News products from the perspective of metaverse: Social motivation, practical model and conceptual change

Manning Zheng
Posts and Telecom Press, Beijing 100000, China. Email: cmgc@xhby.net

ABSTRACT

News products from the perspective of metaverse are the result of the interaction between technology, news production and people’s needs, which turns news consumption from the information consumption of the audience’s real identity to the immersive scene consumption of digital separation. This paper summarizes four practical models of news products from the perspective of metaverse, analyzes the innovation of traditional news value concept by metaverse technology, and makes a cold reflection on news products from the perspective of metaverse.

Keywords: metaverse; virtual reality; news production; mixed reality; immersion theory; news products

1. Introduction

McLuhan put forward the conclusion that “Media is the extension of human beings”. He believes that any media is nothing more than the expansion or extension of human feelings and senses[1]. From the evolution process of the whole media industry, technology makes the presentation content and mode of media evolve from one-dimensional, two-dimensional to multi-dimensional, and the promotion of virtual reality makes the media industry enter the 3D and even 4D era. With the help of extended reality technology, which provides immersive experience and digital twin technology to generate a mirror image of the real world, the concept of traditional news may be completely changed metaverse technology eliminates the fatalistic restrictions of time and space on news, and maximizes the existence dimension and sensory dimension of news. At the same time, virtual reality and other technologies can restore real social scenes and reconstruct new social media communication norms[2], so as to enhance the authenticity of the virtual world.

In a sense, the metaverse makes news really change from “tricks” assisted by entertainment or games to new forms of news products, and realizes the transformation of three paradigms of news production, distribution and consumption and the innovation of underlying logic. A few years ago, virtual reality technology and news “hard connection” virtual reality news put more emphasis on providing the audience with the simulation of human senses such as vision, hearing, touch and taste, which is a low configuration version of virtual reality. After the emergence of metaverse, virtual reality news pursues the creation of a real three-dimensional world. News consumers can break through the time and space
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constraints, immerse themselves in the news scene and participate in the news in a certain role. It can even be said that the metaverse is the ultimate form of media, that is, as a link connecting all human social relations, it has realized a new iteration technically and provided a new scale, new content and new paradigm for human virtual survival.

2. The social motivation of the rise of news products from the perspective of metaverse

2.1. People’s demand for news content changes from “information” to “scene” and “environment”

In essence, the development history of journalism is the evolution history of media technology, and McLuhan’s assertion of “media is information” itself emphasizes the shaping of social individual survival mode and social existence mode by media technology. News relies on technology to constantly carry out morphological innovation, and people use media to constantly eliminate physiological and sensory restrictions. Traditional news meets the basic demand of people for information security—the information level, which is a static and one-dimensional information supply. The information levels, patterns and paradigms provided by new media technology, especially metaverse technology, far surpass traditional media and stimulate people’s new consumer demand scenes, participation, interaction, even returning to the news scene and reconstructing the news environment meet Maslow’s needs for higher social and self-realization. An era of “viewing” (information dissemination) is coming to an end, while an era of “experience” and “action” (virtual practice) has just begun[3]. Metaverse technology will continuously extend the freedom of “human extension”—build the metaverse of human existence with the development of virtual reality technology, and then build the “heart world” within social individuals[4].

2.2. People’s demands for news consumption turn to “presence” voice and more sensory mobilization

In the era of traditional media, the transmission and reception sides are a one-way communication relationship, and “what to spread” and “how much to spread” are determined by the transmitter, which is an unequal communication relationship. With the advent of the Internet era, the audience has become “moving people” (active + mobile), and the public has begun to master a certain “right to speak”. After “knowing” is satisfied, they have to “speak”, question and follow up, and even ask for “presence”. Virtual reality and other technologies based on the perspective of metaverse can restore “presence” to the greatest extent, and the new era of news production is coming. The audience is not only eager to enter the previously inaccessible news sites such as satellite launch and natural disasters, but also hope to participate in various press conferences, parties, sports events, etc. At a close distance, the audience hopes to “be present” and choose the observation object independently, rather than limiting their own news code by lens and text. At the same time, the audience hopes to break through the physical restrictions. When consuming information, have the perspective of God like having super power, and can choose the perspective of observation at will. For example, the tracking of players and football on the court is even better than that on the real scene of the ball game. In other words, the audience wants to be “present” to build “news reality”, have their own initiative, and then freely expand their senses.

