

Problems and Enlightenment from the Long Tail Effect under the New Media Environment

Liang Zhao

Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics Dongfang College, Zhejiang, 314408, China.

E-mail: 872458992@qq.com

Abstract: The rapid development of technology has gradually changed our way of communication. As a very important phenomenon in the new media environment, the “long tail effect” has brought many benefits, but the problems it has brought should not be underestimated. In this paper, the problems under the new media environment and its enlightenment are elaborated to help its better development in the future.

Keywords: The Long-Tail Effect; New Media; Problem and Enlightenment

1. Introduction

In the field of news communication, the Long Tail Effect, as a concept borrowed from economics, is more often regarded as a way to develop a market segment and used in the research of news effect. At present, most studies have taken this as a starting point to encourage the development of professional media, but in this process, there are still many problems that need to be paid attention to.

2. The long-tail effect and news dissemination

The long tail effect is strongly reflected in the news communication, and there is a close relationship between the two.

The Long Tail Effect is modeled on a normal distribution curve, with the raised part of the curve called the “head” and the relatively flat part on both sides called the “tail”. There are two kinds of “long tails” in news communication. From the perspective of demand, “Head” represents the popular demand with a large market, and “Tail” represents the niche demand with a small segmented market. From the perspective of influence, the “head” represents the influence of the event that received a lot of public attention, and the “tail” represents the influence of the event that has seen a decline in public interest over a period of time.^[1]

Long Tail Effect was first proposed by Chris Anderson, editor-in-chief of Wired magazine, in October 2004. In the current mass communication process, “audience passivity” theories like “Magic Bullet Theory” have been abandoned by the vast majority of scholars while the so-called “fragmented mass audience” theory is more and more recognized by people.^[2] The theory of “demarcation” leads the mass media to specialized development, and also requires the current communication content to have a greater breadth and depth. The emergence of new media has provided a huge free news market with lower threshold, allowing more non-mainstream topics to enter people’s lives. The long-tail news is born when more niche hotspots triggering a large number of audience’s interactions form a certain amount of public opinion. All those news eventually create a market that can compete with mainstream news. They cool down after gaining public attention for a period and this is where the long tail kicks in. Some summary symbols that easily remembered and spread appear and prolong the lasting effectiveness of news.^[3]

3. The problems with the effect of long-tail news

In order to make better use of the Long Tail effect in news communication, foremost we must have a clear understanding of the existing problems

3.1 More consumption of public resources

“Long Tail News” is a concept derived from the “Long Tail Theory”. Its biggest characteristic is that the events are very small and have a certain degree of contingency. However, because the conditions causing the event are very common and may be encountered in everyone’s daily life, the occurrence of the event must have its particularity although it is universal. Due to the contingency and particularity of the event, the government, media and the public need to spend more time and energy on the verification of its authenticity. In the age of new media, the power of public solidarity and cooperation seems to accelerate the excavation of the truth and integrity of the event. However, due to the freedom of speech, the information that needs to be verified is increasingly trivial. Therefore, even though there may be a relative decrease in time, normally the total consumption of resources will be more.

3.2 It has a negative impact on the credibility of media

Due to the consumption of more public resources, people’s expectations of the events’ truth will also rise. Meanwhile, for some events, what the public wanted is far more than the truth behind them. The universality of the occurrence conditions makes the public have a preventive mentality, and they are eager for the government to do something to prevent the same thing from happening to them. However, the excavation of “long tail news” may take more time, so there will be a certain amount of public opinion pressure on the government and media. Under the pressure of public opinion, it is likely to bring negative comments such as “inefficiency” and “cover-up of facts” to relevant departments, resulting in the loss of the credibility of the government and media to a certain extent.^[4]

3.3 Inversion of social discourse power leads to imbalance of public opinion

Along with the development of the era, the demand of personal expression is becoming more and more intense. In the new media environment, technology lower the threshold of expression which makes almost everyone can choose subjects and air opinions according to their own interest and demand. At the same time, it is easy to take your personal thought to extremes as the similar content constantly pushed by algorithm based on personal preferences. In addition, the voices of some vulnerable groups can not be heard by the public, which leads to the “one-sided” or serious polarization of public opinion.^[5] On the other hand, the public’s excessive attention and discussion on minority events can even form a powerful storm of public opinion, which reverses social discourse power and loses the its balance^[6]. This not only affects the choice of news topics of traditional media, but also easily makes the public pay less attention to some mainstream news.

