

# The Medium is the Message: An Analysis of Newspaper News Genre Transformation in the Post-print Era

**Authors:** Li Shilong

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## Abstract

[Objective] With the rapid development of technology, newspaper journalistic style is undergoing a quiet yet profound transformation. Studying the renewal and iteration of communication media is of great significance to the evolution and development of newspaper journalistic style.

[Method] Based on literature research, this study analyzes the transformation of newspaper journalistic style from several stages: the popularization of printing, the emergence of telegraph and typewriter, the advent of radio, the impact of television, and the rise of digital media.

[Result] These transformations in newspaper journalistic style profoundly illustrate McLuhan's famous assertion: "The medium is the message." This viewpoint has been fully embodied and validated throughout the evolution of journalistic style.

[Conclusion] The advancement of technology and the continuous renewal and iteration of communication media not only drive the transformation of newspaper journalistic style, but also profoundly reveal the essence of media's far-reaching influence on journalistic style. Each technological innovation brings new development opportunities and challenges to journalistic style, enabling it to continuously adapt to and lead the trend of the times.

## Full Text

### The Medium is the Message: An Analysis of Newspaper News Genre Transformation

School of Philosophy, Heilongjiang University, Harbin, Heilongjiang 150006

## Abstract

**[Purpose]** With the rapid advancement of technology, newspaper news genres are undergoing a quiet yet profoundly significant transformation. Studying the evolution of communication media holds great significance for understanding the developmental changes in newspaper news genres. **[Method]** Based on literature research, this paper analyzes the transformation of newspaper news genres across several stages: the popularization of printing, the emergence of telegraph and typewriter, the advent of radio, the impact of television, and the rise of digital media. **[Results]** These transformations in newspaper news genres profoundly illustrate Marshall McLuhan’s famous assertion that “the medium is the message,” a perspective that finds ample demonstration and validation throughout the evolution of news genres. **[Conclusion]** The progress of science and technology, coupled with the continuous iterative updating of communication media, not only drives the transformation of newspaper news genres but also reveals the essential nature of media’s profound influence on news genres. Each technological innovation brings new development opportunities and challenges, enabling news genres to continuously adapt to and lead the trends of the times.

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## 1. Overview of “The Medium is the Message” Theory

Marshall McLuhan stands as one of the most influential media theorists of the 20th century, his ideas profoundly shaping fields including communication studies, philosophy, and cultural research. McLuhan achieved global renown through his seminal work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, in which he proposed numerous revolutionary concepts that shook the Western world and exerted far-reaching influence on global communication studies. These include “the medium is the message,” “hot and cool media,” “the global village,” “retribalization,” and “the extension of consciousness” [1]. These theories challenged traditional linear models of communication, emphasizing that the form of media itself holds significance beyond simple attention to content.

Prior to McLuhan’s theoretical contributions, Harold Innis pioneered the concept of “media bias,” examining the characteristics of various media including clay tablets, papyrus, alphabets, parchment, hard pens, soft brushes, reed pens, quill pens, and radio broadcasting [2]. McLuhan’s proposition that “the medium is the message” essentially means that any medium (that is, any extension of humanity) introduces a new scale or measure into human affairs, thereby producing effects on both individuals and society. Any extension of ourselves—or any new technology—brings forth a new metric by which we organize our world

[3]. Media are not merely tools for information transmission; they embody specific messages and meanings that shape people's modes of understanding and habits of thought, integrating technological, social, cultural, psychological, and economic attributes.

At the technological level, media as products of technological progress directly determine the pathways of information dissemination and the efficiency of reception. The advent of printing technology, for instance, greatly facilitated the widespread transmission of textual information, while internet technology has made real-time global information exchange possible. At the social level, media shape social structures and patterns of human interaction. Different media forms determine the modes and breadth of human communication—social media promotes instantaneous interaction, whereas traditional letter writing provides more private and asynchronous exchange. Culturally, media serve as carriers of cultural heritage, bearing and transmitting distinct cultural values. Television and film, for example, have played pivotal roles in shaping mass culture, while network media have fostered the formation and diffusion of subcultures. Psychologically, media influence human perception and cognitive processes. The visual imagery of television and film has altered viewing habits, while the internet and mobile devices have cultivated capacities for fragmented reading and rapid attention switching. Economically, media constitute key components of economic activity, influencing the development of information industries and related sectors. Economic models such as advertising, content monetization, and e-commerce are all intimately connected to media advancement.

