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The Path to Innovative Transformation for University Newspapers in the New Media Era (Post-print)

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Abstract

As the economy flourishes, new media—leveraging advantages such as multi-dimensional communication, strong interactivity, large capacity, and high timeliness—has posed tremendous challenges to university campus newspapers, directly impacting their mainstream media status on campus. Therefore, to adapt to the evolving trends of the era, university campus newspapers must re-establish their positioning, analyze their own strengths and weaknesses, and identify a path of innovative transformation suited to their context, thereby achieving new development and breakthroughs, consolidating and strengthening their mainstream media status, and laying a solid foundation for the long-term development of university campus newspapers in China.

Full Text

The Innovative Transformation Path of University Campus Newspapers in the New Media Era

Abstract: With the vigorous development of the economy, new media—with its advantages of three-dimensional communication, strong interactivity, large capacity, and high timeliness—has brought tremendous challenges to university campus newspapers, directly impacting their mainstream media status on campus. Therefore, to adapt to the development trends of the era, university campus newspapers must reposition themselves, analyze their strengths and weaknesses, find a suitable path for innovative transformation, achieve new development and breakthroughs, consolidate and strengthen their mainstream media status, and lay a solid foundation for the long-term development of university campus newspapers in China.

Keywords: university campus newspaper; strengths and weaknesses; repositioning; transformation development

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As an official newspaper sponsored by the Party committee, the university campus newspaper serves as an effective channel for universities to conduct news publicity and strengthen ideological and political education. It fully demonstrates the university's brand and external image, playing a key role in promoting college development, guiding faculty and student opinion, creating a cultural atmosphere, and publicizing policies by focusing on the university's central work. However, with the rapid rise of new media and the advent of the universal information era, the mainstream media status of university campus newspapers has encountered tremendous challenges and impacts in campus communication. Therefore, in this new media transformation, how university campus newspapers can rediscover their position and gain a foothold among campus Weibo, WeChat, and online platforms has become a crucial proposition for the innovative development of university campus newspapers in China.

University campus newspapers can be traced back to the *Beiyang Gongxue* journal founded by Beiyang University in 1895, the origin of Chinese campus newspapers with a history of 120 years, now known as *Tianjin University News*. Currently, campus newspapers exist in almost every university. According to relevant practice surveys, there are more than 1,000 campus newspapers nationwide, constituting an indispensable part of the newspaper industry structure. Through long-term publishing practice, campus newspapers have gradually formed their inherent advantages, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

University students and faculty constitute the primary audience of campus newspapers, which typically report on campus dynamics, hot topics, new developments in faculty and student work and study, and college reform and development. As a mainstream media outlet in campus communication, campus newspapers have highly educated readers who are loyal followers with high demands for news reading. Meanwhile, based on the characteristics of this readership, editors can better grasp and quickly lock onto content and themes that interest readers, which greatly facilitates reducing the difficulty of reader feedback surveys. In contrast, new media has a broad audience of internet users, making it more complicated and cumbersome to collect formal opinions, grasp themes, and target readers.

1.2 Easy News Collection and Rich Student Resources

Students are an indispensable component of campus newspaper readership. Under the university's education and management, they are more likely to cooperate and support newspaper organizers in collecting news leads and conducting reader surveys. Simultaneously, during the editing and publishing process, students can be mobilized to actively participate, and the audience's evaluation of

news value can be incorporated into newspaper layout, thereby truly highlighting reader-oriented principles and revitalizing the newspaper.

1.3 Strong Authority and Rich Expert Resources

As a Party newspaper, campus newspapers possess certain authority. For current hot issues, universities can gather outstanding experts from various fields to interpret these issues from different levels and perspectives. Compared with new media's pursuit of brief, fast-paced news, such in-depth reporting is more profound and authoritative, fully satisfying the needs of highly educated faculty and students for deep interpretation of news and background understanding. This depth and authority represent unique advantages that campus newspapers have over new media.

2. Challenges Faced by University Campus Newspapers in the New Media Environment

In recent years, despite their inherent advantages, the multimedia formats, interactivity, global reach, and rapidity of new media have increasingly highlighted the limitations of campus newspapers.

