



Study on Entertainment of Serious Topics in the Context of Developing Network Media – Taking COVID-19 as an Example

Zitong Zhang

Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Arts Management, School of Humanities, Shanxi Xi'an, 710000, China

644753825@qq.com

Abstract. The Internet has rapidly developed to drive we-media short videos into the masses' sight. With the gradual increase of social pressure, people require releasing their pressure through entertainment and recreation, which endows entertaining topics with a great weight over serious ones. As various memes and entertaining opinions emerge, the resulting excessive entertainment impacts society's moral development. From the perspective of entertainment of COVID-19, the research adopts documentary analysis and case analysis to acquire an insight into the positive and negative effects of the entertainment phenomenon of serious topics and provides relevant improvement measures. The results show that excessive entertainment will lead to a dislocation of news from its original intention. The government, society, and the masses should undertake corresponding actions to prevent excessive entertainment of serious topics.

Keywords: short video; COVID-19; entertainment

1 Introduction

Attributed to the constant development of the Internet and science and technology, short video-based news has come to its heyday, with numerous platforms emerging. According to *The 50th China Statistical Report on Internet Development* released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by December 2021, the number of Chinese short video users reached 934 million. Short videos became one of the entertainment activities and a major source of information for Chinese people. At the same time, information redundancy was becoming a pain point for the media, and the answer to how to make the news more eye-catching was recognized – entertainment. Confronted by the strike of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), Chinese people experienced a three-year quarantine and lockdown. Ironically, the fact that people remained scared of the coronavirus and anxious for the future even after the Chinese government canceled the policy rather provided we-media creators topics for entertainment, and acquiring economic benefits through entertaining topics on the virus became their stepping stone. The gap between entertainment and excessive en-

© The Author(s) 2023

S. Yacob et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 7th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 779, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-126-5_68

entertainment was obscure during the time of entertainment of COVID-19. Taking COVID-19 as an example, this paper aims to explore the cause and impacts of the entertainment phenomenon of serious topics based on the Internet context. Eventually, it provides countermeasures on how to avoid excessive entertainment.

2 Rapid Popularization of the Internet

As the development of network technology realizes an era of mobile internet, mobile internet in turn injects new vitality into the Internet to allow it to satisfy straightforward users' spiritual needs more rapidly. *The 50th China Statistical Report on Internet Development* shows that by June 2022, the number of Chinese netizens reached 1,051 million (with an internet penetration of 74.4%), of which 99.6% are mobile internet users. Meanwhile, the number was increasing, and the devices the Internet accessed from were increasingly pluralistic. According to the Report, on a year-on-year basis, the number of Chinese netizens increased by 19.19 million, and internet penetration increased by 1.4%.

In this context, it enables we-media that takes short videos as the major agent for information dissemination to develop rapidly. Short videos are towering and favored by the masses because of the ability to introduce an event to the audience in a short time. Figure 1 shows that the number of Chinese short video users has been growing significantly since 2019, which was the beginning of short videos' heyday. The number reached 934 million by December 2021.

As shown in Figure 2, the number of short video users has been increasing progressively. By December 2021, the usage rate of short video users was up to 90.5%. According to the *2021 China Mobile Internet Annual Report*, short videos have occupied most people's time online. The proportion rose dynamically. Similarly, by December 2021, the stickiness of short video users was superior to those from other fields, with a 4.7% year-on-year increase. The usage time accounted for 25.7%.

In this case, most traditional media started to embrace such a mode of new media based on short videos, leading to a transformation of the main communication channel of news from text carriers such as newspapers and microblogs to short videos involving video, [1] dubbing, and text that were prevalent across various short video platforms. With the rising of the masses' network participation, their speed and range of propagation increased significantly.[2]

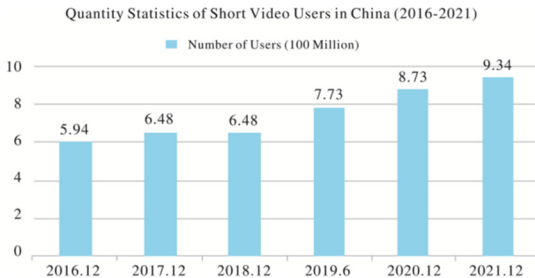


Fig. 1. Quantity Statistics of Short Video Users in China (Source: ASKCI Consulting)

Usage Statistics of Short Video Users in China (2016-2021)

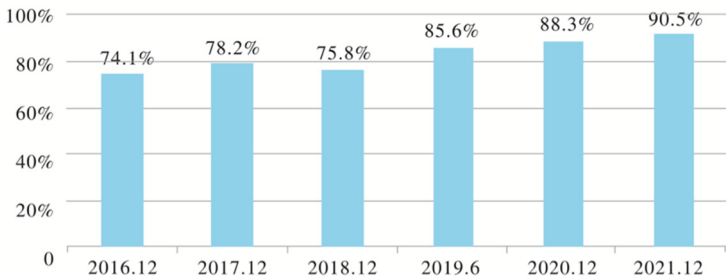


Fig. 2. Usage Statistics of Short Video Users in China (Source: ASKCI Consulting)

