

Research on the Impact of Post-Truth News Events on People's Media Literacy: Taking TikTok Feminist Topics as an Example

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Abstract: With the development of electronic media, media communication platforms have become mass-marketed. “Technologically empowered” non-professional journalists can also publish “news” on public communication channels. The greatly lowered barrier to entry for news dissemination practitioners can lead to the emergence of poor-quality content that lacks depth, accuracy, and authority on the Internet. Therefore, through literature research and hierarchical interviews with users of the ShakeNews platform, this paper takes news events on feminist topics on the ShakeNews platform as a starting point, focusing on how the emergence of “post-truth” reversal news affects the audience’s news literacy. The specific research questions of this paper are: Does the reverse news have an impact on the audience’s news literacy? How? What are the influencing factors? Will the audience’s news literacy continue to decline under the impact of reverse news? There is an impact of reverse news events on the news literacy of the public. Specifically, it is manifested in: the impact of attitudes towards news events. The impact on the attitude of the news protagonist and the audience’s thoughts on obtaining information; The impact on the audience’s information processing skills.

Keywords: post-truth, information overload, reverse news, media literacy

1. Introduction

With the development of electronic media, M. McLuhan’s prediction of a “global village” has become a reality. The changes in new media technology have not only transformed human beings’ use of “single-sensory” access to information into “multi-sensory” and “re-tribalization”, but have also made communication platforms popular [1]. “Technology empowers” non-professional journalists to publish “news” on public communication channels. The greatly lowered barriers to entry for journalists have resulted in the proliferation of poor quality content that lacks accuracy and authority on the web. The balance between content produced by professional journalists and content produced by non-professionals is upset. When controversial news emerges, in-depth rational analysis of the truth of the event is covered by a large number of emotional appeals, and online public opinion shows a tendency towards “one-sidedness”. If the audience’s emotional appeal is briefly satisfied or a new truth factor is revealed, public opinion will be “tilted” again. This is what we call post-truth. Current research on media literacy focuses on measures and descriptions of the degree of media literacy at

the current stage but lacks discussion of news events on the improvement of media literacy. For example, Ji Shuqin and Envy Yu from the School of Information and Communication Engineering of Changchun University of Technology conducted a study on the causes and countermeasures of reversal news in the post-truth era, looking at the perspectives of technology, economy, audience's media literacy, and sensitivity to communication topics, but without mentioning its impact [2]. Gao Feifan of Shanxi Radio and Television Station analyzes the reasons for the emergence of the phenomenon of anti-rotation news, and discusses the governance strategy of anti-rotation news from the perspective of dividing the responsible subjects of the judiciary, the administration, the platform and the mainstream media [3]. Through literature research and hierarchical interviews with users of the ShakeNews platform, this paper takes news events about feminist topics on the ShakeNews platform as an entry point, focusing on how the emergence of "post-truth" reverse news affects the audience's news literacy. The results of this paper are in favor of the government's positive guidance of public opinion through the macro-control of "reverse news". Minimize the negative impacts of "reverse news" on the public, the media, and the administration. Consciously improve the "reverse news" to enhance the audience's news literacy [4].

2. Relevant Background

Entering the twenty-first century, Internet technology is developing at a high speed. Various kinds of Internet platforms and Internet products are emerging, and the traditional pattern of news dissemination has changed as a result. In the post-truth era, there is a lack of truthful analysis of news events based on the influence of a variety of subjective factors such as emotional appeals and personal experience. The objective truth itself is impacted by subjective emotional appeals [5]. The current news audience has been in an era of informationization, in which information is generated in large quantities and transmitted rapidly, media forms are diversified, and the channels through which the audience obtains information are subsequently increased. However, the audience is weak at analysing the mixed information on the Internet and is easily blinded by subjective emotions and others. Feminism, as a hot social topic in recent years, naturally attracts the attention of news practitioners.

