

The Usage of Vlog in Combat Coronavirus News Reporting---A Case Study of “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus”

Nan Dai*

Shanghai Documentary Academy, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Qingpu, Shanghai 201701, China

*Email: dainan@outlook.com.cn

ABSTRACT

On the logical starting point of log news report, this paper takes “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” as an example, discusses the innovative practice of Vlog in Combat Coronavirus News Reporting and considers the path change for news production in the ear of Web 2.0.

Keywords: Vlog, News Production, “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus”

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 wreaked havoc across China at the start of 2020. This study probes into the vlogs, a special form of reports, on this pandemic. With “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” as the study case, we analyzed the framework and features of vlog reports to probe about the new possibility that vlogs provide for journalist productions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON “LOGS”

“Logs” are a genre of journalist writing that presents news in the form of logs. This special genre of journalist writing has been used both in China and abroad, such as the reports on the Indo-Pakistani Wars by Peter Kyne, a Wall Street Daily journalist who won the Pulitzer Award in 1972 and the Crashing Plane by Bissinger who won the U.S. Good News Award.

In 1983, in the report “writing news with strong initiatives – recommend a series of log news reports”, Zhuo Li pointed out that log news is “vivid, natural and credible”, and encouraged “Chinese journalists to try this new form of journalist writing that had rarely been used” [1].

Since the start of the 21st century, many log reports have won increasing attention from researchers. For instance, Hongmei Chen’s “site, depth, humanity” analyzed the log reports released by Beijing Youth Daily, Xinmin Evening, and Yangcheng Evening News during the two sessions; Hongying Hu analyzed the features of the report “charity aid tents in seismic disaster-struck areas” by Vocie of West Lake of Hagnzhou Radio Station in his paper “application of logs in broadcast news”. Zhenhu Sun and Xi Tian Qiang reviewed “TV logs” of “Logs in primary-level departments” by CCTV, and commented that “keeping track of the progress of events by series TV logs can achieve good publicity effect” [2].

With the advent of the Internet era, vlogs gain increasing popularity. Vlog was first introduced in Merriam-Webster

dictionary in 2009, referring to video blogs or video logs [3]. As a product of Web 2.0, vlog keeps records of life by the vlogger. It rose to popularity on YouTube in 2012 and gained rapid development since its introduction to China in 2016 due to the rapid progress of social media and short videos. It started a new trend of vloggers keeping moments of their life by videos, and also became a new form of journalist reports adopted by journalists.

In absence of journalists, vlogs play a crucial role in news reports. Jingruo Zhu, the then director of News Department of China Daily in 2003, revealed the background of the report “Diaries of Nurses”, a news report about nurses against SARS by China Daily, and introduced how diaries of nurses became news reports and became the first news report in China that gave direct description of SARS [4]. In 2016, the aerospace logs series released by Xinhua News Agency were news reports produced by astronauts as “special journalists of Xinhua News Agency”. In 2020, in the fight against Covid-19, vlogs became an important way of news reports and was widely adopted by social media.

3. CASE STUDY: ANALYSIS OF “WUHAN: My Dairy OF COMBATING CORONAVIRUS”

The program “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” initiated in 3rd February 2020 by CCTV encouraged vloggers to use videos to share their moments during the fight against the epidemic and reflected every bit of life in Wuhan during this fight.

The concept of framework was first proposed by Bateson, and was introduced to cultural sociology by Goffman. Gitlin, a communication researcher in U.S., introduced the framework theory into media research and argued that “selecting, emphasizing and expressing media frameworks are the process of selecting, emphasizing and excluding news reports” [5]. Based on the framework theory, we analyzed the program “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating

Coronavirus” from three dimensions: the report subject, object and text.

