A Study on the relationship between constructive news reporting and public anxiety in sudden crisis events — A case study of "Chongqing Mountain Fire"

Yunpei Zhao
Nanchang university,Nanchang 330000,China
Corresponding author E-mail:yunpei129@qq.com

Abstract: When sudden crisis events occur, the existence of constructive news provides a positive and effective way for the media to correctly guide public opinion and perform the function of social governance. This paper intends to use a questionnaire survey to explore whether constructive news has an impact on the public's anxiety psychology. It is found that after the occurrence of sudden crisis events, people's anxiety dissipates significantly due to exposure to constructive news diversion. Based on this. This article concludes that constructive news can build a positive public opinion atmosphere and relieve public anxiety during sudden crisis events.

Keywords: Chongqing hill fire. Anxiety psychology, Constructive journalism, Positive psychology

1 Introduction

In mid-August 2022, mountain fires broke out one after another in Fuling and Nanchuan districts of Chongqing, triggering public anxiety and panic. While reporting the mountain fires, the media focused on using constructive news to alleviate public anxiety in the hope that it could bring more positive influence to the audience. In fact, in recent years, constructive news reporting has received the attention of many scholars. Based on the theoretical framework of positive psychology, it highlights the significance of positive energy narrative and positive experience in promoting social harmony. Constructive journalism advocates constructive and developmental reporting framework, encouraging positive narrative model and realistic orientation in pursuit of problem solving. This paper intends to collect people's attitudes toward the Chongqing hill fires and news guidance through a questionnaire, and use the study of constructive news reporting as a starting point to discover the relationship between media coverage and public emotions.

2 Review of relevant literature

2.1 Research on constructive journalism

The concept of "constructive journalism" originated in the West, and was first proposed by a Danish journalist Ulrike Hagerup in 2008, who advocated that "constructive" should be the leading principle of news value standards. Later, Danish journalism scholar Catherine Guildensted opened up new research horizons and enriched the development of the concept of constructive journalism with the perspective of positive psychology. According to the definition of representative scholars Karen McIntyre and Cathrine Gyldensted, constructive journalism refers to "the use of positive psychology techniques in the production and processing of news, with the aim of creating constructive and positive effects, while maintaining the core function of news ---An emerging form of journalism that provides facts". In general, Western scholars tend to consider constructive journalism as the same line of research as action journalism, relief journalism, peace journalism, public journalism, etc., and see it as a reflection of the realistic path in different contexts of the times.

However, different scholars have different perceptions and understandings of the concept and connotation of "constructive journalism". Some scholars provide a new direction to study the connotation of constructive journalism from a critical perspective, and believe that the core ideological resource of constructive journalism is positive psychology (Hu Baijing, 2019). Some scholars also suggest that the four characteristics of positive, problem-solving, pluralistic and inclusive, and future-oriented are the driving force for the development of the concept of "constructive journalism" (Shi Anbin; Wang Peinan, 2019). At the same time, some scholars have focused on the paradigm change, arguing that the Chinese paradigm of constructive journalism has gradually formed its own unique connotation and development mode in the coordinates of ephemerality and co-occurrence (Qi Yalin, 2020). Some scholars have also talked freely about the conception and practice of constructive journalism. Both studies nourished by psychology, constructive journalism takes motivating audiences and achieving happiness as important goals, and positive emotional placement and infusion of positive emotions are important drivers to improve the tone of news (Chen, Wei, 2019). With the different perspectives of scholars, the theoretical framework of "constructive journalism" is gradually being improved.

Although scholars have different views, they affirm that constructive news has certain value in promoting information governance and increasing media credibility. Nowadays, China's society is in transition, various kinds of social public management problems have emerged frequently, and how to improve social governance has become a major difficulty. While social governance, the value of constructive journalism has gradually emerged, and academics have turned their vision to constructive journalism and social governance research. Some scholars have emphasized that in order to optimize social governance, a new concept of journalism should be introduced to strengthen the symbiosis and collaboration among the government,

media, and the public (Ding Jinnan; Han Hong, 2019). When discussing the value and practice of "constructive journalism," some scholars clearly believe that the conceptual value and practical orientation of "constructive journalism" are conducive to the enhancement of mainstream media's communication, guidance, influence, and credibility in the Internet environment (Tang, Xujun, 2020). Other scholars believe that the promotion and application of constructive journalism can also help promote information governance (Yin, Le; Wang, Danrui, 2020).