3 Entertainment of Short Videos in the Internet Context

To humans, seeking pleasure is natural, and enjoying pleasure is right. The rapidly developing society is pressuring the masses, who in turn become to enjoy entertaining news and are less curious about serious news topics. It makes a mysterious, entertaining topic more eye-catching across the title panel. As time passes, entertaining news has become one of the major domains of coverage.^[3]

In this research, entertainment of serious topics indicates the process of reducing the proportion of serious news and making entertainment a priority to highlight the entertainment value of news concerning politics, the economy, and society to maximize the masses' acceptance of serious news. However, entertainment is a double-edged sword. Proper pursuit of entertainment contributes to collecting and spreading serious news, and an excessive one may lower the whole society's sense of morality.^[4] As a piece of news released by Hubei Fire Protection, the event was about a father and his child climbing and being trapped on the mountaintop. It was supposed to be concerned seriously, but the topic was named "Dads Could Be the Biggest Danger". Also, in 2022, the Sichuan-Chongqing area suffered from a continuous high-temperature climate. Intermittent outages and wildfires struck Sichuan Province and Ba'nan District in Chongqing, respectively. Thermoplegia became a synonym for high-temperature regions because heat death was no longer an exaggeration for those working in high-heat conditions. Under a hot topic named "Sichuan-Chongqing People Want To Cry", a video was released, and many comments were made on it, including "The Hotpot Is On Fire" because these areas are famous for hotpots and "Sichuan and Chongqing Doomed By Fever", to express the commenters' scorn of high temperature. It reflected straightforwardly the catastrophic outcome of the entertainment phenomenon of serious topics.

In the age of news entertainment, the media succumb to digging into the entertainment value of serious events and giving excessive or improper interpretations.^[5] Memes gradually entered the world of serious topics, such as "melon eating", "sit back and wait", and "set a small stool". As bystanders, these meme players take others' painful experiences as sitcoms to watch. Their indifference can be the secondary damage to the sufferers.

4 Prevailing Entertainment of COVID-19

The quarantine and lockdown because of COVID-19 have lasted for nearly three years. Most of the masses suffered extremely from physiological and physical pressure and were already on the verge of a nervous breakdown. On November 24, 2022, a fire broke out in a high-rise residential building in Urumchi (Xinjiang). The accident raised fierce debates among netizens. The masses did not know whether there were any injuries or deaths out of the policy, but it was the last straw that broke the masses' mental backs. Many university students protested against the policy, for instance. Under the pressure of international and domestic situations, the Chinese government chose to reverse the quarantine and lockdown policy, which caused a large-scale spread of COVID-19 in China. Almost every Chinese felt insecure. With the pent-up emotion and the fear of the virus, many We-media creators selected entertainment as an answer to ease the masses' tension and panic. While the masses were in urgent need of mental relaxation and solace, the entertainment of COVID-19 served as an excellent solution that met the masses' demands.

Since then, the strains have been named differently according to symptoms they caused, such as "the Blades", "the Starved", "Fart", and "Weight Loss". As the number of patients kept increasing, led by We-media creators, many netizens posted funny short videos where their bodies were smoking because of the significant fluid loss resulting from high fever.

Network clusters that gathered netizens with similar opinions and feelings in a short time made the prevailing entertainment phenomenon of COVID-19 inevitable. These people have reached a consensus, which was shaped further to be a framework of communication, bonding with personal linguistic features and shared emotions. In this case, a network topic is likely to be coupled with massive short video users' combined attention and influences. Apparently, COVID-19 is one of the topics that drew the attention of nearly all Chinese people. It provided them with a sense of collective identity on the Internet.

5 Impacts of Entertainment of COVID-19 and Countermeasures

5.1 Impacts of Entertainment of COVID-19 on the Masses

Entertainment of COVID-19 has eased the panic, anxious Chinese people confronted with the sudden cancellation of the quarantine and lockdown policy and the spread of the virus, implying to the masses a promising future. To some extent, these topics and news contents have attracted the masses and provided scientific knowledge on the strains and a series of symptoms the patients may experience. The funny, relaxing strain names alleviated the masses' fear of COVID-19 and helped to determine the specific strain the individual was exposed to and the medicines available. Entertainment created an attitude of pulling together in times of trouble to remove the fear and anxiety of most Chinese people.

Excessive entertainment, on the other hand, impedes the masses from absorbing factual information.^[6] With the increasing number of short video creators focused on the entertainment of COVID-19, massive information was published on social platforms. Regular popular science short videos were overwhelmed by entertaining ones, resulting in, at least partly, users being more likely to be exposed to false information. Moreover, such popular science information was full of all sorts of memes that considerably lowered most people's vigilance for COVID-19. While the "seven-day recovery" theory among patients with mild symptoms was well-founded, some critical patients could be ignored. Most people tended to believe the virus was, for now, weak. A creator named the strain she acquired "Weight Loss" because she lost much weight after being infected by this specific strain. In the case of excessive entertainment of COVID-19, many comments under the short video had a shared intention – being exposed to "Weight Loss". Some netizens from the same region even started to line up in the comment section, expressing the intention of gongxiing to the creator's apartment for the strain. According to their responses, COVID-19 was no longer a disease that put all people in danger but a benign strain that people could select based on the symptoms.

