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Approaches to University Campus Media Convergence in the Mobile Internet Era: Postprint

Authors: Li Jing

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Abstract

The proliferation of mobile Internet has catalyzed an unprecedented transformation in the media landscape, elevating media convergence from academic deliberation to practical policymaking. Numerous universities have begun experimenting with the integrated development of traditional and emerging media. This article focuses on the profound backdrop of mobile Internet, adhering to advanced concepts as support and content construction as the foundation, to drive deep integration of campus media across content, channels, platforms, and other dimensions.

Full Text

The Path of Campus Media Convergence in Universities under the Mobile Internet Background

Abstract: The proliferation of mobile internet has triggered an unprecedented transformation in the media landscape, elevating media convergence from academic discourse to practical policy. Many universities have begun experimenting with integrating traditional and emerging media. This article focuses on the profound context of mobile internet, advocating for advanced conceptual support and content construction as the foundation to promote deep integration of campus media across content, channels, and platforms.

Keywords: mobile internet; campus media; integrated development

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Author: Li Jing

University campus media serves both the social functions of mass communication—information dissemination, public opinion guidance, social connection, cultural inheritance, and entertainment—and the special functions of ideological guidance and education. With the development of mobile internet, smartphones have become a “must-have” for every college student. Against the backdrop of media convergence having risen to a national strategy, campus media in universities remains cautious and tentative, far from being swept into the torrent of the times. This has created a predicament where campus media struggles to occupy the commanding heights of communication and secure positions in online public opinion. Therefore, campus media must respect communication laws, adapt to the new communication ecology, achieve integrated development in technology, platforms, and channels, and further enhance their communication power, credibility, and influence.

1.1 Audience Thinking

The term “audience” originates from communication studies. Lasswell’s 5W model decomposes the communication process into five elements: sender, message, medium, receiver, and feedback. As the receiver, the audience has always been at the bottom of the communication pyramid, with almost no choice over media content, and both information acquisition and dissemination behaviors must rely on media.

1.2 User Thinking

The term “user” originates from consumer studies, referring to the user of a certain technology, product, or service, or the party being served. Since 2014, “Internet thinking” has become a hot topic in media and an area of active exploration and practice. User thinking lies at the core of Internet thinking, particularly mobile Internet thinking.

1.3.1 The Vague Audience vs. the Precisely Located User

In the era of traditional media, different media had different terms for their audiences: newspapers called them readers, radio called them listeners, and television called them viewers. Further subdividing, party newspaper readership consisted mainly of cadres, while metropolitan newspaper readership consisted mainly of the masses. This segmentation, typical of sociology, although indicating differences in social strata, remained a vague collective term.

1.3.2 Passive Reception of Audience vs. Active Discourse Power of Users

Under the traditional communication ecology, news communication is media-centered, one-way, and one-time dissemination. Audiences basically receive information passively—whatever the media disseminates, the audience accepts.

Even when they have some choice, it is quite limited. Users are clearly different. The character “用” (use) represents their initiative, while “户” (household) represents their uniqueness and differentiation [2]. In the new communication ecology, users have broken the passive situation of traditional information reception. They can not only choose platforms and seek information on their own, having the initiative in what media to use and how to use it, but also participate in the process of news and information dissemination, transforming from receivers to senders and assuming the dual identities of information producers and information publishers.

1.3.3 Audience's Freedom to “Decode” vs. User's Experience Sharing

Media has never been a closed loop. From print media to television media to online media, audiences could participate in communication through various means such as submissions and comments, but they still had no status in the news release 环节. That is to say, in the era of mass communication, audiences could have a certain degree of “decoding” freedom in the information dissemination process, but because they had no power to participate in the “encoding” 环节, it remained a one-way “media-audience” audience model. In the new media convergence environment, users lack loyalty. To change this situation, media must make great efforts in service, experience, and sharing to transform content consumers into content producers. According to statistics from Tencent Technology based on a sample of 200,000 users, nearly 80% of users share news on social platforms. When users forward articles from public accounts, the ratio of shares to Moments versus shares to friends is approximately 3:2, and the proportion of users who frequently or occasionally follow certain news because of others' sharing reaches 83% [3]. These experiences and sharing not only enhance user participation and increase user stickiness, but also diversify sharing incentives, encouraging people to participate more actively in information dissemination. In this process, a “network-user” two-way interactive structure based on the user model is formed.

