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## The Harm of New Media Content Vulgarization to Journalism (Postprint)

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### Abstract

The rapid economic development has brought about an increasingly prominent social issue for the general public—new media such as online media and self-media are exhibiting a trend of vulgarization. In order to attract public attention, some new media unscrupulously cater to the vulgar preferences of certain audiences, disseminating news content filled with lowbrow interests. This paper systematically examines the phenomenon of “vulgarization” in new media, analyzes it from macro and media perspectives, identifies the harm caused to the general audience by such undesirable media practices, and proposes corresponding countermeasures.

### Full Text

## The Vulgarization of New Media Content and Its Harm to Journalism

**Abstract:** Rapid economic development has brought about an increasingly prominent social problem: online media, self-media, and other new media platforms are exhibiting a trend toward vulgarization. To attract attention, some new media outlets unscrupulously cater to the vulgar preferences of certain audiences, disseminating news content filled with lowbrow interests. This paper examines the phenomenon of new media vulgarization, identifies the harm caused to the general public by such unethical media practices from both macroscopic and media perspectives, and proposes corresponding countermeasures.

**Keywords:** New media content; vulgarization; news reporting; countermeasures

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Media serves as the primary channel for information transmission, representing not only the crystallization of journalists' wisdom and effort but also playing crucial roles in educating the public, coordinating social relations, preserving national culture, monitoring the social environment, and disseminating information. With the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread adoption of electronic devices such as mobile phones and computers, new media operates at faster speeds, reaches broader audiences, and generates greater impact. Consequently, new media must regard "transmitting truthful and comprehensive news" as its fundamental responsibility. However, due to the breakneck pace of progress and the tendency of some actors to link news reporting with economic interests, the responsibilities and mission of journalism are often forgotten in the face of immediate profits. By catering to the special preferences of certain audiences with vulgar, mediocre, and tedious content, numerous social problems have been triggered, prompting media professionals to engage in self-reflection and seek solutions.

Indeed, a "vulgar wind" has swept through new media news reporting. After suffering from the damage of vulgarized news, the public has identified the "four major public hazards" of Chinese new media: vulgar parodies, inappropriate advertising, paid news, and false reporting. Compared with environmental pollution, this "spiritual garbage" has inflicted extremely negative effects on the general audience, particularly for adolescents in their formative years, for whom such damage is irreversible. This issue demands sufficient attention and effective countermeasures.

## 1. Manifestations of New Media Vulgarization and Its Harm to Journalism

The ubiquitous network and the proliferation of mobile phones and computers have provided an excellent environment and platform for new media development. Since the 1990s, China has witnessed a surge in new media growth, characterized by the entertainmentization and marketization of journalism. This transformation is most evident in how professional models and norms across various fields have been replaced by popular celebrities, how scholars fail to attract attention as effectively as attractive women, how entertainment news has supplanted cultural coverage to dominate headlines, and how speculative news has drowned out factual truth. In essence, it represents a contest between "vulgarity" and "dignity," with the former clearly gaining the upper hand.

The harms of vulgarized content in new media reporting can be summarized as follows:

1. A severe lack of seriousness in news reporting, blurring the boundary between news and entertainment;
2. Rampant false news that remains effectively unmanaged and uncontrolled, causing significant disruptions to people's lives and government operations;
3. A departure from fine traditional culture, with bloody and explicit imagery seen everywhere, deteriorating social morals and lacking positive energy transmission with humanistic concern;
4. Excessive focus on ugly social phenomena and trivial life matters, hindering the dissemination and promotion of modern civilization and lowering the overall quality of the general public;
5. Disrespect for factual reporting, with subjective news content taken out of context, leading to a dramatic decline in media credibility before audiences.

## 2. Effective Measures to Curb Vulgarization in New Media News Reporting

In various new media reports, vulgarization has become a pervasive phenomenon—a “chronic disease” in modern social life that is deeply entrenched. Eradicating it requires preparedness for a prolonged battle and a multi-pronged approach. First, we must recognize the current reality: the broader environment and direction of global development cannot be altered, and cultural diversity has become an established trend. To find a breakthrough, we must focus on guiding social values, combating and governing false news, and other related areas, making incremental changes starting from the ground up. Specific countermeasures are outlined below.

