

How Can Print Media Commentary Break Through in the Post-Print Era of Media Convergence?

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Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

New media, which leverages novel technologies, methods, and channels, presents considerable challenges to traditional media—particularly print media commentary—due to its characteristics of diversified information channels, immediacy of dissemination, and broad participation of stakeholders. Traditional print media commentary should seize the opportunity presented by media convergence development, harness the “east wind” of converged media, and hoist the sails of its authoritative professionalism and rational objectivity to strive for a breakthrough.

Full Text

How Print Media Commentary Can Break Through in the Era of Integrated Media

ChinaXiv Collaborative Journal

Abstract: New media, leveraging novel technologies, methods, and channels, poses considerable challenges to traditional media—particularly print media commentary—due to its diversified information sources, instantaneous dissemination, and broad-based participation. Traditional print media commentary should seize the opportunity of media convergence, harness the “east wind” of integrated media, and hoist the sails of authoritative professionalism and rational objectivity to break through forcefully.

Keywords: integrated media; news commentary; exploration; innovation; convergence

CLC Number: G215

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2017)08-044-02

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2017.08.012

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In recent years, the rapid development of the Internet—particularly mobile Internet—has continuously transformed and enriched new media forms, ushering in a flourishing era of all-media and integrated media. Newspaper commentary has long served as the vanguard of public opinion, representing authority and wielding discursive power. However, as new media technologies advance rapidly, diversified channels have gradually eroded traditional media’s dominance, and audiences no longer rely exclusively on newspapers for opinion-based information. In this context, traditional print media has encountered unprecedented impact, and its vehicle for expressing opinions—news commentary—faces enormous challenges.

Commentary is regarded as the banner and soul of news media, embodying the ideology and expressing the stance of traditional print media. In the integrated media era, confronted with the fragmentation of information channels, the mobility of information carriers, and the individualization of commentary subjects, traditional print media news commentary should, while meeting the challenges of new media, quickly seize the opportunities presented by media convergence development. By riding the “east wind” of integrated media, it can hoist the sails of authoritative professionalism and rational objectivity, navigating through turbulent waters toward broader horizons.

1. Challenges Facing Print Media Commentary in the New Media Landscape

New media, with its new technologies, methods, and channels, presents numerous challenges to traditional media—especially print media commentary—due to its diversified information channels, instantaneous dissemination, and broad participation.

1.1 Diversification of Communication Channels and Participants

The development of new media has profoundly transformed how people receive information and significantly impacted the mechanisms of public opinion formation and evolution. The rise of networks, microblogs, and WeChat has diversified information dissemination channels and participants, giving “everyone a microphone” and profoundly affecting traditional print media commentary. Lu Xinning, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *People’s Daily* and former Director of its Commentary Department, once noted that new media has created two major impacts on traditional mainstream media commentary: a “push” effect and a “squeeze” effect. The “push” effect arises because the rapid generation of hot topics demands timely commentary responses—slow reactions result in self-indulgent irrelevance, while overly hasty responses risk misjudgment. The “squeeze” effect occurs because the new media environment is filled with diverse voices and complex conditions, where good and bad opinions coexist and genuine insights are

hidden among them. This cacophony exerts pressure on commentary reporting, making it difficult to occupy the commanding heights of opinion guidance.

1.2 Timeliness of Information Dissemination

In the traditional media era, constrained by technological limitations, news commentary primarily relied on three carriers—print, television, and radio—for limited dissemination. Traditional media’s reach was restricted, and its timeliness pales in comparison to today’s new media. Particularly for print media, the printing and distribution process created an insurmountable bottleneck in competition with new media commentary. By contrast, new media commentary benefits from relatively simple information publishing platforms with short workflows and few constraints, rapidly breaking through the limitations of traditional media’s layout and time slots. Commentary publication and distribution face virtually no temporal or spatial restrictions. In short, the immediacy of dissemination gives new media commentary far greater timeliness, leaving traditional print media struggling to catch up.

1.3 Audience Loss Driven by New Technologies

Technology is the primary driving force of media. Throughout the history of journalism, every technological revolution has brought profound changes to news dissemination. With the rapid development of mobile Internet, media dissemination models are undergoing fission, causing traditional media audiences to migrate en masse to new media platforms represented by mobile terminals. Today, the public obtains news information not only through news apps and social media like Weibo and WeChat, but also via mobile browsers, vertical social applications, and live streaming platforms. This situation has caused continuous user loss for traditional media, even leading many print publications to cease printing. Indeed, the application of new technologies is rapidly rewriting today’s media ecology, posing tremendous challenges to traditional media that lack technological advantages and causing rapid audience loss for print media commentary.

2. Exploration of Print Media Commentary in the Integrated Media Era

From building “two microblogs and one app” to establishing online news agencies, from creating “central kitchens” to forming integrated media news command centers—traditional print media has actively adapted to and embraced the rise of new media in recent years, undertaking various explorations and experiments on the path of media convergence development. The banner of traditional print media—commentary—has also leveraged the opportunities of integrated media development to achieve preliminary experience in new channel expansion and production method innovation.

