

Host Role Space and Communication Strategies in the Intelligent Media Era: A Case Study of CCTV' s Cultural Variety Show “The Curtain Rises” (Postprint)

Authors: Yang Zisi

Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The advent of the intelligent media era has introduced new challenges and opportunities to the content production modalities of traditional host communication. This paper takes “The Curtain Rises”, the nation’ s first large-scale premium drama performance showcase launched by CCTV Arts and Entertainment Program Center, as a case study to investigate the evolving landscape of program hosts as host communication subjects in the broadcasting and television field, and to examine their identity characteristics, role scope, and communication strategies in this new historical period.

Full Text

Preamble

Exploring Host Role Space and Communication Strategies in the Era of Intelligent Media: A Case Study of CCTV' s Cultural Variety Show “The Curtain Rises”

School of Journalism and Communication, Zhongyuan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan 451191

Abstract: The advent of the intelligent media era has brought new challenges and opportunities to the production modes of traditional hosting and communication content. This paper takes “The Curtain Rises,” the first large-scale high-quality theatrical performance show launched by CCTV' s Literary and Art Program Center, as a case study to explore the evolving landscape of program hosts as the main subjects of broadcasting hosting and communication, as well as their identity characteristics, role space, and communication strategies in this new historical period.

Keywords: intelligent media era; hosting communication; role space; communication strategies; The Curtain Rises

Classification Code: G642

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2022)01-131-04

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2022.01.040

Citation Format: Yang Zisi. Exploring Host Role Space and Communication Strategies in the Era of Intelligent Media: A Case Study of CCTV' s Cultural Variety Show "The Curtain Rises" [J]. China Media Technology, 2022(01): 131-133, 154.

1.3 Diversification of Communication Content

We are currently witnessing the dawn of intelligent media, as media founded on mobile internet transformation become increasingly intelligent. The arrival of the intelligent media era, heralded by concepts such as "everything is media," "human-machine integration," and "self-evolution," signifies that new technological forces and media characteristics will "invade" the production of hosting communication content [1]. Technologies including artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality (VR/AR), and 5G are propelling the emerging development trends of the intelligent media era and forming a new landscape, while hosting communication—an important communication form in radio and television media—is also quietly undergoing transformation. In the evolution of media development, communication content was traditionally transmitted unidirectionally from producers to audiences with limited options for the latter. However, in the intelligent media and information age, hosting communication in intelligent environments presents a flourishing diversity. Algorithms and big data analytics enable content production at each network node to be gradually selected, recommended, and disseminated, allowing information symbols from different network branches to rapidly spread throughout the entire information network. Every audience member can also become a content producer, leading to increasingly diversified communication content.

1.1 Diversification of Communication Subjects

In the intelligent media era where communication subjects, platforms, and content are all diversifying, traditional media hosts face tremendous challenges. Due to the optimization and upgrading of high-tech media technologies in intelligent media environments, the threshold for hosting communication subjects has gradually lowered, breaking the former monopoly on discourse within the broadcasting system. The 准入 landscape of "everyone can be a host" has led to increasingly diversified composition of hosting communication subjects. Network media hosts have entered online platforms, and a large number of internet

celebrities have emerged alongside them. Moreover, AI virtual anchors created through intelligent media technologies have taken on the role of virtual hosts in cyberspace. The “dominant” position of traditional media hosting communication has begun to loosen, objectively requiring program hosts to assume new roles and functions. In this new communication environment, as profound changes occur in communication discourse and narrative modes, and as various new media platforms accelerate the integration and complementarity between media, program hosts—acting as the “vanguard” in the field of hosting communication content production—must inevitably face transformation [2].

1.2 Diversification of Communication Platforms

In the former print media era, the maturation of radio and television technology generated content production forms of audio and video streams. In the early 21st century, as radios and televisions entered millions of households, radio and television as emerging media presented unprecedented prosperity. With the development of the internet, various new media relying on networks gradually entered people’ s vision, enabling interactive communication on platforms like Weibo and forums. Furthermore, media products such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops have accelerated the process of small-screen communication. Audio-visual content production forms are no longer monotonously dependent on traditional media like radio and television, but have gradually shifted toward online platforms such as Youku, iQiyi, Tencent, Douyin, and Bilibili. In the intelligent media era, communication platforms rely on algorithms and big data to integrate and upgrade various resources, extending their diversified new media platform tentacles into all areas of hosting communication.

