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An Exploration of Featured Topic Publishing Strategies for Medical Journals: A Case Study of Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze the significance of themed publishing in medical journals, explore distinctive strategies for themed publishing, and provide reference for similar journals.

Methods: Taking the specific practice of Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology as an example, this study objectively analyzes existing problems in themed publishing of medical journals, and proposes unique strategies to enhance the effectiveness of themed publishing in medical journals by combining the characteristics of medical journals with case studies and theoretical exposition.

Results: As a stomatology journal, Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology clarified its direction of themed publishing centered on solving population-wide oral health problems and aimed at promoting the development of oral health care through correct orientation. Through the strategy of “topic selection that prominently reflects social responsibility, language that integrates humanistic sensibility, and publicity that enhances public engagement,” the journal added warmth to themed publishing in medical journals and enhanced its influence.

Conclusion: Themed publishing in medical journals should add warmth while leveraging unique academic professionalism and intellectual depth, enhance social benefits, demonstrate the value of themed publishing in medical journals in the new era, and contribute to the construction of first-class journals.

Full Text

Exploration of Characteristic Thematic Publishing Strategies for Medical Journals: A Case Study of *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology*

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[Purposes] This study analyzes the significance of thematic publishing in medical journals, explores characteristic thematic publishing strategies, and provides references for similar journals.

[Methods] Taking the specific practices of *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology* as an example, this paper objectively analyzes existing problems in thematic publishing of medical journals, and proposes unique strategies to enhance the effectiveness of thematic publishing in medical journals based on their characteristics through case studies and theoretical elaboration.

[Findings] As a stomatology journal, *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology* has established a thematic publishing direction centered on solving oral health problems for the entire population and promoting the development of oral health undertakings through correct guidance. The strategy of “highlighting topics that reflect social responsibility, integrating humanistic and emotional language, and increasing publicity to enhance public participation” has added warmth to thematic publishing in medical journals and enhanced journal influence.

[Conclusions] While leveraging unique academic professionalism and profound thinking, thematic publishing in medical journals needs to increase warmth, enhance social benefits, demonstrate the value of thematic publishing in the new era, and assist in building first-class journals.

Keywords: thematic publishing; medical journal; sense of social responsibility; social benefit; humanistic orientation

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly states that building a modern socialist country in all respects requires adhering to the path of socialist cultural development with Chinese characteristics, enhancing cultural confidence, and building a strong socialist cultural nation [1]. As part of the publishing industry, we must uphold the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, fulfill our cultural mission, achieve high-quality development, and contribute

new wisdom and strength to building a strong cultural nation. Medical journals, based on scientific theory and centered on solving people's health problems, have important significance in strengthening and optimizing thematic publishing under the guidance of the spirit of the 20th Party Congress and in the context of building world-class journals.

The concept of thematic publishing originated from the Thematic Publishing Project proposed by the former State Press and Publication Administration in 2003. Since then, as more scholars have conducted multifaceted research on thematic publishing, the concept has gradually become clear. It refers to publishing and promotional activities centered around the Party and state's main work lines, bearing the responsibility of correctly guiding public opinion and serving the people, with specific "themes" as the publishing objects, content, and focus [2]. For medical journals, thematic publishing revolves around the central focus of people's health, aims to comprehensively promote the construction of a Healthy China, and prioritizes reflecting the rapid development of China's health undertakings, forming promotional works with era-leading, value-leading, and academic-leading roles. Exploring characteristic thematic publishing strategies represents both a key focus and a challenge in medical journal work.

1 Research Background and Study Object

To assist in building world-class journals, medical journals continuously explore integrated development paths in content, channels, and platforms, among which thematic publishing work has gradually gained attention. Searching CNKI with the theme "medical journals" AND full text "thematic publishing" yielded 7 articles (as of April 10, 2024), including 1 article each in 2017, 2019, and 2020, and 2 articles each in 2022 and 2023. Regarding thematic publishing work in medical journals, the *Journal of Military Medicine* takes civil-military integration as its entry point, emphasizing high-level military medical innovation achievements and comprehensively promoting the construction of military medical thematic publishing with academic quality at its core [3]; the Publishing House of Practical Medicine organizes and guides the "Practical" series of journals to closely focus on the major task of "comprehensively promoting the construction of a Healthy China," emphasizing strengthening and highlighting thematic publishing [4]; and *Guangdong Medical Journal* has conducted extensive thematic publishing in promoting and disseminating new clinical medical research achievements, new technologies, and exchanging new experiences in disease prevention and treatment [5]. Currently, related research mainly focuses on emphasizing the need to do thematic publishing well and its effects, without delving deeply into the thematic publishing process or forming unique thematic publishing strategies for medical journals. Since 2019, *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology* has been deeply committed to creating thematic publishing excellence, continuously exploring excellent thematic publishing paths for medical journals, forming unique strategies, highlighting the value and social benefits of thematic publishing in medical journals, and continuously enhancing journal influence.

