Postprint: Reflections on Using "Big Data" to Turn Audiences into Users

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Abstract

Audience share and ratings are important metrics for media assessment and revenue generation. With the widespread application of Internet big data, how media can transition from a single model relying on advertising revenue to diversified development has become a critical challenge for media operators to break through bottlenecks and maximize profitability.

Full Text

Thoughts on Applying "Big Data" to Transform Audiences into Users

Abstract: Viewership share and ratings are critical metrics for media performance assessment and revenue generation. With the widespread application of internet big data, how media organizations can transition from a singular advertising-dependent revenue model to diversified development has become a crucial challenge for media operators seeking to break through bottlenecks and maximize benefits.

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In the context of widespread back-end big data utilization, social platforms like Tencent and e-commerce giants like Alibaba have already deployed sophisticated strategies, achieving industrial layout through mobile payments, third-party services, and financial services. As a high-quality platform with strong public credibility, can television media leverage its data to transform audiences into

users across industries? Can it support massive back-end data infrastructure and apply data analytics to maximize media benefits? Several considerations emerge.

Broadening revenue channels is essential for urban media to break through current bottlenecks. While maintaining viewership ratings to serve advertisers, media operators must consider how to effectively apply big data. First, as "party media," television organizations possess inherent "credibility," giving them advantages over other platforms in attracting followers, though their audience acquisition channels remain underdeveloped. Second, television audiences consist primarily of middle-aged and elderly demographics—groups that demonstrate stronger loyalty and stable incomes, representing higher-quality data for back-end analytics. On this foundation, television stations should systematically organize, plan, and implement back-end data collection, aggregation, and application through media client apps, WeChat public accounts, Weibo, and other new media channels, striving to convert audiences into users while expanding business channels.

1. Strengthening Program Interaction to Enhance Data Collection

Enhancing program interaction and audience participation constitutes the primary channel for audience data collection. By establishing topic-based interactions, soliciting opinions and suggestions, and continuously publicizing participation methods during broadcasts—such as scanning QR codes displayed on screen, downloading and following mobile client apps, or logging into Weibo—television stations can effectively collect and utilize audience information. Programs can be tailored according to audience profiles. In today's competitive media landscape, competition centers on program content; successful television programs attract audiences and encourage active participation. Television media must keep pace with technological developments, examining issues from fundamental, psychological, and viewership perspectives to drive innovation. For instance, experiential programs have become popular content that not only overcomes traditional television limitations and increases interaction between participants and audiences, but also bridges the gap between audiences and media, immersing viewers and enhancing program attention. Additionally, throughout broadcasts, interactive methods should be implemented based on actual airing and live conditions, such as phone-shaking features or logging into Weibo and following WeChat accounts, thereby genuinely increasing audience participation while collecting valuable engagement data. According to the author's investigation, many programs display shake-to-win features during broadcast, where audiences can obtain vouchers or other benefits through participation. This approach not only improves ratings but also expands audience bases.

2. Planning Targeted Activities to Lock in Audiences

Leveraging big data analytics to plan targeted activities and lock in specific audiences enables development of particular industries, enhancing both devel-

opment focus and innovative transformation. Big data provides massive information that can be collected and organized to actively plan targeted activities and identify target demographics based on results. For example, if data collection reveals that a particular program is popular among young audiences—a trend also observed in other regional media—activities can be developed accordingly. Many cities have established *Honor of Kings* gaming zones that are deeply popular among young people; regional media have developed special programs based on this phenomenon, generating significant impact. This approach helps audiences engage with popular lifestyle elements, using trendy vocabulary and formats to create humor that aligns with fashion pursuits and injects vitality into urban media development. Furthermore, activity planning requires multi-angle analysis with corresponding themes to create engaging atmospheres that attract public attention. Thematic information can deliver impact and emotional resonance, while analysis from a program typology perspective can enhance visualization and gradually move toward humanization. Increasing interactive participation links can particularly narrow the distance with audiences, subtly raising public attention.

Case Study: Developing the Elderly Care Industry Through the Weihai Shengquan Senior Living Project

In October, the planning department signed a cooperation agreement with the Weihai Shengquan Senior Living Project. The project's primary revenue model involves promoting and delivering 1,000 elderly tourists to the Weihai Shengquan facility, with additional fees extracted for each incremental participant. Building on this project, we envision creating a closed-loop ecosystem for the elderly care industry—organizing quality enterprises along the senior care industrial chain and leveraging television's credibility to transform middle-aged and elderly audiences into users through resource sharing. This involves establishing the Zibo Television Middle-aged and Elderly Audience Trusted Consumption Alliance (the "Happiness Alliance") to form an industrial closed loop. Alliance members would primarily come from the station's back-end data (audience resources). We have already approached several banks, including China Construction Bank, to initially launch membership cards as co-branded "Happiness Cards" with stored-value functions, an idea that has generated strong interest from banking partners. If we can develop 30,000 middle-aged and elderly members within three years, we can pursue deeper cooperation with enterprises and service institutions across the senior health industry chain—pharmacies, hospitals, nursing facilities, medical equipment providers, etc.—thereby broadening revenue channels through big data application.

3. Establishing a Dedicated Big Data Service Department to Support Application

Data collection, aggregation, and application constitute systematic, professional, and scientific work requiring specialized team operation for both technical and application aspects. From both macro and micro perspectives,

establishing a dedicated data service department is essential to provide foundational support for data application. Several key functions are required:

First, program "fan acquisition" topics must interface with the data application department to identify audience "interest points" within specific time periods and determine which activities will align with these interests, making data truly useful. This requires thorough investigation and analysis to understand fan-attracting topics and enable targeted program development. Additionally, audience segments must be distinguished—younger versus older demographics, which programs achieve highest ratings, and which generate strongest social response. Only through such comprehensive investigation and analysis can future program innovation be achieved.

Second, acquired "fans" require comprehensive tracking and service to avoid becoming "zombie fans." The solution involves strengthening interaction and maintaining back-end operations—for example, pushing fresh news, column headlines, welfare information, and providing interactive prizes. Mobile apps and WeChat public accounts are currently the most effective fan acquisition "tools" and the most efficient channels for back-end data collection and application. However, content-less apps are useless, making app development crucial. It is particularly important to assign dedicated personnel for data information response and processing, as well as back-end data maintenance. Currently, while apps and public accounts have dedicated managers, back-end data processing, collection, and aggregation suffer from shortcomings or even absence, frequently resulting in unresponded audience messages. Establishing specialized personnel for data response and processing is necessary. Simultaneously, to reduce zombie fan formation, app advantages should be utilized to create diverse formats—for instance, analyzing audience patterns by time period to understand actual audience conditions and fan profiles.

In conclusion, big data application will be disruptive for traditional industry development in the future. Only by changing mindsets, embracing market demands, and learning to apply data can organizations avoid detours and recklessness. In the internet era, we place our hopes on "transforming audiences into users" and "speaking with data" to broaden our thinking and smooth our channels.

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