2.1. Post-truth News Events

The Oxford Dictionary listed "post-truth" as its word of the year in 2016, characterizing it as an adjective meaning "a situation in which it appears that objective facts have less influence in shaping public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs do in relation to, or in reference to, the situation," while noting that the expression needs to be associated with a specific noun. The author believes that the main analysis of post-truth news events can be based on three aspects: the beginning of the event (i.e., the description of the news event as it first appeared on online platforms), the emotional appeal, and the key truth factor [6]. The beginning of the event is the initial kernel of the publisher's intention to present the event to the public, and in the process of the event's dissemination, the audience groups involved in the production of this event and its dissemination determine the nature of this event. Emotional appeal: the most obvious feature of the post-truth era is that emotional appeal precedes rational analysis of news facts. Emotional appeals are also an important force dominating public opinion. Key Truth Factor: The reason why reversal news appears reversed is because news events change over time. More and more truth factors are revealed by active truth-seeking or media-literate audiences, leading to a shift in news and public opinion.

The following three news stories are typical of the latest reversal news events that have occurred up to the time of writing this paper.

News I: Pan, a single mother of a three-year-old girl, released a series of short videos on the TikTok platform in July 2023, accusing the owner of a cake shop in Wuxi of molesting her daughter in the

middle and late March and causing her daughter's lower body to become red and swollen. Netizens sympathize with this single mother and actively defend the vulnerable party, criticizing the cake shop owner who molested the girl. Public opinion has led to confrontations between men and women. As a result, the police investigated the shopkeeper and ultimately proved that he had an alibi.

News two: June 7, 2023, Guangzhou subway line 8, girls suspected of being uncle secretly photographed, check the uncle's phone after nothing, after the uncle still exposed on microblogging, posting called it "obscene man", and said that his skillful approach does not seem to be the first time to commit the crime, the incident triggered heated debate. Netizens defend female college students and actively encourage the police to protect their rights. They despised the middle-aged man who took the photos. Netizens expressed their disdain for the woman's behaviour in posting the video on the Internet, even after confirming that there was no surreptitious filming at the scene and that she carried out human flesh. The police's police report, proving that the man is innocent.

News Three: On July 26, 2023, the host Tu Lei was reported by a woman on the Shake platform in real name. The woman said that she had been raped by Tu Lei and was extremely traumatised at the age of 19 years old. The incident triggered widespread concern among netizens. Netizens physically attacked the host and his family. Female audiences posted a large number of negative comments about the host, and vicariously published comments about subterfuge in the workplace. Tu Lei quickly reported the incident, and the police questioned the families of both parties. It was confirmed that the woman suffered from mental illness and that Tu Lei and she had never met.

2.2. Feminist Topics on the TikTok Platform

American feminist scholars have pointed out that women's dependent or non-subjective relationship to men in social reality is not a natural customization, but the result of cultural construction. They believe that on the one hand, the body and psyche that women possess are constructed; on the other hand, the society and culture that women face are also constructed, and the interplay between the two reinforces women's subordinate position. The mass media play a major role in this cultural construction. It can be seen that the communication system from a feminist perspective, is deeply rooted in historical gender power relations, and governs the media's reproduction of gender relations [7].

On March 29, the "China Internet Audiovisual Development Research Report (2023)", which is regarded as the wind vane of China's Internet audiovisual industry, was released in Chengdu [8]. The report showed that the scale of short video users in China reached 1.012 billion. The scale of network live broadcasting users reached 751 million, becoming the second largest application of network audiovisual. The report points out that short video has become the top application to attract netizens to "touch the net". Jitterbug is the software with the highest usage rate and the largest number of users among short video platforms. Therefore, in this paper, the author focuses on the feminist topic on the TikTok platform to analyze and research.

Online communication platforms have made significant changes to modern social life. The short video platform has even become the main source of daily information reception and concept formation. TikTok has become an inseparable part of people's lives. 54.7% of female users in China will use the TikTok short video platform in 2021 [9]. On this popularised platform, feminism has demonstrated a different "voice" than before.

