

Research on the Construction of Public Trust in News Media Related to the Epidemic in Social Media in the Post-epidemic Era

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Abstract: COVID-19 has caused enormous negative effects all over the world since the first confirmed case appeared in 2019. Social media has become an important way for people to get news about the epidemic due to convenience. However, rumors and fake news on social media destroy the trust of people. So how to improve the media trust and provide more useful information for people has become a great challenge for social media users. This paper will focus on the news post on Weibo in post-epidemic era, and discuss the factors that influence the media trust.

Keywords: Media trust, Social media, News, COVID-19, Post-epidemic era

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 has caused great impact on the society for a long period, such as the way people work, study even communication. Since the Home quarantine Order has taken to protect people from the COVID-19, most people have learned some knowledge from mass media about the epidemic general situation, prevention measures and so on at the early of epidemic era, so in the post-epidemic era, people could choose different media to get news according to their own knowledge. Social media provides people with a new way to learn information and knowledge about COVID-19. They can get the latest information quickly and conveniently. Also, people could share information about the epidemic around themselves with other online users on social media. In addition, the media accounts which always report useful news and the media which impress readers deeply will attract numerous readers. Most online users will follow these social media accounts, give positive feedback and share information with others. As a result, more and more users could follow these social media accounts by other users' reply. So social media became an important way for people to connect with others and learn daily news in the post-epidemic era.

People have different reasons to trust the media. There are many articles mentioning the reasons and influence of media trust. However, in the post-epidemic era, the requirement for news about COVID-19 has changed. Social media has attracted more and more users for its convenience and timeliness. As one of the major social media in China, Weibo has attracted a large number of Internet users, most of whom pay attention to various accounts such as news, education and entertainment. Since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan of Hubei Province on 1st November of 2019, Weibo has become the main platform for people to learn COVID-19, such as the Xinhua

News Agency account. Xinhua News Agency has more than 107 million fans, and most of the news gets positive feedback. Although other accounts on Weibo also post many news with same topics, they received less negative feedback. In the post-epidemic era, the Xinhua News Agency still sticks to posting news on Weibo about the epidemic that happened in China. For example, the epidemic that happened in Guangzhou from May to July also has great influence on many cities of Guangzhou Province. This article will pay attention to the Guangzhou epidemic situation, and analyze the media trust according to the news and comments on Weibo. Through the text of news and comments to analyze the influencing factors, such as the source of news, the quality of news and so on. Then this paper will discuss the reason for most people to trust the media in the post-epidemic era.

2. Literature Review

Media trust means the expectation of people to the media behavior [1], and media trust is the most important power for the media to influence people [2]. Media trust has great influence on society. It is believed that high-quality media could help people understand what is happening in the society [3]. As a public health emergency, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused a huge negative impact in the world. Most people need to use the media to get information and protect themselves from COVID-19. In addition, the media might change the way that people think about COVID-19. Trusting high-quality media could help people minimize the health risk brought by viruses [4]. So there are many articles mentioning media trust about mass media. However, social media has become one main way for people to learn news [5]. More and more articles focus on the media trust of social media. For example, whether it is mass traditional media or social media, the frequency of using media is related to media trust. The more times people use media to obtain information, the higher their trust in media [6]. At the same time, people will use the media they trust actively, and keep away from the media they don't trust [7]. Therefore, to trust social media, the first step is to attract more people to use social media and follow themselves, and then improve the trust in different ways. As COVID-19's disease has become a normalized disease, people have entered the post-epidemic era. For most people, using social media to get news is one of the main requirements. Therefore, complying with the requirements of the public is an effective way to improve the media trust in the special period [8].

The information posted by media accounts would be the key to influencing media trust. The source of information is the most important reason why people trust and choose. According to Adorno, the authoritarian personality will promote people to trust information in a reliable or professional way [9]. For example, the government and experts. Wu Y. and Shen F. mentioned that sources from central government get the highest trust in China during COVID-19 epidemic. Experts' information is the most reliable source during social crises, not only on social media, but also on the traditional media [10]. So it is useful to promote more "professional sources based on scientific finding news during the social crises" [11].