3.1. Report subject

“Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” is a program of 33 episodes that were broadcasted from 3rd February to 24th March, 2020. The first episode revealed the front line of the fight – the first batch of hospitals that admitted patients infected by Covid-19. Episode 2 was hot by Yuchen Zeng, an ordinary employee of a media company, who shared the life of an ordinary family in Wuhan during the lockdown. The 3rd episode presents the construction of Leishenshan Hospital based on videos shot by “cloud foreman” cameras and AI audio sources. In the following episodes, different vloggers shared the daily life of Wuhan during the lockdown, the medical staff and patients that fought against the epidemic, and others in different professions that contributed to this fight. 17th March marked the 55th day after the lockdown, and the medical teams that came to aid Wuhan began to withdraw. The 32nd episode was themed on “Goodbye, Wuhan” and showed a series of scenes of medical teams waving goodbye to Wuhan. On 24th March, two months after the Lunar New Year, the last episode “Wuhan is back”, presents in a panoramic view how the city of Wuhan came back to life amid the cherry blossoms in the spring. “Your breath is the gentle breeze of spring”, as a line says in the episode. The epidemic was stemmed under the joint efforts of people around the country and Wuhan was finally brought back to life.

In sum, “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” was a series of vlogs that shared personal stories during the fight against the epidemic, with each episode focusing on one topic. All these episodes constitute a panoramic view of every aspect of everyday life – people, events and the city, during the pandemic. These special reports make up for an important part of the narrative of the fight against Covid-19.

3.2. Report object

Those who occur most frequently in “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” are medical workers. In the 33 episodes, 12 are about medical workers who fought at the front-line of the combat, who were the core of the force against the virus and also played an important part in the reports.

Others involved in this fight were also reported in this program: patients in the hospital, community volunteers, cashiers and take-out deliverers, barbers for medical workers, families quarantined, stop-outs and foreigners who were accidentally quarantined in Wuhan because of the virus. Through their narratives, the vlogs allow the audience to see how the city was like during the lockdown. The images and voices from the grassroots, once released on mainstream media, sent a message to the world: united,

we can succeed over the virus. These vlogs conveyed positive energy and encouraged the audience to keep an upward attitude, which manifested the responsibility of mainstream media to guide public opinions in the face of public emergencies.

3.3. Report text

The report text of “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus”, by creating a narrative system with videos and audios, show the following features.

3.3.1. Daily narrative

Vlogs are self-narration of stories by vloggers. In the first episode of “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus”, Xuejun Hu, a nurse in the Wuhan Lung Hospital, shared her work by her phone. The marks left by the masks on her face were clearly shown in the video. Though she worked in the most dangerous place, she was optimistic. By her phone, she recorded what her colleagues had for meals at work, how they talked with the patients, how they cracked jokes with colleagues clad in thick protection suits and three pairs of gloves. With Hu’s phone camera, the audience knew how the frontline of the fight against the virus was like and the daily narratives were more documentary-like.

3.3.2. Internal perspective narrative

Tzvetan Todorov, a French structuralist, divides the narrative perspectives into three types: omnipotent perspective, internal perspective and external perspective. By the internal perspective, the narrator is the person, and this is the common way of vlogs in which the vloggers shared and narrated what he/she saw and heard to the audience, and thus increased the credibility and intimacy of the reports.

To be specific, the internal perspective also refers to the perspective of the protagonist and the witness. The fourth episode of “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” was shared by Zhenyu Wang, a navy and media journalist. Wang, who returned to Wuhan to celebrate the Chinese New Year Festival with his family, was one who experienced and witnessed the epidemic. With his camera, he shared stories of Chen Li, a member of the navy medical team who came to aid Wuhan. In this episode, Li is the protagonist and Wang is the witness. After interviewing Li, Wang shared his personal feelings in front of the camera and narrowed the gap with the audience. In Episode 18, Liding Wang, a Kuaishou vlogger who were retained in Wuhan created a “crash crew” with his friends, keeping records of Wuhan with their cameras, and in the form of “physical presence”, led the audience to the city, to see the people living in the city, and to realize “mental presence” of the audience in the city.

