A Journalistic Professionalism Trial in Short Video Platform: The Case of Pear Video

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Abstract: With the continuous change of media ecology, online short video has risen rapidly and formed an explosive trend since 2016. Taking Pear Video as a case to study, it is constantly transforming and seeking new development opportunities in the exploration of the industries. This case study conducts comprehensive research on it through the research methods of interview and content analysis. Through the research, it is found that the practical cognition of Pear Video and the judgment of news value among practitioners tend to be self-evaluation, while the lack of news elements and the incline of news themes is corresponding to the short video content. Although it seems that the decline of the Pear Video is a failed trial of the integration between the news and short videos, this pioneering media innovation case still has its essential reference and implications for Chinese media research.

Keywords: Pear Video; Journalistic Professionalism; Short Video Platform; News Practice

1. Introduction

Until entering the era of Web 3.0, the rapid development of personalized classification has led to profound changes in the media environment. In 2016, China's short video consumption rose rapidly, known as the "first year of short video"[1]. At the end of the year, Pear Video was officially launched, and its content is mainly "news of current affairs," which fills the blank of the Chinese mainland online media platform and has gained specific social influence. As an online short video media characterized by citizen news("shooter news"　　　　), Pear Video is constantly transforming and seeking new development opportunities during the exploration period. This study takes Pear Video as the research case to explore its practice of journalistic professionalism trial in the short video.

Taking Pear Video as a case to study, this paper interviewed the practitioners of Pear Video and collected the news data on the official platform to investigate how this media carries out news practice from a perspective of journalistic professionalism. We hope that through the above research, we can get implications from the trial of Pear Video in the past five years.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Changing Journalistic Professionalism

Journalistic professionalism is an essential concept in Journalism and the most crucial news professional standard Western journalists abide by. It began to form in the late 19th century, originated in the United States. With the disintegration of political party newspapers, the commercialization and emotionality of media, journalistic professionalism emerged. By the middle of the 20th century, journalistic professionalism developed into a leading discourse for interpreting and judging journalism. In 1947,

the report of the publishing freedom Committee led by Hutchins, A Free and Responsible Press, formally advocated media specialization: "we suggest that our functions be regarded as public services engaged in professional level" [2].

After the development and practice of the news industry in China's media ecology, the concept of journalistic professionalism got a new elaboration.

In addition to professional knowledge, skills, operation process, and evaluation criteria, journalistic professionalism includes a set of beliefs defining the social function of media, a series of professional ethics regulating journalism, and a conscious attitude of serving the public[3].

2.2 The situation in China's news environment

If we take journalistic professionalism from a normative perspective, the status quo of news and journalist practice is obviously on the other side of this study. The current news media focuses on business profit pragmatically, and to a certain extent, it is guided by the "user-oriented." The user's attention and liking for video play a role in rating and rewarding the platform, and the advertising cost of the platform is the core consideration of most media. On the contrary, the ambition of editors or journalists has not become the critical consideration of the media[4].

For the booming short video platform, the quality of news publishing, especially the content presented on its platform, are worthy of studying. Whether the production of news content is professional has become the direction that scholars need to explore and study.

This study was proposed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: In the era of the short video, how does Pear Video carry out news practice in mainland China?

RQ2: What practical implications can we get from the regarded trial of Pear Video?

3. Methodology

Pear Video is to be chosen as a case to study the professional practices of the news in the era of short videos. The case study method is most valuable when the researcher wants to obtain relevant information about the research topic. At the same time, it can provide tremendous detail[5]. This case study gives a detailed description of the whole development process of a media and how it works on the platform.

3.1 The case profile of Pear Video

Founded in 2016 by Qiu Bing, former CEO of The Paper, Pear Video was his new trial in media transformation. Pear Video is the first market-oriented platform to introduce the traditional media audit system into online short video production. However, Pear Video was ordered to complete rectification in 2017 by Beijing Network Information Office, Beijing Public Security Bureau, and Beijing Cultural market administrative law enforcement corps because it had no authority to report current political news. The current situation of Pear Video is grim. On May 8, 2020, the Pear Video app was officially announced to be off the shelves in the whole internet network. The official website is still in regular operation now. From the announcement of this news, netizens began to guess the reasons for removing from online stores, but the official platform of Pear Video gave no response.

3.2 Multiple research methods in case study

To collect research data, we will mainly use the semi-structured interview on the news practitioners of Pear Video in the case study to understand the application of journalistic professionalism practice in Pear Video. In addition to getting first-hand information from interviews, we also collected data on the platform for media content analysis to provide a more objective supplement to the relevant research.

3.2.1 Media content analysis

This study uses fundamental media content analysis to explore the explanations behind the news content of the videos

on the platform. The data collection is based on the Life column ranking list, which has become the closest to the news content during the transformation period of the Pear Video.

3.2.2 Interview

The method of interviewing has long been the primary research method in qualitative research. In the process of an interview, participants could use language and other sign systems in socially situated interactions to reflect and create interactions. It can also go hand in hand with other methods "providing in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs" [6].

The interview content of this research focuses on the practice of journalistic professionalism in Pear video to understand their views on news value and media development from the perspective of internal practitioners. The purpose of using the interview as the research method is to hope that the values of interviewing are not only to analyses words, reports detailed views of informants but also to enable interviewees to "speak in their voice and express their thoughts and feelings."

