

Feasible Approaches to Enhancing News Communication Effectiveness: A Case Study of Hunan Television's "Xinwen Da Qiuzhen" Program (Postprint)

Authors: Long Yueyue

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Abstract

In recent years, science popularization and truth-seeking programs have gained widespread popularity among audiences. Among these, 'News Big Truth-Seeking' serves as a bridge from rumors to truth for viewers while adhering to scientific principles. How to promote such programs to the general public and improve their ratings has become a critical issue for program development. This paper will conduct exploratory research on the communication effects of the 'News Big Truth-Seeking' program, explore and analyze the problems within it, and propose feasible pathways to enhance its ratings.

Full Text

Feasible Paths to Improve News Communication Effectiveness: A Case Study of Hunan TV's "News Big Truth-Seeking" Program

Abstract: In recent years, science popularization and truth-seeking programs have gained widespread popularity among audiences. Among them, "News Big Truth-Seeking" has built a bridge from rumors to truth for viewers while adhering to scientific principles. How to promote such programs to the masses and improve their ratings has become a crucial issue for their development. This paper explores the communication effectiveness of "News Big Truth-Seeking," analyzes its existing problems, and proposes feasible paths to improve its ratings.

Keywords: Truth-seeking programs; News Big Truth-Seeking; communication paths

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Author: Long Yueyue

With the increasing frequency of online information dissemination, the boundary between rumors and truth has become increasingly blurred, making it difficult for ordinary audiences to judge the authenticity of phenomena based on their own knowledge and experience. In response, Hunan Satellite TV launched the program “News Big Truth-Seeking,” which verifies different claims and viewpoints. Currently, many similar domestic programs have drawn inspiration from America’s “MythBusters” and achieved localized development of program style. Although the program has achieved certain success, its production and communication mechanisms remain imperfect, leaving considerable room for improvement in audience outreach. The following analysis will identify problems in the program’s production and communication, and propose corresponding solutions.

1. Problems in the Communication of “News Big Truth-Seeking”

1.1 Insufficient Rigor in Program Content “News Big Truth-Seeking” draws on the model of “MythBusters,” with both programs ultimately aiming to reveal the truth about things while incorporating topical elements. Topic selection prioritizes audience appeal, and Hunan TV fully leverages its celebrity resources by inviting stars or internet celebrities to boost ratings. Program content is designed as sitcoms, with stars acting out “life scenarios” to introduce each episode’s topic, while hosts and guests jointly deduce and verify “rumors.”

However, the process of truth exploration often requires considerable time. Due to time constraints, the experimental segments in “News Big Truth-Seeking” are often rushed, showing only results. Moreover, because hosts and guests lack professional expertise, they can only follow scripted performances. Many guests have never even heard of the rumors in question but transform into “expert roles” for visual appeal. Such design often leads audiences to question the program’s professionalism. While the program is highly entertaining, insufficient professionalism deviates from its original purpose as a science popularization program. Additionally, some news topics may overlap with other media outlets in pursuit of hot topics, causing resource waste and affecting communication effectiveness.

1.2 Communication Effects Inferior to New Media In the online environment, rumor spreads at an astonishing speed. Compared with online media, television audiences are relatively limited in scope, and TV broadcasting lacks real-time interactivity, weakening communication effectiveness. From this perspective, “News Big Truth-Seeking” still lags behind new media in terms of public opinion guidance. Furthermore, its presentation format is overly monotonous and topic selection is relatively limited, all of which adversely affect program

dissemination.

2. Analysis of Causes Behind Communication Problems in “News Big Truth-Seeking”

2.1 Inherent Program Limitations “News Big Truth-Seeking” airs at a fixed time of 18:00 as linear broadcast, with each episode lasting half an hour. Typically, many viewers are either just getting off work or preparing dinner during this time slot, causing them to miss the program. Moreover, in terms of channel-network integration, the program has insufficient interaction with online audiences and relatively few internet “fans.” The program’s Weibo posts are generally concentrated between 15:00-17:00 daily, with comments and reposts rarely exceeding 50. Most Weibo content is automatically posted, with few dedicated staff interacting with viewers, answering questions, or guiding on-line public opinion. Although “News Big Truth-Seeking” is available on video platforms like iQiyi and LeTV, its limited influence means these sites do not feature it prominently, further affecting effective dissemination.