2.1 Insufficient Appeal and Lack of Interaction with Faculty and Students

As a traditional "print media," campus newspapers primarily rely on lines, images, and text to disseminate information—these relatively monolithic means of communication lack opportunities for face-to-face or online exchanges with readers compared with new media such as APPs, campus networks, Weibo, and WeChat. The absence of interactive features and columns has resulted in poor communication between campus newspapers and their audience, a lack of channels for information feedback, and significantly reduced communication effectiveness.

3. Repositioning of University Campus Newspapers in the New Media Environment

To maintain their position and stand out amid the rapid development of online media, campus newspapers must recognize their strengths and weaknesses, reverse the trend of declining readership, and reposition themselves by maximizing advantages and minimizing disadvantages.

3.1 Positioning Through Innovation in Theme, Content, and Layout

To secure a place in fierce competition, campus newspapers must innovate in layout, content, and themes to improve their quality—the very lifeblood of any newspaper. Only by developing distinctive features and personality can they remain invincible.

3.2 Positioning Through In-Depth Reporting and Authority

While newspapers cannot compete with new media in terms of content capacity and timeliness, they enjoy unique advantages in authority, objectivity, and authenticity. Currently, online information varies greatly in quality and suffers from resource overload, making it difficult to guarantee authority and accuracy. Campus newspapers can compensate for these deficiencies in new media by fully leveraging their depth and authority.

3.3 Positioning Through Broad Participation of Faculty and Students

Truly running a successful publication cannot be achieved by editorial staff alone. Therefore, universities should build platforms for faculty and students, capitalizing on rich student resources and scholarly expertise to create publications with genuine character and high standards.

3.4 Positioning Close to and Serving Readers

All students and faculty are the primary readers of campus newspapers. Publication should select themes that interest them, centering on the concept of “serving faculty and students.” A newspaper cannot be filled entirely with student activities or college development strategies; the ratio of bottom-up feedback to top-down communication must be controlled. The newspaper’s taste and content should focus on issues of concern to faculty and students, conforming to the preferences of highly educated groups to better serve the broad faculty and student community.

4. The Transformation and Survival Path for University Campus Newspapers in the New Media Context

4.1 Winning Through In-Depth Reporting and Strengthening News Planning

Currently, campus newspapers have long publication cycles, mostly quarterly, monthly, semi-monthly, ten-day, or weekly, causing many topics to lose timeliness far behind college website news, becoming outdated by publication time. Campus newspapers contain many formulaic and “bureaucratic-toned” news pieces with relatively monotonous content. For instance, college leadership speeches or major meetings typically dominate the front page, followed by personality interviews and student activities. The style and language are mainly straightforward and lack flexibility, seriously diverging from the focus of faculty and student concerns. In some private colleges, campus newspaper staff face significant limitations in both quantity and quality, particularly in the new media context, where campus newspapers have become print versions of rolling website news. By contrast, official website news can not only accommodate massive amounts of information without layout constraints but also update constantly

to rapidly deliver the latest developments—information that appears more authentic and grounded in the new media context, leading to massive reader loss.

New media undoubtedly seizes the advantage in “speed” and “freshness” compared with campus newspapers. Therefore, campus newspapers should strengthen news planning to effectively respond to new media challenges, focusing on depth reporting such as combined reports, series reports, and special reports where new media falls short. Unlike ordinary news reporting, in-depth reporting can interpret and analyze news from multiple angles and perspectives, enabling readers to comprehensively understand and recognize news events. Consequently, in-depth reporting possesses certain holistic, comprehensive, and profound characteristics. For example, when reporting on “Cultivating Advanced Engineering Practice Talents and Deepening Teaching Reform,” our university comprehensively introduced the reform measures, background, long-term goals, and achievements from two aspects: hierarchical teaching and curriculum system reform, providing a model for other colleges’ teaching reforms with detailed and vivid content.

4.2 Leading Mainstream Values and Leveraging the Role of Commentary

News commentary can both supervise and guide public opinion while expanding the breadth and depth of news. To a certain extent, the quality of commentary writing fully reflects a newspaper’s comprehensive strength, characteristics, and connotation. Campus newspapers can publish commentator articles in each issue, discussing important Party committee decisions, central university work, national education policies, and other aspects to better serve talent cultivation, scientific research, and teaching while creating a favorable public opinion atmosphere. Commentator articles such as “Setting Out Again with a Grateful Heart” can be published alongside award ceremony coverage, transmitting positive energy through the voice of campus mainstream media and guiding students to establish correct outlooks on life, values, and worldviews. During critical periods of university construction, when schools promote applications, commentator articles like “Improving Education Quality and Cultivating Innovative Application-Oriented Talents” can be published to deeply discuss how application-oriented universities can replace teaching-oriented universities, thereby clarifying the direction of talent cultivation and training more useful talents for the nation.