2.2 Research on media coverage and public sentiment

After stepping into the era of social media, we find that issues concerning public anxiety psychology in society have taken on new characteristics in the new media environment. Social anxiety issues are not only presented in the network, but also intensified by the network.

In the risk society, public emergencies have become an important cause of social anxiety. Man-made disasters or natural disasters such as earthquakes, influenza, riots, and terrorist attacks can easily trigger social anxiety in a short period of time, or even keep society in a state of anxiety for a long time. Kazuya Nakayachi et al. found that the post-earthquake population showed more than usual anxiety about hazards such as "earthquake" and "nuclear leakage" in their tests, while anxiety about some other hazards decreased (Kazuya Nakayachi: 2014). Yla Tausczik studied the relationship between social media information search and social anxiety after the H1N1 outbreak and found that people used more negative terms such as anxiety and death when talking about influenza in social media, which was significantly correlated with the content of media reports, and this sentiment was also reflected in frequent searches for relevant information (Yla Tausczik: 2012). In the age of social media, many representations of social anxiety are exposed online, and for groups with media dependence. These representations of anxiety make them more likely to feel anxious during emergencies, so it is especially important to pay attention to the mental health of such groups during emergencies.

Domestic research on public anxiety is more clearly oriented, and it is believed that the online media has a boosting effect on the deepening and rendering of anxiety. Some scholars believe that media boosting is an important cause of contemporary social anxiety problems, and the excessive coverage of negative events makes the media create a negative mimetic environment (Wang Qian; Sun Junqing, 2020), and coupled with the mentality that people are always more willing to pay attention to negative news (Shoemaker P J, 1996), social anxiety is formed in a faster way in the online media. In the online communication, besides some entertaining expressions, people tend to focus on some hostile expressions as well, which should give rise to numerous anxieties. Some studies have concluded that hostility is a prominent phenomenon in China's network nowadays, and hostile venting is greatly related to social anxiety (Chen, Long, 2019). In the reality that social groups have a general instrumental and emotional dependence on new media, the flood of information gives rise to cognitive anxiety, the borderless virtual communication space gives rise to emotional anxiety, and the virtual identity in the media gives rise to identity anxiety (Cao Zhihui, 2018).

Reasonable emotional catharsis is naturally one of the ways to alleviate social anxiety, and of course, there are studies that prove that the higher the trust level, the lower the risk perception of the masses, and the social anxiety will be reduced accordingly (Liu, 2011; Zhou, 2012; Zedong, 2013). In today's new media development environment, the development of people's anxiety psychology is still changing, and the popularity of the Internet has also led to the generalization of social anxiety psychology development. With the development of Internet technology and the advent of the era of self-media, the media disseminate information faster and faster, and more and more media are given the opportunity to speak out. However, irresponsible and ulterior media began to spread rumors and anxiety at this time, which to some extent affected the public's physical and mental health. Because of the complexity of the current situation, more consideration should be given to the attributes of the media and the characteristics of the audience in the governance of people's generalized anxiety in the face of the Internet era, and more specificity is needed in proposing governance strategies.

It can be seen from the above literature that in the research on constructive news and social emotion development, more scholars have focused on whether the orientation of news media and the release of constructive news will aggravate the spread of social anxiety when sudden crisis events occur. This study intends to investigate the types and characteristics of constructive news that can trigger public anxiety through questionnaires and textual analysis, and to explore ways to alleviate public anxiety caused by news releases through final generalization and analysis with the help of positive psychology.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research hypothesis

Constructive news releases have a positive impact on the emergence and alleviation of public anxiety when a sudden crisis event arises. And whether public anxiety arises in the post-epidemic era is also related to the amount of frequency of attention to relevant information, people's psychological learned helplessness and people's learned optimism.

H1: There is no correlation between the time of exposure to media information and the level of anxiety of the public.