The quality of information is the most important way to build the trust of the media. "Reality" supported by scientific statements and specifics is usually trusted by most audiences, Kohring and Matthes mentioned [12]. Timeliness is also a main point to improve media trust. Especially during the period of social panic, people want to get more information about their life as soon as possible. Chen mentioned the question of Weibo's trust in his article [3]. In the post-epidemic era, people spend several hours every day getting information about COVID-19 on social media. However, all kinds of new media videos, live broadcasts and other supporting materials could provide more choices for people and improve the media trust of most people [13]. In addition, local media outlets or social accounts could get more trust. Uwe Brückner mentioned this point in his book, and pointed out that due to people knowing their story and living environment [14]. However, in the digital age, it is easy for people to get worldwide information on social media or other media. So many people prefer choosing the official accounts on social media to trust, in order to reduce the risk brought by the

rumors or fake news on social media. In conclusion, although there are many papers mentioning social media trust, it is meaningful to discuss social media trust in the post-epidemic era. It also provides a new way for people to publish news in the special times, and improves the trust of social media.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method theory

Grounded theory is an important way for quality research. Through the analysis of original theories and data, people could establish the theoretical system and develop the new theory [15]. This paper will compare samples about COVID-19 on Weibo, and theories about media trust, then analyze reasons about social media trust in post-epidemic era.

3.2. Research data

In this paper, the epidemic situation in Guangzhou from May to July in 2021 was taken as the research object. Considering the fake news and rumors might be posted by users on social media, the news of this paper is selected from the Xinhua News Agency account, a Chinese official media account. From May to July, Xinhua News Agency released a total of 73 articles about Guangzhou epidemic. In addition, more than 500 times of disseminated and favorite news will be used, because these news are representative of all news and attract more readers.

3.3. Organization of data

All news will be organized according to basic theory. This paper analyzes the relationship between news content and media trust through the open coding, axial coding and selective coding. This paper will analyze the media's trust in social media in post-epidemic era based on the grounded theory of various news contents.

Table 1: Source of news text.

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Guangzhou center for disease control and prevention	government notification	Source of information could effect the trust on social media
Zhong Nanshan, a prominent Chinese expert in respiratory disease	experts	
Shenzhen Baoan international airport Guangzhou Baiyun airport notification	related official notification	

Table 2: The quality of news text.

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Journalist living in isolation at home in Guangzhou Journalist's home is in this district	real experience	The quality of news could effect the trust on social media
The first confirmed case Guangzhou implement closed-management to 38 districts Person-to-person transmission	accuracy description	
18:00 on May 23th\24th of May\25th of May	time	
Photos\videos\live broadcast	supporting materials	

Table 3: Emotional factors in special news text.

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Medical workers taking nucleic acid testing for kids and old men with kneeling position hot weather\heavy rain	hard work of medical workers	Emotional describe news could touch people deeply
Support each other\overcome the disease	confidence	

4. Analysis

4.1. Source of Information

The source of information is the most important reason why people trust. On May 23rd, 2021, when the first confirmed case appeared in Guangzhou, Xinhua News Agency started to release relevant information in Weibo to reduce social panic. From May to July, Xinhua News Agency released a total of 73 news articles related to Guangzhou epidemic. Most news reports indicate the source of the news. For example, this news post on 2th of June: "Zhong Nanshan appeals Guangzhou citizens take nucleic acid testing as much as possible." The news also added a video about Zhong Nanshan, who said, "The most important thing now in Guangzhou is to test all people's nucleic acid as soon as possible." There are 12 thousand "likes" and 6 hundred comments. Half of these comments wrote "Guangzhou come on!" Quarter of comments are about "we think Mr. Zhong is right, we would like to follow him, all of us will take nucleic acid testing as soon as possible." There are also some comments about "uniting to overcome disease" and "Mr. Zhong, take care of yourself". Therefore, most people believe that these experts could use their professional knowledge to help them overcome the unknown disease, and most people also benefit from the news of experts, for example, it is useful to wear medical masks to prevent COVID-19. Experts are considered to be one of the most authoritative sources.

