Original Paper

Analysis of News Source Selection in the Digital Age: A Case Study of Micro-platforms Operated by People's Daily and Southern Weekly

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Abstract

This study employs content analysis to compare and examine the selection of news sources in the micro-platforms of mainstream media, People's Daily, and urban media, Southern Weekly. It attempts to interpret the impact of the digitalization process on the content production practices of different news media in China. The research reveals that in the digital era, media attributes and platform regulations are direct factors influencing the selection of news sources in news production. This transformation has significantly altered traditional news content production. Official news sources remain the primary choice for news media in producing content in the digital age. Additionally, grassroots news sources, representing the general public, are gradually incorporated into various types of reporting, demonstrating a trend towards democratization.

Keywords

news sources, digital news, news production, content analysis

1. Introduction

News source stands as the primary criterion for gauging the legitimacy of news production practices. Throughout the course of media development history, news media have formulated relevant rules and standards for news source selection to ensure the legitimacy of news production and reporting processes (Reich, 2011). In the realm of traditional journalism, the authority of news sources guarantees the authority of the news industry. However, with the advent of the digital age, significant changes have occurred in this regard. On one hand, empowered by digital technologies, the scope of information sources in the public sphere has rapidly expanded through the collaboration and

networking of news production, leading to the emergence of a plethora of online whistleblowers and self-media journalists who have become the primary providers of social events and breaking news. This has, to some extent, resulted in a phenomenon where the media is "reverse pressured" by news sources based on online popularity during the reporting process (Peng, 2019). On the other hand, digital technologies have empowered the subjects of news production, presenting a landscape where everyone becomes a potential media outlet. This exponential increase inevitably intensifies news competition, breaking the norms and ethics of traditional news reporting in the production of digital journalism. Consequently, the rules and standards regarding news source selection in the news industry are no longer strictly adhered to.

2. The Arrival of the Digital News Era

With the flourishing development of digital technology, the news industry has entered the digital age. According to the 53rd Statistical Report on Internet Development in China released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2023, the number of internet users in China reached 1.092 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 77.5% (China Internet Network Information Center, 2024). In the internet environment, the expansion of the internet user base has diversified the information producers, presenting a scenario where everyone becomes a media outlet, and individuals have become news reporters, granting more freedom to news production and dissemination activities. However, this has also brought about certain negative impacts, especially with the openness of internet platforms. The competition for user attention between professional and non-professional media has intensified, leading to both entities broadening the scope of news source selection. This has resulted in a trend of declining credibility for news media and public institutions. Scholars argue that this is a direct consequence of the global wave of populism brought about by the empowerment of the masses through technology (Klein, & Robinson, 2020). Therefore, the process of digitalization not only changes the external form of news and the news industry but also alters the internal logic and mechanisms within the news industry.

3. The Meaning and Importance of News Sources

A news source refers to where the viewpoints, facts, and related discourse of news come from, in other words, the "provider" of news materials (Li, 1989). News sources determine where journalists obtain information and what type of information they acquire. They are the lifeline of journalists' work; without news sources, journalists cannot conduct interviews (Carlson, 2009). As recorded in the "Chinese Practical Dictionary of Journalism", "news sources are the authentic and reliable basis for news. They can be governments, political parties, organizations, companies and their spokespersons, qualified and authoritative individuals, or eyewitnesses to events. In the case of journalists conducting

on-site interviews, the journalists themselves are the news sources" (Zhang, 2016). Foreign scholars believe that news sources are an important tool for the public to understand the news industry and social life, and their existence and use can verify the bias of news media towards social rights (Carter, 1958).

In the 1980s, interviewing became one of the common ways for news media to obtain information sources in the reporting process, marking the formal transition of the news industry from the party newspaper model to objective reporting. On the one hand, this reflects the news industry's desire to break free from the constraints of partisan newspapers and gain the right to freely choose news sources. On the other hand, it reflects the aspirations of journalists as a group to assert their subjectivity in the process of news reporting (Schudson, 2001). The news industry attempted to institutionalize news interviewing activities and the system of news source selection, repositioning news as a "professional culture". The most significant feature of this culture is its widespread acceptance by society and the public, possessing a certain degree of autonomy (Singer, 2007). Therefore, journalists' selection and use of news sources have always been regarded as important reference criteria for practicing the concept of journalistic professionalism. The authority of news sources to some extent determines the authenticity and objectivity of news reporting, further strengthening the legitimacy of the news industry. At the same time, as the authority of the news industry continues to increase, the selection of news sources in news content production can in turn consolidate the status of the identities behind the news sources, such as government officials, corporate entities, experts, and scholars. Their authoritative aura will be infinitely magnified with the increasing authority of the news industry, thereby placing the discourse resources in society under the control of the news industry (Manning, 2000).