H2: The more frequently people were exposed to constructive news in the face of disaster information, the lower the degree of people's anxiety.

H3: The more critical people are of the media information they are exposed to, the lower the level of anxiety.

3.2 Research design

In order to demonstrate the relationship between constructive news and social mass anxiety

in sudden crisis events, this paper will use a questionnaire to measure the frequency of users' media use, information access, and use the Lister scale to detect the level of people's anxiety and the audience's attitude toward constructive news. In this study, questionnaires have been distributed to 195 people, and the relationship between constructive news and public psychology has been found by analyzing the results of the questionnaires.

In this study, the two hypothetical variables of social media use intensity (H1) and social media use preference (H2) were downscaled into two dimensions of frequency of use and access to information, and the factor of "social media use and psychological state" was added to study the relationship between constructive news and people's anxiety.

In order to obtain the real psychological situation of people before and after exposure to constructive news, a five-point Likert scale was used, with a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4 Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Data Cleaning

This research study was conducted on the general public, including audiences of all ages, and explored the psychological anxiety of the public in society caused by the mountain fires in Chongqing and whether constructive news had a role in alleviating public anxiety. For the need of epidemic prevention and control policy, the author used Questionnaire Star for questionnaire design and distributed 195 questionnaires (144 valid questionnaires) through online distribution.

4.2 Sample description

A total of 195 questionnaires were collected in this survey, and 144 valid questionnaires were screened according to the question "Are you concerned about the mountain fires in Chongqing". Most of the audiences were 19-40 years old, accounting for 96.6%. Among them, most of them pay attention to the mountain fire information for less than 30 minutes (82.64%), but 34.03% of them are exposed to constructive news about the mountain fire less than once a week. A 56.25% of the population believes such news in most cases.

After being exposed to information about the mountain fires, a small number of people believed that they were frightened and anxious, but after being exposed to constructive news. They believed that their communication anxiety was somewhat relieved. It can also be inferred that constructive news has a more significant effect on relieving public anxiety.

4.3 Research findings

From the descriptive analysis, the role of the two microblogs is obvious among the

information access channels, accounting for more than 60%. In this volcano event, 82.6% of people spent less than 30 minutes of attention to understand, and more than 34% of people said they were exposed to constructive news about the volcano no more frequently than once a week, indicating that constructive news is still not enough to reach the public in disaster events.

Through Pearson correlation analysis, H1 holds that there is no significant correlation between media exposure time and audience's anxiety (r=0.152, p=0.070). h2 holds that there is a significant relationship between exposure to constructive news and anxiety (r=0170, p=0.002**). H3 holds that there is a significant correlation between people's critical ability and anxiety level (r=0152, p=0.000**). Therefore, constructive news reading and improving the critical ability of the population can effectively alleviate the anxiety caused by disaster news.

5 Summary and Reflection

5.1 Focus on the real problem: social anxiety caused by the disaster

Starting from August 18, mountain fires broke out one after another in Fuling and Jiangjin districts of Chongqing, triggering national concern. After a sudden crisis event like the mountain fires in Chongqing, people's anxiety and panic are extremely easy to generate, and people with strong empathy will even have a similar painful psychology as people in the disaster area. After the mountain fire, local rescuers quickly set up a rescue command and began to do their best to save the lives and property of the affected people, while numerous media outlets began to relay news stories, passing on information about the disaster. In the spread of the video of experts interpreting the mountain fires, people were generally more concerned about when the fires would be extinguished and how people's lives and properties would be protected. As the rescue activities proceeded in an orderly manner, the mainstream media also paid attention to the changes in people's psychology while releasing the news about the disaster and tried to answer such questions in their follow-up reports.

In fact, the root cause of social anxiety caused by the mountain fire disaster is the survival anxiety caused by the drastic change in people's living environment. In constructive journalism, positive psychology is the theoretical source of constructive journalism. In order to actively understand the public's thoughts, ensure good public participation, and reconcile the contradictions of various parties, mainstream media focus on constructive journalism when reporting news about the disaster, and use positive psychology in their reporting, rendering and spreading positive emotions through media texts. It is expected to alleviate the public's anxiety and achieve the important goal of helping the public to build a positive psychology. By following the principles of positive psychology, the public can be relieved and guided by objective facts.

