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On the Reconstruction of Newspaper Layout Language in the All-Media Era: Post-print Edition

Authors: Zhou Jinxiang, Liang Henian

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Abstract

In response to the rapid development of new media and the formation of instantaneous reading habits among audiences, this paper explores pathways for print media to capture reader attention from the perspective of layout language construction and design.

Full Text

Preamble

Theoretical Research: Media Theory

A Brief Discussion on Reconstructing Newspaper Layout Language in the All-Media Era

Abstract: In response to the rapid development of new media and the cultivation of instantaneous reading habits, this paper explores how print media can capture readers' attention from the perspective of layout language construction and design.

Keywords: all-media; layout language; subtraction; news headlines; news images

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According to the 43rd “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on February 28, 2019, China’s internet user base reached 829 million by December 2018, with internet penetration at 59.6%—an increase of 3.8 percentage points from the end of 2017, representing 56.53 million new users for the year [1].

1. The Dilemma Facing Print Media in the Internet Age

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, blockchain, and other emerging technologies has fundamentally transformed news production and dissemination through mobile applications, social media, Q&A platforms, live streaming, aggregation services, and self-media accounts. In today's information age, everyone has a microphone and a publishing platform, creating a constant deluge of information. In this environment, news spreads with precision down to the minute and second, and any delay or failure to respond promptly in the battle for audience attention risks being ruthlessly abandoned by readers. As a traditional medium, newspapers face increasingly compressed 生存空间 and mounting challenges. Many traditional media outlets are actively integrating with new media to construct entirely new media forms. The Tangshan Labor Daily, with over 70 years of history, has responded to these new circumstances by launching the Tangshan Plus news client, which employs mobile internet technology to deliver user-friendly, interactive experiences with real-time publication of unlimited content length and volume. During local "Two Sessions" periods, extensive on-site reporting and fresh news delivered through Tangshan Plus have achieved excellent communication effects. As the "parent" medium, Tangshan Labor Daily continues to reflect and innovate through this integration of old and new media, recognizing that traditional news organizations must vigorously adjust, transform, and upgrade their existing news production, supply, and distribution methods while reshaping editorial and distribution workflows to better meet the demands of 24/7 communication.

2. The Importance of Reconstructing Layout Language

Faced with the rapid development of new media and the cultivation of instantaneous reading habits, how can print media capture readers' attention and secure a glimmer of hope? The author argues that the overarching trend in newspaper design is moving toward simplicity and clarity, with all considerations stemming from reader convenience to create a fresh, eye-catching visual effect. Achieving this requires reconstructing layout language. A newspaper page comprises text characters, images, lines, and colors—these elements constitute the newspaper's language and form the physical entity of its layout. Through skillful editing and composition, these elements create specific spatial and structural arrangements that generate meaningful variation [2]. As readers' overall literacy and sophistication continue to improve, editors must employ effective methods that satisfy audience needs while allowing readers to feel intellectually engaged during their perusal. This engagement produces pleasure and ultimately cultivates loyal readership—an effect that cannot be achieved through raw copy alone but only through editorial craftsmanship. Editors must therefore fully grasp the emotional content of the text and, carrying this "sentiment," scientifically design and arrange copy and images to display and elevate content accurately and expressively. Additionally, by judging the news value of each piece, editors must clarify relationships of priority, combination, and separation to form a clear ed-

itorial intention, much like a well-defined facial contour that naturally draws the eye.

In today's era of abundant and instant information, layout must convey not only editorial and textual concepts but also consider readers' habits and experiences. Every layout and each editorial decision represents a form of spiritual communication between editor and reader. After forming an emotional judgment about the news, editors must also anticipate reader psychology and emotions—how to organically integrate elements such as headline treatment, layout tone, and image-to-text ratios to align editorial sentiment with reader psychology. In the concrete design process, editors must learn to think from the reader's perspective, considering which layout designs facilitate easier reading and which approaches enable faster, more direct news consumption and better comprehension of editorial intent. Using content and format to express media professionals' emotions and disseminate news more accurately represents a comparative advantage of newspapers.

3.1 Selecting Content: Learning to Subtract

Some suggest that newspapers should use their limited space to publish more news, making information richer and more competitive. The author disagrees. With unlimited capacity and constant updates, new media holds an insurmountable advantage in information volume. Attempting to compete through quantity results in cramped, dense layouts that actually discourage readership. In today's complex information environment, what people lack is not information but reliable, truthful journalism. Therefore, leveraging newspapers' inherent strengths to produce deep, thorough reporting that guides public opinion on major social transformations and events—satisfying readers through comprehensive coverage—demonstrates a newspaper's credibility, authority, and influence.

