

A Phenomenological Study of “Mass Communication Receiver” as a News Source and Its Influence Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century when the Internet is highly developed, social media has become a news dissemination channel that cannot be ignored. Compared with the dissemination channel such as radio and television which were dominant in the past, the mode of group communication and mass communication have a great change. In the news communication context of this era, the receiver of mass communication may also become news sources for others. This paper uses a literature review and data analysis method to study the phenomenon of communication and the impact of this phenomenon when the recipient of mass communication is the news source of others. The results show that this transmission phenomenon is not currently the dominant mode of transmission, but that its rate has gradually increased over the past few years. At the same time, this phenomenon may lead to the spread of information cocoons and false information. In addition, it reduces the influence and trust of state media to a certain extent.

Keywords: *Mass media, News source, Communication, Social media, Social media platforms, Two-step flow of communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, due to the prosperity of a series of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as the development of instant messaging software such as What's app and Snapchat, the structure of mass communication will change in speed and form. The speed of mass communication has become faster than in the past, and unlike in the past when radio and television dominated, there is a time lag between different people in the mass today receiving the same news message. Various changes have made it possible for the receiver of mass communication to generally become news sources for others, relaying news events to other people who are unaware of the news. At present, there is no in-depth study on this transmitting channel and mode in the journalism academic circle, and only some relevant research reports on communication have mentioned the phenomenon of “secondary communication” in a relatively general sense.

When the phenomenon in which the receiver of mass communication becomes the news source is common, the existing news communication mode will be affected to a certain extent. This can give state media biased estimates of the impact of their news releases. When companies and

other organizations try to guide public opinion, they may also misestimate the effect of communication due to the existence of this mode of communication. In addition, understanding this phenomenon can also explain the pattern of unofficial news information dissemination, and help us understand the dissemination of some news like “conspiracy theory”.

This paper specifically discusses the phenomenon of public audiences relaying the news to other acquaintances in a life-like situation. And made possible explanations for the cause of this phenomenon, while clarifying the performance of this phenomenon. Moreover, the possible impact of this phenomenon in the future is also within the scope of this article.

In the research process, the author mainly used the method of literature analysis. This paper comprehensively summarizes pieces of literature about communication. Besides, this paper finds relevant content from the communication phenomena such as “mass communication”, “group communication” and “secondary communication” that have been studied by predecessors. At the same time, it refers to the contents of “media writing”, “new media” and “sources” in journalism literature. Summarize and organize the contents related to the research topic of this thesis “mass

audience communication source" in the communication theory and media theory studied by the predecessors. In addition, this paper also uses the data given by a large number of investigative institutions in recent years to prove the accuracy of the conclusions.

In the future, if the communication industry and journalism academia can make a more detailed research on this communication source and phenomenon, then there will probably be a trend: To study the so-called "mass audience" as a "communication source", rather than just as the receiver and feedback. This paper strives to provide a basic research direction and foundation for this research direction.

2. DEFINITIONS OF “NEWS SOURCE OF MASS COMMUNICATION RECEIVER” AND “NEWS REPOSTING”

The definition of mass communication receiver only refers to ordinary people who receive news and other information. These receiver does not need to have the special meaning of "audience".

The definition of "mass communication receiver" described in this paper is broader than that of the professional term "audience" commonly used in academia. "Receiver" in this paper refers to all those who hear the content. These receivers are people who actually exist and have received the content, not a particular group that is imagined.

The receiver of mass communication, as ordinary people rather than journalists, relay news to other acquaintances in a life-like situation. This author will refer to this act as "reposting the news." Common retweeting behaviors include re-tweeting a twitter with personal comments; talking about recent news events with other acquaintances on a messenger; talking about what they see with their families when having dinner after reading the newspaper and so on.

This phenomenon of relayed news is also reflected in various models of communication. In Schramm's model of communication(in 1945), organizations release much of the same information to different groups, and each group has multiple levels of opinion leaders and subgroups to re-disseminate the information. [1] Relative to other people who did not directly receive the information disseminated by the organization, those who relayed their information became relatively "opinion leaders". What the authors want to study is the dissemination within these subgroups when the information is news.

