Di Ba Communication Process Analysis

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Abstract. Di Ba is an online community in China with more than 28 million members. It has now developed its own network subculture and shows great distinctiveness in the process of communication. To understand its propagation course, this article introduces the operating mechanism of Di Ba, and analyzes 5 basic elements including the communicator, the content, the media channel, the audience as well as the communication effect. Based on the classic propagation models and considering Di Ba’s own features, we finally design a particular model that can precisely interpret Di Ba’s internal and external communication process.

Introduction

Baidu Li Yi Ba is an online forum named after former Chinese soccer player Li Yi. It was established in 2004, also called the Louvre in Baidu, known as Di Ba because Li Yi once boasted that his skill of keeping the ball was just like Henry’s. As of now the number of its followers is about 28.96 million, the number of its total posts reaching 969.83 million. At the beginning, the contents inside Di Ba were mostly banter, humorous joking and irony towards Li Yi. But after it gradually expands the scope of discussion, it is no longer limited to a single idol or topic, but encourages the members to express their own views on the literature and social phenomenon within the law, moral ethics and Baidu Tie Ba agreement. Through these years, it creates a unique network sub-culture by promoting original spirit and the belief “everyone is emperor”.

The Operating Mechanism of Di Ba

The Information Flow inside Di Ba

Baidu Tie Ba is a combination of search engine and online exchange platform, in which people concerned about the same topic gather together to form an interest-based network group to exchange, discuss, share and help each other in a more convenient way through the Baidu Tie Ba platform. Di Ba is known as the biggest one among all. People attracted by the spirit of spoof and connotation gather here and continue to develop this unique sub-culture of Di Ba.

There are three main forms of the communication inside Di Ba. The first one is the most common way that is posting and replying. Any level-4 or above member of Di Ba can be the original poster and create their own discussion post on any interested topic. All the netizens (whether he is a member of Di Ba or a visitor) can see the post but only the level-4 or above members of Di Ba can reply to it. In a thread, when the viewer wants to interact with a poster who wrote something in a certain post (the reply post), all the discussions related to this post will be displayed below, which is called post in post. And this function was put into use since May 2012. At the same time, the internal exchange of Di Ba is conducted in diverse and flexible forms, including text, pictures, live video, live text and other multimedia. The second kind of communication is creating and operating Di Ba Periodical. Compared to an ordinary e-journal, its threshold for creation is set quite low. The content of Di Ba Periodical is mainly organized by the members in the editorial team of Di Ba and can be found through the search engine index. This UGC innovation becomes an effective way to promote the
spread of the sub-culture of Di Ba and to a greater extent meets the netizens’ need to obtain quality information about Di Ba through search engine. The third way of communication is group chat. The function went on line formally in November 2013, breaking the traditional chat mode by posting, therefore providing a more real-time and private exchange space for Di Ba members.

**The External Communication of Di Ba**

With the virtue of its appeal and influence, Di Ba initiates a kind of expedition called the expedition, that is, a kind of network collective behavior under the banner of “where Di Ba members go will instantly collapse into ruins”.

At present, the main form of the expedition is organizing the message and swarming another Tie Ba or certain social networking platform such as Facebook. When fighting a war with another Tie Ba, Di Ba members will post a large number of non-substantive content to disrupt the previous order and even destroy the target. The earliest and largest burst of flame war took place in June 2005 against Li Yuchun Ba, in which the highest speed of posting climbed up to 1 post per second. And the total number of the posts wrote by Di Ba members that night reached nearly 100000, covering more than 1,900 pages. Beforehand, this kind of expedition was only aimed at another Tie Ba.