2.3. Media Literacy

In 1992, the Media Literacy Research Center of the United States defined media literacy as follows: Media literacy is the ability to select, question, understand, evaluate, create, and produce information, as well as the ability to respond to the discernment that people demonstrate when faced with a variety

of information in different media [10]. The emergence of traditional paper media such as newspapers and books has led to an increase in the audience's ability to recognize the written word. The speed of dissemination of paper media such as newspapers and books is strongly limited by time and space. The traditional media of this kind of paper media do not develop at a fast pace, and the audience's education on paper media literacy can be in line with its slow pace of development. However, the development of electronic media platforms has greatly increased the speed of media dissemination, and the audience's media literacy is far from being able to catch up with the development of media dissemination. In the post-truth era, not only is there a lot of reverse news containing a lot of competing truths, but there is also a lot of information that is hard to distinguish between true and false published on the Internet. Audiences are unable to distinguish such information, and their views and perceptions change with the reversal of the news, which strongly affects their media literacy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction to the Interviews

The interview subjects of this paper are thirty people: ten adolescents, ten young people, and ten middle-aged and old people. In the process of self-growth, there are some differences between men and women because of their personal experience and education, and there are also differences in the views they express on the same feminist topic in the news. There are also differences in the level of education due to age differences. Therefore, the division of each age level needs to be separated into male and female to get comparative data. The application focused on in this paper is the TikTok platform, where the user profile tends to be more youthful, and youth is the force of this user. The division of the level of youth is due to the need for research to get more representative data. The Internet audience's age of access to the Internet has been decreasing. The proportion of youth in the Internet audience is also increasing. However, teenagers not only lack relevant Internet literacy education but also lack social experience. Therefore, the teenage group will be more influenced by the Internet. The middle-aged and old-aged groups are divided into two age groups because they have richer social experiences than the teenagers. They have different opinions on news about feminist topics.

Table 1: Interview questions.

Question NO.	Content of the question
Question 1	Gender/age/current industry
Question 2	Whether or not seeing feminist news content produced by unofficial accounts on TikTok would be a concern
Question 3	Whether or not they will post their own comments on the women's topic they just viewed
Question 4	Do you post new comments when a news story you used to follow is reversed
Question 5	Do you remember how many times you experienced reverse news
Question 6	Having experienced many reversed news stories, do you still go to comment when events are not fully reported
Question 7	What is the current attitude towards the news just released

3.2. Analysis of Results

There is an impact of reverse news events on people's news literacy. Out of ten teenagers, eight think that reverse news events have an impact on their news literacy, and two think it doesn't matter; Among the ten middle-aged and old-aged people, six think that the reverse news event has an impact

on their news literacy, and four think it is indifferent; Among the ten young people, nine thought that the reversal of news events had an impact on their news literacy, and one thought it did not matter.

Aspects of Attitude toward News Events

Among the ten youths, seven thought that when they encountered a similar news event again, they would not think about the event according to their first thoughts, and three thought that it was actually the same and there was no difference. Among the ten middle-aged and old-aged people, five of them think that when they encounter similar news events again, they will not think about the events according to their first thoughts, and five of them think that it is actually the same and there is no difference. Among the ten young people, eight thought that when they encountered similar news events again, they would not think about the events according to their first thoughts, and two thought that it was actually all the same, with no difference.

Attitude towards the identity of the news protagonist

Among the ten teenagers, eight thought that there would be no change in their attitude towards their identity, and two thought that there would be a change. Out of ten middle-aged and old-aged people, ten think that there will be no change in their attitude towards their identity.

Audiences' thinking about their access to information

Among the ten teenagers, eight think that their only information source channel is Shakeology, and two have other information sources (parents, teachers, newspapers). Among the ten middle-aged and old-aged people, two think their only source of information is TikTok, and eight have other information software (Today's Headlines). Among the ten young people, four think that their only source of information is TikTok, and six have other information channels (Weibo, Xiaohongshu).