At the same time, it shows that most of the different news from the corresponding source have been positively evaluated, and "Guangzhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention" is the most common news source, for example, the first news about the epidemic situation in Guangzhou, "The first confirmed case of Guangzhou is infected by a new Indian virus.". "Person-to-person transmission is still the route of transmission in Guangzhou epidemic, said by vice-director of Guangzhou center for disease control and prevention." and so on. All this kind of news about basic information is quoted. There are many comments about the news. More than half of these news get more than 5 thousand "liked" and most positive comments. For example, the second news above in this paper got 253 comments and 7709 "likes". "We want to prevent the cross-border spread of the epidemic", "We must be vaccinated" and "Do we have to wear masks when going out" won the highest praise in the comments, and other comments were similar or related to these keywords. Sources from the government and experts are highly trusted, especially in China. Because for most people, COVID-19 is unfamiliar and complicated to them, the news source from government could

provide more real and accurate information to help them understand the epidemic situation and stay away from it.

In addition, news on different topics involves various source. For example, "From 12 o'clock on July 7th, people departing from Shenzhen must have digital health certificate." is from the notification of Shenzhen Baoan International Airport. "Guangzhou Baiyun Airport has prevented more than 5,000 people who can not provide digital health certificate from leaving Guangzhou." is from Guangzhou Baiyun Airport notification. These two news items are about air transportation, and the notice from the airports is the most direct sources. "responsible behavior" and "useful information" are the most frequently seen comments.

On the contrary, unknown sources in the news will get more negative comments. For example, "It is said that getting vaccinated is not useful for people." was posted by a net citizen. "Said by who?" is that the highest frequency of occurrence words in following comments. In short, in the post-epidemic era, the news with specific and authoritative source could gain more trust, while the news with unclear source will gain less trust.

4.2. The quality of news

Since COVID-19 has become a worldwide problem, most people have become accustomed to learning about the epidemic situation through various news. According to Heinecke, people usually choose media outlets with "high quality news" to trust [16]. The quality of news could be affected by different aspects: authenticity and accuracy, timeliness and new media supporting materials.

4.2.1. Media trust for authenticity and accuracy of news

To keep authenticity of news is always the most important quality for news, especially in the post-epidemic era. Real epidemic information and events could encourage people to trust the media and news. For example, since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 epidemic in Guangzhou, the Xinhua News Agency has adopted different methods to ensure the authenticity of news. "the reporter lives in isolation at home in Guangzhou. Since May 31st, Liwan District of Guangzhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention announced that all communities should implement blockade measures from now on. During this period, all people in the community can not go out. All of the daily necessities must be delivered by the sub-district office. Journalists' homes are in this district. According to the reporter's observation, there is no one outside, and daily necessities are sent by property manager in sequence. " This news also provided 5 photos to confirm the news content. In this news, reliable source and real event are two aspects of showing the fact. At the same time, specific information such as "all people" is an accurate description of people's access to this news. Therefore, most of the 194 comments were positive. "Seem like all of people are following rules." and "We have to say the prevention work of China is great." get the higher "liked". "I could recognize where you live from your photos." is special among these comments, which could help to verify the reality of this news. In terms of attention, detailed professional description can also enhance people's trust. For example, news with the words "human-to-human transmission", "the first confirmed case" and "the new Indian variant virus" could help people to better understand COVID-19 and trust these news.

However, inaccurate and wrong information could destroy the trust of people. Another piece of news from Xinhua News Agency, "Guangzhou implements closed management of 38 districts", has also received great attention. This news also took "Guangzhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention" as its information source, and people also give 1.1 million "likes" and over 1000 positive comments. One of the comments received 40 replies. "Guangzhou government also issued an announcement today, but there are a lot of wrong information, such as the address of Zhenguang Experimental Middle School, which is ridiculous!" The reply to this comment also pointed to other

wrong messages in that announcement, such as "Why don't they check the information?", "Who wrote that", "I am from Yuexiu district of Guangzhou. The Zhanxi street is also wrong information.", "I suppose that news is written by amateurish people", "That news freaked me out. I thought I am living the dangerous street" and so on. People could not find useful information from the news. In addition, false information could cause social panic and become rumors of others. Therefore, when people find that the news has no true and accurate content, most of them may not believe in the media for a long time.

