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Discussion on the Reconstruction of Traditional News Communication by Self-Media News Communication: Postprint

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Abstract

Since its inception, self-media has penetrated people's daily lives at an unprecedented pace, emerging as a formidable media force that has profoundly impacted contemporary news communication. With its inherent advantages and extensive audience base, self-media's distinctive immediacy and interactivity have established it as a significant force in the current landscape of news dissemination. In response, how traditional media should address the overwhelming momentum of self-media's development, and how they can achieve win-win cooperation and integrated complementarity in the self-media era, has become an imperative path for exploring the evolution of news communication.

Full Text

A Discussion on the Reconstruction of Traditional News Communication by We Media

Abstract: Since its inception, We Media has penetrated daily life at an unprecedented pace, emerging as a formidable media force that profoundly impacts contemporary news communication. With its unique advantages and broad audience base, We Media's distinctive timeliness and interactivity have established it as a significant force in current news dissemination. Consequently, traditional media must confront this unstoppable momentum and explore pathways for cooperative win-win scenarios, integration, and mutual complementarity in the We Media era.

Keywords: We Media; news communication; reconstruction discussion

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We Media has emerged rapidly in recent years, characterized by vast numbers, diverse types, and the application of cutting-edge dissemination methods and technologies. Compared with traditional media, We Media's most prominent features are liberalization and diversification, allowing individuals to freely express their opinions—aligning with contemporary demands for freedom and equality. We Media has fundamentally transformed traditional news communication patterns in China, catalyzing the reconstruction of conventional news dissemination.

1.1 Definition of We Media

We Media (We Media) is not merely “citizen media” but also termed “personal media,” signifying that its disseminators exhibit privatized, civilian, and universal characteristics. These disseminators employ modernized, electronic means to transmit information to individual or group audiences. Current We Media platforms primarily include blogs, Weibo, WeChat, Baidu Tieba, Tianya, and various internet forums.

In July 2003, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis published a formal definition of We Media at the American Press Institute's Media Center: “We Media is a way for ordinary people, empowered by digital technology and connected to the global knowledge system, to begin understanding how they can provide and share their own facts and news.” Unlike information dissemination dominated by professional media institutions, We Media is led by ordinary audiences, subverting the traditional “point-to-face” transmission model and transforming it into a “point-to-point” concept of equal communication. This approach also implies that the process of individual audiences providing, producing, accumulating, sharing, and disseminating content possesses both private and public dimensions, representing an entirely new mode of information transmission.

We Media is characterized by timeliness and shareability. On We Media platforms, individuals can share their experiences and daily encounters while drawing upon others' shared experiences to solve their own problems. This timeliness is crucial—shared reflections become visible almost instantly, and needed information can be immediately retrieved. Represented by various social networking sites and widely recognized applications like WeChat and Weibo, these platforms have become increasingly important in Chinese life, offering tremendous convenience. In We Media, everyone is equal, with equal opportunities to present their insights and reflections to others. In essence, We Media provides substantial convenience for people's lives.

1.2 Main Characteristics of We Media News Communication

The internet era is the big data era, accessible to all, where everyone's identity is non-transparent and anyone can become whoever they wish. On Sina Weibo, for instance, news is updated daily and accessible to all, allowing users to express opinions and engage in discussions—creating a fundamentally fair

and just environment for free expression. Consequently, We Media is often described as having an information fragmentation characteristic. In contemporary Chinese society, nearly everyone owns a mobile phone, whose functions extend beyond necessary communication to include new capabilities. We Media news can be published online instantly and accessed directly via mobile devices. With massive user bases, news spreads conveniently, enabling We Media news communication to reach audiences in the shortest time through the most convenient formats. Moreover, We Media presents information in multiple forms—images, videos, audio—moving beyond text to create greater visual impact and immersive experiences. Its characteristics primarily divide into diversification, civilianization, and universalization.

Diversification. We Media disseminators originate from various regions and industries, possessing significantly greater familiarity with their fields than traditional media professionals. In certain industry domains, they can grasp media events more concretely, clearly, and realistically. Although these are “long-tail” communication individuals, their professional standards may exceed those of “head” media practitioners.