2.3. Interaction and social interaction run through news production, distribution and consumption, gradually eliminating the boundary between the three

At present, the Internet content is presented through text, pictures, sound and video. The way is relatively single, the user experience is monotonous, and the distance between people and things is very long. Even with the rise of social networks, users communicate with acquaintances or strangers through text, voice and video, and display themselves in the personal space of social platforms.
However, the distance between people is still far away, which is incomparable with the effect of face-to-face communication in real life. Since 2015, there has been an upsurge of virtual reality news at home and abroad. There has been a lot of exploration from technology upgrading to equipment investment to news production, and a series of landmark works have been produced, but the fever soon subsided. With the rise of the concept of metaverse, virtual reality news has become the focus again. The virtual reality news in the metaverse era not only gives the audience an immersive sense of “presence”, but also emphasizes richer and more systematic interaction. This interaction includes the interaction between the audience and the regular reporting object and the interaction with the news scene. The interaction between the audience and regular reporting objects means that the audience can freely choose which perspective and order to see the news scene and reporting objects. The interaction between the audience and the news scene means that the audience can interact with the things and characters on the news scene, and even with other audiences on the news scene. These themselves may also become news, and the “presence” of news consumption not only breaks the restrictions of space and time between the audience and the news, but also connects online (between the audience) and offline (between the audience and the news scene), which is actually an important way to connect the virtual world and the real world. The subject object relationship between news producers and consumers is mutual, and the boundaries of production, distribution and consumption are gradually eliminated in the metaverse.

3. Four practical models of news products from the perspective of metaverse

The core of the metaverse is to transcend virtual space and real space and effectively integrate them. In the metaverse world, everything can be virtual, simulated and reproduced. News events, as facts that have occurred in offline space, can be mirrored and returned in the metaverse space although the metaverse technology is still under exploration, it is a watershed for the whole news communication industry. It will realize the advancement of news products in an immersive narrative mode of real and virtual interaction. Combined with the practical cases of news communication in recent years, we can generally draw four basic practice patterns and mode categories of news products from the perspective of metaverse.

3.1. A practical model for live reporting of emergencies

Technology is still virtual reality technology, and its core strength is to establish a unique empathic relationship between the audience and characters and events[5], which can let the audience understand the news and stories in the areas most difficult to enter. For example, for reports in war zones, users can “immerse” in the theater scene, walk around freely, independently select and determine relevant news scenes and pictures, and selectively observe the streets and passers. By on the scene in the past, it was impossible to see these virtual scenes unless you were in the theater. Different from the immersion effect of traditional virtual reality news, metaverse is committed to combining information with scenes in the real world to construct an attractive interactive environment with the combination of virtual reality and reality, that is, the scenes and characters presented by the low configuration version of virtual reality are not real, but only replace the viewer’s consciousness into the virtual world. The metaverse is a part of the scenes and characters seen by the viewer, which is real and brings virtual information into the real world. From the perspective of domestic practice, in 2021, the VR channel of CCTV network reported many major topics in the form of “panoramic photos + explanations”, such as the presentation of poverty alleviation achievements in various regions, the operation of the cabin hospital under the COVID-19, etc. Of course, there is still a big gap between these and the real metaverse technology, but the continuous upgrading of metaverse technology and the software and hardware of financial media platform will promote more and more on-site reports of
emergencies in the future, and adopt virtual reality and other metaverse technologies to make the audience experience approach the real “news scene”.

3.2. Practice mode of interpretative reporting

In the era of traditional media, explanatory reports are mostly carried out in the form of words, figures, charts and other explanations. It only needs to mobilize people’s single sensory organs, which belongs to the category of “cold media”. Metaverse technology can bring more intuitive and simple experience to viewers. After technical simulation, metaverse technology is superimposed on the real world and perceived by human senses, so as to achieve an immersive sensory experience beyond reality. It is a comprehensive scene synthesis of multi-source sensory organ mobilization and belongs to “hot media”. Because the explanatory report focuses on explaining the context of news facts, explaining the causes and results of facts and the relationship between related things. It belongs to an in-depth news at the level of time series, but it is too pale to express it with simple words and pictures. Metaverse technology can present news through interactive games, virtual scenes and other forms to help users deepen their understanding of news. In addition to the traditional reporting methods, this kind of abstract into concrete explanatory reports, popular science reports and commemorative reports can also insert interactive and game elements, so that the news consumption scene is not hard and single. For example, the emerging news game can experience one game to complete the whole process of news consumption, which not only realizes the function of explanatory reports, but also meets the multiple needs of audience game entertainment.

