

The Working Principles and Innovation of TV Talk Show Hosts in the Era of Media Integration

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Abstract: *In the age of media convergence, TV talk show hosts are presented with new challenges and opportunities. The challenge is that the traditional TV talk show format is old-fashioned, with a single communication channel and less competitive hosts; the opportunity is that the hosts have new ideas about the selection of interview guests, the positioning of audience aesthetics and the innovation of communication methods empowered by the new media. In this context, TV talk show hosts should adhere to the principles of media, practice the Four Forces, meet the challenges, grasp the opportunities, make full use of the new media technology, and become an excellent host talent in the era of media convergence.*

Keywords: *media convergence; talk shows; hosts; uphold fundamental principles; break new ground*

1. Introduction

Television talk shows are an artistic style based on the hosts as the main character. Unlike a regular hosts, the hosts is the soul of a TV talk show, combining four roles: the planner of the programme, the embodiment of the programme policy, the organiser of the content and the hosts of the broadcast.^[1] With the advancement of new media technology and the continuous integration and development of new media and traditional media, society has entered the era of media convergence. The advent of the media convergence era has led to new changes in the media industry in terms of communication concepts, audiences and means of communication, and the value aesthetics of society has also been affected to a certain extent. This brings new challenges and opportunities for TV talk show hosts. This article explores the development path of TV talk show hosts in the era of media convergence by analysing their current industry situation.

2. The challenges of TV talk show hosts in the age of media convergence

2.1. The programme format is outdated and the audience is tired of it

The hosts, as the central character of the programme, is a key factor in the success of a programme. As media technology advances, audiences receive richer media information, their own aesthetic values are influenced to some extent, and their needs for programmes become more diverse and innovative. However, some traditional television programmes have not kept pace with the new era, presenting an outdated programme format that fails to keep up with the times. Among them, traditional TV interview programmes present a high degree of homogenisation in terms of content and the solidification of the writer/director's production ideas; the hosts present the phenomenon of formalised interviews and set questions in the process of hosting, deliberately imposing sensationalism and a lack of real emotion, which cannot meet the audience's programme needs. The most obvious case in point was "A date with Luyu" some years ago. However, with the development in recent years, "Lu Yu" has broken the original format of the programme, going beyond the studio and not limiting itself to guests in a certain field, and closely combining interviews with reality shows to create a more innovative and beloved programme format and enhance the quality of the audience's viewing. The lack of individuality in the same programme style will easily cause aesthetic fatigue among the audience and will lead to a steep decline in the programme's ratings.

2.2. Competitive hosting as web hosts emerge

In March 2023, China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) released the 51st Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China, showing that as of December 2022, the size of China's Internet users reached 1.067 billion, an increase of 35.49 million from December 2021, and the Internet penetration rate reached 75.6%. This shows that there is a huge online community at the moment, reflecting a gradual rise in audience demand for online products. It is this demand that, with the rise of new media platforms, has stimulated the creation of a large number of product producers - self-publishing anchors. Nowadays, the threshold for becoming a self-publishing anchor is also low, and there are no strict restrictions on the professionalism and qualifications of anchors. In a fast-paced society, audiences prefer the fragmented and more personalised short-form video genre to the longer interview genre. As a result, traditional media have been severely impacted by the new media. The so-called right to speak is not only the right to speak, but more importantly, the influence of the discourse.^[2] In the past, most social groups considered hosts to be the voice of the mainstream media and to have a high level of discourse. However, with the proliferation of new media platforms and the emergence of self-media bloggers, everyone has the right to speak on public platforms, which has to a certain extent weakened the right of traditional hosts to speak and reduced the "authority" status of hosts in the minds of audiences, resulting in a significant decrease in the demand for traditional hosts. As a result, traditional programme hosts are presented with huge challenges, and interview TV hosts are no exception.

2.3. Single means of communication, not adapted to the current situation

With the development of the Internet and the advancement of media technology, a variety of new media platforms have emerged, presenting a diversified media status quo, and audiences are also using mobile phones and tablets as their main mobile terminals. At present, many traditional media have developed their own mobile app, such as CCTV's "China Media Group Mobile", which has brought a more convenient and quality experience to the social audience. However, some traditional TV talk shows are still singularly based on TV as the main communication medium, without making full use of new communication platforms to effectively push communication, which leads to traditional talk shows not being able to adapt to the trend of contemporary media development in terms of communication methods, presenting the status quo of a single communication channel. According to the 51st Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2022, the scale of short video users exceeded one billion for the first time, with a user usage rate of 94.8%. Short video user size grows from 648 million to 1.012 billion over the five-year period 2018-2022. In this context, hosts have to compete for audiences, fans and subscribers from different platforms, and are no longer limited to specific frequency channels, programme sections and time slots.^[3] How to make good use of new media technology to open up new horizons for the dissemination of TV talk shows is a major challenge for traditional talk show hosts in this new era.