However, in January 2016, Di Ba members launched a coordinated messaging campaign by flooding Tsai Ing-Wen’s official Facebook page with anti-Taiwan independence messages. It was triggered by Zhou Ziyu event and the Facebook home page of Apple Daily and Sanlih E-Television were also their targets. Di Ba also showed a high level of organization in the effort. The whole process of this expedition, from mobilization, preparatory work for recruitment, task allocation to the live broadcast of the instant situation and tail-in work, was arranged in order, and carried out meticulously and strictly under the organizational discipline. Most of the participants were required to refrain from radical words and offensive language to stay civilized and reasonable. After this event, the battlefield of Di Ba’s expedition is no longer confined inside Baidu Tie Ba.

**Analysis of 5 Elements in Di Ba Communication**

In 1948, the American scholar Larsville put forward the "5W model" in the paper "the Structure and Function of Communication in Society", pointing out the five areas of communication research: control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis and effectiveness analysis.

**Control Analysis (who)**

All 4-level or above Di Ba members can be the communicator by posting inside the forum, but the authority of the information issued and the degree of its promotion are diverse due to different user ID levels, which can be divided into four categories including management team, famous ID, ordinary member and the diver. The management team mainly composes of administrator, deputy administrator, chief editor, and moderator etc., responsible for producing and issuing important information of high authority. Famous "Yi Si" (the name of Di Ba members) contain connotative content writers, graphic makers, video producers, Mars celebrities and other members with a professional skill in certain areas. In the process of exchanging information with other members, these ID users gradually formed greater influence and won the respect and recognition of counterparts, therefore became a well-known ID. Famous Yi Si are often productive and active, and probably the key opinion leader of the group. Ordinary members are the main body of Di Ba with a huge population and are closely related to unstable dissemination behavior of message and information of uneven quality and reliability. However, they generally play an indispensable role in the maintenance of the information flow inside Di Ba. The diver refers to those who are used to receiving information unilaterally, with little or no participation in the process of output or exchange of information.
Content Analysis (what)

As an interest-based network group, the content of the internal discussion involves a wide range of topics like people's livelihood, feelings and hot social issues, but always clings to the spirit of connotation. With the fragmentation of audience, Di Ba develops several more sophisticated groups in order to target and reach key audiences, including the Grand Theater, the Faculty of Original Literature, the Gaming Group, the Food Group, the Medical School, and the Goddess Group. The contents can be original articles or integrated message based on the information from the media, certain network platforms or other information sources. High-quality posts are much likely to be marked as “digest” and displayed at the top of the forum page, in the purpose of promoting the propagation of valuable content and increase effective communication.

When planners launch an expedition in the name of Di Ba, the message disseminated by the participants will tend to be one-sided and centralized, and highly related to the triggering event, mainly compose of joking, irony, persuasion and abuse towards the contradictory object and at the same time contain a large number of meaningless emotional catharsis.

In the campaign of flooding Taiwan leader’s Facebook to fight against Taiwan independence force in January 2016, most comments by Di Ba members are pro-China political expression in the form of both text and picture. What’s most noteworthy in this expedition is the transmission of meme in large quantities as a new kind of symbol propagation.

Media Analysis (in which channel)

As the Internet reading tends to be more fragmented and mobile, most daily communication within Di Ba are completed with mobile phones. The majority of Di Ba members are more inclined to use apps in their mobile phones to replace the traditional way of information exchange that heavily relies on the operation on PC. But during the process of external communication, due to the need of using QQ, Tianya Forum, Microblog and other network platforms for the organization and expansion of the campaign, the stability and sustainability of the network environment is highly required, forcing Di Ba members to return to their computers.

Audience Analysis (to whom)

Recurring rather than unidirectional information dissemination is an important feature of network communication. In the content dissemination within Di Ba, the audience is almost coincident with the communicator. In each post and reply, the role of Di Ba members is constantly changing between the subject and object of propagation. Their coding, decoding and decoding behavior of the same message may vary under the influence and constraints of self-impression, personality structure, group and social environment and other factors.

