

Analysis of the transmission of international breaking news on social media platforms from the perspective of Tipping point Theory -- Taking the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as an example

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Abstract. Malcolm Gladwell's "Tipping Point" theory has been widely used in analyzing epidemic phenomena since its inception. The theory's core is the three laws of popularity: the law of the few, the stickiness factor, and the context power. Previous studies have proved the explanatory power in the context of Internet communication. On July 8, 2020, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated in Nara. The incident spread rapidly on Weibo and became a phenomenon. This paper introduces the Tipping Point theory and studies the case to summarize the mechanism and principle of international flash news dissemination on social media platforms and explore the experience and enlightenment for future communication. What is discovered is that with the dissemination of international breaking news on social media, the "mavens" journalists shift from the frontstage to the backfield, forming a "journalist-news organization" mechanism with both "mavens" and "connectors" roles, which directly triggers the epidemic. Influencers with a considerable fan base work as salesmen, forming a communication mechanism where "salesmen" take the center and spread out, and new salesmen appear at key nodes to continue to spread, which has the possibility of continuously exploding. The research on the "stickiness" of events discovered that the content framework and dynamic reporting mode combining photographs or videos with text could help increase users' attention to news events and spread enthusiasm. The study of context power found that the objective social environment greatly influences the spread of events, directly affecting the public's sensitivity to events.

Keywords: Epidemic, Tipping Point Theory, International Breaking News.

1. Introduction

With the strong global development of the mobile Internet, network platforms with media attributes such as microblogs have become as valuable news media as traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio. Since the birth of Weibo, its extensive accessibility and high timeliness have continuously impacted the traditional order of international emergency reporting. Under the trend of deepening globalization involvement worldwide and more frequent international interaction between countries and regions, new media platforms such as Weibo display strong media advantages in the face of high-frequency and breaking news, particularly when dealing with news events that are continuously followed up [1,2]. In addition, in the international burst news communication activities on Weibo, in addition to the involvement of traditional news organizations, more of them are spontaneous dissemination by Weibo users, which also makes the international burst news in Weibo have stronger immediacy, interactivity, promotion and stereoscopic nature.

On July 8, 2022, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe died after being assassinated during a street speech. As a former Japanese prime minister who pursues "Proactive Contribution to Peace", his information has been highlighted by Chinese media. After the assassination of Shinzo Abe, People's Daily first posted, "# Abenabe fell to the ground wounded by shooting# AbenAbe shot suspect has been arrested " on Weibo at 10:53, which rapidly caused extensive comments and reposts. Then CCTV News, Global Times, and other traditional news organizations started actively publishing news on the Weibo platform. With the continuous generation of new news on the news scene and the continuous discovery of news facts, traditional news organizations carry out "dynamic reporting" on

the Weibo platform, follow up the entire process of on-site information, and steadily explore and recover the truth. From 10:00 on July 8, 2022, to 10:00 on July 14, 2022, a total of 20,973,785 messages related to Abe's assassination were posted on Weibo. In this process, the "explosion" of traditional news organizations on Weibo and the promotion and diffusion of Weibo users rapidly made "Abe's assassination" phenomenon news.

Therefore, this study will use Malcolm Gladwell's "tipping point" theory as an analysis tool, combined with the characteristics of the Web2.0 new media era, adopt the case analysis method to analyze this phenomenon, and explore the reasons why the news of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" is widely spread on the Weibo platform. This study will first briefly introduce Malcolm Gladwell's "tipping point" and its theoretical core "three laws of popularity": "individual character law", "adhesion law," and "environmental power law"; then the "tipping point" theory and the "three laws of popularity" are introduced into the news of "Shinzo Abe assassination" for concrete analysis; finally, this study summarizes the mechanism and principle of the news dissemination process of "Shinzo Abe's assassination", and explores the experience and enlightenment of the dissemination of international breaking news on Weibo platform in the future in this process.

2. "Tipping point" theory in the era of web2.0 new media

2.1. Malcolm Gladwell's "tipping point" theory and new developments in the web2.0 era

In 2000, the American writer Malcolm Gladwell wrote *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference* and proposed the "tipping point" theory in this work. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference* has been a bestseller in the New York Times for 10 consecutive months. Malcolm Gladwell was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time Magazine in 2005. He uses this book to make insightful analyses of business cases and other classic pop culture. Malcolm Gladwell pointed out that the prevalence of anything has three characteristics: "infectivity," "detonability," and "tipping point." "Tipping point" is the critical point at which an epidemic tide breaks through, causing the event or thing to become widespread and spread widely [3].

