

On Collective Aphasia of Grassroots Microblogs

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Abstract: The microblog provides a convenient way to promote the right to speak for the mass society. In fact, under the game of business interests, the operators of the websites strengthen the monitoring of the microblogs through manual and technology control, which gradually erases the enthusiasm of grassroots microblogs, causing the collective aphasia of the grassroots. The grassroots microblogs turn into the bystanders and followers of the elite microblogs, and the discourse right of the grassroots needs to get security. Therefore, grassroots microblogs need to expand the space of the right to speak for the grassroots.

Keywords: Grassroots microblogs; Microblog messages; Information dissemination; Discourse right; Elite microblogs; Weibo.com.

1. Introduction

When microblogs are developing in full swing, some believe that the grassroots finally found their right to speak on the ground that people are using microblogs everywhere and sending messages every moment through various means, which has increasingly impacted more people. However, as long as we analyze carefully, we will find that the grassroots microblogs are turned into passive onlookers and followers of elite microblogs because the operators of the websites strengthen the monitoring of the microblogs through manual and technology control, which gradually erases the enthusiasm of grassroots microblogs by the stimulate of the commercial interests.

According to the China Internet Network Information Center, up to December 2021, the number of mobile Internet users in China had reached 1,029 million, up 42.98 million over December 2020. The proportion of China's netizens accessing the internet via their mobile phones amounted to 99.7% [1] Mobile Phone becomes an extension of the internet, which extends into the pockets of everyone. This directly stimulates the microblog development in full swing as a new medium. The scale of monthly active users of China's microblog users reached 573 million, accounting for 55.5% of netizens. [2]

The future development of microblog trends can be predicted to become more apparent. Regarding the popularity of sina.com, tencent.com, sohu.com, and netease.com, four major portals microblogs, sina.com is ahead of the competition in the areas. [3] Based on these factors, we can take the Sina microblog (weibo.com, similarly after this) as an example to analyze how grassroots microblogs gradually turned into passive onlookers and followers of the elite microblogs.

2. Information Release: One Bark Dog Sets All the Streets A Bark

McLuhan pointed out that any medium is an evolutionary and biological fission process. It opens the door to the perception and new areas for human beings. [4] [22] Regarding morphology, a microblog is a medium fusion of interpersonal communication network, group, and mass communication. By microblogging, everyone can become the information

publisher, the recipient, and the sharer. The microblog recipients are relative individuals or groups with common interests, which have the characteristics of the peer-to-peer and group-to-group. If a microblog has many followers, the information it publishes will exponentially grow, which has the features of mass communication.

Microblog information dissemination has the following features: immediate, diversity, and simplicity, which meet the strong demand of internet users who want to access real-time news. The dissemination of the microblog features the characters of 4A: Anytime, Anywhere, Anyone, and Anything, strengthening the civil discourse right for grassroots.

However, microblogs' rapid dissemination of information is at the expense of sacrificing the source's reliability. Microblogs belong to an unofficial nature without insurance reliable information. In contrast, the statement released by the professional media must be verified to ensure reliability, so the speed of information dissemination would naturally be slower than the new medium. The microblog reports will not be as professional as traditional media reports; however, they can often provide perspective or details for the professional media reports. The views related to its stand, field of view, and personal value judgments. These multi-angle coverages not only make up for the inadequate of professional media but also provide more fresh, direct, and rich information for the audience.

In the microblog information communication process, people are involved in the dialogue of witnesses, analysts, and suppliers with background knowledge. A microblog drives several microblogs to implicate various information and gradually merge into the event stream. The most fragmental, discrete report contains some incidental emotional elements of the user. Accumulated bit by bit, it may even constitute the overall mood of the event. The rapid transmission of microblog information is well known as what is said in the Chinese proverb, "One bark dog sets all the streets a bark." The public is not involved in the attention of the news events, and it just passively reflects the microblog environment to some degree.

