

Challenges, Opportunities, and Practical Applications of Online Ideological and Political Education in Universities in the Digital-Intelligent Era

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Abstract: Deep integrative development of digital-intelligent technologies with online ideological and political education is profoundly changing the educational model and educational nurture space in universities. Presently, the development of online ideological and political education in higher education institutions is also a big challenge and major opportunity. On the one hand, it meets some “byproduct” challenges brought by digital intelligence; on the other hand, deep integrative and novel employment of digital-intelligent technologies can also stimulate expansion of the educational space, enhance the effectiveness of educational activities, open novel modes of influence, and give online ideological and political education in universities new opportunities for practice. In this new era, university online ideological and political education, besides addressing the challenges, should seize its opportunities.

Keywords: Digital-intelligent technology; Universities; Online; Ideological and political education

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1. Introduction

On the global stage, media intelligence has entered a period of rapid growth. The new elements in intelligent media—such as intelligent recommendation, self-customization zones, three-dimensional interactive experiences—have attracted a large number of youth, presenting a double challenge and opportunity for ideological and political education on the Internet in universities, strengthening mutual reliance. “Where people are, there lies the focus of propaganda and ideological work.” The *Outline for Building an Educational Power (2024–2035)* stresses the importance of “deepening the fusion of ideological and political work with information technology, forming a number of distinct brands for online ideological education”^[1], making new requirements for the development of ideological and political education on the Internet in

universities.

Therefore, it is essential to clarify the multiple challenges posed by the intelligent media era, make efforts based on its new environment, have a thinking and innovative strategy, and further promote high-quality and creatively effective development of online ideological and political education in universities.

2. Challenges

In the digital-intelligent era, the convergence of digital and intelligent technologies has made the construction of online educational spaces increasingly complex, confronting universities with multiple challenges.

2.1. “Generalized entertainment”: Precise delivery of entertainment content undermines ideological ground

The entropy of information in cyberspace has an effect on the mainstream ideological identity of university students through the “precise delivery” effect of online media. This precision comes from capital using technology and entertainment to pick out various psychological characteristics of university students. There are three main types of characteristics. First, under the monopoly of capital, digital-intelligent technology pursues traffic, so that vulgar entertainment results in a desire to gratify sensory desires and appeals to the enjoyment of instant satisfaction. Second, they take advantage of anxiety, in turn stimulating rebelliousness. Under the impact of negative media, the legitimate attitude of emotional expression gradually fades away in youth, providing a psychological cultivation foundation for the spread of pessimism and extremism among students, aggravating dissatisfaction. Third, they emphasize novelty and eccentricity, indirectly dispersing wrong consciousness. Compared with authoritative experts, online entertainment media often bring light and make responses to social issues better suited to the adolescent pursuit of difference.

Such entertaining approaches offer ideal channels for conspiracy theories, historical nihilism, and even feudal superstitions.

2.2. “Online subcultures”: Segregated subgroups erode emotional attachment to mainstream ideology

“Online subcultures” weaken students’ emotional identification with mainstream ideology. Because of the entertainment competition and mutual isolation among online subcultures, students’ emotional identification with mainstream ideology was being undermined. Three reasons can lead to this result: First, personality alienation diminishes the internal emotional strength and leadership of online subcultures. Originally designed as self-expressive objects, online subcultures have also become a place of “alienation” due to the unstable beliefs of their participants. Second, the narrowing of communication channels makes the discourse system of online culture push against mainstream ideology. When youths believe that online entertainment can interpret and transform the world, the authenticity and authority of the mainstream ideology will be significantly weakened, and emotional identification with it will also be weakened. Third, “group polarization” appears, with “internet celebrities” misleading Internet audiences; thus, mainstream ideology gets blurred.

These influencers are also popular among college students, and they are extremely easy to manipulate by rumors and some extreme, wrong, and false ideas that they spread for their own selfish interests, which leads to group polarization and various ideological dangers.

2.3. “Multiple melodies”: Intense rivalry among subcultures exacerbates ideological rebellion

Conflicts between online groups are all products of group polarization. Most online communities are suspicious—“poor in thinking but quick in actions”^[2]. When online social hot-button issues occur, conflicts between different groups easily become clashes between subcultures. Generally speaking, those conflicts appear in two forms: the first is “platform-based conflict”: ideological conflicts between different online platforms make different intellectual consequences; the second is “fan-club combat”: value differentiation between different fan clubs leads to more and more polarization.

3. Opportunities: A new context for online ideological and political education in universities in the digital intelligence era

In the era of digital intelligence, networks, algorithms, technologies, and data have all broken through the individual loop; universities can expand educational space, enrich educational effect, promote teaching innovation, and so forth, and create new opportunities for online ideological and political education.

3.1. Expanding the educational space of online ideological education

Given the educational model of online ideological education, traditional teaching methods are changed, and the form of ideological and political education is extended. It changes from real-world individual interactions to virtual human-machine interactions, creating a symbiosis between physicality and virtuality. The physicality accommodated with digital interest leads to a two-sided combination of learning in the classroom and students’ posts, bringing online ideological education deeper into students’ daily life and daily academic routine; that is to say, it manifests the feature of “always” underlying online ideological education, forming a new space for online ideological education in universities.

