

Postprint: Research on the Convergence Development of Television Variety Shows in the New Media Context

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Abstract

In the Internet era, the widespread proliferation of networks has endowed our nation with the world's largest online population, while new media has begun to exert substantial influence upon the development of traditional media. Within today's rapidly evolving Internet landscape, new media has become an indispensable component of people's daily lives. Presently, under the trend of new communication and interaction within the "Belt and Road Initiative," the landscape of traditional media is undergoing profound transformation. This article takes the developmental trajectory of traditional television variety shows within the contemporary new media context as its point of departure, seeks to explore effective approaches for the integrated development of television variety shows in the new media environment through an analysis of the current situation characterized by declining ratings of traditional television variety shows and shifting audience viewing habits, and consequently provides viable pathways for the future developmental direction of television variety shows.

Full Text

Research on the Integrated Development of TV Variety Shows in the New Media Context

Abstract: In the Internet era, the popularization of networks has given China the world's largest online population, and new media has begun to substantially influence the development of traditional media. Today, with the rapid development of the Internet, new media has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. Under the trend of new communication and interaction in the "Belt and Road" initiative, the structure of traditional media is undergoing profound transformation. This paper takes the development process of traditional TV

variety shows in the current new media context as its starting point, analyzes the current situation of declining ratings and shifting audience viewing habits of traditional TV variety shows, explores effective methods for the integrated development of TV variety shows in the new media context, and thereby provides a viable path for the future development direction of TV variety shows.

Keywords: new media; TV variety shows; media convergence

1. Development Status of Traditional TV Variety Shows in the New Media Environment

As a typical representative of traditional television programming, TV variety shows have become a popular genre featuring rich and diverse program formats and fresh, interesting content production, especially with the development of digital technology. With the increasing advancement of Internet technology, a new media environment has taken shape. Under the trend of new communication and interaction in the “Belt and Road” initiative, streaming media represented by television faces enormous challenges, with traditional TV variety shows bearing the brunt. In particular, the three major giants—Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent—have expanded into the film and television domain, and major video websites are no longer satisfied with merely broadcasting content. An increasing number of domestically produced online variety shows have begun to emerge. New media technology is driving the development of various media and transforming their living environments. However, in the information age, the factors that attract audiences to television works are no longer simply manifested in the program’s own new production techniques and trendy visual packaging, but rather in the core of the program itself.

1.1 Diversification of Audience Viewing Platforms and Declining Ratings of Traditional TV Variety Shows

Audience ratings serve as an intuitive indicator for evaluating the quality of a TV variety show. In the new media environment, television ratings have been significantly impacted. An increasing number of mobile terminals such as computers and smartphones can be used to watch videos, making television itself less necessary. Today, audiences no longer watch TV variety shows solely through television sets; computers, iPads, and mobile phones have replaced them as important means for audiences to access information. The diversification of viewing platforms has posed a tremendous challenge to traditional TV variety shows. Moreover, another new variety show model born from online platforms—“online TV variety shows”—has further exacerbated the plight of traditional TV variety shows. The online variety show market not only enjoys strong support from major video websites but has also attracted a large number of producers from traditional variety shows to jump ship. The development of online TV variety shows has sounded an alarm for traditional TV variety shows. Faced with the current situation of declining ratings caused by diversified viewing

platforms, how to integrate new media with traditional TV variety shows has become an urgent issue in today's development of TV variety shows.

1.2 Changing Media Survival Environment and Upgrading of New Media Application Technologies

Today's new media no longer serves only the function of providing timely information. In the creative application of new media technology in television works, the incorporation of creators' personal thoughts and evaluations generates more resonance among audiences. The quality of production technology is closely related to the degree of program realization. Faced with a large influx of new media application technologies into the production process of traditional television works, it is crucial how these works adapt to the transformation of the media survival environment. With the impact of the Internet, changes in media formats are being influenced by the sharing and linkage characteristics of digital media.