2.1 “Two Microblogs and One App”—Exploring New Channels

In the early stages of Internet development, traditional print media responded to channel competition by establishing their own websites, moving newspaper and magazine content online, or providing electronic versions to readers. As more interactive new media channels like Weibo and WeChat emerged, traditional print media continuously explored new dissemination channels and methods, establishing media Weibo accounts while creating short commentary columns such as “Micro-Commentary” and “Quick Micro-Commentary” in print editions. WeChat’s sudden rise represented another major shift in new media platforms. Traditional media commentary departments shifted their new media platform layout from Weibo accounts to WeChat official accounts. For example, the *People’s Daily* Commentary Department launched its WeChat official account “People’s Daily Commentary” in early 2014, initially featuring selected daily commentaries before gradually developing original columns and individual commentator columns. Additionally, most mainstream media have launched their own APP clients to capture the mobile gateway. The expansion of “two microblogs and one app” channels has, to some extent, enhanced the influence and dissemination power of traditional print media commentary.

2.2 “Central Kitchen”—Exploring Production Methods

In the integrated media era, to triumph in information dissemination channels, the key lies in leveraging new technologies and concepts to achieve transformation and convergence in news production methods. In recent years, traditional media represented by central media have actively utilized new technologies—such as drones, cloud live streaming, and VR/AR (virtual reality/augmented reality)—to explore new methods of news production. The application of the “central kitchen” model can be regarded as a major innovation in traditional mainstream media’s news production methods. For instance, *People’s Daily* has created a central kitchen model that innovates news reporting through in-depth articles, photo charts, videos, and H5 products, becoming an important platform for the newspaper to promote media convergence development. During the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Long March’s victory, the “Integrated Media Studio”—New Horizon Studio, led by the *People’s Daily* Commentary Department—coordinated with the central kitchen to produce a series of all-media products simultaneously with the publication of the Ren Zhong-ping article, significantly enhancing the dissemination effect of this traditional *People’s Daily* political commentary brand.

3. How Print Media Commentary Can Break Through in the Integrated Media Era

In the era of media convergence development, traditional print media has undertaken considerable exploration in innovative transformation, and print media commentary has also innovated in new channel expansion and production meth-

ods. However, amid the continuous expansion of new media, traditional print media still needs to strive for a breakthrough on the path of media convergence development.

3.1 Guiding Mainstream Public Opinion with Authority and Professionalism

While the application of new technologies and channels has brought prosperity to new media, it has also created problems such as distorted news information, irrational “discourse violence,” and emotional expression amid the clamor of diverse voices. Truth is the lifeblood of news, while rationality and constructiveness are the foundation of commentary. In the cacophonous new media era, commentary from traditional mainstream media should leverage its advantages in authoritative and professional content to shoulder the responsibility of social watchdog and guide mainstream public opinion. On one hand, traditional print media commentary must enhance its authority and professionalism, using “final word” perspectives to guide public opinion on major issues of right and wrong, thereby serving as the “anchor” of authoritative media discourse, while adopting rational and constructive stances to guide audiences and build social consensus on professional issues. On the other hand, traditional print media commentary must “focus on timeliness, degree, and effectiveness, reflecting the requirements of timeliness, degree, and effectiveness”—grasping the right timing and rhythm, exercising appropriate measure and precision, and employing effective communication techniques to make content appealing and memorable for audiences.

3.2 Leading Business Development Through Innovation

In the new media era, information dissemination patterns have changed, as have audience reading habits and information acquisition methods. Therefore, traditional media must quickly adapt to this revolutionary transformation and meet the demands of the new media era through timely innovation. First, achieve innovation in writing style. Traditional print media commentary, particularly party newspaper commentary, has long been criticized for its condescending attitude and “generally correct but meaningless verbiage.” Such commentary often faces automatic “blocking” by readers in the new media era. Therefore, traditional print media commentary must innovate its writing style, dropping its “airs” and getting closer to readers to win the battle for audience attention. Second, undertake conceptual innovation. The key to media convergence lies in the transformation of concepts and thinking—from traditional media concepts to new media concepts and mindsets. This requires integrating Internet principles such as openness, equality, and sharing into traditional print media work to achieve conceptual innovation and convergence. Third, implement institutional innovation. The transition from traditional print media to integrated media development requires institutional and mechanism-level innovations as safeguards, using reform and innovation to break down barriers that constrain convergence

development.

3.3 Achieving Integrated Development Through Deep Convergence

A survey of current media organizations leading the way in convergence development reveals that they have all actively embraced new media, leveraged new media's dissemination advantages, and endeavored to build new mainstream media by moving from "addition" to "integration." Beyond conceptual and institutional innovations, embracing new technologies and introducing new talent has become an important foundation for achieving deep integration. First, integrate new technologies. Technology is an important driving force for convergence development and a weakness that media urgently need to address. Whether expanding new channels, innovating information production methods, or applying and mining big data, all require advanced technology support to enhance editorial capabilities and broaden dissemination fields. Second, integrate new talent. Media competition is fundamentally talent competition. The implementation of media convergence work essentially depends on media practitioners. Given the current brain drain from traditional media, there is an urgent need to accelerate the building of a talent pool adapted to integrated media development. This requires both enhancing the quality of existing editorial staff to improve commentary quality and meet new media development needs, and introducing new talent such as designers and data analysts who master new technologies.

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