous, and a topic involving college students can quickly gain traction within a few hours. However, some educational subjects still adopt the approach of “offline research, collective discussion, and delayed response”. When the response speed of ideological and political education fails to keep pace with the dissemination rhythm of micro-public opinion, college students are already influenced by other viewpoints in the micro-public opinion, causing the guidance of ideological and political education to miss the “most opportune moment” and making it difficult to achieve practical effects ^[6].

3. Innovative approaches to ideological and political education for college students in the micro-public opinion environment

3.1. Content innovation: Establishing a “fragmented + in-depth” ideological and political content system

3.1.1. Breaking down core ideological and political content into micro-modules

Divide the systematic content of traditional ideological and political education into “micro-knowledge points”, with each micro-module focusing on a specific theme and keeping the length within a reasonable range of

“5-minute reading” or “3-minute viewing”. The content of micro-modules should be “clear in viewpoint and concise in logic”, while adopting lightweight presentation forms that align with the dissemination characteristics of micro-platforms. This allows college students to receive ideological and political content during their fragmented time, gradually accumulating and forming a systematic understanding.

3.1.2. Embedding ideological and political connotations into micro-public opinion hotspots

Establish a linkage mechanism between micro-public opinion hotspots and ideological and political content. When hot topics related to college students emerge in micro-public opinion, immediately extract the ideological and political elements within the topics and integrate them into the hot discussions. For example, when micro-public opinion discusses “difficulties in college student employment”, micro-content can be produced from ideological and political perspectives such as “the alignment of personal ideals with social needs”, “the inheritance of the spirit of hard work”, and “the supporting logic of national employment policies”. This not only responds to the focal points of college students’ concerns but also conveys the essence of ideological and political education through hot topics, preventing ideological and political content from being “disconnected” from micro-public opinion hotspots and enhancing content relevance and appeal.

3.2. Method innovation: Creating micro-ideological and political scenarios with “immersive + interactive”

3.2.1. Attributes effectively utilizing micro-platforms to build immersive scenarios

Set up immersive ideological and political scenarios tailored to the characteristics of different micro-platforms. First, on short video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, create “scenario-based short videos”. By incorporating ideological and political content into the daily learning and living backgrounds of college students, an immersive viewing experience can be generated. Second, on platforms like WeChat Official Accounts and Xiaohongshu, publish “immersive graphics and texts”. From the perspective of college students, record snippets of ideological and political practice, accompanied by on-site photographs and genuine reflections, to create a sense of being present. Third, construct a “virtual ideological and political space” within campus apps, enabling college students to achieve immersive learning experiences through interactive operations ^[7].

3.2.2. Drive the participation of “student-centered” learning to enhance interactive vitality

Transform the conventional “teacher-led” model and encourage college students to transition from “passive recipients” to “active participants”. Firstly, promote the creation of micro-ideological and political education content by college students. Organize a “Micro-Ideological and Political Education Creation Contest”, guiding students to produce short videos, write brief commentaries, and design graphics and text on ideological and political themes. Outstanding works will be promoted on micro-platforms, enabling students to deepen their understanding of ideological and political content through creation. Secondly, facilitate interactive topic debates. Initiate topics related to ideology and politics on micro-platforms, with teachers participating as “equal participants” to guide students in expressing their views and engaging in intellectual collisions, avoiding “isolated preaching”. Thirdly, establish a team of “student ideological and political bloggers”. Select college students with good ideological qualities and strong expressive abilities to serve as micro-ideological and political bloggers. These bloggers will regularly share their insights on ideology and politics and analyze hot topics on micro-platforms, providing ideological guidance from a peer perspective and enhancing interactive effectiveness ^[8].

3.3. Subject innovation: Establish an educational community of “teacher-student collaboration + multi-party cooperation”

3.3.1. Enhance the micro-public opinion literacy of educators

Increase training efforts for ideological and political teachers and counselors on micro-public opinion, covering three main aspects. Firstly, provide training on the dissemination patterns of micro-public opinion, enabling educators to grasp the algorithmic logic, information dissemination pathways, and user behavior manifestations on micro-platforms, as well as the core nodes in the generation and development of micro-public opinion. Secondly, implement practical training on new media skills, including short video production and editing, graphic and text design, and micro-platform operation, empowering educators to independently create micro-ideological and political content and manage micro-ideological and political accounts. Thirdly, conduct training on public opinion response capabilities, teaching methods for identifying negative topics in micro-public opinion, rational response techniques, and emotional counseling strategies, enhancing educators’ comprehensive abilities to cope with micro-public opinion risks.

