

Research on the Change of Agenda Building in the Reports of Human Trafficking

– Taking the Reports of Human Trafficking in Micro-blog in 2011-2022

Ruolan Tang*

Journalism, Xiangtan University, 411105, China

Abstract. Human trafficking has always been of great public interest as a highly damaging crime. Since 2011, the number of reports on trafficking on micro-blogs has continued to increase, and the media have begun to be selective and change their coverage of this issue. This study uses four representative media, namely People's Daily, The Paper, Beijing News, and China Women's Daily, to study the reports on trafficking published on micro-blogs between 2011 and 2022 using content analysis. The study found that the media's coverage of human trafficking has distinctive features, with the two main narrative frameworks being 'presentation of facts' and 'law and policy', while the focus and portrayal of trafficking in the media have changed over time, with different media orientation of trafficking in different time periods.

1 Introduction

Human trafficking is a chronic social problem and a criminal phenomenon. In the age of the Internet, information platforms and the existence of new media have provided much help in the fight against trafficking. As a platform with great influence, the issue construction on human trafficking by different media relying on micro-blog can guide the direction of public attention and influence people's perceptions and attitudes. From the universal wanted search for Aunt Mei in 2019 to Shen Junliang who went to identify his son in 2020 after 15 years of searching for him with debts, to the Fengxian woman who was discussed by people in 2022. We can find that these online hot events not only show the social and public concern about human trafficking but also indicate that with the change of time, the media has changed in the focus and direction choice of human trafficking coverage. People follow news reports about what human trafficking is, where it happens, who is involved, and why it happens[1]. But in reality, what we know about human trafficking through media coverage is not comprehensive enough, and there are more important missing information and gaps about human trafficking that more media are not telling us.

The specific research questions driving the present analysis are as follows: How is human trafficking coverage presented in the media? What are the main topics of focus? Has there been a change in the presentation of topics?

2 Method

This article uses content analysis to translate news into quantitative data and analyse the content of the reports at

different levels, to explore the characteristics of the new media's content dissemination on the issue of trafficking, and to try to explore the meaning behind it.

First, "human trafficking" was used as the keyword for the main post search. In terms of influence, four microblogging accounts, People's Daily, Beijing News, The Paper, and China Women's Daily, were selected as the main subjects. As for People's Daily, as a national party media, has strong authority and accuracy. Beijing News is more influential in social news reporting. The Paper, as a product of the Internet era, is more influential among online media. China Women's Daily, sponsored by the All-China Women's Federation, is more focused and professional on the issue of trafficking in women and children.

Secondly, the reports of human trafficking on micro-blog started in 2011, so 2011 was chosen as the starting time of this study. March 18, 2022, was the last day to determine the sample for this study, so it was used as the cut-off date for data selection.

This paper analyses relevant news reports and identifies a total of the following categories:

2.1 Number of reports

This paper collects reports from 2011 to March 18, 2022, the four media outlets published a total of 735 related stories, including 155 by People's Daily, 178 by The Paper, 152 by Beijing News, and 250 by China Women's Daily. The sample is divided by year, and samples from the same years are grouped together to explore the changes in the number of reports.

* Corresponding author: author@e-mail.org

2.2 Themes of the story

Through the analysis of the sample, a total of 7 primary themes and 27 secondary themes were extracted from the news samples of the four media outlets in this study.

3 Results

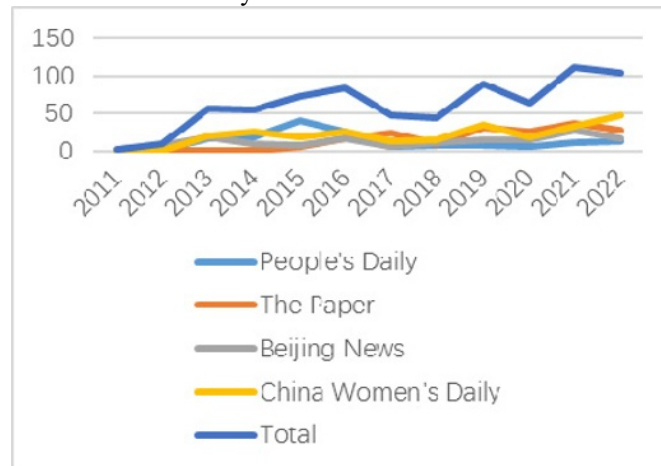


Fig.1. The time distribution of reports.

