

On the Transformation of Military Propaganda Work in the New Media Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

The advent of new media has propelled the rapid development of China's economy, brought great convenience to people's lives, and simultaneously enhanced access to external information, such as WeChat Official Accounts, Tencent News, Toutiao, and other applications, as well as digital broadcasting and touch-screen media. The new media era has transformed traditional paper-based communication methods, enabling further expansion of propaganda concepts and channels, and rendering previously relatively closed military camps no longer 'isolated'. This paper proposes relevant recommendations for military propaganda work in the new media era.

Full Text

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In the past, people typically obtained news and information through newspapers, television, radio, and the internet. The emergence of new media has provided a novel alternative. The new media industry has risen rapidly, gaining widespread popularity through its concise, fast-food-style, and fragmented characteristics. As of March 2017, WeChat's monthly active users reached 649 million, with some official accounts boasting tens of millions of followers. Content pushed by such accounts spreads at an explosive rate through new media platforms, far exceeding the reach of traditional media. It is foreseeable that in the coming era, new media will coexist with traditional media, and as the potential of new media continues to be tapped and its intelligence further enhanced, it may even become a crucial factor influencing social development, progress, and stability. This new commercial environment stems from an entirely new social formation. In the internet age, people's lives are segmented by fragmented content, giving rise to a fast-food-style communication context. Individuals often utilize fragmented time—such as when commuting by bus or subway, or waiting for meals—to systematically obtain desired information without expending much time or effort. The concise and succinct nature of new media content is precisely a product of this fragmented reading habit.

1.3 信息短小精悍

In the Yichun plane crash incident, journalists used mobile phones to capture the latest scenes, verifying the event's authenticity in the shortest possible time and saving considerable time for understanding and handling the situation. In my journalistic career, I photographed soldiers creating ice sculptures with water in 2016; after Xinhua News Agency released the dispatch, it spread rapidly on WeChat and Weibo, garnering nearly 100 million views in just two days. In 2017, I produced a digital photo album reflecting soldiers' lives, duties, and training, which was widely shared on WeChat, exceeding 100,000 views within three days. These examples demonstrate that new media boasts rapid transmission speed, extensive reach, and significant influence, playing a crucial role in dissemination and propaganda efforts.

1.4 形式互动性强

Another distinguishing feature of new media is the unobstructed interactive channel between readers and authors. Traditional media such as television and newspapers can only publish information, unable to obtain readers' feedback in real time. In contrast, new media content includes dedicated comment sections

where authors can receive reader feedback instantly, fostering positive interactions. On live streaming platforms, real-time interaction between information publishers and viewers is even possible. This has infinitely amplified the entertainment function of new media. I often hear soldiers around me remark after watching content from an official account that “the comments are even more interesting,” indicating that new media audiences can become content publishers themselves while reading, further improving information quality and achieving closer interaction.

1.1 内容原创性强

Although new media platforms like WeChat and Weibo have reposting functions, their origins often reflect the wisdom of small groups or individuals, who originally present their observations, thoughts, and gains to readers through a combination of text, images, and audio-visual content. In today’s society, which is rife with “anti-counterfeiting” efforts, this original spirit becomes increasingly valuable. This is also why new media is popular and spreads rapidly. In new media, creators need not be professionals, and topics need not have theoretical sophistication; stating facts, or even expressing astonishment and emotion, can arouse readers’ interest.

2. 发挥新媒体优势，提升宣传人员素质

New media’s characteristics of originality, diversity, fragmentation, and interactivity adapt to contemporary social development and have gained widespread public recognition, leading to rapid growth in user numbers. In this new media environment, military propaganda work faces numerous challenges. Driven by the progress of the times, we must fully utilize new media reforms to improve military propaganda work, leverage new media advantages, strengthen propaganda efforts, and enhance the overall quality of the troops.

Online communication features high speed and efficiency, but it is also a mixed bag where information authenticity requires careful consideration and audience quality varies. Once public events or hot topics emerge, they spread at explosive speeds through new media technology. Any false or inaccurate reporting can adversely affect the military and cause the public to lose trust. Military propaganda departments must promptly seize the new media information “high ground” by building official public accounts and Weibo pages, daily pushing positive news covering soldiers’ lives, duties, and training activities, and releasing objective, truthful, and authoritative news immediately after emergencies occur. This should be combined with innovative methods, using humorous, harmonious, healthy, and optimistic diversified forms disseminated through images, videos, and other means.

As society continues to progress, relying solely on “official media” for propaganda is difficult to adapt to the current development pattern and challenging to create a situation where online public opinion is jointly managed and all citizens

consciously uphold the socialist core value system. Therefore, transforming the mindset of propaganda work has become an inevitable choice. Why was British Prime Minister Tony Blair able to gain popular support and be re-elected for three terms? During his tenure, he continuously collected social and public sentiment in the UK, conducted systematic scientific analysis, and formulated public opinion response plans, which allowed him to emerge unscathed from attacks by opposing parties multiple times and even counterattack using new media forces. The military can similarly learn from this approach by establishing a military-related “public opinion management department,” strengthening connections with local media, new media, and internet supervision departments, promoting civil-military integration to pool collective wisdom, and actively confronting the challenges of the new media era.

3. 新媒体环境下坚守舆情阵地

The primary obstacle to propaganda departments’ in-depth use of new media for military propaganda work in the new era is “people.” In the coming period, new media development will become even more irreversible, with broader and deeper influence. Integrating military propaganda work with new media and cultivating talent for new media usage and management is a crucial current task. Familiarity with new media characteristics and advantages, and proficiency in using new media for propaganda work, should be fundamental qualities for propaganda department leaders and key personnel. In recent years, official accounts representing major military units, such as “Strong Military Pioneer” and “Charge Bugle,” have mushroomed, attracting tens of millions of followers. The creation of such WeChat accounts demonstrates the military propaganda work’s effort to “go global” and represents innovation in propaganda thinking. For leading cadres to improve media literacy, they must first become good “listeners” before they can become effective “managers.”

Only by respecting social development laws, grasping public opinion dynamics, and effectively wielding new media as a weapon can military propaganda workers maintain close contact with officers and soldiers in their propaganda, avoid empty rhetoric, win the discourse power of online positive energy, and gain the trust of troops.

As an emerging information dissemination channel, new media possesses certain developmental advantages while also presenting corresponding problems. We must not violate the objective laws of era development; we should strengthen scientific and reasonable supervision policies for new media to fully expand its information dissemination reach. Simultaneously, we must emphasize the quality of disseminated information, widely apply new technologies such as cloud computing to new media information dissemination, effectively integrate relevant new media content with these technologies, and promote the development of the new media era.

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

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