“The medium is the message” represents the core concept of McLuhan's media theory, a proposition that profoundly influenced postmodern thought and became a key tool for understanding the interaction between technology and society. Through this theory, McLuhan argued that the form of media itself determines the path of social development; media are not merely tools for transmitting information but forces that shape social culture and individual cognition. This idea sparked widespread discussion in the latter half of the 20th century regarding media technology and its social impact, establishing itself as an important theoretical foundation for media studies, cultural studies, and the philosophy of technology. The theory emphasizes the importance of media form itself, asserting that media's influence on society and culture far exceeds that of the specific content they convey. The relationship between media and content manifests as a dynamic process of mutual dependence and interaction. Media are not only vehicles for information transmission but also crucial factors shaping the form of information and the manner of audience reception. The theory reveals how media technology itself profoundly affects social structures and human perception, with content being shaped and constrained by media in this process. As media continuously evolve, they transform the world and people's worldviews, while newspaper news genres undergo corresponding transformations that more deeply influence how people grasp messages.

## 2. Newspaper News Genre Transformation from the Perspective of “The Medium is the Message” Theory

### 2.1 The Popularization of Printing Technology: The Rise of Newspaper News Genres

The popularization of printing technology marked a pivotal turning point in media history, not only dramatically improving the efficiency of information reproduction and reducing costs but also exerting profound influence on the formation and development of newspaper news genres. First, printing technology enabled newspapers to become a mass communication medium. The technology drastically reduced copying costs and increased copying speed, allowing newspapers to be mass-produced and rapidly disseminated, thereby influencing the formation and development of news genres. Second, printing technology promoted the standardization and normalization of news genres. Since printed materials could be reproduced on a large scale, newspapers began adopting standardized layout designs and typesetting rules to improve production efficiency and reduce costs. This encouraged news genres to gradually adopt fixed formats—headlines, leads, body text, etc.—making news reports clearer and easier to read and understand. Third, printing technology made newspaper news genres place greater emphasis on objectivity and accuracy. The wide dissemination of printed materials meant that information’s influence and credibility were greatly enhanced, prompting editors and journalists to pay closer attention to factual accuracy and objective reporting. Additionally, the popularization of printing technology stimulated diversification in news genres. Continuous technological iteration stimulated innovation in genre forms, and as printing technology advanced, expanded layout space enabled a flourishing of genres such as personality profiles and current affairs commentary. Newspaper news genres broke through single narrative frameworks, forming a composite news system that integrated aesthetic appeal with informational value. To accommodate readers’ habits, newspaper news genres stripped away complex rhetoric and employed accessible vernacular expression. This linguistic turn not only broadened the readership but also shaped the basic form of modern public language.

### 2.2 The Emergence of Telegraph and Typewriter: Sharing the Honor of Shaping News Genres

The emergence of telegraph and typewriter, as critical nodes in information transmission technology, exerted tremendous influence on the transformation of newspaper news genres—a phenomenon that aligns with McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” theory. In May 1844, Washington successfully sent the first telegraph signal in human history. This historic event was immediately recognized for its profound academic value by Bennett of the *New York Herald*, who declared: “Washington’s telegraph communication has annihilated space... It ushers in a new era for news reporting” [4]. Telegraph technology significantly increased the speed of information transmission, but due to early technological limitations and high costs, journalists writing telegraph dispatches strove for

brevity and conciseness, eliminating all unnecessary adjectives and adverbs to convey core information with the most concise language possible. Edwin Emery noted in *The Press and America* that the summary lead—placing the most important news content in the first paragraph—was developed by war correspondents during the Civil War because they feared their telegraphs might not be transmitted in full [5].

The typewriter transformed the process of news writing. Its standardized fonts and formats promoted the normalization of news genres, giving newspaper reports a more uniform and professional appearance. Walter Fox vividly described the typewriter: journalists using typewriters “seemed to transfer the machine’s staccato rhythm directly onto the manuscripts themselves. Sentences grew shorter, becoming purely dynamic sounds. Superfluous adjectives and adverbs were deleted to highlight verbs.” Thus, it was the telegraph and typewriter that “share the honor of shaping news genres” [6]. Reviewing this history reveals that the emergence of telegraph and typewriter represented not merely an iteration of communication tools but a crucial leap for journalism from handicraft to mechanization. They forced the news industry to establish three modern principles: “speed first,” “production standardization,” and “information density.” The adaptive thinking inherent in these technologies continues today in applications such as artificial intelligence and 5G, where we can still see the revolutionary genes projected by that 1844 telegraph signal.