2.2 Limited Investment Costs While “News Big Truth-Seeking” focuses on visual appeal and strives to attract audience attention, domestic rumor-debunking programs started relatively late and have not yet formed a mature operational model. Public demand for scientific knowledge is not urgent, resulting in unstable audience groups and few “loyal fans.” Additionally, influenced by the broadcast time slot, the program overemphasizes entertainment elements in content design, increasing difficulty in attracting sponsors. Consequently, the program faces challenges in set design, expert team support, and experimental facilities.

2.3 Lack of “Media Convergence” Awareness Although “News Big Truth-Seeking” has official accounts on WeChat, Weibo, and other platforms, their ability to attract followers is limited, with insufficient account attention. The program merely uses these new media as information dissemination channels, failing to interact timely with audience feedback, resulting in insufficient online interactivity. Despite having many innovative editors and producers, the program still follows traditional production formats, making it difficult to reflect media convergence characteristics and affecting effective dissemination.

3. Feasible Paths to Improve Communication Effectiveness of “News Big Truth-Seeking”

3.1 Balancing Entertainment and Scientific Rigor The “News Big Truth-Seeking” production team should actively interact with users, especially on self-media platforms by responding to questions, suggestions, and comments. Simultaneously, it should solicit program topics from the broader self-media community to enrich topic selection scope. Special episodes can be produced based on online interactions, inviting enthusiastic netizens to the program

site to participate in performances or interact with guests. Diverse self-media resources are beneficial for improving program communication effectiveness.

As science and culture continue to develop, the disconnect between them has become increasingly severe. As a traditional media with a broad audience, television bears important social responsibility in science popularization and truth-seeking. To improve the communication effectiveness of “News Big Truth-Seeking,” there needs to be an objective and comprehensive understanding of existing problems, active transformation of production concepts, improved production quality, gradual establishment of a distinctive program style, and active learning from successful experiences of similar programs to develop rumor-debunking and truth-seeking programs with unique characteristics and high standards.

“Science” often evokes impressions of “rigor,” “seriousness,” “standardization,” and “professionalism.” Compared with currently popular variety shows, science verification programs clearly lack advantage in entertainment and stress relief. However, Hunan TV has always highlighted fashion and entertainment, and “News Big Truth-Seeking” inherits this distinctive entertainment style, enabling audiences to perceive science beyond traditional cognition. Through entertaining program arrangements, scientific content is disseminated, increasing liveliness and entertainment while enabling audiences to acquire more scientific knowledge and form profound viewing impressions. In the entertainment-oriented operation of science programs, the program also attracts audience attention through professional scientific experiments with distinct performative qualities, focusing on guiding audience cognition. However, due to insufficient professionalism of the experimental team, many viewers question the authority of experimental results. The program also intersperses expert interview clips to explain experimental content or scientific phenomena, but these experts lack entertainment performance experience, causing the program to fall back into an overly serious and rigid pattern.

To improve communication effectiveness, “News Big Truth-Seeking” must highlight the professionalism of its experimental team while demonstrating entertainment value, allowing viewers to relax while achieving rumor-debunking goals. Specifically, improvements can be made in the following aspects:

First, the host’s role needs repositioning with reduced screen time. During experiments, hosts and experts should coordinate their division of labor: hosts can participate from the audience’s perspective, primarily explaining experimental procedures and phenomena to connect the program, while experts conduct specific steps to ensure scientific rigor. Second, interaction frequency between expert teams and hosts should be increased. Hosts must enhance their scientific literacy, familiarize themselves with program topics and particularly the background knowledge. Third, experimental teams should develop entertainment performance skills. Fourth, more interaction time should be reserved for experts and hosts. In CCTV’s similar program “Is It True?”, hosts and expert teams perform verification together, but poor pre-program communication, insufficient

rapport, and lack of host expertise result in weak interaction, negatively affecting ratings. “News Big Truth-Seeking” should avoid such issues.

3.2 Improving Program Dissemination Through “Channel-Network Integration” With the continuous growth of online media audiences, “News Big Truth-Seeking” must combine new media with television channels to improve dissemination efficiency and adapt to audiences’ diversified information acquisition methods. The production team should promote the program through Weibo, WeChat, and other official accounts while interacting with similar TV program accounts, such as CCTV’s “Is It True?” and Anhui TV’s “Rumor Terminator,” to attract more followers. Daily post volume should be increased, particularly with updates before 21:00 each night to boost audience clicks. The program can invite popular stars or internet celebrities and interact with their accounts. A distinctive language style should be developed based on program content to enhance characteristics. Sponsor selection should focus on daily necessities merchants, as they align well with the program’s audience and can provide activity prizes.

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(Author Affiliation: Hunan Broadcasting System News Center)

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