Since its birth, this theory has been widely implemented in psychology, anthropology, sociology, and more research fields. It can also be seen in the analysis of the communication impact of cinema and television works, the obesity problem of citizens, and the popularity of games. Nevertheless, limited by the era of its birth -- the era of Web1.0, the "tipping point" theory at the beginning of its birth considers that the popularity of information on the Internet does not have the "tipping effect" demonstrated in the traditional media era and that people have a natural "resistance" to Internet information. With the extensive arrival of the Web2.0 era, studies have completely proved that the "tipping point" theory still has strong explanatory power in the highly interactive, open, and shared Internet environment [4].

2.2. The law of popularity

As Malcolm Gladwell points out in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, The "three laws of popularity" are the three key factors that trigger the "Tipping Point", which is also called the core of the "Tipping Point". The three laws of popularity are composed of the law of the few, the stickiness factor, and the power of context.

In the law of the few, three characters led to the popularity of the transmission of information and events: connectors, mavens, and salesmen. Connectors are responsible for gathering information during the widely spread communication process, making comprehensive and continuous mining of factors that are widely spread or may be widely spread. Mavens take the information assembled by Connectors as a basis, store and analyze it, and eventually transform it into a popular information resource. As a popular transmission process, the role of the most attractive gathering from mavens will have epidemic information resources according to its characteristics of targeted communication. These three roles have their own division of labor and are deeply connected. At the same time, the

goal of the three roles is all to convert specialized information and concepts into easy-to-understand information with popularity and to decrease the distance and gap between communication.

In the law of stickiness factor, the elements of the thing itself can be widely spread, which is the key point of the law. The "stickiness" event has the characteristics of making people feel the great impact and unforgettable, thus arousing the resonance of the audience and promoting its dissemination.

In the law of the power of context, the background and objective conditions of widely spread events are the basis of the law. The external environment is the hotbed of information popularity. If "Stickiness" is the resonance that an individual feels when viewing information, then epidemics that conform to the law of context power focus on the potential for epidemic at the level of society as a whole. When there is a mutual relationship between widespread events and the external environment, social fashion will be triggered. At the same time, if the external environment is not conducive to the popularity of information, no matter whether the information has "Stickiness" or the promotion of individual figures, it will be determined by the external environment and causes unpopularity [5-9].

It is worth mentioning that in the real communication process, due to the high degree of social connectivity, a certain communication role can play one or two roles at the same time. The three laws of popularity reveal the internal law of the event's popularity, which has a high reference value for analyzing the spreading mechanism of Shinzo Abe's assassination on the Weibo platform. In the second part, this paper will combine and analyze the three laws of popularity in the "tipping point" theory with the spread of Abe's assassination on Weibo and discuss the spread mechanism.

3. The law of the few in the news dissemination process of "Shinzo Abe's assassination"

During the dissemination process of the "Shinzo Abe's assassination" event on Weibo, connectors, mavens, and salesmen played a key role. Connectors are responsible for continuously collecting information from the scene of Abe's assassination, and mavens are responsible for transmitting this information to target users. Salesmen are responsible for shortening the distance between different groups and promoting communication between different groups of processed news information.

The process of the explosive spread of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" comprises the release of information, the search volume and the increase of heat, and eventually the wider spread of the effect. In the entire communication process, the release of information by key roles is the key node of communication. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, the information release of each key role on the key nodes drives the increase of each transmission heat.

Table 1. "Shinzo Abe's assassination" in popular blog articles

Serial number	Organization	Time	Title	Repost number
1	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 16:48:47	Japanese media: Mr. Abe died of his injuries.	164595
2	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:18:26	Japanese media released footage of Abe being shot	55404
3	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:31:43	Abe has no vital signs	93834
4	People's Daily	2022-07-08 10:53:23	Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot and wounded	36171
5	Global Times	2022-07-09 08:31:13	Japanese police announced the cause of Abe's death	6640
6	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:00:15	Abe goes into cardiopulmonary arrest	39129
7	China Newsweek	2022-07-08 18:33:34	Mr. Abe's death would trigger a major political upheaval in Japan	8686