3.3. Practice mode of large-scale activities and other communication ceremonies

In the era of traditional media, for some large-scale media events, such as large-scale conferences, concerts, sports events, etc., the elements such as scene panorama and atmosphere cannot be experienced in the video. Live TV is only the “Ritual Body” after eliminating important information elements, and the meaning of communication ceremony is weak, while metaverse technology can solve these shortcomings—let the audience and others be in the event site and feel the atmosphere. Even individual experience exceeds the best viewing position on site. Each user can switch the interactive experience between the first-person perspective and the third-person perspective, surpassing the real physiological dimension of human observation of the world. The emergence of metaverse technology will completely subvert the mode of live TV large-scale events in the future. Especially with the implementation of 5G technology, metaverse technology can be applied in sports event news. During the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games, Chinese media also used content technology to record from a full perspective with 5G + 4K/8K ultra-high-definition digital technology. Reporters recorded videos from different perspectives such as referees, strikers, goalkeepers in the 78-penalty shootout and even football through 5G camera equipment, which can be provided to users. 5G network can combine virtual reality with Internet of things, robotics, industrial control technology and other technologies to realize the integrated production of news products, reflect the sense of watching ceremony of these media events incisively and vividly.

3.4. The practice mode of news documentary is basically different from that of traditional news documentary and general documentary

There are too many divisions, but the degree of realism is relatively high. In the future, in terms of documentary production, files, maps, pictures, audio, etc. Can be used to restore the scene, so that viewers can experience the news scene by themselves through metaverse technology. News documentaries based on metaverse technology can be understood as immersive upgraded versions of animated documentaries. Like animated documentaries, although there are still some disputes about their “authenticity”, which are specifically reflected in the
problems such as the confusion of technology with reality under the development of science and technology in the digital age, the decline of the probative power of images, and whether animation can become the noumenon in documentaries [6]. Metaverse technology makes people immersed in news events or factual scenes, and it is easy to provide a convincing experience for documentaries, news reports or realistic films, so that users can have a deeper emotional connection with the characters in the news. Therefore, metaverse technology has a natural fit with news documentaries. In news documentaries using metaverse technology, users can continuously shuttle through the crowd with the producer’s shooting perspective, and can feel the expression, tone and sound of the surrounding people, as well as the atmosphere of the whole scene. From the current news practice, news documentaries based on metaverse technology are especially suitable for in-depth documentary and social thinking, as well as reporting some news with scarce scenes and strong atmosphere.

Whether in terms of technical environment, audio-visual language or editing rhythm, metaverse technology and documentary are a combination of advantages. For documentaries, with the increasingly blurred boundary between virtual space and real space, news documentaries based on metaverse technology are closer to “reality” than traditional documentaries. At present, traditional news documentaries have a clear “protagonist” perspective, but in the metaverse, the viewer is the first perspective. Coupled with its interactivity, it also brings new possibilities for the development of documentaries. In the future, with the continuous improvement of metaverse technology, when multiple subjects are involved in news documentaries, users can independently select and match the characters in the documentaries based on their own preferences. Each subject can be independent and become their own development clue. Viewers can constantly choose in the documentaries and choose to watch the parts they want to see, hide or skip the parts and characters that do not arouse the interest of the viewer.

4. The idea and value innovation of news products from the perspective of metaverse

In recent years, various new academic concepts such as digital journalism and Internet journalism have emerged one after another, and the elements constituting the value of traditional news, such as timeliness and authenticity, have been constantly challenged. News from the perspective of metaverse has further accelerated the digestion and reconstruction of these elements, thus accelerating the paradigm transformation and concept innovation of the research system of traditional journalism.