Collaborate with universities, families, and social forces to establish a multi-party cooperation mechanism featuring “universities taking the lead, families providing support, and society offering assistance”. Firstly, establish a cross-departmental collaboration team, where the Ideological and Political Education Department, Student Affairs Department, Publicity Department, and Network Center jointly form a “Micro Ideological and Political Education Work Group”, with clear divisions of labor to pool collective efforts: the Ideological and Political Education Department is responsible for content design, the Student Affairs Department handles student organization and interaction, the Publicity Department promotes micro-platforms, and the Network Center provides technical support and monitors public opinion. Secondly, through forms such as “Parent Micro-Classroom” and “Family Ideological and Political Education Topic Guide”, convey ideological and political education concepts to parents, guiding them to cooperate with universities in conducting ideological and political education during family interactions, thereby fostering an educational environment of “home-school mutual support”. Thirdly, leverage social resources such as mainstream media, high-quality enterprises, and revolutionary education bases, inviting mainstream media journalists, industry leaders, and experts in party history to participate in the creation of micro ideological and political education content, introducing mainstream value resources from the social sphere to diversify the content and forms of micro ideological and political education ^[9].

3.4. Mechanism innovation: Improve the public opinion handling system featuring “dynamic monitoring + precise response”

3.4.1. Establish a real-time micro-public opinion monitoring system

Firstly, universities should set up a dedicated micro-public opinion monitoring platform, clearly defining the monitoring scope and focus. The monitoring scope includes micro-platforms commonly used by university students, with a focus on ideological and political hot topics relevant to university students, potential negative public opinion phenomena, and highly discussed student-initiated topics. Secondly, construct a keyword monitoring database, utilizing technological means to conduct real-time capture, classification, summarization, and heat analysis of relevant information. Thirdly, recruit dedicated monitoring personnel to manually verify the monitored information, ensuring its accuracy and timeliness, and providing evidence for subsequent response efforts.

3.4.2. Develop a rapid response plan for ideological and political education

Based on monitoring results, establish a tiered response mechanism that clarifies the processing procedures

and responsible entities for different types of public opinion. Firstly, for general positive public opinion, the response should focus on “strengthening guidance”. Utilize micro-platforms to forward and comment, expanding the influence of positive public opinion and integrating ideological and political connotations. For neutral discussion-based public opinion, the response should center on “rational guidance”. Ideological and political education teachers should publish rational analysis articles and initiate discussion topics on micro-platforms, guiding university students to enhance their understanding of issues from an ideological and political perspective. For potentially negative public opinion, the response should prioritize “timely clarification”. The micro-ideological and political education working group should swiftly release clarifying information and interpret mainstream ideologies to prevent further dissemination of the public opinion. For highly publicized negative public opinion, the response should emphasize “collaborative handling”. Activate cross-departmental cooperation mechanisms, working together with the Publicity Department, Student Affairs Department, and counselors to provide multi-dimensional guidance. Simultaneously, mainstream media should be enlisted to publish positive content to counteract the impact of negative public opinion ^[10].

4. Conclusion

The advent of the micro-public opinion environment has not only posed challenges to ideological and political education for university students but also provided an opportunity for innovation in this field. Faced with the characteristics of fragmented information, widespread emotional dissemination, diverse values, and rapid transmission in the micro-public opinion environment, ideological and political education for university students cannot afford to be “passively reactive”. Instead, it needs to proactively “adapt and innovate” to uphold the crucial task of “fostering virtue and cultivating talent” in the micro-public opinion environment. This approach will assist university students in adhering to mainstream values amidst diverse information, maintaining rational thinking amidst emotional turmoil, and growing into socialist builders and successors who meet the needs of the new era.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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