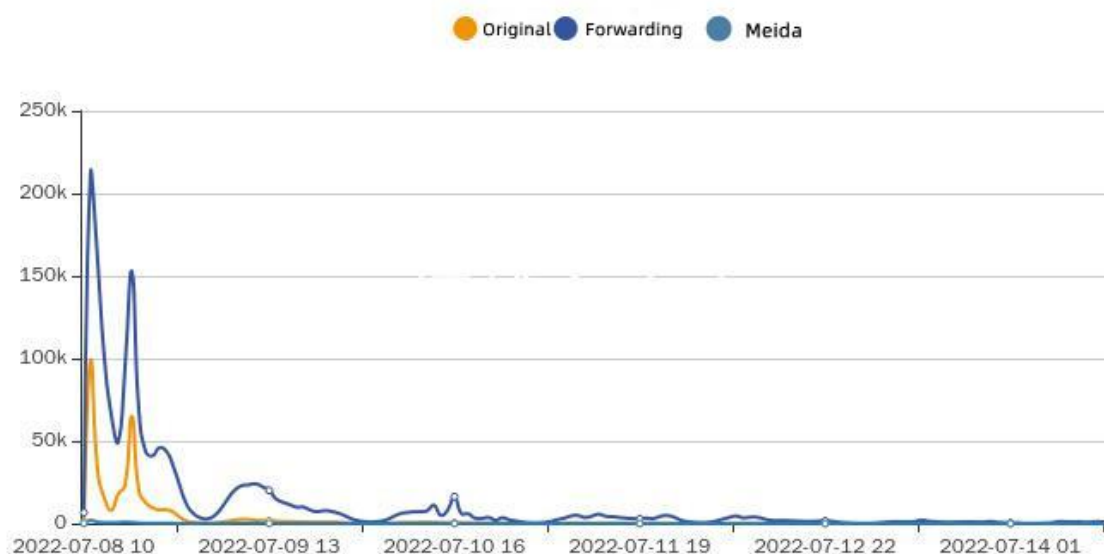


Figure 1. Heat trend chart of "Shinzo Abe assassination."

In the process of the spread of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" on the Weibo platform, frontline journalists of traditional news organizations played a "maven" role, regularly providing first-hand information for news organizations at the scene of Shinzo Abe's assassination and continuously tracking reports to assure the timeliness and accuracy of information. News organizations on the Weibo platform act as "connectors" in this segment, rapidly transmitting information garnered from journalists on the front lines to the public. In this process, it is worth mentioning that the relationship between "mavens" and "connectors" in an organic integration of the whole, that is, the relationship between journalists and news organizations is a definite division of labor and highly integrated. In the traditional sense, the "maven" role is comparatively autonomous from the "connector" role and has a clear boundary of responsibilities. At the beginning of the epidemic, some information may be released to achieve the effect of preheating the epidemic. However, in the spread of "Abe's assassination," the original message was sent directly by news organizations. As shown in Table 2, People's Daily took the lead in releasing the news of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" on the Weibo platform, and then major

media organizations on the Weibo platform began to report it one after another. In this process, the journalist, in his "maven" role, passes first-hand information directly to the media organization, in his "connector" role, and transfers the right to publish information to the news organization. This shift has seen "mavens" journalists not assume the responsibility of the front of the traditional news report but from the front to the back. This blurred the "maven" and "connector" in the process of information dissemination, consequently forming a "journalist-news organization" mechanism with both "maven" and "connector" roles. Such an information release mechanism makes the preheating part of the creation of the "maven" role in the entire process of extensive dissemination severely reduced; alternatively, the "connector" will swiftly and effectively transmit high-quality information to the audience, thus achieving the effect of direct detonation.

Table 2. Chronological transmission routes

Serial number	Organization	Time	Title
1	People's Daily	2022-07-08 10:53:23	Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been shot and wounded
2	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:00:15	Abe goes into cardiopulmonary arrest
3	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:18:26	Japanese media released footage of Abe being shot
4	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:31:43	Abe has no vital signs
5	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 11:43:49	The 40-year-old man who shot Abe has been arrested
6	Beijing News Shell Finance	2022-07-08 14:26:19	What will be the impact of Abe's shooting on Japanese politics
7	CCTV NEWS	2022-07-08 16:48:47	Japanese media: Shinzo Abe dies from his injuries
8	China Newsweek	2022-07-08 18:33:34	Mr. Abe's death would trigger a major political upheaval in Japan
9	People's Daily	2022-07-08 21:33:42	New images emerge of the attack on Abe
10	Global Times	2022-07-09 08:31:13	Japanese police announced the cause of Abe's death

