

On the Current Situation of the Over-entertainment of Network News and the Countermeasures

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Abstract: Since the marketization of medias, news medias are showing unprecedented vitality in the tide of the market, especially the age of digital medias, with its convenience and interestingness, further met the needs of the audience for information. However, every coin has two sides, as a result of the over-entertainment of network news, its entertainment feature has outdistanced its seriousness. And such facts as the inundation of click baits and the fragmentation of the contents of the news have become the cancer for the development of news. In view of this, this paper suggests that the departments concerned to make rules and conduct effective supervision so as to improve the spirit of self-discipline of the medias; get rid of single means of revenue and explore multiple profit models; advocate correct values and cultivate healthy needs of entertainment; improve the real-name system of internet and restrain the production and spreading of pseudo news.

Background

With the popularization of internet and mobile devices, the number of netizens in China keeps growing up, and the speed of content updating and dissemination of news have greatly improved, in which mobile ends and social medias play the leading role, having gradually become the new main battlefield of news dissemination in China. According to the data released by China Internet Network Information Center, as of December, 2017, the total scale of network users had reached 772 million, accounting for 55.8% of the total population of the country, which was higher than the average value of the world (51.7%) and was 9.1% higher than the average value in Asia (46.7%), in which the number of mobile phone users had reached 620 million. Online news apps have become the main channels and platforms for knowing current events, and the mobile end, represented by mobile phones and tablets, is playing an increasingly important role in people's daily access to news. As of March 2017, the number of mobile news users in China was 605 million, in which Tencent News and Toutiao respectively ranked first and second with an active user percentage of 41.6% and 36.1%. Currently, there are three types of news client-ends in the market, respectively the transformation apps of traditional medias such as *Beijing News*, *Liberation Daily* and *People's Daily*; transformation apps of traditional portals such as Tencent News and 163 News; news aggregation apps such as Toutiao and Kuaibao. According to the statistics of effective using time, as of March, all the Top 5 news apps were private news medias. In contrast, traditional medias have single news information and fewer users. In addition, the double-we (Weibo and Wechat) are still important channels and platforms of news dissemination.

An Overview of the Entertainment of News

The entertainment of news is not the product of the network age, it's just that in the age of network medias, the tendency of the entertainment of news is becoming increasingly obvious. It first began in the press industry of the west, and reached the peak in the yellow journalism period, in that period, newspapers were all focused on love affairs, merciless murders and gossips of celebrities, so as to attract the attention of people and improve the circulation regardless of the authenticity of the news and the social influence they had. While the entertainment of news in

China began in the 1990s, it's a phenomenon that appeared among newspapers and periodicals with the advancing of marketization. As for the definition of the entertainment of news, currently, the opinion of Lin Hui is often quoted, he holds that the entertainment of news is mainly reflected in two aspects, the first is the reduction of serious news and the increase of soft news; the second is the softening of hard news during the production of news. With the entertainment of news, the requirement of professionalism for news in the past has been abandoned both in the contents and in the forms, in terms of the contents, the pursuit for the core facts of the news is ignored, instead, the focus point is changed into the digging of the entertainment value behind various kinds of news, the entertainment elements are vigorously pursued; in terms of the techniques, emotions are over emphasized, and the neutral and objective perspective has been abandoned, the perspective of one party in the news is often taken, thus rendering the plot of the news. [1]

Most textbooks of news in this world would tell journalists that satisfying the curiosity of the readers and stimulating their interest are effective ways to disseminate news, which can effectively promote the readers' participation in public affairs, and this has also become one of the pillar characteristics of journalism. About the entertainment tendency of news, there are different voices in the industry, those against it describe it as "steeping the media environment with 'the dye vat of commercial thinking'", thus cultivating a rabble only pursuing sensory stimulation, which eventually leads to extreme entertainment and cause negative participation of the people. In contrast, supporters think that the value of performance and entertainment is of great importance, through the presentation of entertainment medias, the enthusiasm of the readers to participate is stimulated, thus creating support for the construction of public opinions. But it is undeniable that in the current market environment, properly adding entertainment elements in news can undoubtedly meet the diversified psychological needs of the audience, while helping news medias draw attention, incomes are obtained, providing guarantee for the continuous development of journalism.