1.3 Enhanced Audience Participation and Improved Service Concepts of TV Variety Shows

With the support of network technology, television has entered the TV 3.0 era, which requires TV programs to break away from the previous model of "I have already influenced you." Active audience interaction is an embodiment of program identification and facilitates healthy interaction between viewers and programs. Interaction through third-party platforms has become a popular interactive procedure. During the broadcast of the Chongqing TV reality show "China's Supermodel," the TV screen displays prompts for the WeChat "Shake" function, allowing audiences to participate in the program, interact with it, and while watching, shake their phones to post information and browse more exciting content from their mobile devices. For Dragon TV's "Go Fighting" program, by using Sina Weibo's radar function, listeners tuning in online can participate in interactive programs, join discussions about program content, cheer for celebrities, and vote, achieving cross-screen interaction. Establishing major TV client apps satisfies audience demand for accessing program information anytime, anywhere. From variety shows to all types of programs, we can see increasing attention from producers and audiences alike. This model compensates for the shortcomings of communication between television media and audiences, enabling the realization of media integration conditions. Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan believed that media are extensions of humans, and the birth of new media will create a new environment that influences how people perceive things. Audiences watching variety shows through new media terminals will have their viewing habits changed by this new method. On the one hand, people no longer remain fixed in front of televisions but instead use smartphones, tablets, and other terminals to watch variety shows. This approach transcends limitations of time and location, greatly enhancing audience autonomy and even allowing them to freely subscribe to their favorite programs.

On the other hand, interactivity between TV programs and audiences has increased. According to surveys by a new-generation market research company, currently, among domestic TV viewers, over 80% of audiences use social media to participate in interactive chats while watching TV programs through mobile terminals. Therefore, social networks' evaluation and promotion of programs will influence audience feedback and perception of variety shows [1].

2. Specific Strategies for Integrating New Media and TV Variety Shows

New media is advancing aggressively, and traditional TV variety shows are encountering unprecedented impact. Traditional television has no choice but to change, making full use of the characteristics and advantages of new media to seek development. With the development of new media technology, television professionals are constantly generating new ideas, which are mainly manifested in the "three integrations": integration of television media and new media, integration of multimedia means and communication activities, and integration of communication content and emotional rendering.

2.1 Integration of Television Media and New Media

To overcome communication limitations, media integration is a necessary path to break the rigidity of traditional media. In the new media era, established TV variety shows can no longer satisfy the demands of young audiences. In response to the changing viewing habits of young audiences, established TV variety shows are continuously updating their own software and hardware, striving to integrate with currently popular media elements. Today, TV variety shows have dedicated personnel operating their own WeChat and Weibo promotion platforms. Before a program airs, its content is promoted on WeChat official accounts to build momentum; during broadcast, the production team communicates and interacts with audiences through Weibo and WeChat platforms; after broadcast, the team conducts secondary promotion of the program through Weibo and WeChat platforms, employing multiple methods for three-dimensional dissemination. Furthermore, in the new media era, the role of big data is particularly prominent. By classifying the viewing preferences of different audiences through statistically analyzed information, we can provide better and more targeted TV variety show works for different markets.

2.2 Integration of Multimedia Means and Communication Activities

Traditional media communication is directional, whereas multimedia information communication is multi-directional and possesses a certain degree of interactivity. In the 21st century, on-demand news will become the largest platform for multimedia services. Users can send information, receive information, and even obtain information sources that provide information on demand. For example, users of British music TV channels can enter websites to access inventories

of various music TV channels, then upload selected programs via email in a pre-determined sequence to network channel programs. In online channels, based on each user's specific needs, computers are used for comprehensive layout to publish each user's selected program list and notify users when to watch at the corresponding time. The greatest feature of this new method is that while television programs traditionally broadcast according to a single program schedule, the new approach bids farewell to the single program model. Through media communication patterns, audiences can selectively watch programs; through interactive network usage, the Internet can reduce intermediate links in communication, enabling all online information to be directly conveyed to audiences and enhancing their autonomous choice. This initiative not only makes it possible for audiences to select messages but also strengthens information interaction between media and users. This method of using multimedia interaction to closely connect programs with audiences can be considered a typical example of integrating TV variety shows with currently popular new media communication methods.

