Beijing Media Leaders Discuss Future of Media and Technology at Year-End PR Newswire Holds 2017 Media Trends Salon in Beijing ——Smart Media, Immersive Media, Verticalization, and E-commerce Development May Become Future Media TrendsPostprint

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Abstract

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Preamble

On December 16, 2016, PR Newswire hosted the 2017 Media Trends Salon in Beijing. The event, themed "Media Survival and Breakthrough," featured keynote speeches and panel discussions by senior executives from PR Newswire, China Business Network (CBN), Guanmei, Sohu, Toutiao, the Associated Press, Beijing Time, and Lanmeihui. Topics included "The Transformation of Future News Content and Communication Models," "Survival Strategies for Vertically Segmented Industry Media," and "Confusions and Opportunities for Media Influencers."

Keynote Address: Three Imperatives for Media Development

Chen Yujie, Senior Vice President of PR Newswire Asia-Pacific, outlined three critical directions for media's future:

First, the era demands quality content and professional platforms. While information volume continues expanding, information quality and retrieval efficiency have not improved proportionally. User behavior demonstrates this shift: following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, *The New York Times* online subscriptions increased by 130,000 within two weeks—ten times the normal growth rate. Similarly, the *Financial Times* gained paid subscribers after Brexit. After experiencing information overload, audiences now recognize the value of professional media and demonstrate willingness to pay. Consequently, demand for professional media platforms and premium content will intensify.

Second, media must consciously build brands and strengthen intellectual property protection. As more users pay for video and news content, the relationship between content quality, brand strength, and IP protection becomes direct. Media organizations require robust brand awareness and must learn to protect their proprietary rights.

Third, media must educate audiences to discern quality content. Media should cultivate higher brand consciousness among audiences, enabling them to identify superior content and develop more sophisticated consumption habits. Only then can quality media gain expanded development space.

Content Entrepreneurship: Strategic Layouts Across Platforms

Observing the 2016 landscape, major players including BAT, the four traditional portals, and mainstream media have all positioned themselves in content entrepreneurship. Notable developments include:

- **Tencent's Penguin Account** (March 2016): Integrated across Tiantian Kuaibao, Tencent News Client, WeChat News, Mobile QQ, and QQ Official Accounts
- **NetEase Account** (April 19): Launched with regional NetEase accounts
- **Sina Kandian** (May): Began internal testing on April 26
- **Phoenix Account** (August)
- **UC Toutiao** (August): Positioned as an information platform similar to Toutiao with original content components
- **Baidu Baijia** (September 28)

Traditional regional media have also entered this space: Sichuan Daily Press Group collaborated with Alibaba on *Fengmianhao*; *Changjiang Daily* launched *Jiupaihao*; and *Chongqing Morning Post* created *Shangyouhao*.

Xue Chenzi, Founder and CEO of Guanmei, categorized self-media platforms into four types: (1) traditional mainstream commercial portals like Sina, NetEase, and Phoenix; (2) influential local media such as *Southern Metropolis Daily*, *West China Metropolis Daily*, and *Changjiang Daily*; (3) emerging information aggregation platforms like Toutiao and Yidianzixun; and (4) strategic initiatives by BAT and e-commerce giants like JD.com.

Regarding media and capital, Xue noted significant 2016 shifts in support from China's mainstream and party-state media systems. Shanghai established the 825 New Media Industry Fund—a national-level parent fund officially led by the municipality. Guangdong created two billion-yuan media investment funds. *Henan Daily* jointly launched the China Securities Tianshi Cultural Industry Development Fund with *Hunan Daily*, *Securities Times*, and financial institutions.

For 2017, Xue predicted maximum growth in media-livestreaming integration. Simultaneously, self-media must convert followers into users.

Traditional Media Transformation: The CBN Weekly Case Study

Zhao Jia, Executive Editor-in-Chief of CBN Weekly, discussed the magazine's content commitment and new media transformation. As a representative financial publication, CBN Weekly initially created a new reading market by combining accessible reading with strong visual design, operating the magazine as a product. This approach enabled rapid market penetration.

During new media transition, CBN first experimented with an iPad version that achieved considerable popularity before the mobile internet era. However, as smartphones displaced tablets, CBN missed WeChat's optimal window but subsequently leveraged new media to rebuild and enhance brand influence.

Zhao advised traditional media in transition to address: (1) expanding influence under paid models; (2) coordinating WeChat, Weibo, and App platforms to enhance overall brand impact; and (3) developing new business models through new media.

Smart Engines: Efficient Content Distribution

Liu Zhiyi, Executive Director of Toutiao's Data Center, explained how Toutiao's intelligent engine matches article feature vectors with user feature vectors through algorithms and data for precise content distribution.

Toutiao's product metrics include 600 million registered users, 66+ million daily active users (DAU), 76 minutes average daily usage, and approximately 9 daily launches per user.