This form of communication is also reflected in "DeFleur's development of Shannon and Weaver model", in which each receiver can be an "encoder" responsible for transmitting information to the outside world [2]. In the following, the author will also analyze the meaning

changes caused by the continuous transcoding, decoding, and encoding of this news information from the perspective of language composition.

This kind of "reported news" is the opposite of "official news". The so-called "official news" is generally used to refer to the news of government agencies in a narrow sense, and the author takes this as "news directly released by enterprises, organizations and other institutions, or news reported by regular professional news media".

3. RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF “MASS COMMUNICATION RECEIVER” AND “REPOSTING NEWS”

3.1 The Decline of Television Journalism and the Change in Communication Forms between Families

Before the spread of the Internet, what is on television was dominated by the news. In the golden age of the television industry, the three major television networks mainly accounted for more than 90% of the ratings in the United States. [4] And because of the real-time nature of TV news broadcasts, almost all mass media recipients can receive information at the same time. This reduces the meaning of secondary communication while making the source of information single. Even if people mentioned certain news information in the communication, it mostly turned into a discussion of certain news information, rather than a reposting.

3.2 The Rise of Social Media

In the context of the prosperity of the contemporary traditional Internet and mobile Internet, public social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have developed rapidly. According to research statistics by WSR Team (an Australian business organization focusing on online website research and evaluation), in 2022, among Facebook's 1.9 billion users, 23% of users are mainly looking for news. [3] This is enough to prove that the number of recipients of contemporary mass media is very large. On social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which are open and free for discussion, among such a large quantity of mass media receivers, a considerable number of users re-tweet and comment on news information.

After that, there is no shortage of audience for these forwarded messages. According to a 2016 survey report by the Pew Research Center (a nonpartisan fact tank focused on investigating issues, attitudes and trends in the United States and the world), 18% or more of people use online social media as a primary 15% of these people get their news mainly from family and friends. Even among those who get their messages primarily from the agency

directly, there is a large percentage of people who want their friends to communicate something that is relevant to what the agency says. [5]

The above data all show that when a user who is a receiver itself re-tweets, re-posting, etc. on social media, the user will become a news source, the user's friends and family, and even other acquaintances. There is a certain probability that they will be affected and become the next recipient in the news dissemination link. And this dissemination process is common and has a certain influence.

In addition to open public social media, the phenomenon of "retelling news" dissemination in instant messaging software and the phenomenon of mass communication receivers becoming news sources are also becoming increasingly popular in the Internet age. At the same time, some developers of instant messaging software are still intentionally leading the phenomenon of news dissemination. For example, in 2017, WeChat introduced an "official account" mechanism that is conducive to news releases, allowing audiences to quickly receive all kinds of time-sensitive information including news, and to easily forward it to friends. Telegram also has a similar forwarding mechanism. It should be noted that, compared with forwarding and tagging topics on public social media, the dissemination of news information in instant messaging software is less dependent on the news information sources of the official media. Usually, when people discuss news information in private chats or group chats, they will directly re-describe the news information in their own way, without necessarily using the narrative of professional institutions. The possible impact of this will be mentioned below.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF "MASS COMMUNICATION RECEIVERS" AS A NEWS SOURCE

4.1 The Spread of Fake News Information

Mass social media platforms and instant messaging software have brought about a major change in the structure of mass communication, which itself, due to the lack of third-party screening, fact-checking, or editorial judgment, can easily lead to the spread of misinformation. [6] In addition, due to the agglomeration effect and the intelligent push information of contemporary Internet media platforms, this fake news information that should only be spread among multiple small groups or small organizations is aggregated into one seemingly correct news information, which is spread widely within the larger group formed by the merger. The receivers of mass communication within this large group repeatedly become sources and receivers of information, most of whom are in the information cocoon. In the information cocoon, people seem to be imprisoned in a

self-constructed information environment. In this environment, they will become more and more sure that the news information they obtain is correct. [9]

4.2 Dissemination of Ambiguous Information Due to Reposting

When a mass communication receiver becomes a news source and relays it to others, due to the limitations of the receiver's own ability and dissemination conditions, it is very easy to lead to wrong meanings in the paraphrase. For professional journalists and news media, objectivity and authenticity are necessary factors in writing stories, and journalists with professional ethics will try their best to avoid subjective emotions and subjective opinions. But for mass communication recipients in other professions, there is a high probability that they do not realize this even if they do not want to spread false or distorted news content in their subjective will. Their retelling will have an impact on the process of news dissemination.

