

Label-Based Judgment and Moral Simplification in Online Public Event Comment Sections

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Abstract: Comment sections have become an important part of how online public events are understood. After an event appears on a platform, many users do not only follow the original report. They also read hot comments, repeated phrases, jokes, insults, and short moral judgments. These comments often give the event a quick meaning before the full facts are clear. This paper discusses label-based judgment in comment sections of online public events, with attention to the way labels simplify moral understanding. In public discussions, labels such as “unreasonable parent,” “privileged descendant,” “troublemaker,” or regionalized names may seem like casual words, but they can organize how users see people, responsibility, and blame. Once a label becomes visible, later information is often read through that label. Complex events may then be reduced to simple opposition between victim and offender, ordinary people and privileged groups, or one region and another. The paper focuses on three related problems: how labels are formed in comment sections, how they turn complex events into simplified moral stories, and how platform mechanisms such as hot comments, likes, reposts, and screenshots expand these judgments. The aim is not to deny public emotion, but to show that when labels replace factual discussion, online public debate can lose the space for patience, context, and correction.

Keywords: online public events; comment sections; label-based judgment; moral simplification; platform communication; public opinion

1. Comment Sections as Spaces of Public Judgment

Comment sections have become a central part of online public events. When an incident appears on a platform, many users do not only read the original post, news report, or official statement. They also enter the comment section to see how others understand the event. Hot comments, repeated

phrases, jokes, accusations, and short judgments often become part of the event itself. For many users, the comment section is not a place they visit after forming an opinion. It is one of the places where the opinion is formed.

This change is important because public events on digital platforms are often incomplete when they first appear. A short video, a screenshot, a few lines

of description, or one party's statement may spread before the full context is clear. Users may not know the whole process, the exact responsibility, or the later correction. Yet the comment section gives the event an immediate moral direction. It tells people who seems innocent, who seems arrogant, who should be blamed, and who deserves sympathy. These judgments may appear casual, but they can shape the early public understanding of the event.

The comment section also changes the speed of judgment. In traditional news reading, users may spend more time moving through the report, background, and related information. On platforms, the judgment often appears almost at the same time as the event. A user may watch a short clip and then immediately see thousands of comments below it. The most visible comments usually do not offer careful explanation. They are often short, emotional, and easy to repeat. Because of this, they can give users a ready-made position before users think through the event by themselves.

This does not mean that comment sections have no value. Public comments can show social concern, expose neglected problems, and place pressure on institutions or media to respond. In some cases, public discussion in comment sections may help an event receive wider attention. Users may ask questions that were ignored in the original report, challenge unclear explanations, or demand follow-up information. The comment section can be a space where ordinary people take part in public discussion.

The problem begins when this space turns too quickly into a space of judgment. Once users begin to define people in an event through fixed labels, the comment section moves away from discussion and toward informal trial. A person may be called a "troublemaker," a "victim," a "privileged descendant," an "unreasonable parent," or a representative of a certain region or group. These labels are not neutral descriptions. They carry blame, sympathy, ridicule, or anger. After a label becomes popular, later comments may no longer deal with the event itself. They may only repeat and strengthen the label.

Comment sections should be understood as spaces of public judgment, not merely spaces of user reaction. They help decide which parts of an event become visible, which emotions become acceptable, and which moral story becomes dominant. This is the starting point of label-based judgment. The issue is not that users express emotion, but that emotion may become fixed through simple labels before the facts are fully understood.

2. The Formation of Label-Based Judgment

Label-based judgment usually begins when an online public event is still unclear. At the early stage of an event, users often see only a short video, a screenshot, a brief description, or a few emotional statements. The full process may not be available yet. The responsibility of each party may still be uncertain. But the comment section does not always wait for clearer information. It quickly gives names to people, actions, and groups.

A label works because it is short and easy to understand (Becker). It can turn a complicated situation into a familiar type of story. A person may be called an "unreasonable parent," a "troublemaker," a "privileged descendant," or a "local thief." Once this kind of word appears, users no longer need to explain the event in detail. The label already tells them how to feel. It suggests who should be blamed, who should be mocked, and who should be defended.

The high-speed train slapping dispute is a useful example. In this kind of public conflict, the comment section may quickly produce labels such as "unruly child," "unreasonable parent," "victim," or "mutual fight." These words do not only describe different parts of the event. They also push users toward different judgments. If the focus is placed on the child, the event may be read as a problem of family education. If the focus is placed on the slap, it may become a question of violence and legal responsibility. If the label "mutual fight" becomes dominant, sympathy may become weaker, because the event is then placed into another moral frame. The "Beiji Nianyu" case shows another form of labeling. In that discussion, labels such as "wealth

flaunter” and “privileged descendant” helped users connect personal speech with larger concerns about power, family background, and public trust. This kind of label is not simply personal insult. It links one person to a broader social imagination. A single online statement may become evidence of class privilege, official corruption, or unfair access to resources. The comment section then moves from the event itself to a wider moral judgment about identity and status.