The Current Situation of Over-Entertainment of News

Soft news has become the mainstream. The term soft news doesn't only refers to the perspective of topic selection but also to the entertainment tendency of the contents of the text. In terms of the perspective of topic selection, some medias reduce the coverage of political news and focus on news about stars and sports, some even cover eye-catching novelty events. According to the study of Huang Yanning on the contents released by the Weibo accounts of *People's Daily* and *Southern Weekend* from May 28th to June 3rd, 2013, 65% of the contents released by *People's Daily* didn't have any political elements, and the Weibo of *Southern Weekend*, a newspaper with the reputation of serious coverage, also showed a tendency of "softening", with half of the contents it released having nothing to do with politics.[2] Thus it can be seen that even such serious newspapers as *People's Daily* and *Southern Weekend* are paying more attention to soft news unrelated to politics in their Weibo accounts. Compared to the topic selection, entertainment is more obviously reflected in the contents of the text. For example, the event of an air hostess being killed by a Didi driver in Zhengzhou became the focus of coverage of we-medias. The identity of air hostess of the victim became the main point in the coverage of we-medias, much attention had been paid to the process of how the victim was killed and her appearance.

Vulgar titles and the inundation of click baits. If the entertainment tendency of news is with the purpose of catering to the market, the emergence of click baits is the tacit product of various medias with the purpose of getting larger audience and market. In the news of newspapers in the past, the title could appear in the same space as the contents, but in the digital age, the contents can only be viewed through clicking the headlines, as a result, if your title is "slightly inferior", you wouldn't even have the chance to be read. In the beginning, the emergence of click baits was the reluctant action of high-quality contents in order not to be ignored, however, after various platforms came to know the good of it, they became addicted, thus it has become a "compulsory course" of title writing in the age of digital medias.

In a research with four commercial portal websites, respectively Tencent, Sina, Sohu and NetEase, and the websites of four traditional medias, respectively people.cn, nandu.com, ifeng.com

and eastday.com as the samples, in the 1645 titles used in the seven days selected in the research, 267 had the problem of being click baits, accounting for 16.23%. The research also showed that in terms of the emergence of click baits, there was no big difference between commercial portal websites and the websites of traditional medias, with the former having 51.3% click baiting titles and the latter having 48.7%. And as the official website of *Nanfang Metropolis Daily*, the phenomenon of click baiting of nandu.com was even more severe, with coverage with click baiting titles accounting for 22.86% of the selected news coverage. [3] Although it seems that there is still a big part without the problem of click baiting, the worst-hit area of click baits is the top part of various websites, it's also the case in official account pushes, and this is exactly the area with the highest recognition and attention in the age of digital medias, and at the same time the area most likely to have social influence.

The Fragmentation of the Contents of News and the Focus on the Entertainment Elements of Events

“Fragmentation” originally referred to the process of things being fragmented. In the field of journalism, it often refers to the phenomenon of news coverage expressing only part of the fact, thus having not enough width and depth and causing the audience to get superficial information.

News events are composed of different elements, and it's the intention of the publisher that decides which element is highlighted. In the age of digital medias, various medias tend to cover the events as soon as they happen, so that they can draw the attention of the users, meaning that they don't have enough time to have in-depth verification and digging of the events. As a result, the key points or even the facts of some news coverage are with mistakes, and the focus of these news tend to be topics that draw debates. For example, a bus fell into the river in Wanzhou, Chongqing on October 28th, 2018. Without making sufficient investigation, relevant medias arbitrarily thought that it happened because the female driver was driving in the wrong direction, and the judgement was only made according to the information provided in the photos of the scene[4]. The hot topic of female drivers rapidly caused the denouncing of online influencers against female drivers, which aggravated the prejudice of people and caused a lot of trouble for the female driver in the accident and her family.

On the other hand, in the age of digital medias, everyone has become a we-media, individual accounts often release the news before the official news coverage, this kind of news spread much faster than traditional medias but they tend to transmit fragmented information to the audience, reflecting points instead of surfaces of the event and lacking in-depth coverage of the whole event. Due to fragmented information the audience get, there is no way for them to have comprehensive understanding of the development, the causes and the deep reasons and values of the event.

