Post-truth: Reflections on the Source and History of the News

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Abstract: Taking media ecology as a research perspective, this paper analyzes the causes and main characteristics of the Post-truth phenomenon from the perspectives of objective reality, media reality and audience reality. The analysis of Post-truth should be interpreted from a historical perspective. Starting from the source of news, the content briefly combs through the history of news development and analyzes the current situation of journalism. From the context of historical development, the causes and characteristics of Post-truth will be discussed and reflected, and relevant suggestions will be put forward to add dimension to the discussion of Post-truth .

Keywords: Post-truth; Media environment; Journalism; Mass media

1. A brief introduction to Post-truth

Since it was selected as the word of the Year 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries, the discussion on Post-truth has gradually shown a trend of generalization. The meaning of this term is mainly that "statements of objective facts are often less likely to influence public opinion than appeals to emotion and incitement to beliefs"[1]. It can be simply understand that the formation of public opinion today is more instigated by emotional expressions than by facts or truth. Back in 1992, American playwright Steve Tesich spoke of Watergate Affair, Iran-Contra Affair and Gulf War, calling them as the shameful truths. "We want to live in a Post-truth Era " he said[1]. William Davis, a professor at the University of London, pointed out in the New York Times that the power of truth to dominate social consensus has gradually diminished, and the world has entered a Post-truth Era.

The media field is deeply involved by technology, capital and power, and is full of lies, rumors, scandals and illusions. The truth becomes more mysterious. Post-truth helps those who hype up the "truth" that is beneficial to their own interests, and donate those who control the guidance of public opinion to achieve their goals. This behavior also affects the governance of society and the formation of social consensus, as well as people's cognitive confusion about social phenomena and their in-depth exploration of the truth. The post-truth problem is no longer limited to the field of media or information dissemination, but is essentially a lack of social core values. China is gradually modernizing, and the troika of economic, political and social reforms is driving China's reform and transformation. Post-truth reveals the value problems existing in China's reform process, and has become one of the difficult stumbling blocks in his journey towards the Great Rejuvenation. Wang argue that "truth issues essentially a political issue, and the political issue is essentially a social issue. Without social consensus, there is no empirical truth. Only when a social order can produce acceptable universal consequences, satisfy people's sense of fairness, and generate the necessary social consensus can the Post-truth phenomenon be overcome. This conclusion applies both to the West and to China's current reality. It is of practical significance to explore the causes and characteristics of the Post-truth phenomenon from the perspective of media development, and suggestions should also be taken seriously[2].

2. Review of related concepts in media ecology

In 1968, "media ecology" was officially proposed and used by Neil Postman of the New York School, pioneered by Marshall McLuhan of the Toronto School. On August 4, 1998, the Media Ecology Association was founded in New York, and its charter defines it as: Media ecology studies the complex relationship between symbols, media, and cultures[2]. Harold Adams Innis, the first-generation scholar of media ecology School, explored the workings of history from the perspective of the media. Levinson's main idea of "media evolution theory" is actually inherited from McLuhan, and he is also called Digital Mcluhan

and Post-Mcluhan.

Media ecology, which studies media as an environment. Although there are various theories, its most basic common concept is the idea of media, and the most basic theory is pan-media theory. Media ecology is concerned with the development and impact of media technologies and is not limited to research on technology as a material means. The theory holds that the development of media technology is enough to constitute a media environment that will have an impact on human society. This impact occurs quietly, during the current process of transformation and handover of traditional and new media, the audience can touch the change in the media environment obviously. With the rapid expansion and penetration of media into all aspects of human social life, the media itself also constitutes the "pseudo-environment" which described by Walter Lippmann, and the material and structural impact on people and society is becoming more and more obvious.

The intervention of media ecology provides new ideas for the study of communication and media culture, and promotes the academic community to think about the overall and long-term effects of communication media. Of course, the media, as an environment, is also subject to various conditions. For example, the current economic situation, the direction of public opinion, and many more trends in social issues. Liu notes that "printing evolved into an unprecedented revolution in Europe, leading to the Reformation movement, as well as the rise of individualism and the nation-state. However, these changes did not occur in Chinese society, where printing was first invented. These indicates that Europe has a political, economic, cultural and other environment for these changes, while China does not enjoy such an environment [3]. From the perspective of news or media sources and developments, discussing the Post-truth through media ecology research ideas would be very effective.