1.4 User Thinking as the Theoretical Basis for Campus Media Convergence

Even today, when WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok are increasingly popular among college students, university publicity departments still preset the entire faculty and student body, and even broader groups such as parents, alumni, and social professionals, as target audiences, following the “audience-oriented” concept for information dissemination. From this perspective, most news websites on campus only have the form of the Internet, without much mobile Internet 基因 or user thinking, let alone traditional media such as school newspapers, television stations, and radio. In the mobile Internet context, whether for social media or university media, their broad audiences are concretized into individual users with different needs. These users possess stronger initiative and selectivity, as well as more precise user experiences and interactions. Currently, in the smart

campus construction projects being promoted by various universities, establishing a multimedia big database has become a consensus. A big database is not just software that can obtain computational results, but a sustainable process for establishing accurate target audiences. Analyzing the development practices of current Internet application platforms, generally speaking, the main approaches to building large-scale user platforms are relying on technology, content, and service [4]. Technologically, universities find it difficult to establish advantages in technology development and application, and instead rely more on application platforms such as Alibaba and Tencent to complete information integration. For example, the currently popular WeChat public accounts are launched by Tencent. In terms of content, campus media has the advantage of producing news content. According to data from the “2016 China University Campus Media Development Report” (hereinafter referred to as the “Report”) released by the China University Media Alliance in 2016, 69.46% of campus media have news content accounting for more than 40% of their total content, and 28.98% have news content exceeding 60%. However, we must also be keenly aware that the rise of mobile Internet has completely broken the monopoly of campus media over campus news. Therefore, conforming to the trend of mobile Internet, establishing user thinking, and aggregating target audiences with high-quality, segmented news information and timely, precise services is a feasible path for the convergence and transformation of campus media.

2. Content Convergence: Platform-Based Production Integration and Establishing a Campus Media “Micro Central Kitchen”

2.1 The Central Kitchen Model

The establishment of a “Central Kitchen” style all-media reporting platform is regarded as the “key step” for social media to promote the integrated development of traditional and emerging media. Judging from the “Central Kitchen” models established by various prefecture-level media in China, whether aggregative or internal control types, they all take “one-time collection, multiple generation, and diversified dissemination” as their core functions.

2.2 The Micro Central Kitchen

The construction of a Micro Central Kitchen aims to break through the current state where websites, school newspapers, radio, television, Weibo, and WeChat operate independently. It seeks to reconnect and reallocate resources such as institutions, personnel, and equipment. Based on the concept of “unified command, unified gatekeeping, diversified presentation, and multi-media dissemination,” it establishes a large editorial department as the core institution to explore business processes, organizational structures, and management systems suitable for its own development. According to the news production process, specifically, several sub-departments can be established: Planning Department,

News Department, Editorial Department, and R&D Department.

2.3 Implementation Path of the Micro Central Kitchen in Campus Media

The Planning Department is equivalent to the “central nervous system,” the department that “unifies” traditional and emerging media into “one integrated whole.” Personnel in this department must understand the characteristics of different media and different users, possess basic capabilities in coordination, command, scheduling, and communication, and be responsible for brainstorming through forms such as “face-to-face” and “human-computer interaction.” They conduct advance planning, allocation, and arrangement according to the characteristics of different media, effectively avoiding the phenomenon of similar reporting methods and angles across different media platforms for the same news topic. After determining the unique news reporting style for each platform, they formulate work plans and simultaneously command and arrange editorial forces.

The News Department is the core institution, the executive body that transforms users’ real needs into news products, responsible for the “one-time collection” 环节 in the Micro Central Kitchen. This department aims to break the boundaries of “roles,” starting from product types, and divides personnel into three categories according to their specialties: text, photography, and video. It collects news through different combination modes such as “text + photography,” “text + video,” and “text + photography + video” to produce primary news products. Such products— “text + photography” meet the needs of platforms like websites and WeChat; “text + video” meets the needs of platforms like Weibo and TikTok; and “text + photography + video” can satisfy the multi-platform, multi-angle publicity needs for major school news. In this process, some personnel are encouraged to transform into all-media journalists, establishing all-media thinking, product thinking, and teamwork thinking. Based on the traditional core capabilities of “collecting, writing, and editing,” they improve their understanding and application abilities of new media, growing into versatile talents who can edit text manuscripts while mastering photography, videography, and other skills.

The Editorial Department is an important department for innovating news products and the output institution that realizes “multiple generation.” According to media forms, it can be divided into three professional editorial departments: print media, online media, and mobile media. Each department conducts editing and deep processing according to the characteristics of different media and the needs of different news, producing various forms of terminal news products to meet users’ multi-type and multi-level needs. This department requires personnel with different capabilities. For example, newspaper editors need to possess strong gatekeeping abilities, able to “filter before publishing” news; online editors need to have high aesthetic and design abilities to attract people with formal beauty at the first moment.

The R&D Department is the “output layer” for building a new collection-editing-distribution network, responsible for the development, design, and channel promotion of news products. This department mainly uses new network technologies to transform the original news industry, especially developing new media products and derivative products, such as H5 pages and voting mini-programs for WeChat public accounts, super topics and live streaming for Weibo, confession walls and tree holes for QQ Space, etc. At the same time, it explores effective channels for off-campus dissemination, enabling media resources from different universities and even social media resources to complement and share with each other, achieving the goal of “diversified dissemination” while also enhancing the influence of campus media. This flat organizational structure, compact and flexible, ensures that each department has sufficient authority, responsibility, and benefits. Every ordinary student can be a news product manager, and as long as there is a task, a responsible team can be found to complete it.