The intelligent engine distributes media content precisely, delivering information that matches each user's interests. Approximately 200,000 new articles enter

Toutiao's distribution platform daily. Each article receives machine-readable tags—textual labels, interest tags, and structured data—creating feature vectors with hundreds of dimensional vectors.

For each user, the system captures gender, age, location (e.g., Beijing's Dongcheng District), reading preferences by time, weather-based interests, network type (WiFi vs. 4G), and other granular data points. When article and user vectors align through matching strategies, high click-through rates and satisfaction emerge, prompting users to actively share content.

For new users, Toutiao leverages its vast historical data to provide immediate positioning and recommendations. User behavior is segmented into fine dimensions: weather conditions, network format, image preferences. Based on these judgments, accuracy continuously improves. When recommending news about Apple or Facebook, Toutiao considers user characteristics, environmental context, article freshness, copyright status, user experience quality, engagement metrics (likes, shares), and regional sensitivities—all strengthening recommendation trends.

Reader behaviors are granularly tracked: clicked articles, dismissed articles, dwell time, reading completion ratio, sustained topic interests, reading speed, and whether interest tags are decaying or surging. These data dimensions, recorded during interaction and distribution, feed back to media organizations through Toutiao's media lab, enabling content evolution.

Current media lab functions include: automatically generated hot event panels, real-time user-generated content (UGC) 爆料 (breaking news) after verification, and hot word analysis allowing journalists to conduct annual analyses of topics like environmental issues across dimensions of relevance, subscription, and commentary. Event monitoring alerts users following specific stories to latest developments.

User Experience: The Rise of Immersive Content

He Li, AP's Northeast Asia Business Development and Partnership Director, reflected on media lessons from the U.S. election. As the official vote-counting agency, AP has endured 170 years through fax, satellite, and internet eras, now covering 110+ countries from 200+ locations, providing video, photo, and text services. AP's survival stems from its inherited credibility, objectivity, fairness, and accuracy.

The election revealed two critical issues: (1) Quality information access for ordinary Americans was limited due to effective paywalls at premium media outlets, which attracted loyal paying subscribers but lost broader audience reach; (2) The question of what information deserves exposure. This raises two reflections: How can quality content reach the public when paywalls limit dissemination? What standards should media inherit and propagate? Constant extreme rhetoric and sensationalism ultimately reinforce fragmented information consumption.

On innovation, He identified two trends: (1) Chinese institutions, leveraging internet technology dividends, have expanded from mainland China to global markets, creating international transmission windows; (2) Content demand has shifted from text and photos to visualized information—including images, short video, livestreaming, and integrated data packages combining text, photos, and video into story-driven thematic content bundles.

In livestreaming and short video, AP operates four internet live channels 24/7, covering world events from multiple angles. During the Paris terrorist attacks, AP maintained live channels at the concert hall, square, and airport. User research reveals strong preference for immersive content. A successful case involved livestreaming a hospital entrance for over two weeks during the birth of the British royal family's first child, achieving high user stickiness. This convinced AP to pursue lifestyle and "slow livestreaming" content like sea turtle nesting and cherry blossom blooming.

In short video, AP's 200+ global bureaus cannot capture everything, especially with citizen journalism thriving on Twitter and Weibo. Therefore, AP increasingly incorporates high-quality partner short videos alongside its own PGC (professionally generated content), making diverse premium content available to clients.

Forum I: Future News Content and Communication Models

Moderator: Ju Jing, Vice President of Xinhua News Agency's Convergence Media Future Research Institute

Han Hui, Founder and CEO of Lanmeihui, predicted major changes in communication forms—video, graphics, client apps, and big data journalism. Livestreaming and drone technology will significantly disrupt news reporting.

Wang Lei, Assistant to the President of *Legal Evening News*, emphasized speed in news dissemination but "slowness" in content production—meaning specialized, targeted services. The paper's exclusive content strategy prioritizes professional depth. Regarding portal cooperation, Wang advocated sharing excellent content in exchange for distribution channels. For profitability, new media must monetize exclusive content and channels to secure unique resources.

Tao Wendong, Editor-in-Chief of Global Network's Technology Channel, discussed serving readers through data-driven, service-oriented journalism. For instance, when users are in France, they receive local news in Chinese. News functions not as casual observation but as awareness of immediate surroundings. Future forms will comprise only content production and distribution channels, with diversified production units (self-media, livestreaming). Platforms like Toutiao and Yidianzixun represent early stages; future distribution will extend to IoT, automotive networks, and aerospace, with news serving humanity.

Li An, General Manager of NetEase Media's Marketing Department, observed that the 80/20 rule (where 20% of headline content attracted 80% of attention) is dissolving. Among 100,000+ daily mobile content pieces, major events comprise less than 5%. Long-tail content now consumes user time—knowledge increments and interest-based reading. NetEase News matches users with interest tags beyond headline news. Within NetEase's ecosystem, the three most popular content categories are entertainment, automotive, and sports.