### 2.3 The Emergence of Radio: Nurturing Diverse News Genres

In the early 20th century, radio rose as an independent force, challenging the dominant position of newspaper media. In November 1920, the world’s first radio station—KDKA in Pittsburgh, USA—was officially established, and within the following years, numerous countries built their own broadcasting stations. Radio’s unique communication charm quickly attracted large audiences and advertisers, causing traditional newspaper media to experience a cliff-like decline in sales and ushering in the news industry’s first digital reshuffling. “As a new form of news media independent of newspapers, radio broke the monopoly held by the press. It is my humble opinion that diverse media may provide people with important psychological cues: in this realm, multiple operators and multiple business models are not only possible but necessary. Diverse media also nurture the arrival of an era where newspaper genres flourish” [7]. Radio’s creation of “accompanying listening” scenarios unexpectedly stimulated newspapers’ potential for visual communication, prompting attention to visual zoning in layout design and laying the groundwork for modern news visualization. Radio’s emergence not only produced new reporting forms such as live connections and audio documentaries but also created a dual competitive structure of immediacy versus depth, providing 原始动力 for media convergence. When newspaper journalists began borrowing radio’s sense of immediacy in expression and broadcasters began learning narrative structures from newspaper news, the genetic fusion between different media ultimately nurtured diverse news genres, forming

the embryonic form of multimedia communication.

In the 1960s, the television industry entered a period of vigorous development, with the television wave gradually entering people's lives. Television transmits vivid news information through dual dimensions of vision and hearing, posing an enormous challenge to traditional newspapers and forcing them to re-examine and improve their competitive strategies. A new medium will never simply attach itself to an old medium, nor will it allow the old medium to remain unchanged. It will continuously pressure the obsolete medium until it finds new forms and positions for these old media [8]. Each birth of a new medium is accompanied by intense impact. In its efforts toward "visualization," newspaper news genres gave rise to a new category: "visual news." According to the definition in *A Dictionary of Journalism* edited by Gan Xifen, "visual news" refers to "news reports that present things through vivid techniques to achieve visual impact effects. It concretizes abstract concepts and writes news through lively images and typical details, making the content audible, visible, tangible, and sensible, thereby showing the audience the true face of reported facts. In an era when television news is increasingly visualized, visual news has become an important strategy for text-based news to compete" [7].

Television's interactivity also impacted newspaper news genres. Television programs typically allow audience participation via telephone or internet, a sense of engagement that newspapers struggled to provide. To compensate for this deficiency, newspapers began adding sections for reader participation, such as letters to the editor, commentaries, and columns, to enhance interaction and connection with readers. While newspaper news genres strengthened their competitiveness by absorbing television's strengths, excavating and innovating their own unique advantages represented a more crucial competitive strategy. Television news undoubtedly holds significant advantages in presenting "visible" content, but newspaper news genres can play their unique role in handling "invisible" content, thereby fostering the rise of in-depth reporting. In-depth reporting delves into deeper information behind the facts, characterized by objectivity, depth, comprehensiveness, and rigor, also known as interpretive reporting. Jack Haiden once stated: "Interpretive reporting is a form of journalism that explains or analyzes, which is what that overused term 'in-depth reporting' attempts to describe. It is reporting that adds background to reveal deeper meaning" [9]. The renowned American journalist Walter Lippmann also offered incisive insights on interpretive reporting, noting that when faced with numerous complex and constantly emerging facts, news reporting becomes ambiguous in meaning without interpretation. Therefore, a new era has begun in which "why" is as important as "what." If a Washington journalist merely reports what happened without explaining why and pointing out its significance, he has only completed half his work [10].

## 2.5 The Rise of Digital Media: Revolutionary Changes in News Genres

In the 21st century, the rise of digital media as one of the most transformative media forms has brought revolutionary changes to news genres. The rapid development of digital media is reshaping the landscape of news communication. The physical boundaries of traditional newspaper news genres have been broken, with AI-automated news production, metaverse-constructed immersive news scenarios, and interactive data-driven news narratives shifting news from one-way transmission to multi-dimensional communication.

The application of artificial intelligence in news communication is primarily manifested in automated production. Its powerful data processing capabilities can rapidly extract valuable information, greatly improving news gathering efficiency and saving considerable time compared to traditional methods. Tencent's AI-powered "Dreamwriter" writing robot can analyze and report breaking news within minutes, whereas conventional methods might require much longer for information collection and manuscript preparation. While AI holds absolute advantage in timeliness, its stylistic tendencies toward standardization lack emotional resonance and humanistic care—qualities that often make human-written news reports more touching [11]. For news professionals, AI also demands higher levels of professional skill, requiring practitioners to continuously enhance their professional competence and management capabilities, innovating and improving work patterns based on AI's characteristics and development to increase news appeal [12]. AI technology is driving the news industry toward intelligent development. At the micro level, AI enables collaborative operation, integrated management, and intensive allocation of news production processes; at the macro level, AI is reshaping the news communication ecology, urgently requiring the news industry to establish an AI-adaptive development mechanism and construct a sustainable development paradigm for the AI era through technological integration innovation and business model reconstruction [13].