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Objects

This study selects news reports published on WeChat and Weibo by two major Chinese media outlets, People's Daily and Southern Weekly. As digital technology continues to evolve, WeChat and Weibo have become significant channels for the circulation of digital news and for audiences to receive digital news. Therefore, examining these platforms is valuable for understanding the digitalization of China's news ecosystem. WeChat and Weibo serve as vital channels for the daily reception of digital information by the public, making them significant for studying how the news industry selects sources in the digital age. WeChat primarily facilitates the circulation and dissemination of digital news through official accounts, linking content producers, operators, and receivers, relying on its robust online social features to enable networked transmission of news information. Weibo, known for its personalized information production and timeliness in information dissemination, utilizes "trending topics" as a direct channel to enhance its public attributes, displaying more interaction, timeliness, and openness

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compared to traditional public spheres, often playing a crucial role in media sourcing and shaping public opinion.

From the perspective of digital information flow, both WeChat and Weibo meet the public's diverse information reception needs. WeChat official accounts, divided into subscription and service types, operate similarly to traditional newspaper subscriptions, requiring users to subscribe to receive information, which is then further disseminated to non-subscribers. Although WeChat official accounts have limitations in news content production, such as closedness and delay, they serve as important intermediaries for disseminating opinionated and interpretative content. Weibo's anonymity, openness, and strong timeliness allow it to convey information to the public promptly, attract attention, and quickly gather public feedback, thereby rapidly shaping social discourse. However, its fragmented information dissemination is more suited to covering breaking and trending news. Currently, all media organizations in China have integrated WeChat and Weibo into their operations, tailoring their news content production to the features of each platform.

4.2 Research Questions

This paper uses content analysis to study the news sources used by People's Daily and Southern Weekly in their WeChat and Weibo postings, focusing on three types of news reports: political, social, and disaster news. Based on this, it explores the current use and trends in news source selection by the news industry in the digital age, delving into the profound implications of news sources in the news ecosystem during digitalization. The specific research questions are:

Q1: What are the characteristics and conventions of news sources chosen by different media for the same news event across different platforms?

Q2: What are the characteristics and trends of news sources chosen by different media for different news events across platforms?

Q3: Which news sources appear consistently across different platforms, media, and news events, reflecting the stability of news source selection tendencies in the digital age?

4.3 Sample Selection and Analysis

The study primarily selects samples from hot topics in China's public discourse over the past two years, divided into three categories of report types, each involving three hot events.

1). Political reports: the 20th Party Congress, the Winter Olympics, the National People's Congress.

2). Social reports: the Tangshan assault incident, the Fengxian octuplets case, the Hu Xinyu incident.

3). Disaster reports: the Zhengzhou floods, the Eastern Airlines crash, the Sichuan-Chongqing heatwave.

Based on these considerations, the study manually collected data on the coverage of these nine hot events by People's Daily and Southern Weekly, producing detailed statistical tables (Chang, Yang, & Wang, 2022). In sample analysis, the paper primarily relies on the scholarly distinction between

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"information sources" and "content sources". Information sources refer to the channels and methods news media use to obtain news during production, while content sources are the original providers of news content. Drawing on previous work, information sources are further divided into interviews, matrix media, social media, other media, press conferences, and notices, while content sources include national leaders and government officials, experts, industry personnel, media institutions, companies, event participants, eyewitnesses, and commentators. Additionally, the study conducted a statistical analysis of the presentation forms of news sources in the news report samples.