Under the "journalist-news organization" mechanism, when the news organization directly triggers the comprehensive dissemination of information, the "salesman", as the accelerant of the extensive dissemination, promotes the information to another group with itself as the core. Take the Global Times' "Shinzo Abe in cardiopulmonary arrest state" at 11:00 on July 8, 2022, as an example, as shown in Figure 2. After its release, the number of effective reposts was 862 times, covering 7,823,438 people. In the transmission process of this blog article, there are six levels of communication, and each level has a key "salesman" to promote the information to the next group for wider dissemination. In the transmission process of this blog article, the user "Bai Xiaoi", as the "salesman" in the second layer of forwarding, drove the forwarding 136 times and initiated the final five layers of transmission, which played a crucial role in the entire transmission process. On social platforms, such key communication figures as "Bai Xiaoi" are called influencer who usually plays the role of the "salesman" to act as a bridge for information transmission and promote the spread of certain information among specific groups.

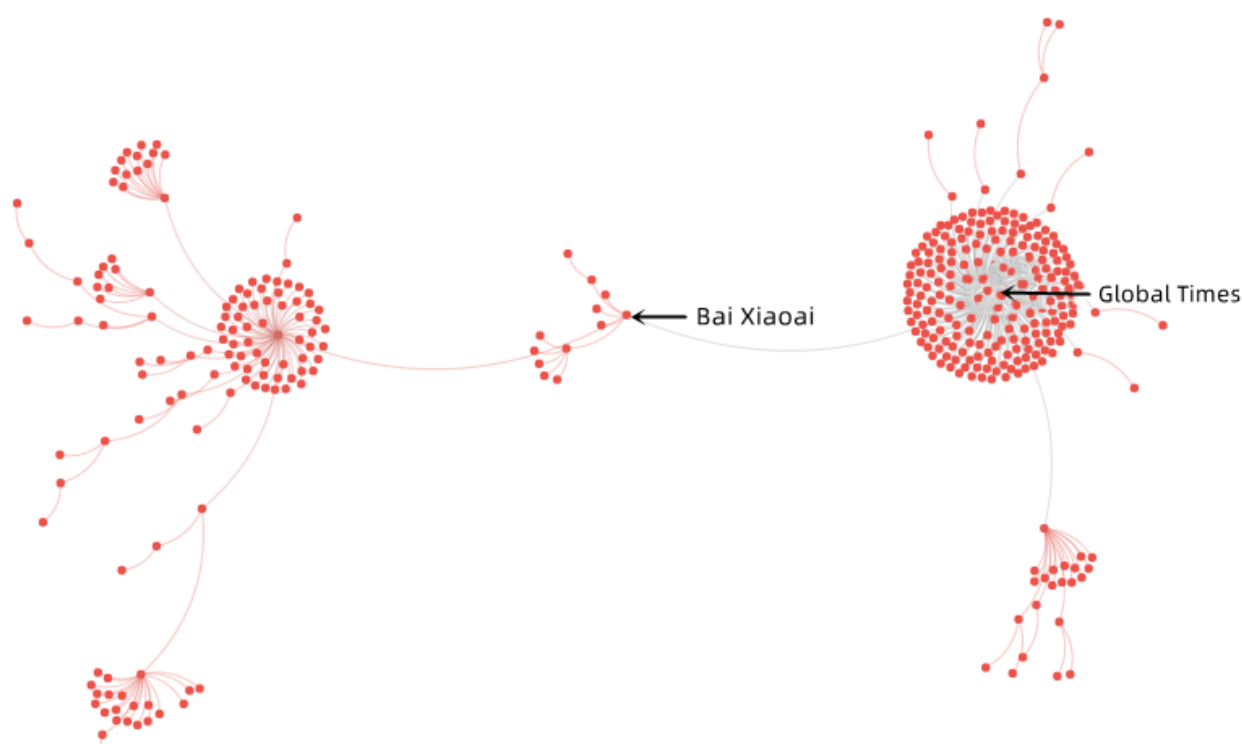


Figure 2. Neural network structure

As can be seen from the case of the Global Times, in the entire process of transmission, the order of salesman appearance is consistent with the process of blog article forwarding, forming a transmission mechanism that takes "salesman" as the center to spread outward, and new "salesmen" appear at key nodes to continue to spread. This mechanism takes advantage of the nature of social platforms such as Weibo: each user's spread can reach their followers or friends, with the potential to continue to explode.

4. The law of stickiness factor in the news dissemination of "Shinzo Abe's assassination"

"Stickiness" exists in the information itself and refers to the infectious and influential factors of the information. The analysis of the "stickiness" of information needs to be considered from multiple dimensions in combination with specific cases, such as a series of indicators for consideration, such as information structure, rhetoric style, information quality, and information form. In the spreading process of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" on the Weibo platform, each popular blog has a strong "stickiness" at different levels.