2. Identity Characteristics of Cultural Variety Show Hosts

Program hosts are generally understood as individuals who, relying on radio and television media platforms, appear as personalized actors in the program content production process, represent group viewpoints, and conduct hosting communication activities with vocal language and paralanguage as fundamental means [3]. As a highly culturally connotative category within television variety shows, cultural programs themselves possess strong literary and artistic qualities. While providing entertainment and leisure, they also exert certain cultural influence and value guidance. Consequently, hosts of cultural variety shows have distinct identity characteristics, role positioning, and functional spaces compared to other programs. Particularly when facing the evolving landscape of hosting communication in the intelligent media era, cultural variety show hosts must assume new role spaces and adapt to trends while changing with the times. In CCTV’ s Literary and Art Program Center’ s show “The Curtain Rises,” host Zhang Lei and story narrator Ni Ping have established excellent models for this transformation.

2.1 Social Nature

As social beings whose attributes depend on the hosting communication environment within society, hosts' identity characteristics are influenced by the era and social environment in which they live, and they always prioritize the pursuit of social benefits. "The Curtain Rises" not only disseminates red revolutionary stories but also allows host Zhang Lei to impart cultural genes and story connotations from that era, enhancing audiences' visual, auditory, and aesthetic thinking capabilities. The program aims to promote and display the Party and state's propaganda will through stories behind various large-scale theatrical performances. In recent years, numerous historical milestones—the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the decisive battle to achieve the first centenary goal, poverty alleviation, and the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China—have created fervent publicity opportunities. As the national mainstream media, China Media Group must fulfill its functions of publicity, education, and opinion guidance, and host Zhang Lei of "The Curtain Rises" inevitably embodies socialist core values in the program, demonstrating noble cultural value and social worth.

2.2 Credibility

A host's credibility stems from noble moral character and professional dedication, and constitutes an important factor in media efforts to build host brands. Host Zhang Lei of "The Curtain Rises" represents the backbone of China Media Group, while story narrator Ni Ping is a household name. Both individuals' rich knowledge frameworks and solid professional skills guarantee audience trust in them. As public spokespersons, hosts must think from the audience's perspective in content creation while simultaneously exerting cultural leadership and opinion leadership roles, speaking for audiences and feeding back to them. As spokespersons, program hosts assume the roles of truth revealers, issue discussants, social communicators, and information integrators. To a certain extent, host Zhang Lei and story narrator Ni Ping of "The Curtain Rises" have given voice to the public's aspirations.

2.3 Aesthetic Quality

A host's aesthetic quality manifests in both connotative and formal beauty, emphasizing self-cultivation alongside language, image, attire, and temperament. Host Zhang Lei of "The Curtain Rises" possesses a quiet, elegant temperament and gentle, sincere language. In each episode, she narrates the stories behind every theatrical production with sincere emotion through her capable and elegant updo and long dress, creating an extremely enjoyable aesthetic experience.

2.4 Personality

Personality is a crucial guarantee for attracting audiences and maintaining a program's lasting vitality, representing a host's most distinctive personal char-

acteristic and symbol of personalized communication. As a female host for CCTV programs, Zhang Lei' s style positioning differs from Dong Qing' s dignified elegance, Zhu Xun' s warm friendliness, or Li Sisi' s delicate beauty. Her hosting style possesses personalized traits: steady yet dynamic, calm yet not rigid, maintaining composure while demonstrating flexibility.

2.5 Emotionality

Emotionality refers to a program host' s ability to flexibly mobilize thoughts and feelings, using delicate humanistic emotional colors as a guide to conduct sincere and equal communication activities with audiences. In “The Curtain Rises,” host Zhang Lei and story narrator Ni Ping demonstrate profound emotional depth, showing complete sincerity in every theatrical performance interview. They form excellent emotional conversation fields with guests and audiences, even shedding tears during some deeply moving segments, demonstrating the hosts' humanistic care and empathy.

3. Role Space of Cultural Variety Show Hosts

As a social communication role, cultural variety show hosts possess both mass communication characteristics and multiple attributes of personalized and individualized communication, making them composite character roles in hosting communication content production activities. Hosts must integrate themselves with audiences, clarify their communication identity as equals with audiences, and simultaneously, to better integrate their identity roles into program production, must have clear understanding of their role positioning and functional space [4].