To effectively implement the requirements of the publishing industry' s “14th Five-Year Plan” development plan, promote high-quality development of medical journals, and assist in building world-class journals, this paper takes *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology* (hereinafter referred to as “our journal”) as the study object, provides a detailed introduction to its thematic publishing practices and effects, and proposes targeted strategies and recommendations for thematic publishing in medical journals.

2 Our Journal' s Thematic Publishing Practices and Effects

2.1 Thematic Publishing Planning Process and Characteristic Content

Since 2019, the Publicity Department of the National Health Commission has clarified key focus areas for thematic publishing work for publications under its administration. Our journal has actively responded to the National Health Commission' s call, organizing editorial board experts to hold “Thematic Publishing Planning Seminars” in the first half of each year, closely focusing on that year' s key oral health work to determine thematic publishing topics. In the second half of each year, we establish thematic publishing columns, inviting renowned experts in the field of stomatology to contribute high-quality thematic publishing articles. The period from 2019 to 2021 represents our journal' s exploratory stage for developing characteristic thematic publishing strategies for medical journals, during which we planned 3 themes and published 13 articles (Table 1).

The planning process and characteristic content are introduced as follows. In 2019, which marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People' s Republic of China, thematic publishing needed to focus on important decisions and task deployments in the historical process of health undertakings since the founding of the PRC, reflecting the development course of China' s health undertakings. In the same year, the “2019-2025 Oral Health Action Plan” issued by the General Office of the National Health Commission proposed a prevention-first, forward-shifted oral health management concept, requiring strengthened oral health education and implementation of oral health services during the first 1,000 days of life [6]. This indicated that children' s oral health management should be prioritized. Our journal, focusing on the development of children' s oral health undertakings, published a series of articles in the “70 Years of Health Undertakings Development Review Column,” including “Current Status and Future Prospects of Pediatric Stomatology Development,” “Pediatric Oral Health Management Model—Dental Home,” and “Promoting Macro Policies to Improve Oral Health,” demonstrating children' s sense of satisfaction and happiness in the development of stomatology undertakings and clarifying future directions for children' s oral health work.

In 2020, the concluding year for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and in conjunction with the “Healthy China 2030” Planning Out-

line' s work deployments on “strengthening oral health work” and “promoting national healthy lifestyle actions” [7], our journal focused on new concepts and advances in the examination, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of common oral diseases. In the “Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity Column,” we published a series of articles including “Application of Digital Imaging Technology in Periodontal Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment,” “Current Status and Prospects of Augmented Reality Technology in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery,” and “Research Progress on Application of Digital Root Canal Location Guide Plates in Minimally Invasive Endodontic Treatment,” providing guidance for clinical work of stomatologists nationwide to better promote universal oral health and thus practice the spirit of the times that universal health supports comprehensive moderate prosperity.

In 2021, which marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, the World Health Organization (WHO) formulated the Global Oral Health Strategy and incorporated oral health into the non-communicable disease and universal health coverage agenda [8]. Thematic publishing work was particularly important at this time, needing to showcase to the world the rapid development of China' s oral health undertakings over the past century. Our journal specially published in the “100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People Column” articles including “History, Current Status, and Future Development Trends of Oral Health Science and Humanities in China—Reviewing the Century-Long Development Course of Dental Prevention in China” and “Development Course of Geriatric Stomatology in China,” to enhance Chinese cultural strength and increase the influence of China' s health undertakings development.

Table 1 Introduction to Thematic Publishing Columns in *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology*, 2019-2021

Year (Issue)	Article Title	Health Undertakings Column
2019 (7)	Current Status and Future Prospects of Pediatric Stomatology Development	70 Years Development Review
2019 (8)	Pediatric Oral Health Management Model—Dental Home	70 Years Development Review
2019 (9)	Promoting Macro Policies to Improve Oral Health	70 Years Development Review