4.1. The strong impact of national politician assassination

As a former Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe is known to the Chinese people. From the perspective of the quality of news content, the assassination of a national politician is unexpected, with a strong impact and shock. The following figure shows the emoji analysis of the blog article related to the "Shinzo Abe assassination" incident. In the analysis, more than 200,000 people used the "Shock" emoji, ranking first among the emojis of reposts and comments. As a major international event recorded in history, the "assassination of Shinzo Abe" brought the public impact into information "stickiness" and promoted the wide dissemination of information.

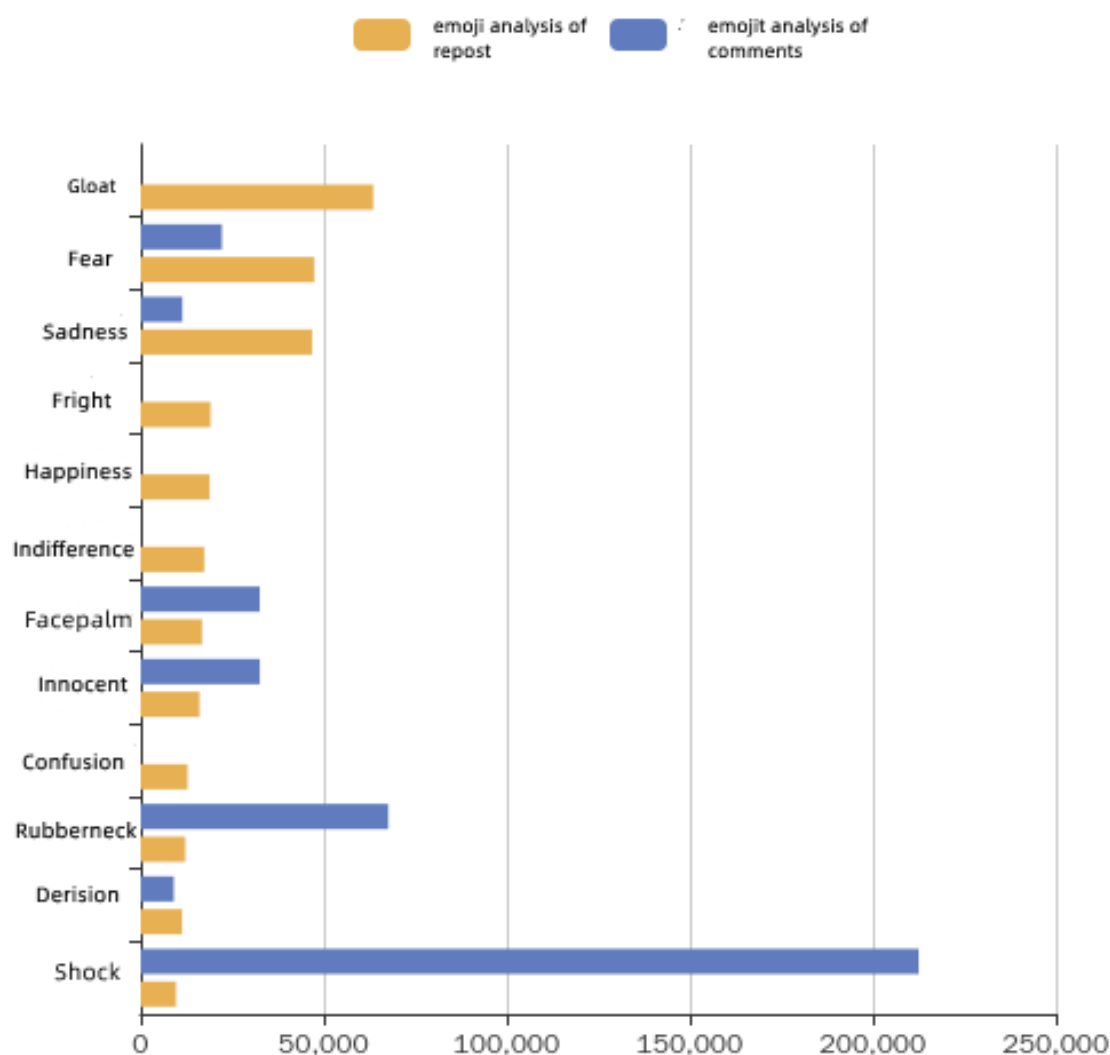


Figure 3. The emoji analysis of the blog article related to the "Shinzo Abe assassination" incident

4.2. The combination of images or videos with text that can rebuild the scene of the incident

In the era of new media, the combination of images and videos greatly enhances the ability of news to express and restore events. Video materials can also promote people's attention to the news event itself. Take the "Japanese media release # Abe shot photograph" released by CCTV News as an example, which was the first article published with video on the Weibo platform, with up to 93834 forwarding volumes. Through video data, the audience can understand the process of the event from a visual perspective, which makes up for the lack of visual expression in words.