4.1. Further dispelling news authenticity: “Avatar” metaphor and mixed reality

In the traditional news value system, truth is always the first life of news. It is emphasized that news reports should be described according to facts, and even pursue “absolute truth” and “extreme truth”. However, news truth is only relative, procedural, limited and constructive, because time cannot be reversed. Therefore, the reproduction of social truth by news is processed and constructed by news producers in the later stage. Just as hall’s encoding/decoding mode emphasizes the loss of objective truth caused by subjective factors such as “position” and “meaning” [7], absolute truth is difficult to achieve.

News products from the perspective of metaverse have an impact on the principle of news authenticity. A series of new technologies brought by the metaverse have further blurred the clear distinction between news reality, virtual reality and fact reality. The “Avatar” metaphor is realized through the metaverse technology. Virtual reality has increasingly become a part of our life. The coincidence between the virtual world and the real world is becoming higher and higher. It is difficult to strictly distinguish whether many social decisions are made based on the virtual world or the real world. A kind of “mixed reality” [8] will dominate people’s thinking and decision-making in the future: Virtual based information is applied to the real world, and real-world based information acts on the virtual
world. Virtual reality, virtual information, real information and real world may meet and superimpose in real time in the same space and interface, complement and confirm each other, and determine people's thoughts and thoughts. Virtual reality and factual reality have you in me and you in me. The traditional concept of news reality will continue to be subverted and rewritten. Mixed reality will replace factual reality and become one of the leading principles of news reality.

4.2. The news value system is reconstructed, and the effectiveness of the principle of timeliness of news is reduced

It is believed that the shorter the time between the news and the fact, the better the time between the news and the fact. A piece of timely news is invaluable, and a piece of outdated news becomes old news. With the rise of social media, the main body of news production has been transferred from organizations to social individuals. In the pursuit of news timeliness, it is difficult for news media to continue to bear the important task of the first news destination, and timeliness has even become a thinking obstacle hindering the innovation and transformation of the news industry.

News products from the perspective of metaverse need longer production cost and cycle, and news timeliness is still short. However, from the perspective of the evolution of news production, the effectiveness of the principle of news timeliness is declining. With the booming of social media, the role of traditional media organizations continues to lag behind in the whole news production chain. In the relay communication of social news production, they play the role of setter and meaning. In-depth reports and explanatory reports have increasingly become the “killer mace” of mainstream news media. The level of news products is becoming richer and richer. There must be both short and fast news products that meet the needs of timeliness and in-depth news products under the reference of social macro coordinates. The overall trend of news production is in-depth and postposition, which is well met by news products from the perspective of metaverse.

4.3. News ethics has become particularly prominent from the perspective of metaverse

metaverse technology can restore the news scene. Some news scenes are disaster accident scenes, crime scenes and other immoral scenes, involving elements such as blood, violence and pornography. Based on the characteristics of presentation, they often emphasize details, scene pictures and even criminal actions, which is easy to violate the most basic bottom line and ethics of news—the ethics of news. Therefore, news ethics is more important for news communication from the perspective of metaverse. News products from the perspective of metaverse still belong to visual news in terms of classification. The visualization of news itself has ethical risks. For example, Nancy Reagan’s anti-drug advertisement hopes that people who watch it will not take drugs through large-scale dissemination. However, later research results show that this advertisement makes more teenagers take drugs, because it visualizes the behavior of drug abuse and becomes a social imitation behavior[9]. In the future, news production from the perspective of metaverse needs to pay attention to grasping the basic bottom line of news ethics, and should not enhance those wrong scenes in order to pursue the truth of the news scene, such as frequently reporting the disappearance of female college students, which may lead to the disappearance of more female college students, etc.

4.4. New journalism regains its vitality

The reporting feature of new journalism is to apply some literary writing techniques to news reporting, and pay attention to dialogue, scene, psychological description and detail description. This reporting method is derived from Thomas Paine’s writing of common sense. In addition, many well-known writers in the history of American literature have been journalists. They first tried to introduce literary elements into news reporting. Tom wolf believes that the traditional objective report can no longer truly show the complex modern society, and
Zheng advocates that journalists should spend a lot of time in-depth interview, record the characters’ dialogue and actions, and show them in their own works. For example, new journalism advocates that journalists can describe people’s subjective feelings and psychological activities in news reports, but it touches the forbidden zone considered insurmountable in traditional journalism theory. News products from the perspective of metaverse inherit the tradition of new journalism to a certain extent. Due to the irreversibility of news scenes, many news scenes are simulated in the later stage, which will inevitably add subjective information processing. Therefore, news based on metaverse technology not only has the means of literary writing, but also integrates many elements such as script creation and director. The new journalistic theory may radiate new vitality under the stimulation of meta cosmic technology.

