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An Analysis of the Applicability of VR Technology in Sports News Reporting: Postprint

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Abstract

In 2016, known as the “Year Zero of VR,” VR journalism proliferated globally and has now become a prominent topic within the field of mass communication, with both academic and industry communities continually exploring its scope of application. This paper extends from the application of VR technology in the journalistic domain to the applicability of VR technology in sports journalism, thereby holding practical significance for the development of sports news and communication.

Full Text

Research • Technology and Application: An Analysis of the Applicability of VR Technology in Sports News Reporting

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Abstract: In 2016, dubbed the “Year of VR,” VR news blossomed worldwide and has now become a hot topic in the field of mass communication, with both academia and industry continuously exploring its scope of application. This paper extends the application of VR technology in journalism to examine its applicability in sports news, which holds practical significance for the development of sports journalism and communication.

Keywords: sports news; VR technology

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This sense of novelty directly increases the appeal of news. Beyond the inherent characteristics of news topics themselves, VR technology—virtual reality technology—creates an experiential virtual world with interactivity, immersion,

and imaginative space by combining simulation technology with various computer technologies. The continuous advancement of VR technology influences the development process of media, from *The New York Times*' NYT VR experiment in 2015 to VR news blossoming worldwide in 2016, making it a hot topic in the field of mass communication today. In 2016, dubbed the "Year of VR," VR news appeared in China's Two Sessions coverage. As VR news continues to emerge, both academia and industry are constantly exploring its scope of application. Against this backdrop, analyzing the applicability of VR technology in sports news reporting holds practical significance for the development of sports journalism and communication.

1. Application of VR Technology in News Reporting

1.1 Content Selection Based on News Value: Freshness

VR technology is an emerging technology, and its application in the news industry remains in the experimental exploration stage. No universally recognized and tested principles for news selection have yet been formed, but journalists have accumulated some experience through continuous trial and error, which can be summarized to form preliminary applicable guidelines. VR news imposes high demands on media organizations in terms of technical capacity, human resources, production time, and economic effects, and is currently only being attempted within a limited scope. In the news production process, selecting the right facts is crucial for opening up the VR news market. Journalists' understanding of news facts and their grasp of news value have always been important criteria for traditional news selection, and in VR news production, these same news values serve as the benchmark for content selection.

Starting from the five elements of news value, first, from the perspective of current technological development, the timeliness of VR news cannot be fully realized. VR news requires a long production cycle and cannot be as rapid as text, images, or even live video streaming. However, the sensory and emotional stimulation that VR news provides is fresh. Taking *The Displaced* as an example, people have developed information fatigue regarding wars in the Middle East, but the immersive visual impact brought by VR technology is refreshingly shocking.

1.2 Content Orientation Based on Audience Usage: Proactivity

The arrival of the information age has made information needs an important component of people's social requirements. Starting from individual audience members, the behavior and psychology of every VR news user have become crucial elements that cannot be ignored in expanding the VR news market. First, considering the practical costs of accessing VR news: compared to the ubiquity and convenience of current online news, watching VR news requires special equipment and high network speeds, making it impossible to receive news anytime and anywhere. Additionally, current single VR news pieces feature rich

content and long durations, making this a relatively “luxurious” way of receiving news. On the other hand, while VR technology can enhance audience experience and narrative capacity, prolonged wearing of VR headsets can cause dizziness, nausea, and other symptoms—human adaptability is a key challenge that VR news production must overcome. Furthermore, whether the strong visual impact audiences receive during unconscious exploration of fully reconstructed news scenes might trigger negative effects is also a topic that VR news production needs to address.

Second, examining the psychological motivations for receiving VR news: from the perspective of individual recipients, the selection criteria for news consumption can be summarized into two main categories: usefulness standards and interestingness standards. Strictly speaking, what VR news provides is not simply “new” information, but rather an innovation in news reporting and communication methods. Audiences are not completely ignorant of the news facts when receiving information. Under this premise, audiences demand higher levels of usefulness and interestingness from VR news to motivate repeated consumption of news events. Taking *The New York Times*’ another VR work, “Seeking Pluto’s Icy Heart,” as an example, exploring the mysterious universe is inherently highly interesting. The Pluto journey realized through VR technology in the video greatly satisfies people’s cognitive and leisure needs, moving them from curiosity to exploration and fulfilling their desire for truth and novelty. Overall, VR news is a news product that media organizations repeatedly refine based on audience preferences and acceptance capabilities, demanding high levels of proactivity from audiences.

2. Applicability of VR Technology in Sports News Reporting

Overall, sports news benefits from relatively stable audience groups who actively receive news to satisfy their needs, and the unique values inherent in sports activities can effectively drive the integration of sports news and VR technology, indicating high applicability. Moreover, within the limits of human adaptability, we can further consider whether VR sports news can be combined with other technological products to enhance the narrative and gamified qualities of sports news, increase audience participation, and continuously expand the VR sports news market.

2.1 Different Content Types of Sports News

Sports news is an important category of news classified by content; all news related to sports can be considered sports news. Competitive sports have always possessed prominent educational, political, economic, and socio-cultural values, making them a core content and important characteristic of sports news. In recent years, with the continuous improvement of living standards, the concept of lifelong sports has been widely accepted, and social sports have also become a

focus of sports news attention. Both competitive sports news and social sports news can serve as fertile ground for VR news development.

The dramatic effects brought by competition and conflict in competitive sports are highly interesting and can satisfy audiences' leisure needs. If special political and cultural significance is attached to competitions, public attention becomes even higher. From the audience perspective, sports news requires viewers to possess corresponding sports knowledge structures, with the majority being sports fans and enthusiasts who have active needs to access sports news, particularly the demand to rewatch exciting matches, creating a perfect application scenario for VR technology. For instance, producing a VR news piece on the highly-rated Super Bowl final would likely attract tremendous public attention.

The massive public foundation of social sports undoubtedly provides strong support for expanding the VR news market. Large-scale social sports events such as marathons and fitness activities allow participants to easily resonate with VR news. On the other hand, VR technology's simulation capabilities can enable remote social sports instruction, allowing ordinary sports participants to learn sports skills through VR videos. At this level, anyone interested in learning sports skills becomes a potential audience for VR sports news.

2.2 Different Formats of Sports News

When mapping VR news onto existing news formats, similar to television news or video news, it can be divided into different formats such as news reports, continuous reports, series reports, news features, news investigations, news commentaries, news interviews, and live news broadcasts. Among these, formats such as continuous reports, series reports, news features, investigations, and interviews place greater emphasis on concentrated, detailed, comprehensive, and in-depth news content. Using VR technology to reconstruct events and environments can expand audiences' access to news events and enhance cognitive and emotional effects. Returning to the sports domain, sports news centered on competitive and social sports offers ample room for in-depth exploration, and the integration of VR technology can enrich the narrative capacity of different program formats, delivering unique viewing experiences. At the opening ceremony of the 2016 European Championship, a virtual reality camera covered in "eyes" attracted public attention, with the broadcaster responding: "Our main task is to give people an immersive experience; this is a comprehensive and in-depth experience."

In summary, sports news benefits from relatively stable audience groups who actively receive news to satisfy their needs, and the unique values inherent in sports activities can effectively drive the integration of sports news and VR technology, indicating high applicability. Moreover, within the limits of human adaptability, we can further consider whether VR sports news can be combined with other technological products to enhance the narrative and gamified qualities of sports news, increase audience participation, and continuously expand

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