Thus, the author advocates for strategic subtraction in layout design, “treasuring ink like gold.” A typical news page can accommodate about a dozen pieces; editors should select vivid, important stories with varied lengths. Layout design must maintain clear hierarchy and emphasis. For lead or major stories, headlines and accompanying images should be enlarged, with white space appropriately expanded. Beyond using prominent headlines with concise text, intensive processing of related stories can also amplify their impact. Grouping different pieces under shared themes or through thematic combinations makes news more prominent. For supplementary pieces, editors should apply subtle treatment to avoid overshadowing primary content. Through strategic planning, each page can feature a focal point, creating a 主次分明的 layout style. This planning involves conscious design and packaging of content and form to achieve clearer themes, more concentrated content, and more innovative formats and angles—a process of re-evaluating news value [3]. Particularly for special sections, a single-theme-per-issue approach is entirely feasible, employing large images with striking headlines, local contrast methods, and multi-angle comparisons to establish distinctive styles and achieve effective communication. Such care-

fully organized, planned, and arranged layouts inevitably create a clean, crisp, refreshing impression that achieves the desired eye-catching effect.

3.2 Crafting Headlines: Brightening the Eyes of the Layout

News headlines are brief texts that summarize or evaluate news content—the “eyes” of journalism. As the saying goes, “One judges a book by its cover and a newspaper by its headlines.” A good headline grabs readers in the instant their gaze sweeps across the page; otherwise, it fails to generate interest. In this era of speed-reading, the “five-second effect” theory suggests readers spend only about five seconds browsing a newspaper before deciding whether to purchase and read it. Capturing attention within these five seconds makes headlines critical. Headlines span diverse domains—society, finance, entertainment, technology—but all represent highly condensed summaries of events, content, and nature. They must convey sufficient information while possessing contemporary relevance to attract readers. Given evolving audience demographics, headlines should be concise, accurate, vivid, and dynamic to strengthen journalistic expression.

Headlines generally comprise main titles, lead-ins, and sub-titles. On the page, variations in headline size, orientation (horizontal/vertical), and font/typeface create different effects. For news pages, after determining headline placement based on article importance and news value, lead and “above-the-fold” pieces receive special treatment, with their headline column spans and font sizes adjusted to achieve maximum prominence according to the overall page rhythm.

3.3 Using Images Effectively: Enhancing Layout Impact

Compared to dry text, people more readily receive information from images, which make abstract concepts comprehensible. Images possess strong visual impact and communicate more directly and vividly than words. As reading methods and habits evolve, text increasingly fails to quickly capture attention. Images, with their visual realism and authentic evidentiary function, gain growing reader recognition. For newspapers, images not only beautify layouts but also serve as powerful tools for enhancing visual impact—an indispensable element for every page.

Each editor has individual aesthetic preferences regarding image use, but the ultimate goal is strengthening the layout to serve thematic expression. First, image size matters considerably. Generally, images rich in important news information and attention-grabbing potential should be enlarged and placed centrally, sometimes framed or embellished with lines for emphasis. Images with weaker news value should be reduced and placed in secondary positions, creating clear thematic focus and hierarchy for effortless reader comprehension. The selection of a dominant image is crucial—it must establish the page’s emotional tone while containing important news information and multi-layered details that immerse readers in the scene. Second, the number of images per page is not arbitrary but carefully designed according to content. Excluding special sections,

news pages have limited capacity—two or three images suffice. Excessive images create a sense of scattered focus, preventing readers from grasping key points or understanding editorial intent.

Currently, many newspapers and magazines one-sidedly pursue visual stimulation, continuously increasing image proportions and creating layouts with excessive imagery and decoration. Yet beneath flashy designs, readers don't necessarily access more information. The author argues that image-centric layouts should not abandon substance; if form becomes superficial, communication loses meaning and newspapers lose their distinctive character.

In conclusion, amid the new media wave, audience tastes have changed considerably and become difficult to satisfy uniformly. However, as news publications, newspapers that grasp journalistic characteristics, follow the principles of staying close to reality, life, and the masses, and actively engage with the times, market, and audience will inevitably move and win over readers.

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(Author Affiliation: Tangshan Labor Daily)

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

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