3.3.3. Personalized expression

Meyrowitz who proposed the theory of media situation argued that digital media blurred the boundaries between personal situations and public situations. Vlogs narrate from the internal perspective of “me” and presents a kind of personalized expression. The vlogger, in front of the camera, shares what he/she sees and hears, what changes the virus has brought about to their life and their personal thoughts. The extensive use of selfies increased the sense of intimacy with the audience and gave the audience a feeling that “he is talking to me” and “I need to respond”. The immersive and substitutive way of expression reduces the physical distance between the vlogger and the audience, arousing resonance among the audience. In the 14th episode – “I will bring you home, Grandma”, Shangzhe Wu, a patient with mild symptoms, registered to Huoshenshan Hospital to take care of his grandma and encourage her to overcome the disease. Her story touched many hearts. When this episode was broadcast on 26th February, many an audience cared how the girl and her grandma were after the program. Unfortunately, her grandma passed away on 6th March, and many left comments on Wu’s Weibo posts to send comfort to this kind and strong-minded girl.

4. SHIFT OF THE MODE OF NEWS PRODUCTION: USER PRODUCTION

Vlogs can be taken as an “experience-style reports”. The vlogs during the Covid-19, under the dual effects of the reports and objective factors, allowed us see a new way of vlog reports: users creating original contents became a new trend and brought about a shift of the mode of news production – user production.

4.1. Shift of production content: report content filled with individual images

Guomin Yu has pointed out that as for “assignment” and “activation” of basic social promotion units by “individuals” are the largest changes that Internet brings to our world [7]. Under the impact of Covid-19, media workers cannot get first-hand materials for reports, but can use vlogs to share stories with “on-the-site” images, thus presenting micro-aspects of the epidemic one after another to the audience. This is a tectonic shift in the mode of publicity in the Internet era: the barriers between the sender and the receiver are broken, which leads to a shift in the content of news production: news production has shifted from journalist workers to the ordinary individuals.

4.2. Shift of the communication process: planning and post-production

The 22nd episode – “Wuhan at 4 o’clock”, presents people who are busy in the wee hours. The 25th episode, “Happy Women’s Day, the most beautiful girls”, is an episode specifically designed for women. The 26th episode “Back to Life”, shares the life of different professions – property salespersons, barbers and factory workers. These three episodes on specific groups of people are typical planned reports, but they are different from traditional news planning. The crew found and decided on the topic and subjects of the reports online, which reflected the shift from “offline news production” to “online news production”.

The program “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” showed consistency throughout the program. Though shooting and editing of the vlogs had no fixed patterns and were conducted by individual users, the program a consistent opening and length, and the post-production techniques are the same.

Therefore, the adoption of the user production mode disrupts “the traditional separated operation of news collection, editing and spreading” [8]. In this shift from the “producer -audience” mode to the “audience –producer -audience” mode, media are no longer content collectors, but are more like an “organizer” who presents the topic through planning and post-production, and serves a role of “controller”.

4.3. Diversification of communication platforms: enhanced promotion effect with the aid of media

“Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” was on air, CCTV, CCTV news channel, Hubei TV, Kuaishou, Ergengtv, Vue and other short-video platforms cooperate to call for vlog works and vloggers. Yicui in Episode 8, Zilan in Episode 9 and Wang Liding in Episode 18 are Kuaishou vloggers who shared their life in Wuhan during the epidemic.

The program also realized cooperation between TV stations and online platforms. To be specific, it was not only broadcast on TV, but spread and shared on social media, creating a new pattern of “all media, full media, efficient media and all media”.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Among all the reports on Covid-19, “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating Coronavirus” shared stories of ordinary people via vlogs and was memories shared by many. Progress of media technologies not only enriched the form of vlog reports, but provided more possibilities of reforms of news production. As a real-world practice of vlog reports in the age of media merge, “Wuhan: My Dairy of Combating

Coronavirus” has been a meaningful attempt of innovation in the way of news production and news promotion.

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