Luan Hui, Editor-in-Chief of Sohu's Media Channel, noted that Sohu's early cooperation with *Legal Evening News* saw text comprising 70% of traffic, but images and video now account for 70-80%. People prefer visual content, aligning with 2016's two hottest trends: livestreaming and short video. While not necessarily the future of news, they represent a significant trend. Visual content holds innate advantages on social media and mobile reading, effectively utilizing fragmented time and creating participatory experiences where users become participants rather than mere observers.

Ju Jing concluded that despite platform proliferation, quality content remains paramount. The bottleneck across VR and other formats is core content. Professionalism holds greater value, and platforms increasingly demand premium content. As platforms consolidate, content will find its true value. The recommendation: focus on your expertise and demonstrate professional depth.

Forum II: Survival Laws of Vertically Segmented Industry Media

Moderator: Ye Tieqiao, CEO of Ciweigongshe

Li Xiaoye, Founder of Yema Finance, identified 2016's greatest challenge as managerial—rapid team expansion after financing required enhanced management capabilities. For 2017, more platforms will emphasize content dissemination. Initially, self-media leaders were individual influencers, then marketing accounts rose, but now original-content-capable accounts—especially from professional media backgrounds—will stand out.

Gao Fei, Editor-in-Chief of Zhidingshe, noted challenges from changing user reading habits due to new communication mediums. Vertical media content can be dry and unsuitable for social sharing. The opportunity lies in rediscovering professional value as readers seek more verticalized knowledge.

Zou Minhua, Executive Editor-in-Chief of Aimei Interactive, faced challenges learning WeChat public account operations and scaling. With stable follower bases in 2017, monetization becomes critical—primarily through advertising, content e-commerce, and video, which can both monetize and engage fans.

Liu Hao, General Manager of China Energy Net, described macro challenges as uncertainty about what challenges exist, and micro challenges as difficulty monetizing quality professional content quickly. The opportunity lies in the death of both fastest-growing and lagging self-media accounts, leaving mid-tier players like theirs positioned to survive. Revenue splits 40% advertising and 60% offline activities and derivatives, with activities comprising 40% of that portion. In the high-barrier energy sector, they aim to provide professional consulting, planning, data analysis, and trend forecasting.

Liu Zhaohui, Founder of Zhi Hui, explained that traditional media operated in two dimensions (content and advertising), lacking user knowledge. Vertical media can solidify the middle links: knowing who users are, understanding enterprise needs at all levels, and monetizing beyond advertising through e-commerce, recruitment, consulting, financing, and training. Content extends beyond online production to events that deliver substantive value. Their core users are mid-to-senior industry professionals (80% aged 30-39, director-level and above) who demand highly sophisticated content. The path forward involves understanding industry chains thoroughly to create transaction opportunities.

Forum III: Confusions and Opportunities for Media Influencers

Moderator: Chao Xi, Self-Media Creator and 6renyou Travel Network

Ge Jia, Internet Media Analyst, described the current period as a "dark age" where channel-building yielded greater returns than content creation. As development dividends exhaust, public accounts face declining followers, reading rates, and open rates. However, this may herald a golden age for content creation, contingent on creators' talent, insight, and passion. From an advertiser perspective, WeChat ads offer minimal direct conversion value but provide brand effects. While the 2C path narrows, 2B remains viable. The cycle of platform credit building and bankruptcy continues, yet advertising remains essential as the medium supporting all product conversions. The key is avoiding over-mythologizing ad effects while recognizing that non-investment means missed opportunities.

Jing Tingting, Founder of *Caijing Bagua Zhen*, noted that while 2014-2015 saw clients providing ready-to-publish content, by late 2015, original capability demands intensified. In 2017, accounts with strong original writing skills will thrive. Advertisers should invest in original-capable accounts with decent follower bases, though in-depth original articles often receive lower readership than forwarded content—a test for advertisers.

Zhou Kaili, Cross-Columnist on Finance and Fashion, identified influencers' core challenge as converting accumulated popularity into sustainable business models that attract venture capital or advertisers. Content remains king as the fundamental value. Her follower base, built from her journalism career through blogs to Weibo, is modest but high-quality. While top reads reached only 8,000+, more articles now achieve 100,000+. Investors suggest that true business models should be sophisticated, sustainable, and 极致 (pursue excellence) in niche fields while riding macro trends.

Wu Lixiang, Founder of *Yule Zibenlun* & *Duojiao Yutou*, predicted 2017 would bring industry consolidation. Individual creativity is limited, making pure individual influencers less viable than institutionalized operations. From a 2B perspective, pure traffic monetization is unsustainable. His platforms focus on industry services: *Duojiao Yutou* operates as a financial advisor, while *Yule Zibenlun* produces in-depth reports relied upon by investors seeking projects.

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