In terms of time distribution, the number of stories on trafficking, in general, has fluctuated upwards and does not show a linear relationship with the year. China Women's Daily's coverage of trafficking has a more pronounced temporal distribution than the other three media outlets, showing a fluctuating pattern from 2011

to 2022. The Paper, as a social media, also pays much attention to the issue of trafficking, and the level of attention remains relatively stable and less volatile, while the interest of Beijing News and People's Daily in the issue of trafficking is generally lower than that of the two media mentioned above.

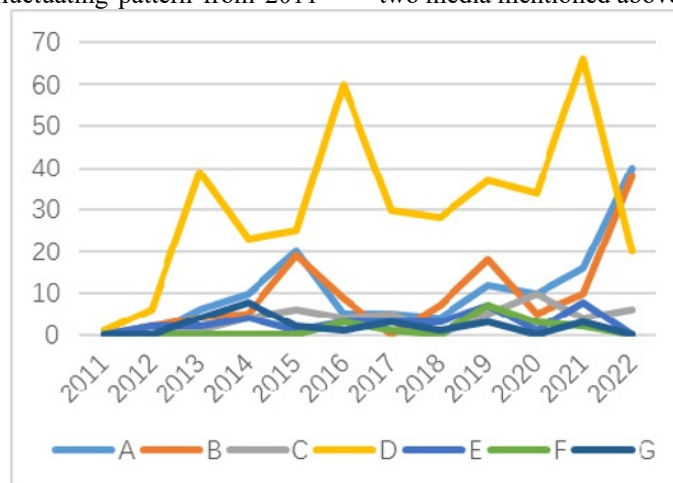


Fig.2. The time distribution of primary themes.

Policy Appeal (A) began to be discussed in 2013 (6 articles) and then climbed to 20 articles in 2015. However, in the three months that 2022 has been counted, there have been as many as 40 reports on Policy Appeal (A) direction. Discussions on the topic of Legal Issues (B) have a volume of greater than or equal to 10 reports in 2015, 2019, 2021, and 2022. It is worth noting that in the first three months of 2022, there were 38 reports on Legal Issues (B). Trafficking Experience (C)

has a completely different profile from the first two level 1 theme, with coverage of Trafficking Experience (C) peaking at 10 articles in 2020. The high volume of media coverage of Handling of Trafficking Incidents (D) is indicative of the high level of interest in this topic. Sorting Out the Trafficking Phenomenon (E), Technology and Platforms (F), and Anti-trafficking Awareness (G) were all underreported overall and did not show a distribution that correlated with time of year.

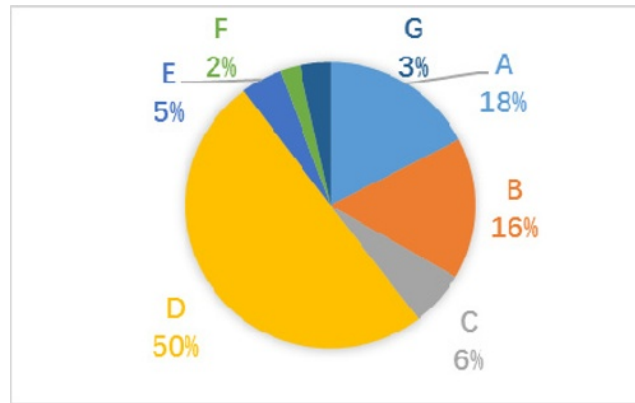


Fig.3. The proportion of primary themes.

The four media outlets showed certain characteristics in their coverage of the topic. Half of the coverage focused on the topic of Handling Trafficking Incidents, accounting for 50%. Secondly, the media also tended to cover Policy Appeal at 18%. The percentage of coverage for legal issues was 16 %.

4 Discussion

We can find that when reporting on trafficking incidents, the media actually focus on the incident itself and the handling of the incident, focusing on the social controversy itself, choosing many individual stories to reflect and analyse the problems and impacts of this phenomenon from the details. A more in-depth study reveals that under this broad topic, the media tends to focus on 'Anti-trafficking, family tracing success stories' and 'Sentencing penalties and experiences of trafficking offenders. and experiences of trafficking offenders. The stories often portrayed in detail the police attitude towards trafficking and the results, including details of the perpetrators' crimes and the outcomes. This part of the story is more positive in terms of its emotional content and presents a basic picture of the main targets of trafficking through in-depth interviews with some of the families of the victims and the motives stated by the perpetrators after their arrest. And the media reported more on macro-level calls for action by the state on the issue of trafficking, as well as macro-level plans to combat trafficking[2]. We can assume that the media's coverage of this section was first to convey national policies and appeals, and secondly to create a more positive environment for the audience, to convey the message that "a serious social problem can be solved", and to reduce the public's anxiety about the social problem of trafficking. The legal aspects of trafficking continue to be discussed. The media has reported on whether the penalties for trafficking are sufficiently severe and whether they should be extended from the trafficker to the buyer. The media interprets the law by quoting legal experts as well as advice, and at the same time conveys the message to the general public.

