

A Preliminary Analysis of the Advantages of On-line Thematic Products in Converged Media Environments: A Case Study of the Pu' er Green Development Forum by People' s Tribune Magazine (Postprint)

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Abstract

Media and technology are intrinsically linked, with each technological innovation throughout history triggering profound transformations in the media industry. Today, media convergence has become a pervasive trend. Among the numerous communication vehicles in the converged media ecosystem, web special topic pages represent a common dissemination tool. As this converged media environment continues to evolve and strengthen, what communication advantages do web special topic pages possess? This paper examines the web special topic page for the Pu' er Green Development Forum—co-hosted by People' s Tribune magazine and the People' s Government of Pu' er City, Yunnan Province—as a case study to offer a concise analysis of the communication advantages of web special topic products within the context of media convergence.

Full Text

Analysis of the Advantages of Online Special Topic Products in the Converged Media Environment –A Case Study of the Pu' er Green Development Forum Event by People' s Tribune Magazine

Abstract: Media and technology are closely intertwined, with each technological revolution in history bringing about tremendous transformation in the media industry. Today, media convergence has become a universal trend. Among the many communication methods in converged media, the online special topic page is a common approach. As the converged media environment continues to improve and strengthen, what communication advantages do online special topic

pages possess? This paper takes the online special topic page for the Pu' er Green Development Forum, co-hosted by People' s Tribune Magazine and the People' s Government of Pu' er City, Yunnan Province, as a case study to briefly analyze the communication advantages of online special topic products in the context of media convergence.

Keywords: People' s Tribune; converged media; online special topic products; traditional journals

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Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan once stated that media are extensions of human sensory capacities—for instance, television extends vision, while radio extends hearing. Throughout history, from papermaking and printing to radio wave technology and cathode ray tube imaging, and further to today' s digital streaming and artificial intelligence technologies, each technological revolution has brought about tremendous transformation in the media industry. Every new technology has propelled significant advancement in communication methods. Since the beginning of the 21st century, progress in information technology has increasingly enriched communication means through digital technology. Today, emerging online media such as the Internet and streaming media have become powerful supplements to traditional media.

Today, media convergence has become a universal trend. The growth and expansion of new media manifest in the fact that an increasing number of traditional media outlets are no longer content with merely covering news events to obtain and refine their content; instead, they rely more on establishing deeper connections and cooperation with their audiences to enrich their platform content. Consequently, diverse communication channels and methods such as forum events, think tank research, and achievement releases have gradually become primary means of information acquisition in traditional media' s news communication activities. Beyond the iterative updating of information acquisition forms, media presentation modes have also broken through the original two-dimensional channels of radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Various new media communication forms, including Weibo, WeChat, mobile apps, and online special topic pages, now account for an increasingly larger proportion of communication media.

Taking People' s Tribune Magazine as an example, this print magazine, founded in 1992, has evolved from a small monthly publication with only a few staff members into a think tank-oriented all-media group encompassing three journals, three websites, two micro-blogs, one mobile app, one think tank, and one

research company—completing a development journey from small to large, from weak to strong. Today's People's Tribune not only delivers its traditional print magazine to readers through a nationwide distribution network, but its online communication matrix, represented by the People's Tribune website, has also become a crucial platform connecting the media group with its audiences. Its online media products have become an important communication tool, and their influence cannot be underestimated. It can be said that People's Tribune Magazine today is a true converged media group. So, as the converged media environment continues to improve and strengthen, what developmental advantages do online media, or new media, possess in terms of their presentation modes?

Online special topic pages are a common communication method among many converged media platforms. In October 2018, People's Tribune co-hosted the Pu'er Green Development Forum with the People's Government of Pu'er City, Yunnan Province. In the online communication component of this event, the online special topic page played a significant role. From the author's perspective, compared with traditional media, online special topic products possess the following advantages in information-era communication work.

Advantage 1: Content Reuse and Secondary Communication Value

Online special topic products are based on the reuse of traditional media communication content, including message content from traditional media, and possess the content advantage of achieving secondary communication value within a short timeframe.