Information processing ability of the audience

According to the current interviewees, the audience's news literacy has improved, although it has been shocked by many reversals of the news. When confronted with news, especially about feminist topics, the first reaction was to think about the possibilities rather than to comment with anger.

4. Discussion

Behind the "global village" is the transformation of new media. Change brings convenience, but it also brings us into the post-truth era. It is a kind of enhancement that people will not believe the same lie after the third time. Longitudinal research on reversal news is now very mature, and horizontal research has also begun. There are many news media platforms in China, and the number of users on each platform is also very large. Due to the limitations of this study, the current amount of data cannot support drawing defining conclusions. However, with the valid data obtained so far, male audiences have self-reflected on being helpers in feminist news and have rationalised their thinking about the status of women. The decrease in polarised views and the increase in female audiences taking on the role of the primary voice of reason in feminist news are positive trends. However, the study found that extreme views, extreme behaviours, and gender antagonisms in feminist news will continue to exist for some time to come. But the authors remain optimistic about this based on their research. The male-female dichotomy will diminish, and the two will break down barriers and work together. If the news literacy of the audience remains low, then the male audience of feminist news will misunderstand feminism and even the women's community itself, and the female audience of feminist news will misunderstand the affirmative action that women should be fighting for and misguide men. It will exacerbate the conflict between the two and cause men and women to fall into their own group silos. Because men and women should not be opposing groups, but rather complement each other. Rights and interests are not gained through confrontation and conflict but rather through continuous dialogue and negotiation in which each party gives in to the other. Based on the authors' study of questionnaire data and literature, it is concluded that the news literacy of both male and female audiences in feminist journalism has been somewhat enhanced in reverse journalism [11].

The governance measures that can be taken by each subject are as follows (additional points): Media platforms: Regularly push topics on improving literacy to users, and set up a reward and punishment system for users with semi-compulsory requirements to answer the questions. Platforms need to establish a sense of professionalism, and online media need to fulfil their responsibilities to curb reverse news. Second, the audience should improve their ability to identify and enhance their sense of responsibility. The Internet is not a place outside the law. Overcome the herd mentality and express your opinions rationally. Third, the government — for news events with a rapid rise in popularity and high impact. Relevant departments should answer the questions raised by netizens directly, intervene in a timely manner to investigate, and release the latest and most authoritative news. Keep the rumour trend in check. Cultivate trust between official media and netizens.

5. Conclusion

The change in media, a post-truth era where emotions precede facts, opinion is more important than truth, and “taking sides” is more important than logic, has brought about the emergence of competing truths. The emergence of competing truths has led to more and more news reversals. When news is reversed, public opinion will also be reversed, and the attitude of the audience will also change. The frequent occurrence of reversal news constantly shocks the audience. But a certain amount of such news will cause the audience to reflect. The original low news literacy of the audience will be affected by the impact of the increase, from their original view of the direction of the network hotspot, but the positive impact of part of the audience will improve their news literacy. When the same type of news happens again, the audience will be more vigilant, increase self-reflection, and have more access to information to scrutinise. The audience’s news literacy increases, and their thinking tends to be rational. This reduces to a certain extent the bad influence caused by online public opinion and can enter a positive cycle of reduced emotional appeal and increased rational exploration, especially when it comes to news on the topic of feminism. Feminism is a news topic that has maintained a high level of heat in the last decade. The increase in the audience’s news literacy can better defend women’s rights and interests and fight for women’s equal rights and interests in the right way and with the right words [12]. This paper is currently limited to a small number of interview subjects and lacks a follow-up survey related to the news literacy of interview subjects. Future research will continue to expand the number of interviewees and update the conditions for dividing the levels according to the actual situation of the interviewees.

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