

Research on Narrative Techniques in News Writing

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Abstract: *In this new era, as the internet becomes widespread and people's aesthetic standards elevate, the public's demand for news reporting transcends mere factual accounts. Readers seek thought-provoking insights through vivid and engaging language. Employing narrative techniques in news writing maintains the authenticity of the events while enhancing the reader's experience with elements of interest, atmosphere, and human interest. This approach allows audiences to savor the content more deeply, making narrative news writing an essential tool for media outlets to attract readers. This paper delves into narrative news writing by examining the balance between authenticity and appeal, the creation of a sense of immediacy through detailed descriptions, and the portrayal of human-interest aspects in reporting.*

Keywords: *Narration; Storytelling Techniques; News Writing*

1. Introduction

News frequently materializes in the public's view through the documentation or creation of journalists and news creators. Consequently, the narrative perspective chosen by reporters, as the primary subject of news events, influences how news facts manifest before the public, occasionally embellishing news and producing diverse effects.

In the current media landscape, with numerous outlets vying for attention and an overwhelming influx of information, people's reading habits exhibit a rapid trend. The fast-paced lifestyle fosters a desire for more convenient, concise news and a yearning for novelty. Therefore, incorporating storytelling (narration) and literary descriptions in news reports can enhance readers' desire and pleasure of reading. While storytelling is but one approach to news writing, it can improve a report's objectivity and readability, making news stories captivating and increasing audience interest.

Diverging from traditional news reporting, which encompasses the five elements of news and hard news, contemporary news reports favor a "storytelling" approach. In recent years, this style has gained prominence in the Chinese journalism industry, garnering significant attention. Western countries, with earlier beginnings and faster development in news reporting, have experienced a swifter transformation. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, Western news reporting transitioned from information-based to in-depth reporting, incorporating narrative-style storytelling. Following its reform and opening-up, China has progressively explored this narrative news reporting style. In today's media explosion, the impact of new media on traditional media should not be underestimated. Amid the rapid and abundant development of new media, traditional media consciously and objectively choose in-depth reporting, employing narrative and storytelling techniques to attract readers, as a prudent and objective strategy for substantial growth.

2. Overview of Narrative News Writing

2.1. The Essence of Narrative News Writing

The author's understanding of narrative news writing involves employing dialogues, descriptions, and scene-setting to delve into news events, meticulously revealing the intricacies and details within these events, and highlighting the hidden, engaging, and dramatic stories.

Compared to conventional news reporting, narrative news not only focuses on the outcomes of events but also emphasizes the depiction of the development process, unfolding the plot, exploring the emotions of the individuals involved, delineating their personalities, and capturing vivid and spirited details of everyday life. During interviews, journalists should utilize details that evoke the reader's visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile senses, allowing them to feel immersed in the scene, as if meeting the characters, hearing their voices, and sensing their emotions.

2.2. *The Significance of Narrative News Writing*

Narrative news writing, as a technique developed through long-term adaptation between news media and audiences, easily resonates emotionally with readers. This fresh, lively, and delicate narrative method has transformed the long-standing monotonous, rigid, and dull state of news reporting. Moreover, "stories" are more intriguing and communicative than mere "facts," significantly enhancing the readability of news articles.^[1]

Furthermore, narrative news effectively breaks through the dogmatism of news media. Due to the high demands for "narrative quality" and "story elements" in narrative news, insignificant work briefings, meeting news, and long-disliked "news clichés" are excluded, making news coverage more consistent with communication principles.

3. Drawbacks of Narration in News Writing

3.1. *Weakening the Function of Public Opinion*

The narration-focused approach in news writing appeals to the majority of readers, as continuous storytelling helps maintain the audience's enthusiasm for consuming information. However, certain drawbacks emerge. During the dissemination of narrative news, audiences may be attracted by the abundance of dramatized content, leading to a significant weakening of the social public opinion effect. Consequently, essential information that news should convey is omitted, resulting in a reduced level of public attention to significant societal events.

3.2. *Compromising the Authenticity of News*

Authenticity lies at the core of news reporting. Excessive pursuit of narrative elements can introduce journalists' subjectivity, which may replace the actual context. While storytelling techniques make news reports or programs more topical, they contravene the principle of authenticity in journalism.

3.3. *Predisposing News towards Vulgarities*

The news industry's lack of genuine concern for its audience at a deeper level and the continuous narration of content results in the marginalization of some vulnerable groups. Journalists, driven by sensationalism and hype, may expose the privacy of individuals involved. The use of inhumane methods to unearth news stories demonstrates a lack of respect for people.

