

Creative Trends of Television Variety Show Galas in the Context of Media Convergence: A Case Study of the 2018 Shenyang Cultural Spring Festival Gala (Postprint)

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of media convergence, the program creation of television variety galas exhibits discernible innovative trends, primarily manifested across four dimensions: innovation in program scheduling, integration of Internet thinking, application of high technology, and market-oriented organizational planning. Television variety galas must not only demonstrate innovative consciousness in program scheduling, but also deeply embed Internet thinking into the very ontology of gala creation, thereby effecting a comprehensive renewal of television variety galas from the inside out and engendering qualitative transformation. Moreover, with the innovative development of television variety galas, the creative methodologies integrating high technology and art are becoming increasingly diversified, and this new conceptual framework will likewise propel the creation of television variety galas toward greater maturity. Within the market-oriented competitive mechanism, urban radio and television stations must also seize opportunities, grasp both the context of media convergence and the tide of marketization during the organizational planning process of galas, establish their brand presence, enhance their competitive edge while increasing commercial advertising revenue, remain grounded in local culture, and produce quality programs that genuinely resonate with and move the general populace.

Full Text

Abstract

In the context of media convergence, the creative production of television variety shows is exhibiting distinct innovative trends, primarily manifested in four aspects: innovation in program arrangement, integration of internet thinking, application of high technology, and market-oriented organization and planning.

Television variety shows must not only demonstrate innovative consciousness in program arrangement but also deeply embed internet thinking into the very essence of creative production, fundamentally transforming the medium from the inside out. Moreover, as television variety shows continue to innovate and develop, the integration of high technology with artistic creation is becoming increasingly diversified, a new concept that will propel the creative evolution of television variety shows toward greater maturity.

Within a market-oriented competitive mechanism, urban radio and television stations must seize opportunities, grasping both the media convergence context and marketization wave during the organization and planning process. This approach enables brand establishment, increases commercial advertising revenue, enhances competitiveness, and remains rooted in local culture to create programs that genuinely resonate with and move audiences.

Keywords: media convergence; television variety show; creative trends

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Introduction

The first and second industrial revolutions brought explosive growth in productivity, while internet development has catalyzed rapid information expansion. The swift rise of new media, built upon internet foundations, has created enormous competitive pressure for traditional media, giving birth to the concept of “media convergence.” As Huang Chuxin, Deputy Director and Secretary-General of the New Media Research Center at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, summarizes: “New mainstream media should be ‘converged media’ that retains the orientation consciousness, high authority, and professional pursuit of traditional media while incorporating the timely interaction, innovative fashion, and grassroots accessibility of internet new media” [1]. In essence, traditional media should leverage internet power to preserve its strengths while absorbing characteristics of network new media. Concurrently, the most significant change in the post-convergence communication system is the centralization of the audience—traditional media must become audience-centered and evolve toward new mainstream media.

Under this overarching trend of media convergence, the creative production of television variety shows has undergone corresponding transformations. Television variety shows constitute an important component of radio and television programming. According to Gao Xin in *Television Art Studies*, television variety shows represent “a television program format that employs live broadcast technology, artistic evening performance styles, and electronic technical production to recreate various artistic programs, organized and connected by hosts

to integrate art and entertainment, providing audiences with comprehensive aesthetic enjoyment” [2]. These events are held only on major holidays and anniversaries, requiring substantial investment in human resources, materials, and technology, and reflecting the production capabilities of established television stations. With internet technology development, television variety shows must now compete with online variety shows. Consequently, under media convergence, television variety show production is demonstrating clear innovative trends.

1. Innovation in Program Arrangement

Program arrangement is crucial to the success of a television variety show, as it constructs the overall structure. When arranging programs, directors must first establish the show’s theme, select appropriate programs accordingly, then sequence and adjust them to build the overall framework. Second, directors must provide specific guidance for each program to maintain audience interest throughout the lengthy broadcast. Thus, program arrangement forms the soul of a television variety show, and under media convergence, innovation in arrangement is essential.

The 2018 Shenyang Cultural Spring Festival Gala, titled *New Era, New Shenyang*, produced by Shenyang Radio and Television Station, consciously innovated its structure. Centered on the theme “New Era, New Shenyang,” the gala leveraged Shenyang’s urban characteristics and resource advantages, integrating the city’s cultural system to showcase artistic masterpieces and cultural development achievements. To present cultural workers’ artistic accomplishments and their spirit, the gala was divided into two sections: “Classic Repertoire” and “Excellent New Works,” creating a clear and concise structure. The first section adapted and fused classic works, preserving their distinctive features while injecting local Shenyang characteristics. The second section presented outstanding artistic programs created in recent years, conveying Shenyang’s cultural confidence and promoting the city’s spirit in the new era. Additionally, the entire gala adopted a narrative structure, exploring stories of Shenyang’s artistic talents and their connection to the city, integrating narrative and scenographic elements into the overall conception, and using narrative threads to connect the entire show, thereby achieving a certain literary quality. The gala showcased Shenyang’s humanistic sentiments and, through the cultural system, presented high-caliber artistic works that highlighted urban transformation and Shenyang’s new era cityscape. While enjoying this Spring Festival cultural feast with Shenyang characteristics, audiences found resonance in the narrative elements, felt their inseparable bond with Shenyang, and experienced urban pride.