In People's Tribune's daily editorial work, a large volume of content is generated from news interviews and research articles. Theoretically, all this data content can become potential content resources for online special topic products. Taking the Pu'er Green Development Forum co-hosted by People's Tribune Magazine and the Pu'er Municipal Government as an example, the forum adopted a comprehensive communication strategy that included publishing a special magazine issue, releasing press communiqués, and launching an online special topic product. During the preparatory phase, a substantial amount of conference and event materials was compiled and accumulated, including forum reports, expert speeches, green development white papers, collections of typical green development cases, and series of event photo galleries. All these material resources can be effectively processed, reorganized, and repackaged to become refreshed and excellent content for online special topic products. In the preliminary preparations for this Pu'er Green Forum, the online special topic page served as an important component of the publicity plan, scheduled to launch simultaneously on the day of the forum. Thanks to the draft-saving function of the online special topic page editing platform, the large volume of materials accumulated during the preparatory phase could be directly edited, organized, and saved on the uploading platform. Some materials obtainable in advance, such as expert speeches, summaries of typical cases, and background introduc-

tions, were suitable for direct copying into the online special topic page backend and saving as drafts to ensure smooth subsequent publishing. For other conference content requiring minor editing and organization, such as white papers and typical cases, systematic editing, organization, and optimization could be conducted concurrently during the preparatory phase to ensure the content and format better aligned with internet communication habits and standards. In this way, a large portion of the material content accumulated during the forum's preparatory phase could be "secondarily developed and utilized" through online communication platforms, thereby maximizing their original value.

This demonstrates that online special topic products can effectively facilitate the reuse of traditional media communication content, helping it achieve "secondary communication" within a short period.

Advantage 2: Aggregation Platform for Streaming Media Content

Online special topic products serve as aggregation platforms for network streaming media content, with presentation forms that can include short videos, hyperlinks, H5, etc., possessing the formal advantage of comprehensively and multi-dimensionally expressing communication themes.

If news content appearing in print and television media focuses more on message release and transmission, then online special topic products more closely resemble aggregation platforms that blend multiple communication channels. Such an aggregation platform can be considered a form of "hypermedia." Regarding the definition of "hypermedia," Douglas Engelbart, who worked at the Stanford Research Institute, pointed out that "hypermedia" is an extension of "hypertext." The connotation of "hypertext" includes, on the one hand, highly interconnected textual narratives, and on the other hand, information with intrinsic connections. It directly breaks the communication logic established in traditional books.

Douglas Engelbart further explained: "In printed books, sentences, paragraphs, page numbers, and chapters are arranged in sequence—a sequence determined both by the author and by the physical structure of the book itself. Although readers can browse a book at will and peruse any part as they please, the book itself remains constrained by physical three-dimensional space." This situation is completely shattered in the digital world. This is because the digital world is composed of information, and information space can be entirely unrestricted by three-dimensional space. An idea or a series of ideas can be expressed or further argued through a set of multi-dimensional pointers. Readers can choose to activate the extended implications associated with a particular pointer or completely ignore them. In this textual structure, large blocks of information are recombined, sentence structures are expanded, and word definitions are re-framed. Therefore, network streaming media content composed of "hypermedia" or "hypertext" is no longer trapped in physical three-dimensional space but becomes "a book without page numbers." This content consists of link after link.

These connections can be embedded by the author when “publishing” the work, or they can be gradually completed by readers during the process of “reading” the text.

The online special topic page for this Pu’ er Green Development Forum represents highly typical “hypertext” content. The topic page contains “hyperlinked” materials in various forms, including text, images, and video footage. These materials collectively constitute a “composite media communication form.” In the composite media communication model, the trend of mutual influence among different communication media becomes increasingly evident, and the degree of media convergence grows ever higher. In the converged media era, media users have transformed from mere “readers” into “users.” Audiences no longer passively accept information provided by media but increasingly actively engage in interaction with content produced on media platforms, making their social attributes more pronounced. The advantage of composite media forms lies in providing users with more interactive functions. The online special topic page for this Pu’ er Green Development Forum also included social functions. All users entering the page to browse content could participate in topic discussions through the “micro-commentary” section and interact through sharing and forwarding. The Pu’ er Green Development Forum special topic page essentially became a public platform providing social functions for users—precisely the platform advantage that social media supported by internet technology possesses. Therefore, against the backdrop of continuously deepening media convergence development, innovatively adopting composite communication models helps bridge the distance between content and audiences in communication media.