The inclination towards narrative news is propelled by commercial interests, as the media, controlled by business forces, exploit human emotions as commercial resources. This practice leads to the media's evasion of weighty matters in favor of lighter issues, thereby damaging the intrinsic nature of journalism and causing a decline in media credibility. Narrative news prioritizes storytelling, emphasizing the importance of plot, which results in a one-sided approach to news dissemination. Some media outlets, in an attempt to recreate situations, may resort to coarse language, contributing to the vulgarity of news.

4. Analysis of the Causes for the Inclination towards Narration in News Writing

4.1. *Expanded Scope of Dissemination*

Traditional news media dissemination often requires a series of professional processes before news is published, which limits the timeliness of information acquisition. The development of new media effectively addresses this issue, breaking the constraints of time and space. With just a smartphone, the public can access various latest news updates. As the speed of news dissemination accelerates, people utilize fragmented time for reading, gravitating towards content that interests them. The storytelling approach in news is more captivating, and readers are more willing to spend time engaging with intriguing news content, gaining both valuable information and enjoyment. Consequently, the growth of digital news media in the new era has broadened the scope of news dissemination.

4.2. *Enlarging the Coverage of News Dissemination*

Compared to traditional news reporting, narrative content satisfies the news demands of different age

groups, extending the coverage of news dissemination and adding interest to news. Traditional news dissemination usually relies on newspapers, radio, and television, while online news is accessible through computers, smartphones, and other portable devices. On the other hand, internet platforms efficiently integrate text, images, audio, and video, catering to the news demands of diverse audiences. Storytelling techniques in news reporting further widen coverage, disseminating news through various appealing channels and enhancing media attention and influence.

4.3. Enriching News Reporting Content

In contemporary society, some news media professionals still prefer traditional information gathering and editing methods when working. Although their reporting may be rigorous and objective, it often lacks novelty. In today's rapidly evolving era, engaging content is more likely to attract public attention. Narrative news storytelling enables the efficient integration of pre- and post-production content, enriching news reporting. The swift growth of internet platforms provides robust technical support for online news, laying the foundation for diversified content and expanding media dissemination. Online news can quickly capture public attention and spark widespread discussion, as it covers audiences of various age groups, naturally amplifying public interest in news while increasing topicality and discussion.

5. Analysis of Narration in News Writing methods

5.1. Balancing Authenticity and Appeal in Narrative News Writing

Authenticity is the "lifeline" of news reporting, and ensuring the veracity of events is the fundamental requirement for all news stories, serving as the premise for narrative writing.

As previously mentioned, narrative news writing can increase audience engagement and provide substantial benefits for journalists themselves. Consequently, some journalists may disregard factual accuracy in pursuit of more convoluted and intriguing storylines to attract readers. They may also overemphasize atmosphere in their scene descriptions, creating "inaccurate explosive points," which ultimately damages the objectivity and authenticity of the news. Disregarding objective facts and excessive storytelling is one of the major pitfalls among contemporary journalists.

Not all social news stories are suitable for narrative writing, particularly those that primarily focus on events or reflect social issues. Applying a dramatic flair to issues that urgently require the attention and resolution of relevant authorities may divert the focus of the report, diminishing its social impact. Consequently, the public's concerns may go unresolved or be overlooked, which also constitutes a lack of factual accuracy.

Addressing the question of how to showcase appeal while maintaining authenticity becomes a critical consideration in news writing.

Initially, journalists must adhere to the fundamental principles of news communication: not exaggerating or minimizing facts, preserving the authenticity of the news, and ensuring that the basic framework and content of the story remain unchanged to reflect "true-to-life" events. During the writing process, it is essential to verify news sources from multiple angles, scrutinize news content and story details thoroughly, and carefully apply writing techniques and modes of expression to craft authentic stories and produce engaging narrative news.

Next, the narrative aspect of news writing is primarily evident in the concrete story characteristics it generates vivid, intricate, and captivating. However, news writing cannot emphasize artistic effects like works of art. It is crucial to explore the causes, processes, and outcomes of stories within the news, with a particular focus on uncovering appeal. In some cases, journalists may even deliberately create interest during the writing process, which requires a certain level of skill. For example, many unforgettable news pieces captivate readers through engaging, heart-stirring text that conveys the "twists and turns" of a story. This technique not only exemplifies a news writing skill but also serves as an ingenious method to captivate the audience's thoughts.

