

Study of Narrative Communication of Data News-- Taking the Example of The Paper's MEISHUKE

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Abstract: In the era of big data, data is a key factor in news production, and data news has become a "blue ocean" for new media information disseminators to compete for. Although the quality and level of data news report in domestic media are improving year by year, and the audience's demand and satisfaction for data news products are rising; however, the practice of data news report in China is still too much at the level of visualization communication, and no data-driven data news narrative communication has been formed in a complete sense. This paper studies and analyzes the useful exploration of the Paper's "MEISHUKE" Column in the issue of data news narrative communication from three perspectives: narrative structure, narrative time and narrator, in order to enrich the theory of domestic data news narrative communication practice.

Keywords: "MEISHUKE"; data news; narrative communication.

1. Introduction

Data news is a form of news report that uses a data-driven narrative. Compared with traditional news, data news is more diverse in content production and news paradigm expression, and its communication medium is more integrated; high-level data news report is a narrative communication based on data visualization. With the spread and development of big data, cloud computing, VR, AR and other emerging technologies, China's data news is booming, and various news websites and clients have launched relevant columns. Among them, the Paper's "MEISHUKE" is a new media column that combines two functions of data news report and data visualization knowledge teaching and communication, which has significant research value.

2. The "Narrative Structure" of "MEISHUKE" Data News

The "narrative structure" of data news can be analyzed in terms of both stylistic structure and textual structure. The former refers to the construction of data news facts by "intertextuality" the latter refers to the presentation of the narrative within the text, i.e. "how the story is told" and "what story is told".

2.1 The Stylistic Structure of "MEISHUKE" Data News

The study of the stylistic structure of data news refers to how to merge multiple texts together to achieve a combination of news texts. In his research, the scholar Zeng Qingxiang has proposed three kinds of narrative structures: honeycomb, rhombus and diamond structures. [1] The multi-text narrative of data news belongs to the diamond structure, and each cut of the diamond structure represents multiple media. The multi-text narrative of data journalism takes narrative intent as a start point, with different media complementing each other. As we all know, data news is data-driven. The original database has a large amount of data, but also has a wide variety of data, and the value of the data is difficult to estimate, so the succeed of data news is very dependent on the integration ability of the media and the value of the original data. Data news is a non-linear narrative, and its text is arranged in an orderly manner with appropriate charts and videos selected according to the characteristics of the data, rather than a disorganized pile of layouts or fractured jumping lines.

In data news, "MEISHUKE" use the diamond narrative structure as the main stylistic structure, the combination of charts and text as the common form of visual outreach, using text as background material and content extension, using pictures to present the value of data, showing the relationship

between people and things. Here, the role of the visualization chart is to highlight valuable data, tell news stories and present news facts. In order to make the layout neater and tidier, the “MEISHUKE” provides hyperlinked text at the beginning and end of the data news, so that users can simply click on the links to get additional or expanded content to the narrative in the text.

2.2 The Text Structure of “MEISHUKE” Data News

McLuhan said “the medium is the message”. The Paper’s “MEISHUKE” data news integrates different media such as text, chart and sound; the diversified use of media can make the data news text diversify in structure. Different stories, different ways of storytelling, correspond to different multi-media combinations, and thus form a special narrative text structure of data news.

Traditional news report carries factual elements and information fragments of different values in a flat structure of headline, introduction, body, ending and background. In the “MEISHUKE” data news, the news text is no longer confined to the traditional flat structure, but rather derives the “three-dimensional elements” of the news narrative. The main feature is the frequent use of a combination of dynamic and static data visualization, such as the interspersed use of maps, timelines, interactive polls, streaming videos, etc. It is particularly noteworthy that each report of the “MEISHUKE” makes frequent use of pictures. The use of picture series such as “One picture to the end”, “One picture to understand”, “Eight pictures to understand”, and “N pictures to explain” is the most important way of presenting data in the “MEISHUKE”, which also constitutes a characteristic of the structure of the narrative text structure.

3. The “Narrative Time” of “MEISHUKE” Data News

There are three concrete forms of time representation in narratology, namely story time, narrative time, and reading time. Story time is the time when a story is happening; narrative time is the telling time of the story; and reading time is the time when the reader is reading (both natural time and psychological journey); these three forms can be used together in the general narrative process. In data news report, narrative time is often disrupted to compare data and data associations across different timelines, leading to various thought-provoking conclusions.

News narratives are divided into linear narratives and non-linear narratives. Linear narratives mostly follow a chronological order. For events or activities that have a clear temporal element in the development process, the narration only needs to follow the tracks of the main line (time line) to show the complete status. [2] “chronological order, time duration, frequency” are called the three major elements of linear narrative. The chronological order can be divided into “natural order” and “mis-timed order” according to whether the order of textual words is consistent with the story order. The “natural order” refers to the narrative chronological order in which the textual words are organized in the order of the occurrence, development, and conclusion of the story. The “mis-timed order” consists of a “flashback order” in which the outcome or ending of the story is placed first in the sequence, and an “interpolation order” in which the textual words are positioned forward in the normal sequence of the story. The “MEISHUKE” data news often chooses a “natural sequence” to develop a linear narrative, i.e., it follows the traditional “when, where, who, what, why and how” to tell the news, as in its work “2 Months, 13,753 Cases, How COVID-19 Spreads Worldwide?” falls into this category.