The microblog also led to an increase in active blog users. The happening blog users can be attributed to two factors: 1) Further improvement of Internet penetration and 2) The leading role of microblogs. With the development of Web 2.0, microblogs integrated the advantage of blogs, BBS, and

instant messages connected with mobile phones, which are increasingly popular in all ages. Active interaction, low threshold to the users, and convenient updates and other features make microblog users more active than the traditional blog. Moreover, a high degree of source-receiver heterophily, often present in the diffusion of innovations since new ideas often come from people quite different from the receiver, creates unique problems in obtaining effective communication. [5]

3. The Content: Full of Homogenous and Inferior Messages

Weibo.com integrates a variety of platforms via an open API interface, through which it can release real-time microblog information through web pages, client software, mobile messages, WAP, binding IM tools, etc. In addition, the microblog synchronization function can simultaneously release a message in other related microblogs. When all the information is gathered in the microblog database, all users can view it openly. As the information on the microblog updates every minute, the microblog becomes a powerful, immediate, and efficient self-medium, spreading messages from one point to another. "The strength and energy of hybridized media release new as atomic fission with a huge nuclear energy." [4]²⁶⁶ However, we should know that easy operation and low threshold to the users will result in poor quality messages, widespread and uncurbed.

The easy operation mechanism and casual recording mode of the microblog inspire the user's personal expression desire. Some people think that every microblog user is likely to become a reporter at the scene of the incident, who can quickly release live coverage promptly and timely. However, do grassroots microblogs have so much power? Many articles boast the microblog advantage and benefits, more like the public relations articles released in a decorated face out of the media. In China, microblog is still a source of entertainment for the grassroots. When a user is registered on weibo.com, the website automatically recommends some elite microblogs for the newcomer to follow. In this way, at the beginning, the grass-roots had passively become the elite microblog's followers.

Many grassroots microblogs rarely publish newsworthy information; instead, they delight in reshipping those funny texts or pictures. Such a large number of copies of the data meet the unreal sense of participation for the grass-roots. And those elite microblogs scarcely forward the grassroots information. When the grassroots deliver the messages of the elites, they usually add some piece comments, with an entertainment attitude. On the "Grassroots Popularity List" of Weibo.com, the top three are "Gag Selection," "Fashion & Love," and "Best Quotation," etc. Most of the contents are trifle and innocuous words.

Since the low threshold, randomness, and word limitation, the microblog can be used as a medium to provide clues of unexpected events. However, the news could be more complete and in-depth coverage, for its range of social communication functions is thus significantly reduced. Publishing information with unknown truth may lead to rumors spread. Microblog can spread breaking news events or rumor around the globe quickly. As Benjamin pointed out, modern technology allows the works to be shared in countless copies. In this way, authenticity, originality, uniqueness, and authority will be lost, which causes real works of art not to be

touched. Therefore, the artwork repeatedly devaluated with the halo around it disappearing. [6]

From one perspective, the emergence of microblogs shares some power with professional media organizations, which disseminate information from the center to the individual. One of the measurable indicators of the information dissemination capabilities of microblogs is the forwarding times. The forwarded number determines the length of the message links of the microblog, which achieves the effect of value-adding by delivering the rewritten message of the mass of information. The users are both information agencies and audiences in a sense. However, most grassroots microblogs need more originality and practical value. They wish to be concerned but often forward elite microblogs and become passive information forwarders and the yes-men of elite microblogs. And some grassroots usually deliver those funny microblogs to amuse themselves.

4. Low Threshold: A Result Driven by The Interest of Business

The microblog has the three most attractive points: First, simplistic. Microblogs are mainly used as short messages to publish, so they are straightforward. The second is of cross-media. Microblogs can be issued via applications, websites, browsers installed plug-ins, installed sharing buttons on blogs, etc., which are pervasive and ubiquitous in various forms of communication media. The third is the amplification effect. Due to the synchronization of share and search, the propagation velocity and the forward function grow at an exponential rate, but the quality of the content is still rough.

Weibo.com operator is exploring the commercial way. Microblogs are based on the vast number of users, and the user's enthusiasm is also essential. The flow of information and attention generates Microblog commercial value. For example, on the right-hand column of the personal microblog home page, there is a button "microblog on your phone." The users can update the microblogs by sending mobile phone SMS through China Mobile, China Unicom, or China Telecom. The open platform of weibo.com also encourages people to jointly develop microblogs, such as chat robots, browser tools, blog plugs, webmaster tools, games, software, etc. Weibo.com also provides the user with a paid service for those who wish to get more attention.