The author selected one of the short videos concerning "Weight Loss" from a well-known platform, under which 11 thousand comments were made. In order of popularity, 300 were selected for statistical analysis, among which nearly 140 expressed the intention of being exposed to "Weight Loss".

Influenced by the excessively entertaining short videos, people were no longer worried about and scared of the suffering of critical patients and the mortality of older people that are vulnerable to COVID-19. People started to ignore self-protection to improve the possibility of infection, as one of the current adverse impacts of excessive entertainment of COVID-19.

5.2 Countermeasures for Excessive Entertainment

5.2.1 Government.

The government should formulate and publish laws and regulations to prevent serious news from being excessively entertaining. In-depth survey and governance work should be undertaken in the culture and entertainment fields to reinforce the supervision of new media further. Thus, it may guarantee a proper orientation, truthful content, and purposive dissemination of news.

5.2.2 Industry.

The media should steer the orientation of Internet speech. Mainstream media should produce truthful popular science content in time, leading the masses to improve their awareness of self-protection with scientific knowledge. We-media creators should be responsible for making full use of their flexibility to ensure the masses stay on the correct routes. The companies in the industry should also be responsible for improving the overall humanistic cultivation and quality of the practitioners through a continuous system covering personnel screening, training, and education.

5.2.3 The Masses.

The masses should establish a good concept on serious topics. In no case, excessive entertainment with the pain of viruses and diseases should be avoided. It is not proud to be infected by some diseases, and it is not worthwhile to show off. As for serious topics, everyone should abandon the mentality of teasing as a bystander and work together to maintain the correct orientation of social values.

5.2.4 Society.

Society should make a joint effort to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility among teenagers with immature personalities and unformed concepts of the world, life, and values. As various opinions appear online, they are susceptible to negative ones because of the absence of robust information filtering.^[7] If there is no correct and healthy guide from the media, schools, and parents, these teenagers may have a decreased sense of moral responsibility, which triggers more social conflicts.

6 Conclusions

“In the bygone era, where there was a shortage of information, we were committed to searching and collecting news. Now, confronted with massive information, we should pay more attention to the process.” Excessive entertainment of serious issues is substantially the representation of a fading essence in the news because a piece of news that carries much entertainment is inevitably involved in a dislocation from its original intention. However, the fact is that currently, entertainment has become a significant communication means of serious events. Media at all levels are committed to endowing the truth with entertainment and spice to maximize the spread, during which the authenticity and seriousness of the event and the deviation from the topic are uncontrollable. It is prone to cause a dislocation of news from its original intention and diverge the focus of a serious event.

Typically, entertainment of COVID-19 partly reduced people’s fear of the virus and death, whereas excessive entertainment took away the masses’ attention and made people believe that COVID-19 was no longer a risk. In the context of rapidly developing network media, serious topics should not be replaced by entertaining topics. The government, society, and the masses should make corresponding improvement actions to rectify entertainment of serious topics from being excessive to moderate.

References

1. Wang Z.Y. & Sun Y., Development Status of Short Videos and Countermeasures in China [J]. *Media*, 2018, (11),87-89.
2. Li X.Y., Characteristics and Value of Public Issues in the Context of Network Participation [J]. *Youth Journalist*, 2019, (09),32-33. doi:10.15997/j.cnki.qnjz.2019.09.011.
3. Jiao Y.B., Research on the Existing Problems and Countermeasures of Entertaining News in China [D]. Northeast Normal University, 2014.

https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=6ybcPoTwXqenSG9SHaA53Z1YKn7EQVyYkHbgRZ5zuttqhqeNtEnPWfjMtOy32P4yOPPPRp_S81wtnlz8iCXcaw2DSkSL11VRGip6rra3RB-QgT6SzXY-_ajIpbxdM_5umC_n5vBUt5E=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS

4. Pan A.L., Exploration of the Disadvantages of Online Entertaining News Topics [J]. Journal of Social Science of Harbin Normal University, 2016, (04),185-187.
5. Gu J.Q., Analysis of Entertainment of Serious News in the Context of New Media – Taking Short Video News as an Example [J]. New Media Research, 2018, (21),80-82. doi:10.16604/j.cnki.issn2096-0360.2018.21.034.
6. Deng X.Y. & Xiang X., Negative Social Effects of the Entertainment-oriented Communication of Internet Opinions [J]. Youth Journalist, 2018, (03),37-38. doi:10.15997/j.cnki.qnjz.2018.03.014.
7. Yu H.Z., Research on the Entertainment Phenomenon of News [J]. News Window, 2017, (04), 24-25.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