3. Consider from the source of news

There are many theories about the definition and origin of news. On September 1, 1943, Lu Dingyi proposed in Our basic view of journalism: Materialists believe that the origin of news is material things are facts, that is, facts that occur in the struggle of human beings against nature and in the struggle of society.Therefore, the definition of news is the reporting of recent facts[4]. Lu defined news from the perspective of Marxist materialism. He believes that the source of news is objective facts. Due to the realities of the time, his version ignores the newsworthy. That is to say, news does not reflect all objective facts, but selects a part with news value. Then, how can the news truly reflect the objective existence? This is an epistemological question that emphasizes how and to what extent news reflects facts. From the perspective of axiology, news also needs to conform to the social mainstream values, popular values and aesthetic orientation. Some news cannot be promoted to the public and can not convey positive energy. Blood, violence and other unethical scenes and descriptions are not advocated in the news. This is also a necessary prerequisite for the existence of news ethics.

It is very difficult for news to reflect facts in theory. In practice, news can be generally considered to reflect objective facts or not to reflect objective facts. That is, audiences have the same judgment about fake news to some extent. It is not advisable to treat spurious news as an objective fact. The audience should have good discernment and analytical skills. This is the formation of "consensus", that is, the media has the ability to build "consensus" based on facts to a certain extent. The media thus has the ability to guide public opinion, and the media has also realized its function of integrating social consciousness at this level.

With the advent of the post-truth phenomenon, the fact-based integration function of news has been weakened, and the demagoguery function based on emotions has been continuously strengthened. The main problem with the Post-truth discussion is in the audience acceptance stage. Although the ability and degree of reflection of facts in the news that journalists are proud of is improving, it can even reach the level of "hyper-real" such as simulation and imitation as Baudrillard said. However, the "last mile" still exist, that is, "facts and truth are far less able to influence public opinion than emotions. "

4. Consider from the historical development of news

From the perspective of the historical development of journalism, the media has used many means to prove that it is "real enough". For example, the inverted pyramid form has been introduced in the form of text presentation, the instant operation program is updated to live broadcast, and the technology similar to simulating reality was introduced. Efforts at the ideological level are also essential, such as press regulations, journalistic ethics, the concept of objectivity, and journalistic self-discipline. In 1935, the American Newspaper Guild's ethical approach recognized the objective view. It states that the primary duty of journalists is to provide accurate and unbiased news to the public[5]. Even if journalism devotes almost all of its resources to proving its "real enough", it is inevitably evaluated as self-talking. Moreover, the criticism of journalism as "not professional enough" and "not objective enough" has never stopped, and each attack is actually a dissolution of journalistic authenticity. Journalism is mixed with other voices, and we must ensure the timeliness of news while constantly attacking the authenticity of the news, so as to gain the trust

of the audience.

The philosophical scholar Lan notes that "objectivity has become an important criterion that has been considered to achieve the truth. In the Post-truth Era, there are holes in the logic. The value of objectivity is reserved only to decorate different political positions. Each position can always intercept the data analysis that is beneficial to itself, so as to discard the data that contradicts itself[6]. If the crisis faced by journalism in history is sideways and circuitous, it has had varying degrees of impact on the truth of journalism. Then the arrival of Post-truth confronts the foundation on which journalism depends, that is, authenticity. The ability of news to reflect facts and the ability of news to use facts to guide public opinion have been challenged. As Hu puts it, "In the Post-truth Era, the premise of professional journalism, to provide as much truth as possible, has become difficult and meaningless, so professional journalism is facing an unprecedented crisis."[7]

5. Conclusion

Dramatic reversals and sensational and emotional expressions are more likely to resonate and track the audience than conventionally expressing the truth or falsity of facts. The audience will be more involved in subjective consciousness for the development direction of dramatized things with ups and downs. For some people who profit from this or manipulate public opinion, every bias of public opinion will bring an incomparably huge flow, and the flow will become the real money. However, from another point, this shows that the influence of the media on society is increasing, although the method is not controlled or recognized by the mainstream, its ability to guide public opinion has not declined, but has increased. "The digital revolution has opened channels for different interpretations to circulate, while also emphasizing that no one can claim that what they know is the absolute truth, that is, a world that transcends truth and post-truth."[8] So journalists don't have to feel useless or doubt themselves. Even if it may take more time and effort, journalists will certainly be able to find new ways to cope with change.

Note:

1. Digital News Report 2017 - Reuters News Agency (https://www.reutersagency.com/en/reuters-community/ digital-news-report-2017-3/)

2. See the New York media ecology website(https://media-ecology.org/)

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