3. Platform Convergence: Seeking Connections Between Platforms to Build a Media Convergence Ecology

Whether for social media or campus media, the key to convergence still lies in platform convergence, with the goal of creating an “integrated” platform ecosystem. It must not only play the roles of news information producer and mainstream public opinion guide, but also serve the role of meeting the information needs of faculty and students. Specifically, it means elevating user needs, user experience, and user interaction to more important positions.

3.1 Optimizing Existing Platforms and Upgrading Self-Operated Campus Media

University campus media each have their own characteristics. In the process of media convergence, an important consideration is intensive cultivation—seeking not to be “grand, comprehensive, and all-encompassing,” but rather to be small yet refined, each with distinctive features that complement one another to meet different user needs. Generally speaking, print media publications are four-page monthly issues with lagging publication times and limited layout capacity. In terms of content, they should emphasize “depth,” conducting more in-depth reporting, including various special reports and comprehensive coverage. In layout design, they should emphasize “beauty,” using cross-page spreads and large images to enhance visual impact. Online media should strive to build “small yet beautiful” professional platforms. In form, they should emphasize “speed,” establishing the concept of “news never sleeps,” sharing messages at the first moment and from the first scene, seizing the initiative in fast and accurate dissemination. In content, they should emphasize “comprehensiveness,” covering the central work of the school party committee, important work of various units, outstanding role models, etc., enabling faculty and students to obtain comprehensive and timely news information as much as possible. Audio-

visual media products should emphasize “vitality.” In addition to creating fresh news products, they should break through channel limitations and develop toward networking, allowing users to listen and watch through multiple terminals, freely choose time and programs, achieving the goal of being accessible anytime and shareable everywhere.

3.2 Leveraging Major Platforms and Deepening Cooperation with Baidu, Tencent, and Others

The emergence of WeChat public accounts precisely meets this demand. The “Report” states that 82.55% of universities have newspapers, while 87.26% have WeChat public accounts. WeChat public accounts have surpassed newspapers, radio, Weibo, and others to rank first in the campus media list. To produce products more suitable for mobile reading habits, they should reflect the characteristics of “proximity,” “novelty,” and “precision.” “Proximity” means strong relevance to users and emotional closeness. Major campus news events, important events in the education front, and special time node events have always been content welcomed by campus media audiences, showing that timeliness, importance, and prominence rank first in news value. However, on new media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo, the focus of information value elements has shifted. Users have shifted from focusing on the information itself to focusing on the relationship between information and people, with interest and proximity playing a greater role in constituting information value. Users are more willing to click, browse, like, comment on, and forward information that is related to themselves or people they know, and information that is humane and resonates with them, creating a secondary dissemination effect. “Novelty” means novel forms and rich presentation formats. The mobile Internet era is also an “attention economy era,” and novel expression methods and presentation formats are more likely to gain attention. It cannot be denied that there is homogenization in the content of university WeChat public accounts. If there is not sufficiently attractive content, efforts can be made in the way content is presented, launching products in various styles and forms, such as live news, graphic news, H5 news, VR news, big data news, voice news, animated news, etc. “Precision” means “accurately timing” the release. According to the “2016 China University New Media Blue Book,” it was found that contemporary college students are most active on new media at 22:00. This time period is after lights-out, and choosing to push content during this time period will yield better results. In addition, special times such as “beginning and end of semesters,” “military training,” “Teachers’ Day,” “sports meets,” “graduation season,” and “school anniversaries” can also ignite users’ passion.

3.3 Building New Platforms and Creating Core Competitiveness in Content Production

If building only a few open platforms cannot achieve the vision of “integration,” then the emergence of news clients brings the construction of a media

convergence ecosystem closer to this goal, as it can integrate the functions that universities want to provide to users into an organic whole. However, currently, few universities have launched news clients, and they are merely satisfied with copying news from website platforms to clients without in-depth excavation and development. Looking at social media, from central to local levels, various media groups have launched heavyweight news client products and are gradually developing from “portal-type” to “search-type,” from “closed-type” to “open-type,” and from “message release-type” to “service-type.” Combining with services is both the most lacking and the most promising development module for university news clients. Due to the relative closedness of university news clients, service content can achieve precise delivery, generally summarized into two modes: “learning + life” and “school + society.” For teachers, interfaces can be developed to integrate multiple systems such as research management systems, educational administration systems, OA office systems, and personal income queries. For students, interfaces can be developed to provide convenient services for learning and life, such as class schedule queries, grade queries, campus card balance queries and recharging, and campus IP broadcasting. At the same time, because of the one-to-many push method of WeChat public accounts, personalized and specialized services can be provided according to collective needs, such as launching functions for ticket purchasing, city maps, and second-hand markets before winter and summer vacations.

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(Author’ s affiliation: Nanning Normal University, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region)

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