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News innovation must first do well in postprint topic selection planning.

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Abstract

Media organizations must continuously pursue journalistic innovation to achieve development, and such innovation must prioritize topic planning. Without topic planning, media lack positioning and direction, exhibit neither depth nor breadth in reporting, cannot substantiate the “content is king” paradigm, and possess no discourse power, inevitably resulting in reactive management, crisis-driven operations, perfunctory performance, and ultimate irrelevance. Media that fail to engage in topic planning seriously and consistently will inevitably face marginalization. Traditional media already confront considerable difficulties; failure to innovate amounts to awaiting their demise, making journalistic innovation the sole viable path to survival and development. This paper provides a concise overview of topic planning for news interviews and proposes recommendations regarding its principles and key considerations.

Full Text

News Innovation Must Begin with Effective Topic Selection Planning

Abstract: Media organizations must continuously innovate in journalism to develop, and news innovation must begin with effective topic selection planning. Without topic selection planning, media outlets lack positioning and direction, fail to achieve depth and breadth in reporting, cannot claim “content is king,” possess no discourse power, and inevitably struggle to cope, run themselves ragged, muddle through, and produce irrelevant content. Media that do not engage in serious and sustained topic selection planning will inevitably be marginalized. Traditional media already face severe difficulties; failing to innovate is tantamount to awaiting doom. Only through news innovation can media survive and develop. This paper provides a brief overview of topic selection planning in news gathering and offers recommendations on its principles and considerations.

Keywords: news innovation; topic selection; iterative topic replication; hot news; editorial staff

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2. Topic Selection Planning: Identifying the Essence and Connections of Matters

Topic selection planning involves choosing the theme, direction, main thrust, topics, scope, subjects, target audience, methods, implementation steps, measures, and objectives of reporting, ultimately achieving the desired effect. It is the process of predetermining topics, identifying related parties, studying the essential connections between matters, and exploring causal relationships. The process begins with topic setting, followed by developing strategies and detailed implementation plans to achieve goals and effects.

Topic selection planning is the process by which news media establish reporting objects, specifically including value judgments on anticipated news facts that may arise from news clues, as well as presupposed judgments on the feasibility of news reporting formulation and future dissemination. It must represent a novel conceptualization, constructing a new world of topics through fresh thinking. Specifically, it refers to media carefully planning and arranging the direction and development of events before project production to ensure alignment with initial intentions. It involves planning what to do, when to do it, who will do it, how to do it, and what the outcome should be. Like a bridge, it connects our current position with our ideal destination.

3. Principles of Topic Selection Planning

Topic selection planning requires multi-dimensional consideration. In planning major thematic reports, media must ground their topic selection in the broader context of the era, capturing temporal depth, spatial span, substantive thickness, and dissemination breadth to optimize and maximize communication impact. Planning serves implementation, implementation serves realization, and realization serves effectiveness.

3.1 Upholding the Principle of Orientation

No media outlet can afford to lack topic selection planning. Effective topic selection planning constitutes news innovation; its essence is news innovation and the path to media survival and development. It is the most fundamental, most manageable, most effective, and most essential form of news innovation that media should persistently uphold. Every media organization should seek topics and engage in continuous news innovation based on its own positioning.

3.2 Positioning and Credibility Principles

Control over positioning through topic selection planning determines the degree of control media have over their target audience. Media positioning concerns what to do and what not to do—a matter of survival. Media products differ fundamentally from ordinary products, primarily because they serve the public interest above their own, giving them distinct political attributes. Specifically, media positioning includes role positioning, audience positioning, content positioning, and competitive positioning. Role positioning is fundamental, audience positioning is core, content positioning is key, and competitive positioning establishes relative market position.

Audience positioning refers to the target public for media product promotion and design. Selecting a target audience is crucial because it essentially determines product positioning. Every media product must make choices and exclusions, as promotion requires public support, and only with a defined audience can decisions on product type and development direction be made.

3.3 The Importance of Angle in Hot News Coverage

The angle of approach to hot news is paramount; topic selection planning must seize opportunities to “leverage hot topics.” Planners must possess keen insight and responsiveness. For widely followed hot events, planners must maintain readiness to develop topics, harness momentum, and fully express media discourse power. The explosive potential of hot topics is enormous and even immeasurable, making them excellent sources for topic selection. However, in an environment where media outlets rush to chase hot topics, standing out while maintaining correct orientation requires unique planning angles. This demands lateral thinking and vertical action—lateral thinking to discover all possible extensions, and vertical action to deeply develop each extension. This approach allows each point to become an independent topic or combines multiple points for in-depth planning.

3.4 特写 ing Controversial Issues

Following the principle of “特写 ing controversial issues,” disputed topics can be guided to facilitate in-depth exploration. For enduring and universal controversies behind news stories, planners can see through phenomena to essence; for hot topics, see through the hype to underlying principles; and based on orientation principles, clear away confusion to clarify direction.

4. Practical Considerations for Topic Selection Planning

4.1 Genuine Topic Selection and Planning

Dedicated planning personnel and regular topic selection meetings are essential. Topics must be submitted with planning outlines, and submitted topics should be discussed and even debated. The process requires preparation, discussion,

and selection—formalism should be avoided. Discussion not only refines topics and identifies issues but may also generate new topics through collision of ideas, an essential aspect of effective planning.

4.2 Controversial Nature of News Topics

In contemporary Chinese society, evolving values and life perspectives lead to diverse evaluations of social events. Therefore, news media should ensure selected topics carry appropriate controversy to enable audiences with different values to express their viewpoints, thereby enhancing news value. Topics lacking controversy may result in low audience interest.

4.3 Concise Formulation of Topic Content

News activities are creative endeavors requiring journalists to adapt to on-site conditions. Overly detailed planning may constrain journalists' creativity and adaptability, leading to failed interviews and ineffective news gathering.

4.4 Stimulating Creativity in Editorial Staff

News reporting relies on editorial staff to create activity segments and content for successful media product dissemination. Diverse media coverage requires editorial staff to actively innovate in their thinking, mobilizing subjective initiative to discover news topics. Topic selection planning must determine not only interview subjects and content but also format, timing, and contingency measures—such as easing interviewee anxiety and effectively introducing topics. All these require editorial staff to possess creativity.

4.5 Exploring Topic Selection Planning Techniques

Topic selection planning techniques are essentially creative mental activities that require breakthrough thinking. Key innovative approaches include: (1) Integration—collecting multiple pieces of information about the same event, studying their connections, and synthesizing them into multi-dimensional, in-depth analytical articles based on internal logical relationships; (2) Trend determination—predicting the development trajectory of news events; (3) Panning for gold—identifying differences and discovering highlights through comparisons of similar phenomena; and (4) Reverse thinking—avoiding conventional approaches.

4.6 Investigating Causes and Influencing Factors

Media professionals must first study the phenomena and causes of innovative developments to identify connections between them. In the new development context, both traditional and new media environments require proactive planning and audience positioning to secure market share and audience groups, ultimately achieving positive social impact. Topic selection planning should focus on event hotspots, identify media concerns, discover audience interests, and tap

into resonance points between media and audience. It can attract audience attention and guide their cognition and thinking according to the selected topics. Ultimately, topic selection planning is the content and strategy determined by media after evaluating and judging the value of news clues.

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