3.1 Embodiment of Media Will

As the communication subject in content production activities on radio, television, and other media platforms, program hosts to a certain extent assume the communication roles of political propaganda and public opinion, and must achieve certain cultural and social benefits, unconditionally embodying and maintaining the communication credibility and social influence of their affiliated media. In recent years, numerous historical milestones have created fervent publicity opportunities. As the national mainstream media, China Media Group must bear the responsibility of publicity, education, and opinion guidance, and host Zhang Lei of “The Curtain Rises” inevitably embodies the Party and state' s propaganda will in the program.

3.3 Disseminator of Advanced Culture

Program hosts are pioneers of cultural dissemination, and the popular programs they create serve as carriers for cultural transmission. Program hosts should correctly position their communication identity, clarify their media responsibilities, shoulder the historical mission of inheriting civilizational spirit, disseminating

advanced culture, and participating in cultural construction during social transformation periods, becoming gatekeepers and transmitters of cultural integration. The program topics of “The Curtain Rises” –including the ethnic song and dance drama “Yimeng Mountain,” the spy dance drama “The Eternal Wave,” the poverty alleviation song and dance drama “Ode to the Earth,” and the national liberation dance drama “Cavalry” –all possess distinctive historical characteristics of their eras and reflect China Media Group’ s responsibility, commitment, and vision as the national mainstream media, subtly and enduringly influencing audiences by transmitting the spirit of red advanced culture.

3.4 Program Process Leader and Organizer

Hosts are the “face” of a program, while the program is the host’ s “substance” –the two complement each other. Program hosts’ role positioning encompasses being program connectors, coordinators, leaders, and drivers—the soul and core of the program. In program processes, hosts should also upgrade from unidirectional 传播填鸭者 (spoon-feeders) to multidirectional interactive organizers, relying on their advantages in “human” perception and control to make multiple interactive behaviors more humanistic [5]. In “The Curtain Rises,” host Zhang Lei assumes the roles of narrator and interviewer. When guests speak freely and affect the overall program pace, Zhang Lei naturally assumes the host’ s leading function, taking control of the rhythm with sincere emotion, introducing guests, guiding and advancing the program process, evaluating and summarizing each interview segment, and explaining different theatrical performers and story plots to audiences, thereby driving the entire program forward [6].

3.5 Beneficiary of Technology Empowerment

Against the backdrop of continuous media transformation supported by high technology, various technical means are applied to major media at the fastest speed to achieve communication goals and improve efficiency. After media acquire communication technologies, they feed back to content production, and hosts, as the communication subjects in the content production process, are direct beneficiaries. Hosts can also draw on agenda-setting theory for interactive communication, rapidly collecting audience feedback signals and, through coordination, integration, filtering, and reproduction, feeding back to audiences to achieve mutual influence and equal communication [7]. In “The Curtain Rises,” host Zhang Lei invites audiences onto the stage for zero-distance communication and interaction with performers, establishes topic groups on Weibo, actively comments and interacts, achieves cross-circle communication, and internalizes and reorganizes audience questions to form connections and sequences that enrich program content.

4. Communication Strategies of Cultural Variety Show Hosts

In “Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse,” the “encoding-decoding” theory is proposed, dividing television discourse meaning production into three stages: encoding, product, and decoding [8]. Television program content producers encode information according to their intentions, while audiences decode and interpret the encoded information based on their environmental backgrounds and knowledge structures. To enable programs in the intelligent media era to better achieve producers’ communication goals and reach audiences for successful decoding and acceptance, research on content production-level strategies is essential. Only by constructing the program’s underlying logic well at the encoding level can good products be produced to achieve excellent communication effects and enable smooth audience decoding.

4.1 Language Communication Strategy

Language is the expression symbol and primary medium for program hosts to communicate and exchange ideas, and the fundamental means for hosts to conduct hosting communication content production activities. As the most basic and commonly used means in hosting communication strategies, program hosts’ language should be popular yet standardized, possessing certain normativity and accuracy. In word selection and sentence arrangement, it should maintain the highest level of cultural character, choosing words and phrases with high cultural taste and rich connotation that have plain and clear meanings. With unique language artistic style and appropriately responsive witty oral expression, hosts can resonate with audiences and enable them to comprehend at the ideological level. From a personalized and humanized perspective, using forms beloved by the masses and based on media institutions’ social vision, hosts should conduct communication expression with expert depth.