Several conditions make label-based judgment easy to form. Public events on platforms often spread faster than verification. Comment sections reward expressions that are brief, sharp, and emotionally clear. Users also tend to repeat words that have already gained visibility, because repeated labels make participation easier. A user does not need to write a long argument. Repeating a popular label is enough to show a position.

This process also depends on emotional convenience. Labels reduce the burden of understanding. They allow users to respond quickly in a crowded information space. But this convenience has a cost. When a label becomes the main way to understand an event, the person inside the event may be flattened into one identity (Goffman). The event may lose its timeline, context, and uncertainty. What remains is a simple moral category that can be liked, shared, ridiculed, or attacked.

3. Moral Simplification and the Loss of Event Complexity

The deeper problem of label-based judgment is moral simplification. An online public event usually contains many layers: what happened first, what happened later, who provided the information, what evidence has been checked, what remains unclear, and what social issue may be behind the conflict. But in comment sections, these layers are often reduced to a few moral positions. Someone is good or bad. Someone is weak or powerful. Someone is ordinary or privileged. Someone deserves sympathy, and someone deserves punishment.

This simplification makes public judgment faster, but it also makes the event thinner. A label gives users a clear emotional direction before they understand the full situation. Once a person is called an “unreasonable parent,” later details may be read as proof of poor family education. Once another person is called a “privileged descendant,” every sentence or gesture may be taken as evidence of arrogance and unfair advantage. The label does not only describe the person. It begins to organize the whole story.

In the high-speed train slapping dispute, the comment section could easily turn the event into a simple moral conflict between an innocent passenger and an unreasonable family. This kind of reading may reflect real anger about public order and family education, but it may also push other details aside. The event involved conflict in a public space, physical action, legal responsibility, and different understandings of self-defense and mutual fighting. When the discussion is controlled by labels such as “unruly child,” “unreasonable parent,” or “victim,” the event becomes easier to judge, but harder to understand carefully.

The same pattern can appear in events related to wealth and power. In the “Beiji Nianyu” case, online labels such as “wealth flaunter” and “privileged descendant” quickly connected a personal online statement with public suspicion about family background and official power. This connection was not groundless, because the event later involved formal investigation and public accountability. But the comment section still tended to turn a complicated public concern into a simple identity story. The person was no longer only someone who made controversial remarks online. She became a symbol of privilege, unfairness, and social resentment.

Moral simplification is powerful because it gives users a feeling of clarity. In a confusing event, labels help people decide where they stand. They make anger easier to express and sympathy easier to gather. They also make participation easier. A user does not need to understand all the details of an

event to join the discussion. Repeating the label is enough to show agreement with a moral position. But public events are often not as clean as comment-section labels suggest. A person may be wrong in one part of an event and still be harmed in another part. An institution may need to take responsibility, but that does not mean every person connected to it should be mocked. A region may have a management problem, but that does not justify turning local people into a group label. When labels become too strong, these differences disappear.

The loss of complexity also affects later correction. If new evidence appears, users may not easily change their judgment. They may only accept information that fits the label they already believe. Details that weaken the label may be ignored, doubted, or treated as excuses. The event then stops being an open public issue and becomes a fixed moral story (Muir, Roberts, and Sheridan). Comment sections may still look active, with many replies and arguments, but the real space for understanding becomes smaller.

A healthier public discussion does not require users to give up moral judgment. Public events often involve harm, unfairness, irresponsibility, or abuse of power, and these should be discussed. The problem is using labels as a shortcut for judgment. When a label replaces context, the event is no longer examined as an event. It becomes a ready-made story of blame.

4. Platform Mechanisms and the Expansion of Labeling

Label-based judgment does not spread only because users like simple words. It also grows through platform mechanisms. In comment sections, some comments are placed higher, repeated more often, copied into other posts, and turned into screenshots. A label that first appears as one user's emotional expression may soon become the visible language of the whole event. When enough users repeat it, the label begins to look like a shared conclusion.

Hot comments play a clear role in this process. They often appear before many users have read the full event description. A user may open a post, watch a

short clip, and then immediately see a highly liked comment that already names the people involved. The comment may call someone an "unreasonable parent," a "troublemaker," a "privileged descendant," or a representative of a certain region. This kind of comment gives the event a ready-made frame. Later users may not respond to the original event directly. They respond to the label that has already become visible.

Likes and replies also reward strong labels. A careful comment may say that more information is still needed, or that responsibility should be discussed after the facts are clearer. Such comments are often less attractive because they slow down judgment. A sharp label, by contrast, is easier to like and easier to quote. It gives users a quick emotional position. Anger, ridicule, and sarcasm travel faster than patient explanation in many platform spaces (Crockett).