3.2. Enhancing the effectiveness of online ideological education

“Precision distribution” of information is an inevitable outcome of the digital intelligence era. Although “precision distribution” does lead to homogenization of information, it can also motivate learners and provide empowerment for education. College students have various interests and hobbies; meeting their personalized needs is one of the primary goals they strive for when exploring cyberspace. However, amid the ocean of information, it’s difficult for students to accurately find out the content they need. With the development of intelligent algorithms, big data uses students’ online behavior “traces” to find the “precision distribution” model on the basis of trace analytics. Highly efficient personalized information matching is realized, overcoming the shortsighted and fragmented predicament of the distribution model, meeting students’ personalized needs, and providing more time and space empowerment for them to be self-controlled in self-development.

3.3. Innovating the modes of online ideological education

One of the most prominent features of the digital intelligence era is the rapid increase of intelligent technologies. With these technologies developing so quickly, they optimally complement the modes of online ideological education in universities. First, the interactive mode based on virtual technology with high frequency transcends the shortcomings of the traditional “one-to-many” instruction, which cannot

engage most students, so overall motivation and participation are low. Second, the development of big data provides technical support for university online ideological and political teachers to accurately analyze students' learning characteristics, online learning behaviors, and individual development needs. In return, it innovates the way of dynamic ideological and political content generation, satisfying personalized learning requirements, and stimulating innovative thinking. Finally, smart devices are widely installed to enhance the enterprising effects of online ideological and political education in universities.

4. Practical pathways for online ideological and political education in universities in the digital-intelligence era

In the digital-intelligence era, universities' online ideological and political education should stay closely attached to the mission of the times, give rise to new potential to carry out ideological and political education in the new era, not only overcome difficulties and seize favorable opportunities, but also make full use of the advantages to provide new impetus for high-quality development and innovation breakthroughs for this field.

4.1. Establishing top-level thinking that prioritizes value rationality in space construction

The core mission of ideological and political courses is value guidance. In the digital-intelligence era, building an online ideological and political course construction for universities requires a first practice^[3], that is, creating the concept of value rationality as the leading principle for major construction. First, value rationality should prevail over the applicability of spatial technology. Whether it is the connectivity logic of digital technology or the decision-making logic of intelligent technology, this belongs to instrument rationality logic. Only by treating digital-intelligence technologies as tools for the educational space, instead of as ends, can universities retain the dominance of value rationality. Second, implement the construction principle of "space is a body, technology is a tool."

"Whatever digital-intelligence technologies may be, they should never rule over the educational space; they should only be optimization tools for space operation. That is, digital-intelligence technologies can facilitate teaching and education of educational information and enhance teaching efficiency; but they should not diminish teachers' and students' value judgment and affect the students' freedom to think independently within this space. Third, establish a law of operation for algorithmic use in university online ideology and political education space. As digital-intelligence technologies are put into play in this space, they should not be opaque "black box" algorithms to teachers and students, but should be open, controllable and interpretable."

4.2. Strengthening the systemic foundation for ideological identification in educational spaces

Before facing the practical dilemma of a mismatch between the supply and demand of educational content and the poor effect of identification with ideological content, and when universities start to seek a creative reconstruction of content with constant value leadership, universities will change the existing forms of discourse and means of delivery. For one thing, initiate the promotion of a creative "translation" of mainstream stories in university online ideological and political education spaces. The essential point of ideological and political education is the internalization of beliefs and the transformation of values into actions by students. For the second, speed up the systematic construction of knowledge graphs in

university online ideological and political education spaces. To overcome the fragmentation caused by digital-intelligence association, universities should complete the building of a knowledge graph (similar to a “smart tutoring engine”) built around the theme of ideological education, connecting separated educational information into an organic thinking system. Third, constantly expand the communication channels of mainstream content in the university online ideological and political education space.

Given the attention-grabbing power of commercial platforms and their incursion into campus-based ideological platforms, universities not only have to keep improving their own platforms but also step out into the external space.

4.3. Steering algorithmic operations in educational spaces through value rationality

To address the weakening of autonomous value guidance and algorithmic dominance resulting from the integration of digital-intelligence technologies into university online ideological and political education spaces, institutions and educators should neither reject nor resist these developments, but proactively embrace them and transform them into usable, controllable forces. First, increase research and development efforts to embed value orientations into recommendation algorithms used in university online ideological and political education spaces. Second, clearly define ethical boundaries regarding data collection and usage in these educational spaces. Third, explicitly delineate the application boundaries of digital-intelligence tools within university online ideological and political education environments ^[4].

5. Conclusion

Faced with the profound challenges brought by integrating digital and intelligent technologies into online ideological and political education in universities, institutions must adopt a systematic approach to consistently embed educational values across all dimensions and stages of ideological education, effectively addressing structural dilemmas arising from technological integration. To build an online ideological and political education environment that is value-driven, humanistic, and intellectually profound, universities need to work synergistically and systematically across conceptual redefinition, content restructuring, and technological regulation.

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Disclosure statement

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