In addition, weibo.com has launched "The Hot Topic List" on the homepage (*The number in the brackets refers to the number of occurrences*). "The Hot Topic List" of May 13, 2022 is "RNG rematch"(11.23million), "Wei Dongyi refutes the rumor"(4.42 million), "14 years on and we've seen more than home rebuilding" (2.78 million), "Chinese scientist discovers a new drug to treat Covid-19" (2.44 million), "RNG players have posted blogs"(1.64million), "Unmarried mother broke up with no baby and regretted being rejected after one year" (1.18 million), "Begging 6 yuan breakfast fee for half an hour and get 300 by the roadside" (1.18 million), "Riot Games"(1.12 million). Among them, some hot topics are significant events, and some issues are advertising smartly inserted into the hot topics. In addition, the videos, pictures, and related blog sites also bring much traffic to sina.com. As long as microblogs can attract internet users long-term, they will convert the vast flow into rich niches, such as online games, reading, shopping, and other advertising profits.

Focusing on celebrities, the entertainment industry, and the sports community, some media, associations, and businesses

all emphasize the promotional platform of microblogs. The entertainment industry needs many fans, the sports community needs many sports lovers, the media needs many readers, and businesses need many customers. So, releasing information can get a lot of audiences concerned. *Southern Weekend*, *New Weekly*, *Nanfang City Daily*, and other well-known media in China have also opened microblogs and set forward shortcut buttons. The users can forward these links to the pages through microblogs and then read them on the phone. It is more personalized than the previous media.

“You should be able to see very clearly then that social media offers a gigantic opportunity for any business owner to promote their products to exactly the market they want to reach.”[7] For the point of commercial, to attract a significant number of users, it must lower the threshold to attract the most widely used users to read microblog information. A few words, simple sentences, or some pictures are always on the microblog. Because of the lower threshold and cost of the network, the user can easily register as a microblog user and become a part of the information producers or the information forwarders. This resulted in the microblogs being swamped with much redundant information. The lack of regulation may well imperil the discourse rights of the vulnerable groups.

5. Instant Search: Neglects The Right to Search for Grass-roots

As of December 2021, the user size of search engines in China had reached 829 million, up 59.08 million from December 2020, taking up 80.3% of the national total. Search engines have become the primary access for netizens to the internet. [1]29 And the traditional status of the internet portal shifts from news portals to search engine sites. The access to life information mainly depends on the internet and search engines. As microblog search engines emphasize precision and marketing effectiveness, they greatly enhance marketing microblogs' value.

Undoubtedly, the search service is one of the most essential services in the network. In the microblog, search services were also highly integrated. The most noticeable feature of the microblog search engine is the real-time search. If you want to know about COVID-19, type “COVID-19” in a microblog, and you will get hundreds of topics on the latest coronavirus news, which ordinary search engines can not obtain. For example, search for “children left behind” (*the children staying in the rural area whose parents are out to work in the cities*), and you can search hundreds of microblogs. The microblog search engine has the advantage of “real-time” “right now.” However, Baidu and Google’s search engines currently do not have this advantage.

Instant search functions of microblogs may produce a new profit model. Business users are the vital advertising source for Weibo.com. It helps the users to communicate with customers with “popular search keywords” and supplies authentication services to cultivate the brand. Based on an online advertising service with instant search, it may accurately indicate a user's intention and preference. Because the microblog reveals the preferences, lifestyle, and brand attitude of the consumers, advertisers can precisely match the ads by analyzing the data of the microblogs. Weibo.com search service has two purposes: One is instant information search; the other is for commercial.

However, for commercial reasons, microblogs can take some complex and subtle technical means to screen the

instant search results of some topics. In theory, the users need to enter the keywords, and they can quickly get the information they need. Still, the profit-oriented microblog search engines will take technology to shield some information that the public should learn about. The network and the blog rely on its search and continuous link; therefore, if the search engine is controlled to screen insufficient information in case the internet users click harmful microblogs.

Therefore, the rights to be aware and publish of the microblog users can be controlled secretly by search engines. With the rapid development of internet technology, internet technology is becoming more and more specialized. The masses are increasingly challenged to understand how the latest technology controls search engines and their right to know is limited. The search engines are designed to crawl on the elite microblogs and put them on top lists while laying the grassroots microblogs behind the elite microblogs. Preventing the elite microblogs from marginalizing the grassroots microblogs is critical.