4.2.2. Media trust for timeliness news

Timeliness is one of the main factors of newsworthiness [16]. Especially for this kind of hard news, people could learn the latest information about the epidemic as soon as possible. For example, the Xinhua News Agency published the first news about the Guangzhou epidemic on 24th of May, 2021. "The confirmed case virus in Guangzhou belongs to a mutant strain in India. According to the notification from Liwan District of Guangzhou CDC on May 23rd, it was initially determined that Mr. Guo from Jinlong District was the confirmed case related to 'imported cases' abroad. "Till 18:00 on May 23th, the epidemic involved a total of 12,072 samples of key populations in key areas, and 115,573 nucleic acid tests have been completed, all of which were negative." This news published at 0.45 AM, related to the basic information about the confirmed case and nucleic acid testing yesterday. "We can't relax at the special time.", "Virus is awful, we should protect ourselves." and "We should wear masks for a long time." are the main comments of this news. Most people have got useful information about the epidemic situation in Guangzhou, so they could pay more attention to their daily life, especially those living in or around Guangzhou. During this period, the Xinhua News Agency reported the newest information everyday. "25th of May. One confirmed case was founded in Nanning, Guangxi Province, which is related to Guangzhou epidemic cases." "on May One, a confirmed case was found in Maoming, Guangdong Province. The confirmed case is one of the service personnel of Youyijia Restaurant, and Mr. Guo, who was confirmed on May 24th, had no mask service." These two messages were released on May 25th, and gave the main information of confirmed cases in Guangzhou. And almost, this account published two or three news about the main information about Guangzhou epidemic, the content about confirmed cases, contact transmission, close contact, route of transmission and so on. Most news could get more than 500 comments and likes. "I will not go to Guangzhou these days" and "We have to wear masks when we go out" appeared many times in comments on this news.

Therefore, timely information could help people avoid the dangerous influence. The more specific and accurate information people get, the less panic the society will have about them. People could trust the media that always provide valuable news, not the media that always reporting outdated information.

4.2.3. Trust for new media supporting materials

New media could provide information from various aspects. Even though traditional news has already proved the truth of news from sources, details, data and so on, some audiences still have little doubt about news. In this special era, the news in the form of news media could give people the reason to trust. For a long time, photos and videos have been common ways for news to provide supporting materials. For example, the news reported on 31th of May about "Guangzhou citizens taking nucleic acid testing in the rain on 31th of May.", added one video that recorded the medical workers doing nucleic acid testing for people, and most people are waiting in order. The news received 640 comments, most of which were positive, which showed their trust in the news content and gained 7979 likes. The news posted on 2th of June, "Zhong Nanshan appeals Guangzhou citizens take

nucleic acid testing as much as possible.”, provided a short introduction video of Zhong Nanshan. This news has got 1.2million likes and 662 comments. “We should take nucleic acid testing”, “All of us will follow Mr. Zhong” and “Guangzhou Go on” are comments of this news, and most of others are also positive. Besides photos and videos, live broadcast is one important way to report events in this 5G era. Xinhua News Agency released 9 live news about the press conference of Guangzhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention “Guangzhou center for disease control and prevention press conference for senior high school entrance examination” “Guangzhou center for disease control and prevention press conference for Guangzhou enterprises” “Guangzhou center for disease control and prevention press conference for airport” and so on. People could get important information directly as soon as possible through the new media platform in the post-epidemic period. Therefore, publishing news in the form of new media could gain people's trust.

4.3. Emotional effects of news

Emotional description is not supposed to be used in news [17]. News should describe the facts with objective views. However, in the post-epidemic era, emotional news has special power to affect people. Emotional details and stories could help readers build media trust, and reduce social panic in special times.