Year (Issue)	Article Title	Health Undertakings Column
2019 (10)	Current Status and Future of Chinese Dental and Alveolar Surgery	70 Years Development Review
2020 (7)	Application of Digital Imaging Technology in Periodontal Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity
2020 (8)	Current Status and Prospects of Augmented Reality Technology in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity
2020 (9)	Pediatric Caries Management	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity
2020 (10)	Research Progress on Application of Digital Root Canal Location Guide Plates in Minimally Invasive Endodontic Treatment	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity
2020 (11)	New Progress in Brachytherapy with Radioactive Particles for Oral and Maxillofacial Malignant Tumors	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity
2020 (12)	Prevention and Treatment of Oral Diseases in Disabled Children	Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity

Year (Issue)	Article Title	Health Undertakings Column
2021 (4)	Development and Future Main Tasks of Periodontology Viewed from Two International Classifications of Periodontal Diseases	100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People
2021 (5)	History, Current Status, and Future Development Trends of Oral Health Science and Humanities in China—Reviewing the Century-Long Development Course of Dental Prevention in China	100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People
2021 (6)	Development Course of Geriatric Stomatology in China	100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People

Note: Our journal changed to bimonthly publication starting in 2021.

2.2 Effects of Thematic Publishing

With a deeper understanding of the concept of thematic publishing and strengthened awareness of the key focus areas for thematic publishing work issued by the Publicity Department of the National Health Commission, our journal has continuously explored and implemented thematic publishing strategies, gradually enhancing the influence of our thematic publishing. This is mainly reflected in the following aspects. First, increased average download counts on CNKI: the average download count for our journal's thematic publishing articles was 548.4 in 2019–2020, which increased to 905.7 in 2021, approximately 1.6 times that of the previous two years. Compared with non-commissioned articles, the average download count for thematic publishing articles was higher each year, especially in 2021 when it was approximately 2.5 times that of non-commissioned articles (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Second, third-party evaluations: our journal has been selected for two consecutive years as having excellent articles in thematic publishing under the commission's administration. In the 2021 annual call for excellent thematic publicity works under the commission's

s administration, 30 sponsoring organizations submitted 489 thematic publicity achievements, and our journal's selected article was the only one in the field of stomatology among the 48 final selected excellent thematic publishing articles. In the 2022 annual call, with increased competitive pressure as 33 sponsoring organizations submitted 519 thematic publicity achievements, our journal still had one article rated as an excellent thematic publishing article. Additionally, the *Yearbook of Chinese Stomatology* is a comprehensive, academic serial publication in Chinese stomatology, published annually and serving as important material for understanding and researching the development history of Chinese stomatology, as well as an important platform for academic exchange between Chinese and international stomatology. One of our journal's thematic publishing articles was included in the *Yearbook of Chinese Stomatology* (2023 volume). This represents recognition of our journal's thematic publishing work and an effective way to further enhance journal influence.

3 Strategies and Recommendations for Thematic Publishing in Medical Journals

In recent years, scholars have continuously explored thematic publishing strategies, which can be summarized as: improving thematic publishing topic selection and planning mechanisms, optimizing thematic publishing topic structures, enhancing thematic publication quality, and strengthening innovation in thematic publishing forms and dissemination methods [9]. While these strategies have certain reference value for medical journals, they lack targeted guidance. Through continuously summarizing thematic publishing experience, our journal has formed characteristic thematic publishing strategies and recommendations for medical journals (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

3.1 Clarifying Thematic Publishing Direction for Medical Journals to Demonstrate New Era Publishing Value

A journal's orientation constitutes the core of its overall design, and only by maintaining correct orientation can the direction of thematic publishing be clarified. First, orient by the responsibilities of medical journals. In recent years, the key focus areas for thematic publishing work for publications under the administration of the National Health Commission have closely revolved around themes such as "70 Years of Health Undertakings Development Review," "Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity," "100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People," and "Everything for People's Health—These Ten Years." The word "health" is particularly prominent, representing the unique task and responsibility of medical journals. Health is an essential requirement for promoting people's comprehensive development and a fundamental condition for economic and social development. The Party and state have always attached great importance to people's health. During the "13th Five-Year Plan" period, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core prioritized safeguarding people's health in its strategic development position