### 2.1 Perfecting Laws and Regulations Related to New Media News Reporting

As the saying goes, “nothing can be accomplished without norms.” The reason why vulgar content frequently appears in online news and self-media reporting is that China has yet to enact specialized laws and regulations for standardized management in this domain. In previous cases involving new media news reporting, all rulings could only rely on judicial interpretations and explanations, and these legal gaps have emboldened many to act without fear. Therefore, to fundamentally eliminate vulgar content in new media reporting, we must start with legal norms, with government departments issuing corresponding laws and regulations to mandatorily constrain news content in the media. Media serves as an intermediary for information dissemination and must adopt an attitude of responsibility toward society and audiences, considering both legal and moral dimensions, and uncovering more valuable news from a humanistic perspective rather than blindly catering to people's demands and lowering journalistic standards.

## **2.2 Strengthening Industry Self-Discipline from Within New Media Itself**

As a medium for news dissemination, apart from legal constraints, the industry should strengthen professional ethics. When reporting on breaking events, journalists should adopt a constructive perspective rather than simply parroting others; regarding current hot topics, they should treat them rationally and avoid sensationalist bandwagoning; they should strive to uncover universally valuable content within events to provide positive guidance to the public. New media needs to set aside economic factors, correctly analyze the aesthetic needs and viewing habits of various social strata, rather than blindly lowering standards. Media's positive guidance of audience values and worldviews can effectively help people elevate their level of demand and cultivate appreciation for high-quality content.

Clear ethical guidelines must be established for journalists and media workers, with strict professional ethics for practitioners. They are required to fulfill their primary duties while maintaining their own image and that of the media as a whole. Once individuals are found to violate professional ethics, causing negative social impact and tarnishing the media's image in the public eye, they must be dealt with seriously to serve as a warning to others. Regular training in professional ethics and skills should be provided to practitioners to enhance their overall competence.

## **2.4 Fully Leveraging the Role of Social Supervision Systems**

A minority of audiences specifically seek news content of vulgar taste, and some websites and self-media platforms, considering their interests, create dedicated sections for such individuals, thereby harming other audiences. Therefore, once such situations are discovered, they should be immediately curbed or reported to facilitate relevant departments in holding the parties accountable and preventing such incidents from recurring.

## **2.5 Guiding the Public to Cultivate Positive and Healthy Aesthetic Standards**

Whether in campuses or communities, guidance toward sophisticated aesthetic preferences should be conducted at the small-group level, reminding people to maintain clear-headedness and avoid indulging in the false pleasure created by new media with a frivolous cultural mentality. Regarding the overwhelming variety of news online, people must be selective in what they read and accept. They should resist undesirable information, refusing to view or disseminate it. Instead, they should focus more on information related to their personal progress and development, absorb content that enhances self-cultivation, and learn more about mainstream culture, elite culture, and reports that highlight humanistic values.

## 2.6 Rational Use of Various New Media Platforms

In the information age, news spreads like wildfire, and many new types of media have emerged, allowing people to access the latest information from around the world with just a few clicks. Out of novelty or curiosity, it is easy to be confused by such diverse information, which requires people to exercise self-discipline, choosing to acquire information that is helpful and uplifting while staying away from news media content filled with lowbrow interests. If each of us consciously distances ourselves from vulgarized information, such undesirable news content in new media will lose its audience and market share, its dissemination channels will be blocked, and the further spread of vulgarization in new media news reporting can be effectively prevented.

## 3. Conclusion

The rapid pace of development has brought many challenges to modern civilization. In recent years, many types of media have emerged, relying on networks and proliferating in every corner of life. Therefore, the emergence of new media vulgarization serves as a wake-up call for the era's development. Cultural and economic development are not parallel but closely interconnected, so the vulgarization of news reporting exerts highly detrimental effects on economic and social development, warranting vigilance and self-reflection from everyone. Although rapid social development creates better living environments and material comforts for humanity, not all development is progressive or perfect. Some flaws may exist on the margins and be unavoidable. What we need to do is not turn a blind eye to these defects but confront the drawbacks left by development with the correct attitude and strive to transform them into new drivers for greater development.

Currently, China is actively integrating with the world. While joining the global market, we are also facing enormous challenges. However, the trend of media vulgarization is extremely detrimental to national progress, humanistic construction, and social ethos. From a long-term development perspective, only by comprehensively strengthening countermeasures can new media in the new era truly benefit the people, make society more harmonious, and realize the "Chinese Dream" we envision.

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