4. Results

4.1 The professional performance of the news on Pear Video

4.1.1 The main themes of video content

After the content analysis, we count the word frequency of the news tags of each short video, and the results are shown as the keyword cloud figure and themes classification figure.
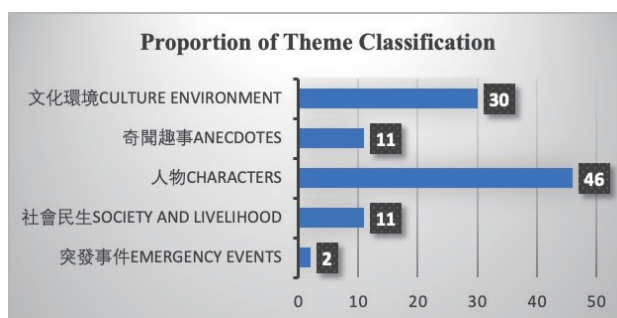

Figure 1 Proportion of the classification

According to Figures 1, the theme of news content of the Pear Video website focuses on people and the cultural environment.

Corresponding to the interview resources, we can find that Pear Video has a strong sense of public responsibility. It pays attention to the social minorities, excavates the news value from social events to help meet the needs of the neglected minorities.

4.2 Practical skills and perceptions of practitioners on Pear Video

4.2.1 Professional background of practitioners

The professional background of most interviewees is related to communication, focusing on journalism, the Internet and new media, television editing, and directing. At the same time, there still exist some practitioners without media-related professional backgrounds. At the same time, the interviewees with relevant professional experiences have a relatively shallow grasp of practical skills related to news and generally master news interview and editing separately, rather than having a systematic knowledge level.

4.2.2 Practitioners' perceptions on news practice

When talking about the professional culture of Pear Video, respondents generally said that the work is highly efficient, and their professional quality and grasp of news value will be greatly improved in a short time.

However, some respondents said that "the content on the platform is highly homogeneous, and it is easy to fall into a fixed and rigid editing mode after long-term contact, which is not conducive to career development due to its low innovation." Due to the controversial news qualification of Pear Video itself (i.e., whether it has the right to interview News), some interviewees said that their identity as a citizen reporter was unstable, and their media environment was more marginalized. By summarizing the practitioners' interview data, we can find that Pear Video, as an information video media, pays more attention to first-hand news collecting. The professional requirements of the work are not high, and the difficulty of the work is also low, which leads to the burnout of the practitioners, hoping to seek new development opportunities.

4.3 Internal audit rules in Pear Video

From the interview of practitioners, we can find that Pear Video does have its internal audit rules, generally including confirmation of authenticity, timeliness, news elements. But the embodiment of the above rules are not apparent in the primary editing work. According to the topic selection, the amount of news does not have a rigorous audit, most of which are censored by shooters or editors. The major news events will have higher authority management to guide and audit:

Excerpt. Qin

Translation: I'll select materials according to my pre-conceived structure, retaining the focus of the conversations and news points for the characters' interviews.

4.4 Extra reward for news production

When there is no fixed evaluation standard for video quality and difficulty, the communication effect affects the news selection behavior of employees to a certain extent.

According to the interview, the salary of interns of Pear Video is calculated using news production. In contrast, the wages of regular employees are calculated by the number of news published on the platform. If the number of videos is more than 10000 or listed on the forum, they will get the corresponding salary reward. For formal employees, the data of video playback has a higher impact on performance:

Excerpt. Zhang

Translation: Interns' pay is determined by the number of news articles, if the amount of broadcast more than a million or more than 10 million, there are different rewards.

5. Conclusion

With the continuous change of media ecology, the online short video has risen rapidly and formed an explosive trend in 2016. As a short video media platform characterized by citizen journalism, Pear Video is constantly transforming and seeking new development opportunities to explore the industries. It conducts a comprehensive analysis on it through the research methods of case study to obtain implications from the media exploration and trial of Pear Video in the past five years.

Although it seems that the abandonment of news content is a failed trial of the integration between the news and short video, we can still obtain implications from this pioneering media innovation case.

From a positive point of view, the transformation and content repositioning strategy of Pear Video also reflects the affirmation and pursuit of journalistic professionalism. Pear Video has gradually been recognized by the Chinese media industries and liked by users in the past five years. From the social perspective, visual information and video information will present a pattern of multiple coexistences. Different ways of information dissemination will meet the needs of other social groups.

As pan and Lu said, the basic idea of journalistic professionalism still has the ability of standardization and liberation today. This vitality comes from the restarting of Journalism and is more rooted in motivation. The professional expectations of media and journalists and the core value of public life as its foundation[3]. The short videos may need more professional news presentations in the future, but the current data shows that life and story are still the backgrounds of short videos. As a product of the transformation from traditional media to new media, Pear Video itself represents the first application of citizen news in China. From the integrated media The Paper to the Pear Video, the media itself is only the carrier of information, and the media ecological situation and transformation behind it are the focus of research.

Therefore, the practice of journalistic professionalism in Chinese media still has a long way to go. However, probably not in the online short video platform, at least for now.

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