and made the decision to implement the Healthy China strategy. The “14th Five-Year Plan” for national health planning further emphasizes the need to improve the health system, continuously enhance medical service quality, continue efforts to advance Healthy China construction, and continuously meet the people’s growing health needs [10]. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, especially since the reform and opening up, China’s medical and health undertakings have developed steadily, with an increasingly sound medical and health service system, which has laid an important foundation for achieving Healthy China. However, the contradiction between insufficient overall health service supply and growing demand remains prominent [7]. At this time, medical journals must firmly grasp the political and professional attributes of health work, base themselves on key health tasks and contradictions, clarify their responsibility to promote universal health, solidly carry out thematic publicity work, provide strong ideological guarantees and powerful spiritual strength for the “14th Five-Year Plan” for health undertakings, and demonstrate the publishing value of medical journals in the new era. Second, orient by the mission of medical journals. A journal’s mission is the main idea guiding its development, reflecting its core goals and values. Orienting by the mission can ensure the professionalism and academic quality of thematic publishing and reflect the brand characteristics of medical journals. As a stomatology journal, our journal, oriented by journal responsibilities and mission, has formed a thematic publishing direction centered on solving oral health problems for the entire population, aimed at promoting the development of oral health undertakings, and with the vision of oral health for all, whole-body health, and life-long health for all. Through thematic publishing, we reflect the rapid development and progress of oral health undertakings, highlight the important role of “healthy oral cavity” in “Healthy China” construction, and thus demonstrate the value of thematic publishing for stomatology journals in the new era.

3.2 Adding Warmth to Thematic Publishing in Medical Journals to Enhance Social Benefits

Thematic publishing in medical journals possesses unique academic professionalism and profound thinking. Approaching themes from a medical academic perspective and enabling academic resources to better serve national strategies can make thematic publishing based on academic content more credible and academically influential. However, this also makes thematic publishing content in medical journals overly professional and lacking “warmth.” Some articles published during our journal’s exploratory stage of thematic publishing focused more on academic height and professionalism. For example, the article “Current Status and Future of Chinese Dental and Alveolar Surgery” elaborated on the development of dental and alveolar surgery from clinical technology and scientific research perspectives, with strong theoretical content. The series of articles including “Application of Digital Imaging Technology in Periodontal Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment” and “Current Status and Prospects of Augmented Reality Technology in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery” (2020 thematic

publishing column articles) mainly introduced new technologies and developments in stomatology, highlighting the “practical” characteristic, keeping pace with hot topics of the times, and demonstrating the development of Chinese stomatology, but they received average responses with relatively low average download counts on CNKI (Figure 1). How then can we add warmth to thematic publishing? Huang Shuyuan, President of People’s Medical Publishing House, believes that thematic publishing should be more vivid and better meet readers’ reading needs by adding popular and accessible expressions rather than lecturing sternly [11]. Feng Shixin, Director of the Publishing Bureau of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, believes that we need to launch a batch of segmented and targeted thematic publications through easy-to-understand expressions, touching stories, and plain language [12]. Combined with our journal’s thematic publishing experience, we have extracted the unique strategy for adding warmth to thematic publishing in medical journals: “highlighting topics that reflect social responsibility, integrating humanistic and emotional language, and increasing publicity to enhance public participation.”

3.2.1 Topic Selection—Highlighting Social Responsibility As an important channel for disseminating medical knowledge, medical journals should pay more attention to public health issues in thematic publishing, especially concerning vulnerable groups, to better assume social responsibility and warm people’s hearts. For example, December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Currently, the oral health status of disabled children in China is not optimistic and deserves attention. Our journal specially published the article “Prevention and Treatment of Oral Diseases in Disabled Children” in the “Universal Health Supports Comprehensive Moderate Prosperity Column,” introducing challenges faced in preventing and treating oral diseases in disabled children and recommendations for preventing common oral diseases, thereby strengthening publicity for oral health of disabled children in China and promoting the development of universal oral health. Additionally, with global population aging, China’s population aging has attracted widespread attention, and oral health care for the elderly has received increasing emphasis. Our journal published “Development Course of Geriatric Stomatology in China” in the “100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People Column,” emphasizing the particularity of oral treatment for the elderly due to their different physical and psychological conditions, drawing social attention, assisting in advancing the task of “healthy aging,” and improving the quality of oral medical services for China’s elderly population.

3.2.2 Language—Integrating Humanistic Emotion Medical journals not only record the trajectory of medical science and technology development but also lead the direction of future medical development. Medical journals bearing such a significant mission should also construct socialist core values and fully play their humanistic guiding role. Integrating humanistic care into thematic publishing of medical journals can better infect readers, resonate with them,

and enhance social influence. In our journal's "100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People Column," the article "History, Current Status, and Future Development Trends of Oral Health Science and Humanities in China—Reviewing the Century-Long Development Course of Dental Prevention in China" uses narrative medicine as an entry point to add humanistic color. The article tells the development process of preventive stomatology experienced by the author from the late 1930s to the present along a timeline, departing from the previous routinization and formalization of thematic publishing content and expressing more of the author's genuine emotions to enhance the article's appeal. Additionally, it includes quotes from poems and classical Chinese texts, beginning with the prose form "Looking back further allows one to see further ahead. Tracing the past, facing the present, realizing dreams for the future, and moving toward a new era of health for all" [13], which catches readers' attention and enhances the article's inclusiveness and artistry. The "sensitivity of literature" and "spirituality of art" constitute the temperature of expression.