5. Cold thinking of news products from the perspective of metaverse

At present, with the popularity of the concept of metaverse, the combination of virtual reality and news communication presents more in-depth integration and dimension upgrading. Mainstream news communication institutions are eager to try, but mainstream media still need to effectively screen when testing metaverse technology.

5.1. Competitive dimension and ecological pattern within the news industry

The media will completely change the panorama. The upgrading of any media technology is essentially the reconnection and reconstruction of human social relations and the redistribution of discourse resources based on such social relations. The era of metaverse will bring new track divisions to media competition, and the competition of media pattern is still a subversive development, such as the decentralized development of news communication brought by WeChat and microblog, and the algorithmic news push brought by today’s headlines, which have brought great changes to the pattern of journalism. The news competition from the perspective of metaverse extends to the construction of a new platform for the virtual world. Compared with the traditional media in the field of news and information before being “crushed” by Internet enterprises, the future news production may be further decentralized and form a more diversified pattern, that is, the news production presents the concept of ecosystem, different production subjects have different niches, and each plays the role of “clean and ugly”, and the socialized division of labor of news production will be more and more detailed.

5.2. News content and forms will emerge one after another from the perspective of metaverse

The future metaverse technology may promote the division between serious news and game news, and its own development will show more and more tension. On the one hand, in terms of expression form and content scene, news products from the perspective of metaverse may be closer and closer to real scenes and real experiences in the field of serious news. On the other hand, metaverse technology also has unique advantages in the relaxed and lively presentation of game news. In the future, news products from the perspective of metaverse may enable users to better experience news products and realize full-dimensional and immersive experience through multiple interactions such as sound effect, animation and AI face change. News scenes and users realize two-way communication. The designer of news products can partially restrict the user’s operation, and users can also follow their own choice path to explore and experience, allowing readers to “visit” news events according to their own pace and rhythm, without strictly following the linear logic of traditional news reading, so as to form a highly personalized news consumption and create their own author narrative according to their personal preferences[10].

5.3. Technology is still the threshold that mainstream media need to cross

In the era of metaverse, technology plays the role of “infrastructure” in news production and the
whole news industry chain, and technology has increasingly become the basic threshold for the transformation and integration of mainstream media. In a sense, the development path of mainstream media must be “technology is king”. From the perspective of news practice approach from the perspective of metaverse, it is still highly dependent on virtual reality. Basically, all production modes are “media + VR company”. Any metaverse technology news project is inseparable from the technical assistance of VR company. The production of traditional media has always been the leading mode of text, audio and video production. With the rise of data news and visual news, news production will become the leading mode of visual rich media production. Relying on technology as the underlying structure to realize the visualization, participation and interaction of news, technology has become the key link of media transformation. It can be seen from the market share of news and information app that it is difficult for app products of traditional media to squeeze into the top ten of downloads. In the era of mobile Internet, news organizations represented by “algorithm + operation” will dominate news production, while in the era of metaverse, technical news organizations represented by “news + scene + recognition” will dominate news production, distribution and consumption. The phenomenon of technology paradigm dominating news production will become increasingly prominent in the future.

6. Conclusions

The development of news products in previous years from the perspective of metaverse is mainly driven by the single dimension of virtual reality technology. With the popularity of the concept of metaverse, the connotation of news products from the perspective of metaverse is constantly enriched and improved. It is no longer a simple technical concept, but gradually tends to be a complete body of news. Just as some researchers believe that the metaverse is the ultimate form of the Internet, news products from the perspective of the metaverse may end all the traditional news products in the past. That is, at the individual level, “people” are rediscovered and activated in the news, so as to realize the transformation of subject and object of news communication. At the social level, news “mirrors” the real world and realizes the real mapping of the real world.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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