5. Research Findings

This study gathered a total of 564 news reports from WeChat official accounts and Weibo, consisting of 175 information sources and 328 content sources. Corresponding data visualizations were created, as described below:

5.1 Number of Reports and News Sources on both Micro-ends

In the 1970s, communication scholars Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw introduced the "agenda-setting" theory in their book "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Communication". They posited that mass media, by setting certain topics, can change how people perceive events or opinions, and even influence the level of audience attention. While mass media cannot directly determine people's views on a particular event, under the deliberate provision of information by media institutions, people's opinions and attitudes may change following the media's agenda-setting and the frequency of its coverage. As times have changed, the audience's demand for information has shifted from a simple, mirror-like reflection of objective facts to a "pseudo-environment" form of information representation, resulting in the audience being influenced to some extent by the "opinion environment" created by the mass media. Under this premise, this paper investigates the coverage of nine types of hot events by the two news media on micro-platforms. The number of reports can reflect the different levels of attention paid by different media on different platforms to various events, indirectly indicating the frequency of news source usage on different platforms.

Table 1. Number of Reports on 9 Hot Events by Two Media on Two Micro-clients

News Category	News Events	Number of reports on WeChat public accounts		Number of Weibo reports	
		People's Daily	Southern Weekly	People's Daily	Southern Weekly
Current Affairs Reports	the 20th National Congress of the CPC	16	12	25	19
	Winter Olympics	46	24	76	54
	The 2023 Two Sessions of the NPC and the CPPCC	8	9	16	21
Social Reports	Tangshan beating incident	7	8	10	8
	Feng County Eight-child Woman Incident	4	5	6	5
	Hu Xingyu incident	6	5	9	7
Disaster Reports	Heavy rain in Zhengzhou	11	15	14	19
	China Eastern Airlines crash	13	21	15	16
	High temperatures in Sichuan and Chongqing	7	9	6	12

Table 2. Two Media Reports on Two Micro-ends9News Sources of Hot Events

| News Category | News Events | WeChat public account reporting news source | | | | Weibo news source | | | |
| | | Information Source | | Content Source | | Information Source | | Content Source | |
		People's Daily	Southern Weekly	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	People's Daily	Southern Weekly
Current Affairs Reports	the 20th National Congress of the	7	5	5	6	8	3	5	9
	Winter Olympics	18	8	9	8	21	9	9	8
	The 2023 Two Sessions of the NPC	2	3	8	10	3	4	10	13
Social Reports	Tangshan beating incident	4	2	11	18	5	3	6	6
	Feng County Eight-child Woman	1	2	13	7	2	3	4	3
	Hu Xinyu incident	4	4	5	3	2	4	3	2
Disaster Reports	Heavy rain in Zhengzhou	5	7	10	28	1	3	8	15
	China Eastern Airlines crash	9	6	11	18	3	3	8	10
	High temperatures in Sichuan and	3	2	9	16	2	4	5	9

In this study, a total of 564 news reports were collected from the WeChat official accounts and Weibo platforms of both media houses. As seen in Table 1, both People's Daily and Southern Weekly featured a higher number of political reports, particularly focusing on major national events such as the 20th Party Congress and the Winter Olympics, while also adequately covering social and disaster news (Table 1). Furthermore, it was found that the number of reports on the Weibo platform for all three categories exceeded those on the WeChat official accounts. Firstly, from the platform perspective, the Weibo platform allows unrestricted posting of articles, where any topic related to the reports can be treated as a news point, enabling convenient news reporting and rapid formation of public opinion. Secondly, from the audience perspective, users are more inclined to search for information on Weibo, where they can directly access the "Trending" section to learn about the day's hot topics and participate in user interactions promptly. Hence, as illustrated in this graph, regardless of whether it's mainstream

media or local urban newspapers, the volume of reports on Weibo for all three categories surpasses that on WeChat official accounts. Table 2 shows that People's Daily and Southern Weekly used both information and content sources in their news reports on WeChat official accounts and Weibo (Table 2).

5.2 Two Micro-client Information Sources

This study gathered 175 information sources from the WeChat official accounts and Weibo of People's Daily and Southern Weekly, and detailed data visuals were created accordingly, as shown below:

Table 3. The Information Sources of 9 Types of Hot Events Reported by 2 Media WeChat Public Accounts