For example, in the article *A New House with Only Stairs and No Floors*, which won second prize at the 28th China News Awards, the author used humor to depict the transformation of living conditions: "A new life came with new tastes. Over a year ago, when the journalist interviewed Wu Yuyi in his adobe house, the pungent smell of pig manure wafted from the pigsty into the living room. The toilet was simply

two wooden planks next to the pigsty, requiring one to hold their nose while 'doing their business.' Now, the toilet in the new house is clean and hygienic, with no unpleasant odors." The humorous language displaying the change in "tastes" adds appeal, satisfying the audience's pursuit of narrative news stories in just a few words.

It is evident that in recent years, award-winning narrative news pieces, both domestically and internationally, have shared a common characteristic: excellent writing. The authors either use genuine, heartfelt language or employ humorous and witty expressions. High-quality narrative news pieces not only rely on storytelling techniques but also on the content of the narrative news itself. If the narrative news conveys information that the audience is concerned and interested in, the piece is inherently successful. Storytelling techniques are merely a means to optimize the narrative news' effects and are indispensable. This necessitates that the individuals responsible for writing narrative news actively put forth effort, hone their writing abilities, and skillfully apply various news writing techniques in their work.

5.2. Capturing Details and Creating a Sense of Presence in Narrative News Writing

Robert L. Hilliard, an American scholar, believes that a good, complete news story should resemble a theatrical performance, with "obvious conflicts and contradictions," a "constant sense of presence and tension," and "providing the reader with any possible details." [2]His words are indeed classic. To create a vivid news story, it is essential to establish corresponding story scenes in the audience's minds. There are various ways to create a sense of presence, and the author believes that the optimal approach is through the depiction of details.

For example, in the article *54 Years: The Old Soldier's Journey Home*, which won second prize at the 28th China News Awards, there is a passage describing the following scene: As usual, Wang Zhiyuan is playing mahjong, but he is somewhat restless, his hands trembling, and a good card falls to the ground. Wang, who hurriedly enters the room, leans into whisper, "Third Uncle will be back tomorrow." Wang is so excited that he pushes the cards away. He has been dealt the best hand of his life. "Restless," "hands trembling," "leaning into whisper," and "pushing the cards away" – the author uses a series of details to depict the emotional scene when, after 54 years, an elder brother hears that his younger brother is about to return. Each detail described immerses the audience in the scene, making them feel as if they are present and witnessing the unfolding story through the author's words.

Of course, the effective use of detail is one of the means to enhance the appeal of news. In the past, news reports were often criticized as dull and uninteresting, with the mere presentation of the "six elements" considered sufficient. Now, however, audiences seek empathy and sentiment in the news, requiring vivid dialogue, scene setting, and the capture of details. A more meticulous portrayal of storylines and related details within events is necessary, highlighting the hidden aspects that evoke excitement, or the dramatic storylines throughout the development of events. Once the detailed scenes constructed bring the audience into the story, their sense of resonance can be greatly enhanced.

Therefore, in narrative news writing, authors must master writing techniques and skillfully apply details to enhance the authenticity and narrative quality of the stories. By employing descriptions of visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory sensations, authors should delicately express what they see, hear, think, and feel, leaving vivid impressions on the readers.

5.3. Incorporating "Human Interest" in Narrative News Writing

News scholar Fred Hibbert believes that there are five essential qualities in news value: 1) eventfulness, 2) proximity, 3) prominence, 4) significance, and 5) human interest. Among these, human interest elements include adventure, conflict, humor, joys and sorrows, gender relations, the unusual, and personal interests. The joyful components of human interest encompass factors such as relaxation, humor, and interest in the news; while the sad aspects include disaster reporting, sympathy, and compassion. In recent years, media has shown a preference for "letting ordinary people tell their stories," capturing human interest within the diverse aspects of life and displaying the warmth and coldness of human emotions.

For example, in the article *Adopting a Cerebral Palsy Child, A Sanitation Couple's 14-Year Journey Touches Many*, Xi'an sanitation worker Feng Yaning and her husband, despite their less-than-ideal financial situation, adopt a child with cerebral palsy found on the roadside, taking care of him meticulously for 14 years. In another piece, *Lv Zhenghong: A Man, A Boat, and Twenty Years of Selfless Medical Service on the Water*, the author depicts a scene where Lv visits a pregnant woman for a checkup.