Civilianization. A unique advantage of We Media is that its communication subjects span all social strata, predominantly from society’s lower echelons, earning them the designation “grassroots 阶层.” Compared with traditional media professionals, these “amateur” information disseminators lack obvious utilitarian motives, often representing themselves or their groups, enabling more objective and rational judgment of news events.

Universalization. We Media’s greatest characteristic is transferring discourse power to ordinary audiences, providing the “grassroots 阶层” opportunities to voice their perspectives. Simultaneously, it constructs a stage for ordinary people to express themselves and develop individuality, transmitting their “personal voices” to netizens more effectively. As We Media has developed and its universalization has increased, the power of the “grassroots 阶层” has grown increasingly formidable.

1.3 Challenges in We Media News Communication

1.3.1 Information Overload and Audience Disorientation. On the complex and ever-changing We Media platforms, information publishing costs are extremely low, significantly reducing audience information acquisition costs. Concurrently, new media’s temporal and spatial convenience has substantially improved information timeliness. However, when confronted with massive, rapidly changing information, audiences encounter substantial invalid information, leading to confusion and disorientation. Additionally, We Media’s low entry threshold creates a vast and mixed user base. People from all industries gather on these platforms, publishing and disseminating events or viewpoints based on personal moods. Since much of this content constitutes non-news information, it creates audience discomfort and generates strong demand for orderly meaning.

1.3.2 Complex Disseminator Quality and Difficulty Distinguishing Truth. Since We Media news disseminators require no verification or examination, their personal qualities cannot be evaluated, with internet trolls among them publishing eye-catching false information that disrupts public perception.

1.3.3 Gatekeeping Deficiency and Frequent News Norm Violations. Due to low entry barriers, the authenticity and objectivity of We Media citizen journalism require verification. Individual moral baselines and media literacy become variables affecting news quality. Traditional “gatekeeping” is weakened or even eliminated on We Media platforms, leaving the accuracy and credibility of citizen journalism to be improved. Consequently, increased “reading risks” and credit costs for citizen journalism objectively exist.

2. Deconstruction of Traditional News by We Media News Communication

Only by clearly understanding how We Media news deconstructs traditional media can we comprehend its reconstruction. Deconstruction involves examining traditional news communication’s characteristics, 深入研究 its deficiencies, identifying unreasonable aspects, and improving them to enable news to progress with the times and better satisfy public needs. Deconstruction divides into communication method deconstruction and communication carrier/effect deconstruction.

2.1 Communication Method Deconstruction

Traditional Chinese media typically transmits information to audiences without interaction, employing specific methods to obtain news and selectively disseminating it—a limited process constrained by scarce news resources insufficient to support diversified content. As times progress and public cultural demands increase, traditional media cannot satisfy these needs. We Media has fundamentally transformed news communication processes and methods. First, We Media news communication has become widespread, enhancing audiences’ ability to access news, with everyone able to share known information. Second, We Media news communication is simpler, streamlining traditional processes and eliminating cumbersome steps for greater convenience. Third, We Media significantly enhances timeliness, enabling audiences to obtain real-time news within extremely short timeframes. Individuals can freely publish information and participate in news dissemination, providing tremendous convenience. Media also possesses automatic information filtering capabilities, allowing people to select preferred news, express viewpoints, discuss with others, and protect personal information if they wish to remain anonymous—providing solid safeguards for free expression. In the We Media environment, everyone becomes a news discoverer, disseminator, and commentator. This deconstruction of communication methods breaks traditional news’s disadvantages, making news communication more democratic and equal.

2.2 Communication Carrier and Effect Deconstruction

Traditional news communication carriers are limited to television, newspapers, and other singular mediums, whereas We Media employs diverse carriers like WeChat and Weibo, relying on the internet. The internet's hallmark feature is big data, enabling users to access every detail of public life. Various apps provide platforms for video upload, allowing people to follow news through video, audio, or images—constituting the deconstruction of traditional media effects. When unusual events occur, people can obtain information about timing, processes, and other details through various apps, with video providing more direct understanding. Audiences can track developments and comment on news, expressing opinions—demonstrating We Media's advantages. During the traditional media era, audiences passively received information without initiative, whereas the We Media era grants them active choice and control, enabling diverse access methods and opportunities to express viewpoints—symbolizing We Media democratization. We Media can unite people from all directions, enhancing cohesion and increasing news communication's depth and breadth.