Information Source	Current Affairs Reports			Social Reports			Disaster reports			Information Source Proportion
	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type Proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	
Interview	22.22%	21.40%	27.21%	22.22%	12.50%	17.65%	35.30%	53.33%	43.75%	25.87%
Matrix media	17.05%	15.20%	16.25%	11.11%	25%	17.65%	17.65%	6.67%	12.49%	16.52%
Social media	20.00%	13.37%	16.30%	22.22%	12.50%	17.65%	11.76%	6.67%	9.38%	18.48%
Other media	29.62%	36.53%	28.61%	11.12%	37.50%	23.52%	29.41%	13.33%	25.00%	26.09%
Conference and Notice	11.11%	13.50%	11.63%	33.33%	12.50%	23.53%	5.88%	20.00%	9.38%	13.04%

Table 3 presents the statistics of information sources for the three types of reports on the WeChat official accounts of the two media outlets. In general, both media favor other media and interviews as the primary sources of information on WeChat, accounting for 26.09% and 25.87% respectively, ranking first and second. Social media and matrix media follow, with 18.48% and 16.52% respectively, while press releases and announcements are used the least, at only 13.04% (Table 3).

In political reporting on WeChat, other media and interviews are the most utilized information sources, at 28.61% and 27.21% respectively. Information from social media (16.30%) and matrix media (16.25%) are nearly identical, differing by only 0.05%. Press releases and announcements are less commonly used as sources, accounting for just 11.63%. For People's Daily's WeChat account, aside from other media (29.62%) and interviews (22.22%), social media (20%) and matrix media (17.05%) are also significant secondary sources. Southern Weekly's WeChat account tends to rely more heavily on other media for political reporting, at 36.53%, significantly higher than the other four types of sources. In these reports, the use of social media (13.37%) and press releases (13.5%) is relatively balanced.

In social reporting, the usage proportions of the five types of information sources on WeChat are quite

similar, with other media and press releases used more than the other three types. People's Daily's WeChat account frequently uses press releases and announcements (33.33%) as information sources in social reports because when social events occur, they quickly generate public opinion. Facing the loud public discourse, as a mainstream media outlet, it promptly retransmits authoritative reports from relevant organizations or units, as well as news conferences, to clarify the truth and guide public opinion and emotions appropriately. In contrast, Southern Weekly's WeChat account in social reports often chooses other media (37.50%) as the main source, swiftly retransmitting information from national authoritative media like CCTV to effectively guide public opinion, with a relatively even use of the other four types of sources.

In emergency reporting, interviews are the preferred information source on WeChat, accounting for 43.75%, followed by other media at 26.09%. The proportions of matrix media and press releases are similar, at 18.48% and 13.04%, respectively, while social media sources appear least frequently, at just 6.52%. Both media outlets tend to select interviews as the primary source in disaster reporting on their WeChat accounts, with Southern Weekly using interviews to a greater extent, at 53.33%, significantly higher than People's Daily's 35.30%. As a local urban media focusing on public welfare, Southern Weekly utilizes interviews to directly engage with eyewitnesses, participants, and commentators during disasters to gather more information about the incident and convey it promptly to the audience and the public. Additionally, People's Daily's WeChat account uses press releases and announcements less frequently (5.88%) in disaster reporting, while Southern Weekly's use of matrix media and social media (6.67% each) are the least frequent.

Table 4. Information Sources for Nine Hotspot Issues Reported by Two Media Outlets on Weibo

Weibo information source statistical chart

Information Source	Current Affairs Reports			Social Reports			Disaster reports			Information source proportion
	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportio	
Interview	25.00%	37.50%	29.17%	11.11%	20.00%	15.79%	33.33%	30.00%	31.25%	26.51%
Matrix media	12.50%	6.25%	10.42%	22.22%	20.00%	21.05%	16.67%	10.00%	12.50%	13.25%
Social media	25%	18.75%	22.92%	22.22%	10.00%	15.79%	0.00%	10.00%	6.25%	18.07%
Other media	31.25%	25.00%	29.16%	11.11%	20.00%	15.79%	16.67%	30.00%	25.00%	25.30%
Conferences and Notice	6.25%	12.50%	8.33%	33.34%	30.00%	31.58%	33.33%	20.00%	25.00%	16.87%

Table 4 displays the statistics of information sources for three types of reports on the Weibo platform for both media outlets. On Weibo, interviews (26.51%) and other media (25.30%) have the highest

percentages, showing a minimal difference between them, indicating that these are commonly used sources on Weibo. Social media and press releases and announcements are relatively balanced, accounting for 18.07% and 16.87% respectively, while matrix media is used the least, at only 13.25%.