This paper summarizes the framework of media coverage. Firstly, the presentation of facts and the telling of stories is the part of the story that the media focuses on and spends most of its energy constructing. Secondly, there is more coverage of laws and policies in the four

media. Through a factual framework, the media interprets trafficking cases to influence the audience's perceptions and attitudes toward such cases[3]; through a legal and policy framework, the media highlights the policies and legal improvements made by the state to alleviate and weaken the public's anxiety and anxiety about such social problems, which can maintain public opinion and social stability to a certain extent.

As for the temporal changes in the content of media coverage of trafficking, this paper presents a chronological overview of the characterization and portrayal of trafficking in the media. From 2011 to 2014, the media portrayed trafficking as "family misfortunes", "tragic stories" and other unfortunate stories with tragic overtones, and through the publication of a large number of search notices, the problem of abduction and trafficking was actually regarded as a small probability accident. while the message to the public was to find the abductees, and there was almost a blank on the subjects involved in the trafficking incidents, as well as the causes of the trafficking incidents and the return of the abductees to their families and society afterwards. From 2015 to 2018, due to the advancement of China's comprehensive rule of law in 2015, we can clearly observe that during this time period, the media's portrayal and treatment of abduction and trafficking incidents slowly began to shift from the previous tragic narrative to rational analysis. Putting the issue of trafficking in the context of the law is an increased part of this time period compared to the years 2011 to 2014, but the media continued to focus more on the tragic narrative and the emotional condemnation of the perpetrators. The year 2019 has seen an increase in media coverage. The coverage of this time period was detailed and adequate, both in terms of policy and law and also in terms of the technological means of combating trafficking and sorting out the phenomenon of trafficking. And we can see that the media coverage of trafficking was more detailed, though small in number, and dealt with the actual plight of the trafficked victims, as well as sexual exploitation and violence. In addition to the legal issues discussed, the legal subject of trafficking has been expanded to include "whether the sale is a crime" and "the legal recognition of the abductee's marital status". All in all, the media is trying to complete the portrayal and portrayal of trafficking and improve the public's understanding and perception of trafficking.

The gaps in media coverage actually reflect the character of the media's approach to trafficking. It is clear from the statistics that there are only three reports on sexual violence and exploitation in trafficking, six on the specific plight of abductees, and four on the regulation of public authority, yet these issues are in fact very important and a large part of the trafficking problem[4]. When it comes to the causes of trafficking, the media is in fact silent on the subject, focusing only on the aftermath of trafficking.

5 Conclusion

Exploring how the issue of human trafficking is reported is a complex issue. The media coverage is not only about public concern and understanding of the issue, but also reflects the media's orientation towards the characterization of events. Analysis of the changes in media coverage of human trafficking reveals that the media favors relevant thematic content that can help stabilize public opinion dynamics and stabilize society, resulting in an insufficiently complete portrayal of trafficking incidents and a lack of clarity in its contours. The study finds that, in the current context, media coverage of the issue of trafficking is still relatively homogeneous and incomplete, and has lost some important aspects of the topic. In general, this article looks at the media coverage on the new media platform micro-blog and gives an overview of what is missing.

References

1. Borer, Mary. (2015). Human Trafficking in the Media: Who, What, Where, and Why? Honors College. 225.
2. Meghan R.S. (2014). Chronicling a crisis: media framing of human trafficking in India, Thailand, and the USA. Meghan R. Sobel School of Journalism and Mass Communication, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2014.903425>.
3. Rachealle Sanford. (2015). Framing Human Trafficking: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles from 2012 and 2013. Western Kentucky University.
4. Maria Eirini Papadouka, Nicholas Evangelopoulos & Gabe Ignatow (2016): Agenda setting and active audience in online coverage of human trafficking, *Information, Communication & Society*, DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2016.1139615