4.2 Image Communication Strategy

Image communication strategy can also be called nonverbal communication strategy. Program hosts’ nonverbal images and appearances authentically express information conveyed through their every gesture, improving program communication effects, increasing program appeal and penetration, and 烘托 rendering the overall program environment and atmosphere [9]. Program hosts’ standing posture, sitting posture, walking posture, facial expressions, temperament, attire, makeup, and hairstyle all serve as image symbols that provide essential supplementation, emphasis, interpretation, and explanation to the information hosts transmit, coordinating with program content and overall style.

4.3 Symbol Communication Strategy

Although program hosts primarily rely on vocal language and paralanguage to transmit information and express emotions in communication activities, props

as symbolic information can provide very necessary explanation, interpretation, and emphasis to the limited, singular linguistic information transmitted through vocal language [10]. To achieve effective communication, program hosts need to utilize various information symbols and program means as much as possible to enrich program communication effects and make their influence more profound and enduring. If program hosts can make good use of symbolic information such as props—for example, small objects with unique memories for guests, unforgettable audiovisual symbols, or certain guests—they can evoke strong resonance and create unique on-site effects.

4.4 Emotion Communication Strategy

Teacher Wu Yu from Communication University of China points out that hosts are the soul of programs, and that the characteristics of hosting communication are personalization, humanization, interpersonal nature, and interactivity. Although AI artificial intelligence virtual composite hosts in the intelligent media era have, to a certain extent, acquired hosting communication functions, “emotionality” is the only aspect in which they cannot compare with human hosts [11]. For program hosts, as the soul and pillar of programs, to mobilize audience emotions, they must first invest emotions themselves. Hosts should strive to shorten the psychological distance with audiences, establish an equal relationship, sincerely face audiences, break through their psychological defenses, and then use their genuine emotions to resonate with audiences and guests, forming good emotional conversation fields.

4.5 Cultural Communication Strategy

Although hosts’ greatest advantage lies in personalized communication, they still possess the mass communication characteristic of “point-to-surface” social grouping. Hosts’ functions and roles in information integration, organizational connection, atmosphere control, on-site management, and emotional mobilization all stem from their profound implicit knowledge and cultivation [12]. In communication activities, hosts become aesthetic objects through their unique aesthetic forms, bringing spiritual pleasure and aesthetic feelings to the public. Their pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty in communication content, and their functions of transmitting information, constructing culture, influencing audiences, and guiding public opinion serve the cultural function of cultivating audience aesthetic sensibilities.

The most direct reflection of a nation’s cultural ideology and social moral ethics is its mainstream social values, which also reflect the basic wishes and group consciousness of the nation’s mainstream society. From cultural immersion and artistic influence to group thinking and intellectual education, mainstream social media play an exceptionally important role in improving citizens’ cultural quality and level, as well as guiding public social activities—all of which reflect social media influence and host influence [13]. As a bridge between audiences and communication content in the content production process, hosts play a powerful

role in transmitting information, communicating emotions, and realizing values. As “image spokespersons” for communication media and “interactive interfaces” between television media and audiences, hosts constitute the basic components and important factors for media to form social communication brands, and serve as brand spokespersons and personalized symbols constituting the brand [14]. Achieving hosts’ personalized communication while forming good host brands and producing excellent cultural programs that give play to hosting communication functions of program hosts and mainstream media is no easy task. As a cultural variety show, “The Curtain Rises” has submitted a qualified answer sheet. In this gamble between technology and tradition in the intelligent media era, program hosts should learn from this experience, reconstruct their role space and communication strategies, and thereby develop core competitiveness in the development wave of the intelligent media era.

References

- [1] Peng Lan. Intelligent Media: The Future Media Wave—New Media Development Trend Report (2016) [J]. International Press, 2016(11): 6-24.
- [2] Gao Guiwu, Liu Juan. The Evolution of Hosting Communication Patterns in New Media Environments [J]. International Press, 2016(3): 6-19.
- [3] Chen Hong. Introduction to Program Hosts [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, Communication University of China Press.
- [4] Wang Zhen. Role Positioning of Television Program Hosts in the Converged Media Era [J]. China Radio & TV, 2020(12): 78-79.
- [5] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [6] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [7] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [8] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [9] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [10] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [11] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [12] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [13] (Citation incomplete in original)
- [14] (Citation incomplete in original)

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.