In addition, when the receivers of mass communication disseminate news information to others in other forms, more omissions and subjective imaginations may occur. According to the Neil Postman's theory of "The Medium Is the Metaphor", when the carrier of the information changes, the meaning of its content will also change, and at the same time, it will also change the reading mentality of the receivers at the next level in the communication chain[8].

4.3 The Decline of the Public's Trust in Professional Institutions

People are influenced by "first impressions" when reading and processing information, and they are also biased towards the influence of information received for the first time when evaluating subsequent information. [7] On public social media platforms, people usually first see the information posted by family members or friends, and then click on the relevant news report links or hashtags. At this time, if the two problems mentioned above appear in the first news information seen, it will cause the receiver to be strongly affected by the "first impression" when browsing the reports of professional institutions. And a similar phenomenon occurs in privatized instant messaging software, and there may even be cases where receivers do not browse reports from professional institutions.

Therefore, it can be inferred that when a considerable number of mass communication receivers become news sources, it may lead to the news information of professional institutions being perceived as biased or incomplete by the receivers, which in turn leads to a decrease in their trust in professional institutions.

4.4 Enriching the Path of News Dissemination

Even though this author has mentioned many of the shortcomings of the "mass communication receiver" as a news source above, this news source has a positive meaning. One of the most important is to enrich the path of news dissemination. In contemporary times, the amount of news being reported has increased significantly, and for most average news recipients, more news is missed than received. The "mass communicator" as the news source provides a special news dissemination path.

This transmission path often occupies the recipient's social time or entertainment time. Some people distinguish such times from those devoted to browsing news information. This gives them more access to news in addition to professional media and official reports. There are also some people who regard socializing, entertainment and browsing the news as the same activity. Even so, other receivers of mass communication associated with them may bring up the topic of recent news at times they don't expect. In any case, this transmission path may give receivers additional time to obtain news information. Moreover, the dissemination path will also change the dissemination effect of the same content due to the different psychological expectations of the receivers.

In addition, under this transmission path, there is a certain relationship between the communicator and the receiver, and the relationship between the two may be colleagues, friends, and relatives. Due to the similarity of the two in terms of social status, geographical location, identity or hobbies, news that is related to the communicator's own interests or that can arouse the communicator's interest has a great probability that it is also related to the receiver's own interests or can arouse the receiver's interest. Therefore, this communication path also has the effect of screening and selection, and news spread through this path has a more influential communication effect on the receivers.

5. CONCLUSION

In the contemporary era, with the vigorous development of Internet social media platforms and instant messaging software, the traditional TV news industry is relatively declining, and the phenomenon that the receiver of mass communication becomes a news source is common in contemporary times. The existence of this phenomenon enriches the news dissemination path, but it is not the main way of news dissemination, it only occupies a part. This form of dissemination of "reported news" by non-journalists may lead to the widespread dissemination of false information due to a lack of institutional supervision, and make some people trapped in the information cocoon. At the same time, it is also possible that due to the limitation of the ability of the communicator and other conditions, ambiguous news information may be generated. In addition, due to the effect of "first impressions", these news sources with

the recipients of mass communication as news sources will reduce the public's trust in professional institutions. Contemporary news organizations and other organizations that need to distribute information should pay attention to the dissemination of such news information. Although this paper attempts to reason and prove through data, due to the influence of objective factors, some data are lacking. For example, due to the issue of user privacy, there is no publicly available data to describe the private chatting of communication and social software and the news discussion and forwarding in user groups. It is hoped that more survey data can be used in future research to illustrate news dissemination when mass communication receivers are news sources.

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