In political reporting on Weibo, similar to the WeChat official accounts, interviews and other media are the primary sources, with nearly identical percentages of 29.17% and 29.16%. However, the use of social media as a source is higher on Weibo, at 22.92%, due to the inherent characteristics and rules of the Weibo platform. News reports on Weibo also effectively link matrix media and utilize press releases and announcements as sources, accounting for 10.42% and 8.33% respectively (Table 4).

In social reporting on Weibo, press releases and announcements are the most used sources, at 31.58%. This reflects Weibo's approach to major social emergencies, where it quickly disseminates official press releases and announcements as the main sources to accurately guide public opinion. Additionally, Weibo leverages matrix media (21.05%) to enrich its news production. Other sources, including interviews, social media, and other media, are used equally, each accounting for 15.79%.

In disaster reporting, matrix media (12.50%) and social media (6.25%) are the least utilized, positioning them on the fringes, while the usage of other sources remains more balanced, all above 20%. Both People's Daily and Southern Weekly tend to prefer interviews as a source, with respective usage rates of 33.33% and 30%. Moreover, People's Daily shows a high reliance on press releases and announcements, whereas Southern Weekly depends more on other media as a source.

5.3 Micro-platform Content Sources

This study gathered 328 content sources from the WeChat official accounts and Weibo of People's Daily and Southern Weekly, and detailed data visualizations were created accordingly, as shown below:

Table 5. Content sources for 9 types of hot events reported by two media WeChat official accounts

WeChat public account content source statistics chart										
	Current Affairs Reports			Social Reports			Disaster Reports			Content source proportion
content source	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	
National leaders and government	50.00%	40.67%	45.65%	24.14%	21.43%	22.81%	20.00%	16.13%	17.39%	25.64%
Experts and scholars	10.18%	33.33%	26.09%	17.24%	19.75%	21.05%	6.67%	16.13%	13.04%	10.46%
Industry personnel	9.09%	8.33%	0.70%	10.34%	7.14%	0.77%	13.33%	12.90%	13.04%	10.77%

Media organizations	9.09%	0.00%	4.35%	3.45%	7.14%	5.26%	6.67%	6.45%	6.52%	5.64%
Companies	4.55%	5.17%	4.35%	3.45%	5.25%	1.75%	10.00%	3.23%	5.43%	4.10%
Event participants	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	90%	14.29%	10.53%	16.67%	25.81%	22.83%	13.85%
Witnesses to the event	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%	10.71%	10.53%	13.33%	11.29%	11.97%	8.72%
Event commentators	9.09%	12.50%	10.86%	24.14%	14.29%	19.30%	13.33%	8.06%	9.78%	12.82%

Regarding the overall content sources used on the WeChat official accounts of both media outlets in the three categories of news reports, the media tend to select national leaders and government officials (25.64%), and experts and scholars (18.46%) as the primary content sources. The aim is to ensure the authoritativeness of the news reports and the credibility of the news media, while less frequently using media institutions (5.64%) and corporations (4.10%) as direct content sources.

In political and social reports, both media's WeChat platforms favor authoritative news sources over non-authoritative ones. The People's Daily WeChat account ranks national leaders and government officials as the most frequently used sources across all three news categories, with respective proportions of 50%, 24.14%, and 20%. Moreover, it does not utilize eyewitnesses or participants in political reporting, whereas in social and disaster reports, it more frequently includes commentators (24.14%) and participants (16.67%). This reflects that the media's use of news sources is influenced by the type of news report. Southern Weekly's WeChat account also ranks national leaders and government officials as the primary sources in political and social reports, at 41.67% and 21.43% respectively. However, in disaster reporting, its usage of participants (25.81%) far exceeds other sources, reflecting Southern Weekly's core values of justice, conscience, compassion, and rationality, and indicating that in the digital age, media source selection is still influenced by the media's own characteristics (Table 5).