With the overall framework established, creative programs become the show’s most striking highlights. Arrangement involves more than simple program listing; it requires novelty and continuous innovation. In this gala, the time-traveling poetic drama *The Best Era* employed cross-temporal situational poetry

recitation, allowing audiences to experience the great era through art and envision a bright future. The cheongsam tribute *Fireworks Over the City* creatively grafted cheongsam with ballroom dancing, delivering unique visual impact that reflected both Shengjing' s history and Shenyang' s present.

2. Integration of Internet Thinking

John Fiske argues that “in daily current affairs and entertainment series, television condenses abstract, universal concepts into concrete forms, then ‘thinks through’ these conceptual meanings through dramatic forms of typical characters in typical environments” [3]. In other words, television variety shows must convey certain “conceptual meanings” to audiences. Meanwhile, emerging online variety shows have “to some extent reawakened public participation, connected the life source of ritual, and provided people with relatively free carnival” [4]. Online variety shows are filled with “grassroots” significance, closer to the masses, and thus win larger audiences. Therefore, facing the impact of online variety shows, traditional television variety shows must innovate during creative production by integrating internet thinking.

“The essential characteristics of the internet include: abundance replacing scarcity in resources, interaction replacing one-way communication in behavior, and platforms replacing pipelines in channels” [5]. Internet thinking integrates these internet features into television variety show creation, emphasizing the internet' s advantageous role in resource allocation—namely, matching, integrating, and optimizing various resources. Combining the internet with the television industry realizes the internetization of television and achieves deep integration between the internet and television. The application of internet thinking, coupled with the industry trend of media convergence, has brought enormous transformation to television variety shows. This transformation involves not only structural innovation but also a fundamental shift in thinking. Cultural products must undergo industrial upgrading, which contains tremendous industry opportunities. The implantation of internet thinking enables television variety shows to adopt audience-oriented thinking more extensively, provide audiences with more excellent programs, deeply explore program creativity, emphasize details, create atmosphere, and cultivate audience stickiness. Moreover, television variety shows increasingly emphasize marketization, using the internet to improve product distribution efficiency and truly achieve cultural product upgrading.

During the planning of *New Era, New Shenyang*, the director integrated Shenyang' s cultural resources and designed different artistic programs for audiences of different age groups. The gala featured nostalgic songs like *Where Peach Blossoms Bloom* and *Red Flags Fluttering*, English songs such as *Let It Go*, and popular folk songs like *South of the Mountain*. The finale, *My Motherland and I*, prompted a full-audience chorus that brought the gala to its climax, resonating with audiences across age groups. Furthermore, the director employed internet thinking to integrate multiple channels and

platforms, strengthening promotion and marketing to reach more potential audiences, generating pre-broadcast buzz and maintaining traditional media' s competitive edge.

3. Application of High Technology

To keep pace with the times, television variety shows must fully utilize high technology, allowing stage design to deliver visual feasts that exceed audience expectations. High technology application has transformed both the form of television variety show creation and stage design concepts. In *New Era, New Shenyang*, a combination of location shooting and post-production 3D modeling displayed real footage of Shenyang' s Imperial Palace, Jinlang Street, and the Hun River banks on stage and large screens, embedding virtual “theme titles” and animation effects to present grand, technologically sophisticated, and well-designed visuals. On the gala' s large screens, Shenyang appeared brightly lit and bustling with vibrant vitality. Simultaneously, the screens provided audiences with a bird' s-eye view that magnified Shenyang' s majestic momentum. This design showcased Shenyang' s unique fashion sense and high-tech character, echoing the gala' s theme and extending Shenyang' s distinctive atmosphere to the live venue.

High technology was also evident in stage lighting design. The gala incorporated holographic electronic technology in its lighting design, enabling lights to move with musical rhythms and create wonderfully strange stage effects. In the large-scale song and dance performance *Frozen Adventure*, holographic electronic lighting technology brought a winter wonderland to the stage through high tech, leading audiences into a fantastical icy realm that greatly expanded stage spatial expression. Under holographic lighting, the stage perfectly presented a realistic winter world, creatively breaking traditional stage 时空 limitations. “Ice and snow” culture represents Shenyang' s regional characteristic, and this design element aimed to showcase ice and snow culture concepts and promote Shenyang' s winter sports development.