Academician Zhong Nanshan once proposed that humanistic spirit is the quality and social responsibility of medical practitioners, and that humanistic spirit is the core value of medicine [14]. Medicine must advance and culture must develop, not solely relying on scientific and technological progress but also needing support from humanistic spirit. Through thematic publishing in medical journals, we can transform medical humanistic spirit into humanistic medicine (how to cure and prevent diseases well) and publicize it to help improve China's medical service level and benefit numerous patients.

3.2.3 Publicity—Enhancing Public Participation In the new era, medical journals should keep pace with the times, adapt to practical development, and play new roles by utilizing new technologies, new materials, and media convergence. The dissemination of thematic publishing particularly needs to adapt to the requirements of the times, innovate content presentation and dissemination methods, and strengthen content construction for integrated publishing development. Moreover, whether the dissemination of thematic publications has warmth also depends on whether multi-channel and multi-angle delivery to readers is fully considered.

If thematic publishing in medical journals can achieve the popularization of academic knowledge, it can enhance public participation, strengthen publicity efforts, and increase social influence. For example, on September 20, 2022, the 34th National Teeth Love Day, our journal's WeChat public account forwarded popular science knowledge on children's oral health with the theme "Strong Youth with Healthy Teeth, Prosperous China with Healthy Nation," simultaneously publishing a series of articles on children's dental trauma in the "Everything for People's Health—These Ten Years Column." This not only focuses on temperature-oriented popular science for the general public but also professionally disseminates disciplinary knowledge.

Timing is also crucial for the publicity of thematic publishing. Some thematic

publishing content in medical journals is rarely touched upon in people' s daily lives, but it all originates from history and life. Combining with era themes or hot topics during publicity allows more readers to pay attention and participate. For example, on “Chinese Physicians’ Day,” while thanking all medical workers who serve the people diligently, we still hope they remain true to their original mission. Our journal’ s WeChat public account simultaneously publicized articles from the “100 Years of the Party Seeking Health for the People Column,” further creating a good atmosphere of respecting doctors and valuing health and assisting in advancing the implementation of the Healthy China strategy.

The report of the 20th Party Congress pointed out: Uphold the Chinese cultural stance, distill and display the spiritual symbols and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, accelerate the construction of a Chinese discourse and Chinese narrative system, tell Chinese stories well, spread Chinese voices, and present a credible, lovable, and respectable Chinese image [1]. The publishing industry’ s “14th Five-Year Plan” development plan states: The publishing industry must adhere to placing social benefits first, guided by socialist core values, actively fulfill publishing social responsibilities, and focus on publishing social effects [10]. Strengthening and optimizing thematic publishing is an important component of the publishing industry’ s “14th Five-Year Plan” development plan. Creating thematic publishing excellence is an important part of medical journal development, the main path for assuming medical journal social responsibility, and an important way to respond to the spirit of the 20th Party Congress.

Our journal actively responds to the Party Central Committee’ s call, adheres to correct guidance, establishes a global perspective, explores content resources, enhances original capabilities, integrates socialist core values into the journal, closely focuses on the main line of “Healthy China,” creates excellent thematic publishing, and strives to play the journal’ s era-leading, value-leading, and academic-leading roles. Regarding adding warmth to thematic publishing in medical journals, we propose the strategy of “highlighting topics that reflect social responsibility, integrating humanistic and emotional language, and increasing publicity to enhance public participation” to enhance social benefits, fully leverage thematic publishing value in all aspects, better serve the Party and people, further promote high-quality development of medical journals, and assist in building a socialist cultural powerhouse.

This paper has certain limitations, as it only summarizes the thematic publishing experience of *Chinese Journal of Practical Stomatology*, and the strategies formed may lack universality. Thematic publishing strategies for medical journals need further improvement through comparative analysis of thematic publishing effects with similar journals to identify current dilemmas and shortcomings in medical journal thematic publishing, and through questionnaires to comprehensively understand readers’ evaluations of thematic publishing publicity effects to find effective measures to enhance the effectiveness of thematic publishing in medical journals. Moreover, in the context of building world-class journals, how medical journals can find breakthroughs to further enhance social

influence and achieve high-quality development balancing social and economic benefits is an issue that our journal and all medical journals need to consider. Strengthening thematic publishing is only one direction; exploring characteristic development paths for medical journals remains an important topic.

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Author Contributions Statement

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