The metaverse, utilizing virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR) technologies, creates possibilities for "spatial presence" in news broadcasting, enabling news to break through physical limitations and allowing audiences to shift from third-person observation to first-person experience. This fosters the development of "participatory journalism." As an emerging technology, the metaverse brings infinite development opportunities to the news industry but also introduces new risks and challenges. For instance, in reporting on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, using metaverse technology to simulate battlefield conditions blurs the boundary between news and gaming, with excessive entertainment potentially triggering ethical controversies. While the metaverse offers entirely new experiences for news industry development through its unique communication methods, regulatory authorities must also keep pace with the times in formulating relevant rules to regulate metaverse technology application. As technology develops and application scenarios expand, the metaverse has become an important frontier in news communication

[14].

The application of interactive data journalism marks a paradigm shift from “producer-centered” to “audience-centered” approaches, with media transforming complex data into explorable dynamic charts. Currently, numerous domestic and international media outlets have established data journalism columns and assembled data journalism teams, with excellent results achieved in practice by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and Xinhua News Agency, among others [15]. Based on published data journalism works, infographic-based data journalism represents the mainstream form, though interactive data journalism may become the new form of future data journalism [16]. However, interactive data journalism also faces challenges. Practice reveals that while significant breakthroughs have been achieved in technical interaction, there remains obvious room for improvement in the transmission-reception dimension. While developing interactive data journalism’s strengths in strong presentation and multi-dimensionality, the auxiliary function of text itself cannot be ignored. Coordinating the relationship between data visualization and textual narrative has become a core issue urgently needing resolution in interactive data journalism development.

The development history of media is essentially a history of media shaping society, innovating society, and promoting social progress—simultaneously, it is a history of media continuously creating messages (the medium is the message) [17]. In examining the evolution of newspaper news genres, we can clearly observe that the emergence of new media technologies serves as the core driving force for transformation. As a typical representative of traditional media, newspaper news genres have undergone transformation from the printing era to the digital era of multimedia convergence, shifting from singularity to diversity and from linearity to interactivity. Each iteration of media technology has reshaped the speed, scope, and depth of news communication, thereby exerting profound influence on public cognitive patterns and value orientations.

As we focus on the digital transformation of newspaper news genres, cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain traceability, and 5G networks are reconstructing the genetic map of the news media industry. Traditional newspaper news has broken through the physical boundaries of print, achieving breakthrough innovations in AI news production, metaverse news live studios, and interactive data journalism. News has transformed from one-way information transmission to multi-directional communication platforms. This transformation compels us to re-examine the nature of news and how to maintain its authenticity and authority in new media environments.

The matching of form and content is closely related—different forms suit different content, and different genres can better convey specific messages. The transformation history of newspaper news genres profoundly illustrates McLuhan’s famous proposition that “the medium is the message.” The transformation of newspaper news genres is not merely a technological upgrade but a profound change in communication concepts and audience interaction methods. News

organizations need to reconsider how to maintain content authenticity and authority in new media environments and how to stand out in fierce market competition. Simultaneously, audiences need to adapt to new information acquisition methods, learn to distinguish truth from falsehood, and cultivate critical thinking.

Media plays a decisive role in shaping and regulating the dimensions and manifestations of human communication behavior—it is an extension of human senses. In terms of influencing human sensory experience, social structural composition, and social transformation processes, media carries more profound significance and value than content itself [18]. The transformation of newspaper news genres is essentially a continuous process of adapting to new technologies and new demands. In this process, the matching of form and content becomes particularly important. Different forms suit different messages, and different genres can better convey specific content. The transformation process of newspaper news genres not only reflects the progress of media technology but also reflects the development of social culture and changes in audience demand. Through this transformative process, we can more deeply understand McLuhan’s proposition that “the medium is the message”—that media are not merely carriers of information but are themselves part of the message, influencing both how information is transmitted and how audiences receive it.

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**Author Introduction:** Li Shilong (2000—), male, Han ethnicity, from Pingdingshan, Henan, master's student, School of Philosophy, Heilongjiang University, research direction: philosophy of science and technology.

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