Table 6. Content Sources for 9 Hot Event Categories Reported by 2 Media on Weibo

Weibo content source statistics chart

Content source	Current Affairs Reports			Social Reports			Disaster Reports			Content source proportion
	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	People's Daily	Southern Weekly	Type proportion	
National leaders and government officials	25.00%	20.00%	20.37%	23.08%	25.23%	20.83%	28.57%	20.59%	23.64%	21.81%
Experts and scholars	20.83%	23.33%	22.21%	15.38%	9.09%	12.50%	9.52%	8.82%	9.09%	15.79%
Industry personnel	12.50%	6.67%	12.96%	15.38%	9.09%	12.50%	9.52%	5.80%	7.27%	9.02%
Media organizations	4.18%	10.00%	7.41%	7.71%	12.50%	4.17%	0.00%	2.94%	1.82%	4.52%
Companies	8.33%	3.33%	5.56%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.76%	8.82%	7.27%	5.26%
Event participants	20.83%	10.00%	16.67%	15.38%	18.78%	16.67%	14.29%	23.53%	20.00%	17.29%
Witnesses to the event	0.00%	10.00%	5.56%	15.38%	7.13%	20.83%	23.82%	14.71%	10.18%	13.53%
Event commentators	8.33%	16.67%	9.26%	7.69%	10.10%	12.50%	9.52%	14.71%	12.73%	12.78%

For both media outlets on the Weibo platform, as with the WeChat official account platform, national leaders and government officials are the primary content sources, constituting 21.81% of usage. Other categories such as event participants, experts and scholars, eyewitnesses, and commentators also feature prominently, with percentages above ten: 17.29%, 15.79%, 13.53%, and 12.78% respectively. In contrast, industry personnel, companies, and media institutions are used less frequently, occupying the most marginal positions with 9.02%, 5.26%, and 4.52% respectively.

In political reporting, national leaders and government (20.37%) and experts and scholars (22.21%) remain the most frequently used sources, reflecting a continued reliance on authoritative news sources. For social reporting, both news media do not use companies as a source at all, with a relatively balanced use of other news sources. In disaster reporting, aside from national leaders and government officials (23.64%), eyewitnesses (23.82%) and participants (23.53%) are extensively used by both People's Daily and Southern Weekly on Weibo, indicating that the use of authoritative and non-authoritative sources is constrained by media attributes and platform rules (Table 6).

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper aims to outline the overall landscape of news source selection and usage in the news industry in the digital age through content analysis of "micro-platform" reporting by People's Daily and Southern Weekly.

Firstly, from a platform perspective, the selection of information sources on both WeChat and Weibo is balanced and aligns with the news production patterns in the digital age. On WeChat, aside from interviews and other media being heavily utilized, other sources are also appropriately used,

particularly social media, showcasing the platform's integration of original and curated content. In terms of content sources, both WeChat and Weibo utilize authoritative sources such as national leaders and government officials, and experts and scholars, to enhance the authoritativeness of news reporting. Additionally, both platforms pay considerable attention to non-traditional sources like event participants, eyewitnesses, and commentators, especially evident in social and disaster reporting, reflecting a higher degree of trust in traditional authoritative news sources on these platforms.

Secondly, from a media institution perspective, People's Daily and Southern Weekly display clear differences in source selection. As a mainstream media outlet, People's Daily has inherent advantages in accessing official sources represented by national leaders and government officials. In contrast, Southern Weekly, as a local urban media, faces certain constraints in accessing authoritative sources. Especially in political reporting, when major policies are announced or significant meetings held, mainstream media can access government information firsthand. In contrast, local urban media like Southern Weekly rely on rebroadcasting from other media or official announcements from government departments, occasionally using social media accounts as supplementary sources in disaster reporting, significantly lagging behind mainstream media in terms of timeliness.

Lastly, from a reporting type perspective, political reporting primarily relies on official news sources, while social and disaster reporting tend to favor non-official sources. According to content sources on WeChat, both People's Daily and Southern Weekly predominantly use authoritative sources like national leaders and government officials in political reporting. However, in disaster reporting, besides heavily utilizing governmental sources, both also extensively use participants as primary news sources.

While data analysis supports these conclusions, it is challenging to generalize about news source selection in the digital age due to ongoing technological evolution and the manual nature of data collection from WeChat and Weibo, which may include errors such as duplicates or omissions. Nonetheless, this study's findings suggest: first, that news production in the digital era still predominantly relies on government as the leading news source to ensure report authoritativeness; second, that non-elite sources such as the general public are increasingly featured in social and disaster reporting, reflecting a shift towards democratization in news source selection; and third, that media characteristics and platform rules directly influence news source selection in digital news production.

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