4.3. The dynamic and continuous follow-up reporting model

In order to balance the timeliness of breaking news and the extent of detail of the report, many media organizations adopted the reporting strategy of the dynamic report and continuous follow-up in the "Shinzo Abe assassination" incident. For example, CCTV News issued a 46-word short message at 10:54 to introduce Shinzo Abe's shooting while making a speech and then dispatched four consecutive blogs to convey the situation in a dynamic way following the development of the situation. The four messages were read 17.03 million, 32.48 million, 32.38 million, and 64.38 million, respectively (as of 24:00 on July 8). This dynamic and orderly reporting mode effectively takes into account timeliness, and completeness greatly elevates the attention of Weibo users and is conducive to user forwarding and extensive information dissemination.

5. The law of context power in the news dissemination of "Shinzo Abe's assassination"

The law of context power refers to the fact that the external and objective environment can influence people's attitudes and concepts and exert a tremendous influence on the impact of communication. In other words, in the epidemic tide of an event, the reason that promotes its widespread is not only the information itself but also the social environment that people live in, which leads to a certain attitude that is conducive to its spread.

The Chinese people's attitudes towards Abe are contentious and strong. In an article analyzing the China-Japan relations under Shinzo Abe after he took over as Japanese prime minister, "Uncle Reiwa" mentioned that Shinzo Abe's relations with China were not "friendly" in the real sense but more like an ambitious "detour" [9]. Liu Jiangyong, a professor of international relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing, said of Mr. Abe's foreign policy: 'He is trying to appeal to the right wing at home while pursuing a formal leadership engagement with China without altering his view of history and pride.' Following this philosophy, Abe advocated the purchase of the Diaoyu Islands in 2012, following the preceding prime minister's cabinet, and visited the Yasukuni Shrine the following year, which further deteriorated China-Japan relations [10].

It is not difficult to speculate that Mr. Abe's policies during his tenure have made his government controversial to the Chinese public. Nevertheless, whether the Chinese public's attitude toward Abe's government is positive or negative, the long-term relationship between Abe and the Chinese people makes the Chinese people pay close attention to Abe's message. Through the analysis of the sentiment judgment model cooperated by Weibo and the Research Center for Social Computing and Information Retrieval of Harbin Institute of Technology, the sensitivity of the "Shinzo Abe assassination" event on the Weibo platform is as high as 82.79% (as of July 14, 2022), which belongs to the highly sensitive range (in the model: Low sensitivity (0% to 20%), medium sensitivity (20% to 80%), and high sensitivity (80% to 100%). The social environment, which paid close attention to Abe, played an important role in the spread of information, showing the power of the environment.

6. Conclusion

Malcolm Gladwell's "tipping Point" theory provides a unique perspective to analyze the spread of global breaking news on social media platforms. Through the interpretation of the reasons for the widespread, the dissemination mechanism behind and future improvement strategies can be better detected and explained.

By introducing Malcolm Gladwell's "tipping point" theory, this paper analyzes the dissemination phenomenon of "the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe" on the Weibo platform and makes an in-depth discussion of its transmission mechanism combined with the three popular rules. In the process of analysis, the information report mechanism of "maven" and "stickiness" of international breaking news on social media platforms is discovered -- "journalist-news organization" mechanism. Through the dissemination effect of "Shinzo Abe's assassination" event on the network platform, it has been proved that the information release mechanism of "journal-news organization" is suitable for the release of international breaking news on social platforms and can achieve a good dissemination effect. In the process of the international breaking news release in the future, the combination of photographs or videos and text should be adopted more, which proves to be more in line with the browsing preferences of social media users. In addition, compared with the expression of pure text, the combination of photographs and videos makes the news have stronger expression and reductive ability.

All in all, the above specific analysis according to the explosive point theory helps to select the best news reporting strategy. With the development of science and technology and the change of objective conditions, the application of the "tipping point" theory should be updated constantly to ensure the effective guidance of international breaking news reports and the enlightenment for the future phenomenon of popularity.

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