2.3 Integration of Communication Content and Emotional Rendering

As recipients in video content communication, audiences habitually select programs to watch through anticipation and judgment of program content. In the process of integrating new media and TV variety shows, fully considering audience viewing preferences and psychology is a key aspect for television work creators. Creativity is the soul of TV variety shows, and in the process of integrating new media with TV variety shows, the reshaping of content and creativity is crucial. Walter Benjamin stated in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that "the production of cultural works is different from industrial production and scientific education; the core of culture is the spiritual characteristics of humanism and people-oriented philosophy. Only by evoking the core emotional genes of cultural resources, enabling cultural and creative resources to achieve emotional communication and resonance with audiences of cultural consumption, is the best path for the cultural industry from gestation to generation" [2]. In TV variety show production, only through planning that transforms or redesigns patterned scenarios to create programs with unique highlights can directors more easily attract audience attention. In a puzzle-type program, how to allow audiences to see the extraordinary side of participants, how to demonstrate a participant's competitive advantage, and how to reflect the program's fairness and impartiality all require presentation to audiences in a unique way, thereby stimulating audience audiovisual excitement points. Therefore, the integration of creativity and planning, combined with the fusion of communication content and emotion, and conveying multiple factors of memory and auditory expression through new methods are the secret to improving the watchability of variety shows.

3. Development Directions for TV Variety Shows

3.1 Increasing Program Depth and Striving to Create Quality Productions

In the new media context under the “Belt and Road” strategy, culture has increasingly become an important force driving economic growth and a significant factor in comprehensive national power competition. In particular, as an emerging industry, the cultural industry has to some extent become the basic form of cultural flow, with cultural products and services becoming important components of international trade. Currently, in the global industrial competition landscape, China still has considerable room for improvement in both the “quantity” and “quality” of cultural innovation. In order to seize ratings, new TV variety shows unilaterally hype topical events as program content to cater to audience viewing hotspots, which greatly damages the audience’s audiovisual environment and particularly exerts significant negative influence on the value orientation of underage viewers. General Secretary Xi Jinping once delivered an important speech at the Symposium on Literature and Art, stating that “literature and art cannot lose their direction in the tide of the market economy, cannot deviate on the question of whom they serve, otherwise literature and art will have no vitality. Vulgarly is not popularity, desire does not represent hope, and simple sensory entertainment does not equal spiritual happiness.” New TV variety shows produced using new media concepts should still follow orderly production rules, focus on improving the cultural connotation of programs, and create “positive energy” television works—this is the mainstream of the industry.

3.2 Consolidating Program Content and Avoiding Technological Panacea

The economic base determines the superstructure. With the development of science and technology, science and art are becoming increasingly integrated. The implementation of creativity relies on certain technologies as a foundation, while the development of science and technology can enrich the forms of TV programs. The application of danmaku (bullet comments) in online variety shows provides opportunities for audiences to comment on program content; the application of special effects subtitles paired with emojis in program packaging further enriches the packaging forms of TV programs. Art appreciation activities require audience feedback, which can improve the quality of TV art works—this is a virtuous cycle in TV program production. Moreover, under the premise of abundant material and technical means, we should even more create TV programs with “content as king.” New Internet technologies have endowed programs with form, yet content is the living soul of TV art works. In TV programs, we should see more “human factors.” In TV program production, we should fully consider consumption habits and customs under various cultural backgrounds, study the cultural traditions, value orientations, and reception psychology of different foreign audience groups, identify their concerns and interests, develop marketable

cultural products in a targeted manner, form cultural brands, enable Chinese culture not only to “go out” but also to “go in,” and minimize the phenomenon of “cultural discount” to the greatest extent [3]. A truly excellent TV program must have not only technology as its foundation but also novel creative content, enabling it to stand firm in the wave of new media development.

3.3 Persisting in Program Innovation and Avoiding Creative Follow-the-Leader

With the advancement of information technology and the rapid development of the Internet, the entire world has been connected into a global village. Today’s TV program producers can easily access industry-related information, with everything becoming readily available through the Internet. When a program attracts significant attention in one country, many TV program producers from other countries will introduce or borrow the program to bring it to their own countries. However, even with localization modifications, the core content of the program does not change much and still lacks innovation. Continuous innovation and the creation of high-quality variety shows with innovative cultural cores have become primary issues in the integration of new media and TV variety shows. In addition to “sharing” and introducing excellent variety shows, the production of TV variety shows should more importantly involve participation in “co-discussion” and “co-construction” to create TV variety works with innovative cultural cores and form a cooperative pattern of two-way interaction.

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

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