News about the Guangzhou epidemic could explain this point. In the news about the epidemic era, it is very important to include emotional details. Although news should not contain emotional details, in a special period, many news stories have content related to emotional features. For example, the Xinhua News Agency reported news with live broadcast about Nucleic acid testing (NAT) and vaccination in Liwan district, Guangzhou on 27th May. “Due to the increasing number of local confirmed cases, most people want to get vaccinated against virus as soon as possible. These medical workers have finished 1200 vaccinations from 8:20 am to 3:00 pm”. From the video, it is easy to learn that medical workers are very busy with heavy protection suits in hot weather. According to this news, many people gave comments, and this article selected some keywords from top ten comments: “It's too hot, you really done a hard job”, “Thank you for your work”, “I am very happy to be born in China”, “It is very important for all of us to get vaccinated as soon as possible”, and most of the comments are positive, with the workloads of medical workers in the news text and the pictures about them in the video. All these could encourage people to understand the news and trust the content of this kind of news. Not only in this news, others news with the same characteristic also get more positive comments such as “Guangzhou citizens taking nucleic acid testing(NAT) in the rain on 31th of May. Although the heavy rain and wind have broken citizens’ umbrellas, they are still waiting for the nucleic acid testing in the line. If we insist on supporting each other, we could overcome the disease.” At the same time, a video about medical workers and volunteers was added to this news. All of the following comments on this news are positive: “I have already joined the volunteer team.” “Chinese people are best, Guangzhou, come on! Guangdong, come on!” “People will always show their thanks to you!” In this news, most people show their trust in the news, and give positive comments to the news. During May to July, the Xinhua News Agency released 73 news articles about epidemic situation and 7 news articles related to special emotion, all of which were positively evaluated.

Most people could feel confident and moved by this kind of news. When they are touched by news, the contents of news will give a positive impression to people, and then, most people will choose to trust the news and support the actions in the news reports. Therefore, on the other hand, emotional news not only could help people trust the news, but also could reduce the social panic in the post-epidemic era, and with a positive attitude in this era.

5. Conclusion

Social media has been an important way to obtain information for a long time since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 appeared. Most people have special requirements for the post-epidemic media, because they already know something about COVID-19. According to the news about COVID-19 on Weibo, people will choose different news to trust for various reasons. First of all, source of information is the most important reason for people to trust, authoritative and official source could get more positive comments and liked. At the same time, most readers show they will support the actions mentioned by the news. Besides, the quality of news is also important for people to choose the news. Authenticity and accuracy of news are the primary factors of news, because people can get the key information from the news, and avoid the negative influence brought by the wrong information. Timeliness is the life of news, especially in the post-epidemic era. Timely information could give people new information about the epidemic situation, help people take protective measures and try to stay away from dangerous places. Therefore, if people always get useful information from the news, they would trust the media more in the future. It is also useful to use new media technology to support the news, such as pictures, live video, virtual reality and augmented reality materials. Because these materials could provide more direct sense or real station than simple words. Last but not least, it is different from other news, emotional factors have positive effects for news in the post-epidemic era. The emotion could impress people more deeply than fact. People are deeply moved by actions of the medical workers and other volunteers, and then they might choose to believe the news and give positive feedback. It is also useful to reduce social panic in this special time. However, emotional factors are not suitable for all the news, especially hard news. Emotional factors might affect the quality of news, or even give readers wrong guiding of emotion. When people change their mind through other ways, they might think the news is wrong, even if they do not trust the media any more. Therefore, although in post-epidemic era, emotional factors are easily touched and gain more trust, it is very important for news to properly use emotional factors in special news.

Therefore, according to the real feedback about Guangzhou epidemic situation in Weibo, in the post-epidemic era, various reasons may affect the media trust. New media changed the reading habits of people and many people choose social media to get news and information. Although in some respects, it is free for media outlets to publish news in their own special ways, following the basic rules still could help them to get more media trust. Media trust is important for media outlets around the world. Not only in the post-epidemic era, but also for a long time, building media trust has always been their important goal.

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