In this process, all text, images, videos, and even H5 mini-programs in the online special topic page can be regarded as effective means for comprehensively showcasing this forum event. The process of readers browsing the online special topic page is essentially one of interacting with multiple media forms, including sound, images, dynamic video, and coding programs. Compared with the singular, rigid two-dimensional communication pathways of books and newspapers, communication on online special topic pages is no longer dull and uninteresting. Multi-level, multi-dimensional communication methods stimulate audience senses from various aspects and enhance readers’ interest in the event.

Advantage 3: Channel for Building Organization-Audience Relationships

Online special topic products serve as excellent channels for organizations to establish relationships with audiences, featuring fast communication speed and low communication costs, and possessing the channel advantage of rapidly connecting with audiences and building positive corporate images.

For social organizations, institutions, and commercial enterprises that need to establish and shape brand relationships, online special topic products are ideal public relations communication media. These organizations can use network

platforms to accomplish a series of tasks including building good interactive relationships with potential users, establishing positive brand images, promoting brand products, conducting crisis public relations, and telling brand stories. This is determined by several characteristics inherent to online special topic products.

First, network media products in the information age feature fast communication speed and timely information updates. In the era when traditional media communication methods dominated, print media such as newspapers and books primarily disseminated information content through printing. However, processes such as typesetting, printing, and binding required certain waiting periods, causing message content transmitted through traditional media channels to experience some delay before reaching audiences. Additionally, constrained by distribution channels and methods, the audience scope of traditional print media was usually limited to existing fixed groups, making it difficult for timely information to reach new audience segments—a certain limitation. The characteristics of fast communication speed and timely information updates possessed by emerging online media can precisely compensate for these shortcomings of traditional media, thus constituting the essential features of ideal public relations communication media.

Second, material content such as images, videos, and hyperlinks in online special topic products experiences relatively low quality loss during transmission, and the cost of copying and disseminating is extremely low. There are no restrictions on user scope for disseminated content; only a string of hyperlink characters is needed as a medium to complete the connection between users and communication content. Therefore, leveraging the platform advantages of the internet, this material content can easily form a communication fission effect, reaching every corner of the world in the shortest possible time—possessing the core characteristics of ideal public relations communication media.

The release of the online special topic page for the Pu' er Green Development Forum in Yunnan Province illustrates this point to a certain extent. From a government public relations perspective, this green development forum activity conducted by Pu' er City can be regarded as a practice in building a positive image of ecological construction by the Pu' er Municipal Government—a vivid case of public relations construction. “Small input, large output” is undoubtedly the result hoped for by the Pu' er Municipal Government. The design and launch of the Pu' er Eco-Forum online special topic page precisely met the public relations needs of the Pu' er Municipal Government.

Today, the continuously expanding influence of online special topic products has placed higher demands on media practitioners. Becoming a qualified converged media journalist is no longer as simple as just being able to write articles. Converged media reporting has become an unstoppable trend. On January 25, 2019, after inspecting several achievements in the new media construction of People' s Daily, the General Secretary emphasized that mainstream media such as party newspapers, party journals, party television stations, and party web-

sites must keep pace with the times, boldly apply new technologies, new mechanisms, and new models, accelerate the pace of converged development, and achieve maximized and optimized communication effects. Against the backdrop of media convergence, media practitioners must not only possess the news sensitivity, news gathering and editing capabilities, and content integration skills that are crucial in traditional media, but also master essential operational skills in the emerging media environment, such as video editing, online special topic page production, flash short film production, and H5 production, thereby better adapting to the development needs of media in the converged media context and becoming versatile media professionals.

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

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