At a time when the mountain fires were severe and urgent, and the difficulty of rescue was gradually increasing, the news media were trying to do a good job of soothing the people and mobilizing their emotions while disseminating the disaster situation. While reporting

the mountain fire outbreak to rescue in Chongqing, constructive news also plays the role of guiding the public's psychology and relieving their anxiety. The People's Daily pointed out that "guarding the mountain city and moving the whole country, this is the hot-blooded hero of the top, this is the Chinese people who cannot be crushed and rise up since". When reporting on the disaster rescue, media reports not only focus on the hard work of the official rescue team, but also on the surrounding villagers and enthusiastic citizens of the volunteer team and the many ordinary disaster relief gathered. This sparked even more admiration and compassion for the relief workers from the general public. While praising the rescue team members, the constructive news release is not only ironing out the hearts of the people through warm writing. But also doing a good job as a "coordinator", providing a sense of presence and companionship for the ordinary people who cannot participate in the rescue. In the words full of warmth and strength, people can feel more resolute determination to unite against the disaster and protect the safety of the masses.

5.2 Guiding social discussion: emphasizing public participation

Constructive journalism should emphasize public participation on the basis of ensuring the professionalism of the content. When faced with a sudden crisis like the mountain fires in Chongqing, an overly closed approach to social governance is bound to show the contradictions of insufficient resources, lagging information, and slow response. In order to reverse this situation, more respect for the expression of public discourse must have its justification.

While emphasizing the right of public discourse, the media remains in a dominant position. In news releases, the expression of public opinion is particularly important. It is the responsibility of the media to ensure the smooth flow of public opinion. The focus of constructive news is on seeking public interests, proposing strategies to solve problems based on the identification of problems, and responding to public concerns with constructive solutions, which is what the public would like to see after constructive news is released. In addition, constructive news also needs to give more consideration to social governance issues such as "promoting public discussion" and "enhancing social cooperation", and make more reasonable predictions on the social opinion environment and the direction of public opinion, so as to better play the role of psychological regulation for the public in major crisis events. In the aftermath of the Chongqing hill fire, the public has been very concerned about the public's reaction to the fire.

In the aftermath of the Chongqing fires, the source of public anxiety was the fear of survival caused by the outbreak of the fires, and the mainstream media chose to adopt a constructive news reporting mode when reporting on the situation of the fires. At 17:00, The People's Daily released the news that "there are no casualties and the surrounding people have been relocated", which gave people a peace of mind and helped thousands of worried people get out of the trap of anxiety, so that people's anxiety was significantly relieved.

Actively constructing public dialogue and guiding public discussion is one of the purposes of constructive journalism and one of the ways for the media to accomplish social governance

as a leading public opinion maker. Promoting public participation, guaranteeing the correct expression of public opinion and encouraging positive and active discussions can effectively reduce the anxiety of the people concerned. After a sudden crisis event, the voice and encouragement of mainstream media, the release of the masses' enthusiastic discussion and positive expression of opinions on the disaster can truly achieve the purpose of soothing people's emotions.

5.3 Mobilizing social emotions: feeling the determination of disaster relief

In this year when the epidemic has not yet dissipated, the occurrence of a major sudden crisis event, the mountain fire, has become a source of panic in the hearts of people in Chongqing. In such a context, the breeding and spreading of negative public sentiment seems to be the norm. The public is influenced by overly negative attitudes, which inevitably leads to disappointment and irritation with society in the long run. When this happens, it is also essential for the media to publish emotional mobilization of positive emotions. Emotional mobilization inspires emotional resonance among the masses, unites national emotions in reporting on disaster relief, and brings together the expectations of all people in the experiences of small people. In today's media communication environment, attention to emotional communication is the main feature of online communication, and the release of constructive news is of great significance in terms of public opinion guidance and emotional mobilization. In order to relieve people's anxiety and spread positive emotions, the tone of constructive news reports is mostly bright and positive, so that readers can be full of energy even after reading them. The People's Daily released a poster about the mountain fire rescue in Chongqing, "Battle Mountain Fire", in which "red is the plundering mountain fire, blue is the headlights of the people fighting the fire", and issued the phrase "these people are as solid as the Great Wall, this city is a clang of temperament" to pay tribute to the heroes. Subsequently, major media vied with each other to forward aerial photos of the dueling scenes of the Jinyun Mountain Fire in Beibei, Chongqing, praising the determination of the people to rescue the city through the spread of the warm "healing system". In the coverage of this mountain fire crisis, the language of constructive journalism built strong faith for the public and conveyed the emotional ties of overcoming the hardships together. The ordinary but brave people who rescued the fires were able to tighten their strings in a time of crisis, showing the unity of the Chinese people in their bones in the face of danger.