“The most significant feature of news words is the non-chronological nature of the constituent elements of news.” [3] The “MEISHUKE” data news also sometimes adopts a “non-linear narrative”. The non-linear narrative reflects the narrator's “data presentation from multiple dimensions” of the news. Under the premise of ensuring the authenticity and objectivity of data journalism, the multi-media arrangement creates different news topics and contents. Users will not need to read the whole text from beginning to end, but select only one dimension that interests them to read, and the information obtained will also not be missing. The change or reorganization of the narrative time of the Paper’s data news plays a great role in the narrative tension of the news, giving users the feeling

of a large time span and multiple narrative timelines going hand in hand, which can increase the attractiveness and readability of data news reports.

4. The “Narrators” of “MEISHUKE” Data News

A narrator is the person who tells the story. The narrator can act as a story character and tell the story in the first person, or he or she can be completely hidden from the reader. According to HeChun, a researcher in news narratology, the creator of the text should not be separated from the narrator. “The news narrator, refers to both the narrator and the writer of the narrative text, and the two overlap in many cases.” [4] The news narrator is actually the overlap between journalists and news organizations. Journalists manage the collection and editing of news, and the market orientation and value orientation of the news organizations they belong to affect the journalists' writing work to a certain extent.

4.1 “The Disappearing Narrator”

Unlike film or literary narrative, the narrator does not appear in a scripted role in the news narrative process, and there is even no specific narrator, that is, the so-called “disappearing narrator”. The narrator of data news has changed with the development and change of technology, and any user feedback or UGC can be transformed into a news source for the data news team under certain conditions. That's why the “MEISHUKE” often holds interactive activities such as surging polls and quizzes online.

In the report “When the Earthquake Happened: what are the common memory scenes”, which is the representative work of the “MEISHUKE”, the technical means of QR code sweeping is used to collect memories of the Wenchuan earthquake from netizens for horizontal comparison and presentation. At this moment, the narrator of data news no longer exists, and the microphone has been handed over to the public, which tells its own story, further confirming the disintegration of the right of words and the characteristics of the era of citizen journalists. [5]

4.2 “The Hidden Narrator”

In news report, the narrator is sometimes hidden. As a data journalist, you need to organize the data news according to certain values, and to filter and check the presentation of data and content. The narrative style of data news is a combination narrative, where the data journalist as a narrator can be hidden, or even manipulate the combination of different media technical expressions to achieve the desired communication effect.

Among the work of “MEISHUKE” data news, “The game: In divorce proceedings, the hidden corner where love is hidden” allows the audience to take on the role of a judge, learn about the case and make appropriate judgments in a dramatic interpretation, and finally present the ending of the real case. In the interactive design of this work, the incorporation of game elements can create a mimetic space with strong participation for the audience, making them become direct news narrators. [6] The producers of “MEISHUKE” data news can not only hide themselves effectively, but also immerse the readers in the data-based drama, thus avoiding the readers to fall into the aesthetic fatigue of graphical data and the “digital gap” problem.

5. Conclusion

Since it was first introduced in 2014, the Paper’s “MEISHUKE” Column has been developed for 9 years, and the level of data news narrative has been at the forefront of data news report in China. However, the interactive narrative of the “MEISHUKE” is not yet perfect, and the proportion of interactive data news report is relatively small, so the potential for “narrative” is yet to be explored in depth. In terms of narrative strategy, the narrative perspective still needs to be expanded, the means of multi-media narrative combination still needs to be enriched, and there is still room for improvement in terms of lack of narrative tension and insufficient storytelling. As a data news column

created by professional new media, “MEISHUKE” also has the function of cloud dissemination of data news teaching knowledge, which is its characteristic and innovation. In the future, this column can further build the communication model, lead the trend of data news, and further make the narrative of data news report from flat to three-dimensional when creating data video, drawing data information long map, and developing interactive “digital reading news” and game-based “immersion news”. providing more useful experiences for the exploration of narrative dissemination and practice of works in domestic data news.

In addition, the Paper’s “MEISHUKE” Column is on the right path of “perfecting its own technology, improving the quality of creation and exploring new resources of data” in terms of data citation, data analysis, data investigation and “crowdfunding”. Faced with the trend of short video and light 3D rendering visualization of information dissemination on mobile platforms, and under the wave of artificial intelligence and ChatGPT technology, the specialized data news industry may also be triggered by the technological revolution to “dramatically change the industry”, either releasing more effectiveness or being “grassroots Self-media assimilation”. In this context, based on the logical paradigm of data news, starting from data, content, design, operation and maintenance, marketing and promotion, it is worthwhile for the industry and academia to consider how to strengthen innovative practices, continue to deepen and expand, ensure the quality of data news, and ensure that the news value and public opinion positions are not lost.

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