6. Ranking Lists: Marginalize Grassroots Microblogs Further

The transmission is a powerful commodity because it produces surplus value (seen in this light, it is the same as any other commodity) and manufactures a symbol and image whose significance will shape people's awareness. The popularity value and fan rankings can attract everyone's attention, and the overall value of the popularity list is based on the number of microblogs launched. The more the fans listed on the microblogs, the higher degree of the bloggers are concerned. The celebrity microblog has the most prominent effects of mass communication; for example, Kai-fu Lee's microblog has about 48.70 million fans, Hanhan's microblog has over 45.30 million fans, Li Ziqi has approximately 26.92 million fans, and Eileen Gu has over 6.82 million fans by May 15th, 2022.

Theoretically, the relationship between the microbloggers and followers seems equal. You can take the initiative to follow others; others may also follow you. The information flows rapidly between the followers and the microblogger, and the microblogs become a platform for exchanges and mutual assistance. Whenever the question was asked, his followers would reply. However, the relationship between elite microblogs and grassroots microblogs is not rooted in reality; the concerns between them are not peer-to-peer or interactive, but in a unidirectional model – Is the grassroots microblogs follow the elite microblogs and the elite microblogs scarcely concern the grassroots microblogs.

“Popular Event List” is the leaderboard according to the number of fans or forwarding times. The leaderboards reflect the influence of the microblogs. In the leading position of “The Popular Event List,” “Weibo.com” ranks first, and Tencent microblog ranks second, but Sina microblog and Netease microblog are a far cry from them. At 22:00 on the evening of July 4, 2010, Germany won Argentina in the World Cup; the related message on weibo.com is 1.93 million; on Tencent microblog, it is 445,000; and on sohu.com and netease.com, it is less than 100,000, which are not in the same grade of magnitude compared with sina.com and tencent.com microblogs. [8] Of course, the microblog operations of tencent.com, sohu.com, and netease.com were ceased for their bad business.

This ranking list is usually an agenda with artificial factors. The keywords in “Microblog Square” are mainly the ones the microblog operator considers essential. It specifically includes “Topic List in One Hour,” “The Popular Standings,” and “The Popular Standings for Grassroots.” When the user opens the personal microblog home page, he will see “Hot Topic List,” “The Most Interested People,” and “Popular User Recommended.” The first and the third items direct the visitors to the elite microblogs, while many visitors scarcely notice the grassroots blogs.

Therefore, although the threshold is low, even if the public can quickly register the microblog, they act as spectators for their poor accomplishments. Microblogs have the power of influence because they record the present, a passive medium. The opportunity to present for microblogs is far less than the elite microblogs. Therefore, the grassroots microblogs will be submerged into the masses even if they have sharp judgment. Given this, the grassroots microblogs appear to increase their right to speak, but the elite microblogs still exclude them.

Elite microblogs are sustained by their solid powers and the website’s technical support. In contrast, grassroots microblogs are often personal electronic message boards to relieve emotions. As grassroots microblogs are limited in time and energy, they find it hard to produce high-value or highly creative content, thus becoming the forwarders and followers of elite microblogs. As Vincent Mosco said, the power class also affected the contemporary workplace. Numerous studies have pointed out that the large-scale service sector has differentiated into two distinct types... Well-trained individuals use information technology to make their work full of information and colorful, while more people are the machines taking care of automatically working machines.

7. Conclusion: Microblog Have Muted the Voice of Grassroots

American scholar Neil Postman thought, “Like the brain, every technology has an inherent bias. It is predisposed to be used in certain ways and not others within its physical form. Only those who know nothing of the history of technology believe that a technology is entirely neutral.” [9] As a kind of new media, the microblog is a more positive way to know about the world and get involved in the world. However, it didn’t give the deserved right to the grassroots to speak. Some users have even found themselves wholly sidelined. As the microblog site operators pursue interests, the microblog operators strengthen the monitoring through manual and technology control. It erased the enthusiasm of grassroots microblogs and caused aphasia at the grassroots. Consequently, the grassroots microblogs are turned into

passive onlookers and followers of elite microblogs.

8. Profile of the Author

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9. Note

This paper is the research result of the projects “Study on Literary Aesthetics and Creation Mechanism” (Project Number: 21Y022) of the Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education Research Center of Sichuan Province 2021, “Innovative Research on Literary Theory Teaching to Enhance Practical Character”(No.MBXH23YB154) of the Sichuan Association for Non-Government Education 2023, and “Research on Innovative Research on Literary Theory Teaching under the Background of New Liberal Arts” of Sichuan University of Communications 2023.

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