According to Dayan and Katz, media events are a huge symbolic system, the production of events is also related to the art of television, journalism and narrative art, and can provide "insight into the aesthetic quality of television production". In this case, the news coverage of the mountain fires highlighted the Chinese people's morale and the unity of the rescue workers and the general public in the event of a sudden crisis. As a media event, the report of the fire was also disseminated through artistic narrative means such as pictures, videos and songs, which were delivered to every audience who cared about the fire in a networked way, and played an important role in relieving people's psychology and anxiety.

In this paper, we analyze the impact of constructive news, and under the guidance of positive psychology and learned optimism. We still believe that constructive news release can alleviate people's anxiety to a certain extent. However, due to the low sample size of this survey, the research results are inevitably a bit juvenile. In future research, the author will try to overcome the problems of low total sample size and unbalanced sample proportion in this study, and try to obtain more informative and mature research results.

References

[1]. Le, M.M. (2015). What is slow journalism?Journalism Practice, 9(2), 138-152.

[2]. Hermans,L., & Drok, N. (2018). Placing Constructive Journalism in Context. Journalism Practice,1-16.

[3]. Bill, R. K. (2013). The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the PublicShould Expect. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 78(4), 851-853.

[4]. Hermans L.Gyldensted C. (2019).Elements of constructive journalism: Characteristics,practical application and audience valuation. Journalism, 20(4) , 535,551.

[5]. Seligman,M,E. Csikszentmihalyi. (2011).Positive psychology: An introduction. American Psychologist 55(1) , 5 ,14.

[6]. Peterson,C. Seligman, M. E. P. (2004).Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification. New York: Oxford University Press.

[7]. Martin. M. W. (2007). Happiness and Virtue in Positive Psychology. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 37(01), 89-103.

[8]. Zhang Zili. (2005). Media coverage and public opinion in public health emergencies: the case of"Sudan Red". Journalism University, 19-22. (in Chinese)

[9]. Chen Kaixin. (2020). Textual construction and production reflection of constructive journalism: the report of the new crown pneumonia epidemic by WeChat public number "Freezing Weekly" as an example. Young Journalists, 56-57. (in Chinese)

[10]. Wang Qian, Sun Junqing. (2020). The Formation and Diversion of Social Anxiety in the Media Perspective. Journal of Beijing Union University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition),34-40. (in Chinese)

[11]. Sui Yan, Li Yan. (2012). On the socialization of personal emotions in the era of group communication. Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China), 34(12), 10-15. (in Chinese)

[12]. Yan Fang, Yan Huan. (2017). Social memory reconstruction of reverence in the communication of sudden public events. Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China) , 39(02), 55-58. (in Chinese)

[13]. Xie Shiyu, Jiang Haoran,Yang Xiao Guang. (2021). Analysis of the characteristics and evolution of public opinion in major public health emergencies: an example of the New Crown Pneumonia outbreak. Shanghai Preventive Medicine, 33(03), 203-211.(in Chinese)

[14]. Guo Yi.(2020) Constructive journalism: conceptual tracing, theoretical reflection and dialogue between China and the West[J]. Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China),42(01):72-77. (in Chinese)

[15]. Shi Anbin, Wang Peinan.(2019). Constructive journalism:Historical tracing, conceptual evolution and global practice. Journalist, (09), 32-39+82.(in Chinese)