Before setting off, rain and snow start to fall, accompanied by strong winds. Without any hesitation, Lv steps out into the weather, and his boat moves across the turbulent lake, persistently heading towards a faint light in the darkness. These stories reflect the "human interest" of ordinary people, and the more human interest a news report contains, the deeper the impression it leaves on its readers.

Thus, it is evident that "human interest" in narrative news writing, especially in today's increasingly sophisticated audience's aesthetic appreciation, has the power to penetrate the hearts of readers. The display of "human interest" in news can break the monotony of traditional news narratives, making the content more authentic and closer to life.

5.4. Establishing Suspense

An exceptional narrative news article should gradually unfold the story, enticing the reader step by step to continue reading. In narrative news writing, especially in feature writing, an anecdote is initially employed as a descriptive introduction. This approach is more effective in arousing readers' interest and evoking a sense of identification than direct reasoning, aligning with the order in which people typically comprehend things—through the logical relationships between specific, familiar individuals or events to understand broader social life. For instance, the opening of the report "I Am Also a Leaf" reads: Suddenly, a burst of cheering erupts in the quiet library, and Hu Weiwei lifts her head to see a familiar figure appear before her eyes. Much like telling a story, the article begins with a calm and unhurried tone, inadvertently establishing suspense: Why the cheering? Who is this familiar figure? Through the creation of suspense, the reader's desire to continue reading is ignited.

5.5. Adopting a Grassroots Perspective

Narrative news aims to avoid audience fatigue by focusing on individuals as the core of the story, using personal experiences and stories as entry points and clues to highlight significant news events, reveal newly introduced regulations or policies, or reflect social changes. Employing a grassroots perspective to narrate these stories in a layered manner has become a common storytelling technique.

The grassroots perspective primarily involves presenting ordinary stories of ordinary people. Many award-winning works in national news competitions, such as the China News Award, recount the lives and experiences of ordinary individuals. For instance, "In Our Next Life, We Will Be Mother and Son Again" tells the story of a teacher who encourages her son battling malignant lymphoma to remain strong and optimistic. "Chasing You to the Edge of the World" narrates the tale of a military wife who, despite hardships, climbs a mountain to spend the New Year with her husband and fellow soldiers.

The stories of ordinary people often serve as microcosms of the lives of the general populace. Their social significance may be more valuable than that of news about high-profile individuals, as their stories provide a closer reflection of social realities.

Another aspect of the grassroots perspective is humanizing prominent figures by presenting them on an equal footing with the audience, rather than elevating them onto a pedestal. This approach requires actions from the individuals themselves that support such a portrayal. Using the example of "I Am Also a Leaf":

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Surprised, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao approaches Hu Weiwei.

"Hello, Prime Minister!" Hu Weiwei immediately stands up to greet him.

"Please sit down. What are you working on?" the Prime Minister asks.

"I am researching some materials," Hu Weiwei replies.

She then introduces her major and recent study plans to the Prime Minister. "He is genuinely amiable, just like my father," Hu Weiwei says.

...

Soon, the Prime Minister joins the group.

"Will chatting with you all for a while not take up too much of your time?" he inquires. The students answer with laughter. The Prime Minister then takes a seat opposite Shi Haoyu.

This piece deviates from conventional methods, deliberately selecting various details that showcase

the Prime Minister's approachable demeanor. For example, he initially asks Hu Weiwei to sit down and later seeks permission from the students to chat, asking, "Will chatting with you all for a while not take up too much of your time?" These vivid details not only close the gap between the Prime Minister and the students but also between the audience and the news itself, effectively bridging the distance between the audience and the Prime Minister.

6. Conclusions

Narrative news emerged as a response to audience needs and serves as an inevitable stage in the media's journey toward differentiation, mass appeal, and increased readability and visual appeal. The use of narrative news writing techniques has seen a widespread trend, presenting news facts in the form of captivating stories. This approach not only makes news reporting more engaging and relatable but also greatly enhances its readability and relevance, providing a novel direction and method for news coverage. The advantages of this approach are evident: employing suspense and conflict to capture readers' attention, stimulating their senses, and allowing them to empathize with the author's perspective. Furthermore, it respects and utilizes a wide range of events. While some news materials may not be suitable for traditional, solemn reporting methods, narrative news writing techniques can transform virtually all valuable news resources into informative content within the text.

References

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