Causes of the Over-Entertainment of News

Changes in the needs of the audience in the age of digital medias. Ever since the beginning of the market operation of the journalism of China, news medias have experienced the change from centering the transmitters to centering the audience, and the needs of the audience have also become more diversified. Especially in the age of digital medias, the rapid development of new media technologies greatly expanded the information contact of the audience, making it more convenient for them to have contact to news information[5].

Differences in the professions and interests of individuals created different user groups, they scattered in different corners of the world before but the convenience of network had gathered them in the same space, thus creating a nonnegligible group, which also made news coverage targeting small audiences possible. Nowadays, many interest groups of small groups of people have appeared in such social medias as Douban and Tieba, and a large number of official accounts for different groups also appeared, providing relevant information for them. This is not only the age of information explosion but also the age of information segmentation. On the other hand, digital medias integrate such methods of dissemination as pictures, texts, videos and audios, thus greatly

satisfying the needs of people for entertainment, after studying and working under great pressure, people are more willing to dive into the internet and have more recreations and entertainments. People seem to have entered an Eden in which they can have entertainment at anytime and in anything[6]. And under the influence of this, the formerly serious news also began the process of “entertainment”.

News medias blindly cater to the market and lack the spirit of self-discipline. As the aggravation of the over-entertainment of news, the professional ethics of pressmen is constantly declining. Since the marketization of news medias, traditional medias lost the subsidiaries of the government, while assuming the sole responsibilities for their profits and losses, they have to compete with new medias. In order to survive, they are exerting all their skills to adapt to the tide of marketization, thus losing the spirit of self-discipline. In the age of digital medias, the censoring of the government about medias became less strict than before, giving medias more autonomy, and the overflow of autonomy of medias exactly had the effect of helping the villain do evil. To meet the needs of the audience is not to deliberately cater to the audience, nor is it to stimulate the audience by digging news with “juice”, but to guide them to have appropriate entertainment. This is the reflection of news medias not correctly understanding marketization and being unable to correctly deal with the relationship between the market and the public interest. At the same time, the fragility of the self-discipline of medias has indulged the lack of self-discipline spirit.

Countermeasures to the Over-Entertainment of News

Improving the self-discipline spirit of medias. The improvement of the self-discipline spirit of medias can be realized in two ways. First, departments concerned should make relevant rules and regulations and implement them in a consistent manner, so as to punish the over-entertainment, pressmen who are trying to cross the line must keenly feel the pain, so as to warn them and efficiently stop this phenomenon from further developing, thus realizing better self-discipline through the regulation of heteronomy. Second, the education of the professional ethics and professional quality of pressmen is also essential, they must form correct value of journalism and value of right and wrong, they must shoulder the social responsibility for the audience instead of blindly following the trend, let alone encouraging the bad tendency. The pressmen must realize the social significance and importance of journalism and have a correct understanding of the entertainment of news.

Exploring multiple profit models. The root of the problem of over-entertainment of news is the single method of income of news medias, websites of the medias need clicks to get the sponsor of advertising, and at the same time, the appraisal of website editors is also related to clicks, as a result, they resort to extreme measures to attract traffic. News medias depend solely on this channel of profit, no wonder the phenomenon of over-entertainment and pseudo news would emerge. The solution is undoubtedly expanding the channels of profit and exploring diversified ways of realization. News medias can create news with their own characteristics through industrial innovation and creating column brands, thus forming their own influence in a particular industry or field, and they should integrate it with sales platforms and launch derivatives so as to get rid of the sole model of depending on clicks.

Improving the real-name system of internet. Internet is not a place without supervision, nor is it an place without laws. The age of digital medias has given the audience more chances to speak, but it doesn't mean that they are allowed to unscrupulously do whatever they want. The convenience, rapidity and anonymity of internet have been taken advantage of by a group of lawless people to challenge laws and morality, they hide the dark side of their hearts in the internet, and intentionally make up hot events with entertainment features just to release their pressure or satisfy their desires. Through the dissemination of the ignorant people, these pseudo events cause bad social influence and seriously threat the stability of the society. In view of this, the comprehensive implementation of the real-name system of the internet has become imperative in restraining pseudo news and rumors.

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