3. Reconstruction of Traditional News Communication by We Media

We Media usage continues rising in Chinese society, which has become inseparable from it as various news reaches audiences through these channels. However, numerous deficiencies exist in We Media communication. Given its relatively recent emergence, We Media news dissemination remains imperfect, necessitating complementarity with traditional news communication to ensure better future development and greater convenience for more people.

3.1 Introducing New Technologies into Traditional News Communication

To keep pace with We Media's unstoppable development, traditional media must introduce emerging technologies and internet technologies to disseminate news events in new ways. For instance, traditional news media can utilize platforms like Zhihu, WeChat, Weibo, Baidu Tieba, and Tianya, employing big data analytics to understand audience interests and produce new programs tailored to public preferences. Simultaneously, they can broaden interaction channels with audiences, mobilizing their enthusiasm and attracting participation in media events. Additionally, traditional media can leverage opinion leaders like “big Vs” and We Media personalities to expand news dissemination scope.

3.2 Gatekeeping Requirements for We Media Information

Although traditional media has many deficiencies compared to We Media, it possesses aspects worth emulating, such as strict information gatekeeping. In China's We Media landscape, the freedom of speech and anonymity enable uncontrolled expression, with some individuals maliciously spreading rumors

that severely and negatively impact others—representing We Media news communication’s shortcomings. People should integrate traditional and We Media approaches, implementing review mechanisms for speech in We Media communication processes. We Media easily becomes a conduit for rumors and improper discourse, where traditional media can play a role by officially and formally debunking misinformation, thereby achieving integration between the two. Traditional media holds significantly greater authority than We Media, whose publishers often disregard responsibility concepts and publish improper remarks. Reasonable gatekeeping to filter unhealthy content while retaining beneficial material is crucial, enabling more people to find valuable information in the We Media domain and fostering more harmonious social development.

3.3 The Natural Process of We Media Information Verification

First, traditional media can correct We Media-published content. In this We Media era of information overload, when traditional media questions inappropriate information, it should respond immediately, using authoritative television, radio, and newspaper outlets to comprehensively explain and publish credible, authoritative content to counter harmful information. Second, We Media possesses a unique self-correction mechanism. When harmful information floods the internet, audiences may initially struggle to distinguish truth from falsehood, but as time passes and relevant information accumulates, truth gradually emerges. This process represents “time witnessing miracles” and We Media’s self-correction mechanism where rumors collapse on their own.

3.4 Gatekeeping Deficiency and Opinion Leader Fan Effects in We Media

The We Media era is also an “all-people media” era, where individuals freely and democratically publish information according to personal interests without temporal or spatial constraints. In this free, democratic space, the gatekeeper’s role is significantly weakened. In traditional media communication, opinions and suggestions only reach audiences after manual or institutional review—a process rarely occurring in We Media communication. Traditional gatekeeping mechanisms have been weakened by We Media’s freedom. Moreover, opinion leaders easily emerge in We Media communication, such as Weibo “big Vs” and We Media accounts—benchmark figures in specific fields or industries with hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers who constantly influence audience thoughts and viewpoints during dissemination.

Marshall McLuhan’s theory that “the medium is the message” posits: “The emergence of a new communication mode does not negate previous modes but rather integrates them by building upon their advanced features, creating a more perfected process that reflects contemporary characteristics and demands.” Compared with traditional broadcasting and television, We Media as an emerging communication technology shoulders the historical mission of implanting this technological power into social structures, making interactions between technol-

ogy and society, technology and people, and technology and technology more frequent. The news communication process in the We Media era represents vivid evidence of humans using technology to exert subjective agency and enhance participation. In this human-technology interaction, We Media employs its technological advantages to enable positive interaction and integration between traditional and emerging media, reshaping a new model that better satisfies audience needs and facilitates social communication development based on deconstructing original media communication patterns.

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

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