3.4 Easy to generate stereotypes

Another characteristic of “Long-Tail News” is its strong typicality. According to the features of the typical public, some simple key words easily to remember refined. Those words are the key to form a piece of long-tail news. Because of some news, these words become the pronoun of some behavior. For instance, when mentioning the topic “whether to hold the elderly up or not”, we immediately think of the blackmail; when mentioning “Qingdao prawn”, the thought of the scenic spot will be recalled. It results in certain negative stereotypes of public to an old man who fell down in the street or restaurants in Qingdao, which are difficult to eliminate. When the public encounters a similar situation again, it is easy to preoccupy themselves and lose their objective attitude. In some negative news events, though the incidents have gradually faded from the public eyes, the long-tail effect is still making its negative impact continuously, even for some events with uncertain truth. Because of the biased public opinion and the spread of the “Hibernation Effect”, the negative stereotypes of the event will be gradually strengthened. What make matters worse is that the reliability of the

information source and even different voice will be forgotten.^[6]

4. Enlightenment

Through the existing problems, we should reflect on ourselves, sum up experience and get some enlightenment. I will elaborate from the two perspectives of media and audience as follows.

4.1 To the media

4.1.1 Rational use of resources to improve the quality of news

New media environment accelerate the information transmission and the enormous number of communication platforms not only bring convenience to the audience, but also provide more channels. When a corresponding event occurs, the media should make good use of various resources to track the event in all aspects as far as possible and conduct more organized analysis, and finally report the hot issues of the event at first time^[7]. In addition, the development of new media has lowered the threshold of the news market, and the information products accessible to the audience are uneven. Media is a bridge connecting information and audience, and the fundamental change of this situation lies in its own. The media should uphold professional ethics, adhere to the principles of journalism, maintain the authenticity and freshness of traditional news and assume the responsibility as a social disseminator even in the new media environment. Information is the basis of news forming, to maintain the authenticity of news, the media should improve the ability of information judge and screen to ensure the quality of information. Only by maintaining the authenticity at the source and laying a solid “foundation” can real and high-quality news be created.

4.1.2 Correctly guide public opinion and balance the right to speak

The media is the bridge connecting the news and public for which it plays a strong role in guiding public opinion. No matter it is positive or negative news, it has positive educational significance for the audience. On the basis of supporting the “head” effect of the news, the media should reasonably select materials, formulate ideas and arrange the news. Based on the guarantee for the “head” effect of the news, the media should pursue the truth of the event from as many angles and directions as possible, pay attention to the multi-voices, correctly guide the public opinion to a positive direction to develop a “long tail” of positive energy.^[8]

4.2 To the public

4.2.1 Improve your judgment

Technology changes with each passing day, more than one channel is provided for people to get information and news. In the world of diversified information, in addition to being a “transmitted”, a retweet of Weibo or WeChat also makes the public easily play a vital role of “communicator”. Under the background of “decentralization”, everyone is the center. This change leads the fission reaction of communication. Therefore, the public’s choice of information and news is very significant. For instance, since the COVID-19 outbreak this year, “Don’t believe rumors and don’t propagate them” is a choice of the public. Improving one’s own judgment and excluding “News Junk” from the market to create a harmonious environment is a moral criterion that public should abide by. Even in some special periods, the state has criminalized the spread of fake news.^[9]

4.2.2 Holding Inclusive thinking

In news events, there is often a public with radical views. Although the role of “opinion leaders” has been greatly weakened in the new media environment, its guiding role to public opinion still cannot be underestimated. For most of the audience, it’s necessary to think from multiple angles to get a comprehensive understanding. What’s more, adopting more suggestions so that we can help some vulnerable groups make their voice heard with no spare effort on the premise of rational judgment and choice.^[10] This is an efficient way which can improve the recurrent imbalance of public opinion to a large extent.

5. Conclusion

Under the background of the great age of the information, in the face of the spread of public growing demand, both the media and the public should understand correctly the “long tail” and give full play to its positive role. It is used as a way to balance the right of discourse and build a harmonious environment of news, rather than make it to develop in the opposite direction and become the long stick that roils the market.

REFERENCES

- [1] [Beauty] Chris Anderson. Long-tail theory [M]. Beijing: China CITIC Publishing House, 2006.
- [2] Qingguo Guo. Communication tortutorial [M]. Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 1999.
- [3] Duo Chen. "Long tail Effect of News Communication in New Media Environment [J]. Audio ovisual, 2017 (01): 78-81
- [4] Sling Lin. The public opinion dilemma behind the stereotype of "Xuexiang ripping off customers" [J]. News Research Guide, 2021, 12 (03): 73-75
- [5] Liangrong Li .An Introduction to Journalism [M]. Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2018
- [6] Yue Hyang. Construction of We Media Society in Crisis Events [J]. Young reporters. 2013, (15): 28-29
- [7] Shence Lei, Li Yuping. Inquiry into the Long tail Effect of New Media News Communication [J]. News Research Guide, 2018, 9 (3): 155.
- [8] Jing Xia. Long-tail effect of new media news communication [J]. The Media Forum. 2020, 3(15): 39-40
- [9] Chunchi Wang, Yang Di, Yan Zhuo. Study on the Long-tail Effect in New Media News and Information Communication [J]. News Research Guide, 2016 (07): 97
- [10] Weiqiu Chen. Adjustment of Social Distribution of discourse in the New Media Era [J]. International press. 2014, 36(05): 79-91