The Nanyang Midi Music Festival theft incident shows how labeling can expand through platform discussion. What began as reports of lost or stolen items after a music festival soon moved beyond the specific question of theft, event management, and compensation. In many comment sections, the discussion became linked with regional labels. Some users no longer talked only about who stole what, how the site was managed, or how the losses should be handled. They began to judge a place and its people through the event. A specific public incident was stretched into a broader regional image.

This kind of expansion is not accidental. Platform communication often removes statements from their original setting. A comment under one post may be screenshotted and reposted elsewhere. A short phrase may become a meme. A local incident may be attached to old stereotypes. When this happens, the label no longer needs the original event to survive. It can circulate on its own, carrying anger, mockery, and group prejudice into new discussions. Reposting also changes the scale of judgment. In the first comment section, users may be discussing one event. After screenshots and short posts spread, many users encounter only the strongest label, not the fuller context. The event becomes a symbol. A

person, a family, an occupation, a school, a region, or a social group may be judged through one compressed phrase. The platform does not need to tell users what to think. It only needs to make some expressions more visible than others.

The expansion of labeling also creates pressure on later discussion. Once a label becomes dominant, users who question it may be treated as defending the wrong side. Asking for more facts can be read as sympathy for the blamed party. Pointing out missing context can be mocked as making excuses. This makes public discussion narrower. The comment section still looks active, but the range of acceptable interpretation becomes smaller.

Platform mechanisms do not create every label, but they help decide which labels survive (Gillespie). Short, emotional, repeatable labels are well suited to hot comments, likes, reposts, and screenshots. Longer explanations need time and attention, but platform discussion often rewards speed. When visibility depends on quick reaction, labels have an advantage over context. This is why label-based judgment can move from one comment to a larger public mood.

5. From Quick Judgment to Responsible Public Discussion

Label-based judgment is difficult to remove completely from online public events. Public events often involve anger, sympathy, fear, or disappointment. Users naturally want to respond when they see unfair treatment, public conflict, abuse of power, or harm to ordinary people. Comment sections will not become calm and neutral spaces, and they do not need to become that kind of space. The real question is how public discussion can avoid turning every event into a quick moral trial.

A more responsible form of discussion does not mean that users should stop judging. Some events do require moral judgment. Violence, fraud, abuse, discrimination, and institutional irresponsibility should be criticized. The problem appears when judgment is made too early and then fixed by labels. Once a label becomes the main way to talk about a

person or a group, later facts may lose their force. The event is no longer open to correction. It becomes a story that users repeat because it already feels familiar.

Comment sections need more space for context. When an event is still developing, users should be able to see what is known, what is unclear, and what has changed. A public discussion is healthier when people can distinguish between verified facts, personal guesses, emotional reactions, and moral conclusions. These differences are often mixed together in comment sections. A joke may sound like evidence. A label may look like a conclusion. A rumor may be repeated until it feels true.

Platforms can play a role here. They do not need to control every opinion, but they can reduce the excessive visibility of extreme labels. Hot comments should not only reward anger, sarcasm, or sharp insults. Follow-up information, source links, correction notices, and clearer timelines should be easier to see. When an event has new facts, the platform should not let the earliest emotional label remain the strongest public memory. A discussion that never updates itself can easily become unfair.

Media accounts and self-media accounts also need to be careful. Many labels begin before the comment section, in titles, captions, edited clips, and selective descriptions. If a post already frames someone as arrogant, shameless, privileged, or guilty, the comment section will usually follow that direction. Public events should be presented with enough basic context, especially when the event involves private individuals, minors, regional identity, or unverified accusations. A stronger title may bring more traffic, but it may also push users toward premature judgment.

Users also have responsibility, though this responsibility should not be reduced to a simple demand for "rational speech." Public emotion is part of public discussion. The more practical point is to slow down the act of labeling. Before repeating a popular label, users can ask whether the label describes the event or only expresses anger. They can also ask whether the label targets a specific action or expands blame to a whole identity, family,

occupation, region, or group. This small pause matters because many online judgments spread through repetition rather than careful agreement.

Responsible public discussion does not require every user to write a long analysis. It only requires that labels do not replace the event itself. A comment can express anger and still leave room for facts. A user can criticize misconduct without turning a person into a permanent identity. A platform can allow strong discussion without making the harshest labels the most visible ones. When this balance is lost, comment sections may still look

lively, but they become less capable of understanding public events.

The value of comment sections lies in participation. They allow ordinary users to respond to public issues and question existing explanations. But participation becomes weaker when it is controlled by labels. Label-based judgment gives users a quick sense of clarity, yet it often removes the patience needed for public understanding. A better comment culture should keep the energy of public expression while leaving space for context, correction, and uncertainty.

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