In Di Ba's external communication activities, the object of communication transfers to the audience outside Di Ba network group, including the main target, people involved, and those who receive relevant information through the media or other network platforms. But because the content of communication contains the particular sub-cultural characteristics of Di Ba, so in the course of the integration of two independent lingual environments, the number of effective audience who actually accept the media impact in both attitude and behavior is quite small due to the lack of common value space and grammar norms.

Effectiveness Analysis (with what effect)

The Uses and Gratifications theory proposed by Katz suggests that the acceptance behavior of the audience is very subjective and dynamic, that they contact with and use the media according to their own needs, and that the media can and should meet the needs of the audience. In the general trend of mass decentralization, the internal information in Di Ba has been carefully classified and sorted, so the audience can take the initiative to choose the specific form and content of the information to meet their personal needs like the needs for emotional communication, the needs of interpersonal communication, and the need for leisure and entertainment. Therefore, the effect will differ greatly
with dissimilar choices. But since the daily communication interaction mainly happens inside Di Ba, its effect is much likely to be remarkable within a group where members have a strong sense of belonging and identification, sharing the same value, interest and similar experience.

On the other hand, Di Ba’s grand external communication campaign always tends to get high-frequency coverage and continuous concern from mass media and social media each time, drawing the public attention to a certain issue and even affect the policy agenda, therefore breaking the traditional agenda-setting model where the mass media control the clout to set the topic for public discussion.

However, as group communication often has a great emotional infection and seditious influence on the participants, the Spiral of Silence phenomenon often exists in Di Ba’s external communication process. With the accumulation of ideas, Di Ba members’ comments will gradually converge and eventually form into a dominant idea in the way of using connotative words to ridicule the dissenting opinions rather than through rational and logical discussion.

**Di Ba Communication Model Building**

**Overview of Existing Propagation Model**

The classic models of communication mainly include the Lasswell model that elaborates the process of communication, and the Osgood-Chramm's Model, which considers that both sides of the communication can act as the behavior subject of communication and play the role of coder, interpreter and decoder respectively at different stages of propagation.

At the same time, with the development of technology and the media, some network communication modes different from the traditional mode of transmission are put forward. For example, the infinite and decentralized webbed model proposed by Wang Zhongyi emphasizes the interaction and equality during the process of communication, while the basic model of Internet communication raised by Xie Xinzhou lists detailed possible influence in the whole information flow.

**Di Ba Communication Model**

According to the analysis of the five elements of Di Ba communication, it is found that in addition to the basic features of network communication (like diversified contents, frequent interaction between communicator and audience, disclosure of information), its unique expedition culture makes the external communication of Di Ba as an interest-based group significantly different from the daily internal discussion. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the internal and external propagation when building Di Ba communication model.

Considering its particularity as well as drawing on some applicable features from the Xie Xinzhou's basic network communication model, we propose the special communication mode of Di Ba based on the traditional Lasswell model and the Osgood-Chramm's Model (as shown in Figure 1).
In this model, Di Ba members disseminate and exchange original articles or sorted message integrated from other sources, interacting with each other, with their role cyclically converted among coder, interpreter, and decoder. Due to the different degree of authority and popularity of their user ID, each individual member's communication status is at a different level. And they may have distinguished interpretation on the same event based on their own values, feelings, and social environment. The external communication of Di Ba is a typical kind of group communication through Internet media. In the whole course of expedition, the highly organized Di Ba group acts mainly as the communicator, flooding the target with one-sided comments or pointless substance under efficient leadership and strict discipline. After intensive news coverage on the expedition, the message will gradually reach a wider audience, and some of the receivers may give a positive or negative feedback, while others may choose to accept the information passively and make no response.

Conclusion

With the rapid development of the information service industry, the audience begins to selectively allocate the limited attention to where their own interest lies, and meanwhile aggregate into many interest-based virtual communities on the internet. Through the study of Di Ba, a typical representative of the interest-based network group, we can understand its special dissemination process, including both the internal and external communication, and at the same time supplement the existing network communication model theoretically.

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References