Computer-augmented reality (AR) technology also intervened in stage expression. The video interactive program *Magnificent Voyage* used AR technology to display the 30-meter-long *Panoramic View of Shengjing* on large screens. This work, created over five years by world-class panoramic painters Professors Li Wu, Yan Yang, and Zhou Fuxian, truthfully, completely, and vividly depicts Shenyang' s urban layout and characteristic architecture from the 1920s and 1930s, showcasing the essence of 市井 life. Audiences could see familiar landmarks like the Imperial Palace, the two imperial tombs, the Marshal' s Mansion, and the Hun River, while also sensing many vividly preserved old elements, such as the precious ancient city walls that have disappeared but still stand proudly at the picture' s center, making audiences feel as if they have traveled back in time. The gala used AR technology to enlarge the image, leading audiences through detailed views to revisit old Shenyang' s appearance while incorporating modern aerial photography of new Shenyang, allowing audiences to experience

the historical transformation from old to new Shenyang.

4. Market-Oriented Organization and Planning

The organization and planning model of television variety shows significantly impacts overall effectiveness. With intensifying market competition and gradually opening investment policies, television variety show organization and planning is moving toward marketization. Using market-oriented competitive mechanisms to select partners and attract advertising investment has become an inevitable trend. This market-oriented approach not only generates economic benefits for television stations but also motivates directors to improve program quality to stand out in market competition. As a local television station, Shenyang Television's funding sources for variety shows show more obvious marketization traces. In market competition, Shenyang's galas no longer blindly pursue program quantity or super scale but instead attract audience participation through quality programming to find more suitable commercial partners. The preparation process for television variety shows is also becoming increasingly transparent and open. After all, market-oriented competition mechanisms face society as a whole, requiring attraction of various resources and participation of diverse forces while conducting secondary integration and optimal allocation of resources to maximize resource utilization and demonstrate gala value.

Shenyang Radio and Television Station's audience primarily consists of local Shenyang residents. Therefore, in organizing television variety shows, it must leverage this advantage by remaining locally rooted and drawing on local forces to make programs more closely connected to people's lives and create content that local audiences love to watch. In the era of media convergence, traditional media no longer merely publicizes and implements the Party's line, principles, and policies, serving as the mouthpiece of the Party and government and correctly guiding public opinion. Under media convergence, with rapid market economic development, traditional media cannot simply output one-way content but must grasp audience needs to produce higher-quality, more diverse premium programs. As an urban television station with small coverage, Shenyang Radio and Television can more easily secure the local audience market, providing information about real events happening around audiences. This cultural proximity makes the local audience group more stable. Simultaneously, this makes local audiences more willing to disseminate information relevant to themselves, greatly enhancing initiative and participation, thereby accelerating information dissemination and increasing interactive communication. Shenyang Radio and Television fully utilizes this advantage in market competition by remaining locally rooted, enhancing brand characteristics, using industrial management thinking to create sustainable industry chains, and thereby achieving advertising revenue goals.

During the preparation of *New Era*, *New Shenyang*, to expand local influence and build the Shenyang Radio and Television brand, the director team conducted random street interviews in busy commercial areas like Zhongjie and

Taiyuan Street, asking target audiences what programs they wanted to see and their feelings about Shenyang. Simultaneously, flash mob events were held in major squares, edited into short videos, and distributed on Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin to attract audience sharing and expand brand awareness. Local Weibo influencers were employed to create buzz and frequently interact with target audiences, further expanding the gala's influence. These methods created tighter connections between the television variety show and people's daily lives, deeply excavated urban connotations, gave the gala more distinctive positioning, and created irreplaceable advantages. Consequently, Shenyang Radio and Television stood out in market competition, winning successive sponsorships from multiple businesses and laying a solid foundation for future cooperation. Centered on Shenyang's urban theme, the gala fully showcased the city's regional characteristics and the spiritual charm of Shenyang people, closely adhering to its conceptual framework to stir audience resonance. Post-gala, collaborations with well-known manufacturers produced souvenirs to further build the city television station brand and facilitate brand establishment, while planning to create sculpture walls to add to Shenyang's landmark architecture.

In summary, city television stations must be rooted in specific cities, grasp the principal position of the market in television variety show organization and planning, strive to stand out in market-oriented competition, select more suitable partners, increase advertising revenue while enhancing brand awareness, and further consolidate local audiences.

For traditional media, the new media convergence environment represents both opportunity and challenge. It must seize the moment, keep pace with reform, and face challenges head-on. Under media convergence, television variety show creation must demonstrate innovative trends, showing innovative consciousness not only in program arrangement but also deeply embedding internet thinking into the creative essence to compete with online galas. Moreover, as television variety shows continue innovating and developing, the integration of high technology with artistic creation is becoming increasingly diversified, a new concept that will drive television variety show creation toward greater maturity. Within market-oriented competition mechanisms, urban radio and television stations must also seize opportunities, grasp media convergence and marketization waves during organization and planning, establish their brands, increase commercial advertising revenue while enhancing competitiveness, remain locally rooted, and create programs that truly delight and move audiences.

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

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