4.3 Enhancing Readability and Appeal, Staying Close to Campus Life

In the new media context, campus newspaper editors and reporters should promptly change previous reporting methods, actively covering events that faculty and students enjoy and delving into the actual lives of faculty, staff, and students. According to survey data, the information faculty and students most want to obtain from campus newspapers includes: various service information, campus activities, major university news, and in-depth coverage of hot events; the most interesting news genres are: commentary, short messages, photo news,

and in-depth reporting. To enhance the competitiveness of campus newspapers, the proportion of news republished from campus websites should be minimized. News value should be highlighted with short, concise messages; the university's highlights and characteristics should be explored to increase the proportion of in-depth reporting. Campus newspapers should also employ eye-catching layouts, punchy headlines, and accessible language to attract readers, focusing more on topics of interest to faculty and students to improve appeal and readability. For example, publishing "Six Courses You Can't Miss" through in-depth investigation of students' six favorite courses with special interviews of relevant teachers and students would certainly generate significant response and resonance among students.

4.4 Creating Quality Columns and Emphasizing Brand Effect

Undoubtedly, whether modern or traditional media, the most important aspect is the influence and reach of columns. Columns can fully demonstrate a news media's aesthetic orientation, reporting level, and news planning hierarchy. In the new media context, campus newspapers must establish distinctive, diverse, quality columns with strengthened planning to create brand effects that attract more audiences. When specifically planning and designing columns, three approaches can be taken: First, fully reflect the educational and service nature of campus newspapers, staying close to the actual campus lives of faculty and students; second, enhance the guidance and authority of columns by leveraging the advantage of concentrated talent in universities to provide strong reference bases for scientific research and teaching reform; finally, maintain good communication and interaction with readers with certain openness and specificity. In long-term development, campus newspapers can launch their own brand and characteristic columns, such as personality profiles, contemporary commentaries, and youthful features. By selecting currently popular focus and hot issues and inviting several students to share their feelings on these topics, campus newspapers can gain popularity among students and attract audiences.

4.5 Pursuing Integrated Development and Building an All-Media Platform

New media has accelerated the speed at which faculty and students access information with the gradual popularization of internet technology. To achieve efficient and rapid dissemination of news and information, campus newspapers must pursue integrated development. Through an all-media information release platform—including mobile terminals, campus networks, WeChat, Weibo, television, radio, and newspapers—campus media can achieve integrated development and mutual exchange, providing faculty and students with more three-dimensional, comprehensive news and information. When releasing message-based news, the all-media platform can fully leverage its speed advantage to attract audiences instantly. Online media can pre-release introductions to campus newspapers' characteristic columns, in-depth reports, and major news to arouse readers' in-

terest; the commentary functions and advantages of in-depth reporting can be fully realized by campus newspapers within the all-media information platform, focusing on explaining news events' development trends, backgrounds, and full stories to satisfy readers' high-level reading needs. For example, our university' s publicity department news center can establish an all-media information platform that integrates the university' s news resources through faculty correspondents, students, new media editors, and campus newspaper editors, creating an all-media information platform suited to our university' s actual conditions, including official accounts, radio stations, and relevant websites. Through this platform, editorial staff can conduct overall planning, collection, and aggregation of various news and information, and publish and edit different types of news 稿件 according to the characteristics of each media channel, thereby maximizing news dissemination effects through the integration of mobile speed, network breadth, and newspaper depth.

In summary, the rapid development of the all-media era has completely transformed the traditional media landscape, making media transformation imperative. As a traditional medium, the transformation of university campus newspapers cannot be accomplished overnight to meet the demands of new media' s rapid development; it also requires an arduous, complex, and long-term process. Only by actively seeking breakthroughs amid difficulties, adjusting editorial thinking, and continuously updating editorial concepts can campus newspapers find a new development path through magnificent transformation and achieve complete renewal.

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

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