3. Opportunities for TV talk show hosts in the age of media convergence

3.1. A diverse selection of interview guests

In the era of media convergence, programme hosts are increasingly rich in the way they capture social news information and have a broader platform to access information, no longer limited to the traditional editorial channels. The hosts can be selective in the guests they invite to the interview based on the current topical issues. For example, in November 2020, Ding Zhen, a young man from Litang County, Sichuan Province, received widespread attention for a short video of Ding Zhen's pearls posted by a photographer on a short video platform, followed by an interview with CCTV on 29 November; on 13 June 2023, Peng Qinglin, a young man from Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, saved a woman from falling into the water in Hangzhou after the short video was released and quickly received widespread social attention, followed by an interview with CCTV. Through this format, the hosts are able to use hot topics to attract the attention of the communication audience, while diversifying the choice of interviewees, enriching the diversity of the content and completing the timeliness of the programme. In addition, with the rise of new media platforms, compared to the past, most people nowadays make their personal presentations on new media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo and Little Red Book. Hosts can also make use of the diversified media platforms to turn passivity into initiative, explore interview

guests who are not yet popular but have deep social value, conduct in-depth interviews with them and carry out programme production to create a unique programme brand.

3.2. Aesthetic precision for the target audience

The development of big data technology provides easier access for hosts to understand the needs of today's audience. In line with journalistic regulations and professional ethics, the hosts can use big data technology to collect data from users of new media platforms, and through algorithmic means, fully understand the aesthetic tendencies of the current communication audience, and plan and produce programme formats and content to match them. In the past, if you wanted to receive feedback from the audience, you needed to do so by phone or email, and later some TV programmes set up QR codes at the bottom of the screen for scanning feedback; nowadays, on the new media platform, hosts can communicate with the audience through live streaming and other forms to get real-time feedback, and according to the regular and quantitative feedback, hosts fully understand the audience's product needs and programme presets. In this way, it is not only the hosts themselves who think about the creation of the programme, but also the use of new media technology to collect information and brainstorm, so as to make adjustments to the hosting style, the production of programme content and the innovation of communication means, and to enhance the core competitiveness of the programme.

3.3. The converging development of media technologies

"Media Convergence" is a mode of operation that utilises and integrates the strengths of the Internet, radio and television to enhance their functions, means and value.^[4] In the past, traditional media used television alone as the main medium of communication, but in the era of media convergence, traditional media and new media continue to complement each other and intermingle, and new media technology makes up for the shortcomings of traditional media in the past. For example, China Central Radio and Television (CCTV) launched a short video programme on 29 July 2019, which relies on the "CCTV News" and is created and disseminated through short videos on new media platforms. The hosts of the show have changed their broadcasting style to a light-hearted and lively presentation that has gained the hearts of many audiences. As of June 21, 2023, the official DouYin number of the "CCTV News" has received 360 million likes, 36.168 million followers and 6.571 billion plays on related topics. The achievements of CCTV's innovations have provided guidance for traditional programmes, including TV talk shows, in the era of media convergence, and the convergence of media technology will bring a new direction for traditional media to move forward.

4. Uphold fundamental principles and break new ground of TV Talk Show Hosts in the Age of media convergence

The premise and foundation of break new ground is to uphold fundamental principles so that innovation has the right direction.^[5] In the era of media convergence, in the face of rapidly developing media technology and endless fancy formats, hosts should remember their responsibilities, maintain their originality, adhere to their mission, dare to innovate, and explore and develop professionally with the spirit of innovation on the basis of "no change".

4.1. Adhering to media principles and eliminating vulgar communication

In an era of "every man for himself" media, there is a wide variety of content on the media platforms, with a mix of good and bad. As a mainstream media hosts, he or she is the vane of the hosts team and should adhere to personal political qualities, practice professional ethics and lead the industry in an authoritative capacity. Therefore, as a TV talk show host, first of all, we must adhere to the correct political direction and political stance, study and apply the Marxist concept of news in depth, do a good job as the first gatekeeper in the creation concept of the programme, grasp the social impact brought about by the selection of the interview guests, and not just pursue the economic benefits of the programme, but should put social benefits in the first place, eliminate vulgar communication content, promote the main theme and spread positive energy. Secondly, the hosts should enhance their own discernment, discover guests and stories that can inspire social empathy and carry forward the spirit of excellence, and bring them to the screen through programme interviews, which can make the audience truly feel the truth of the interview content, inspire their own values of truth, goodness and beauty, and lead the good ethos of society. For example, through the interview with Zhang Guimei, the headmaster

of Huaping Girls' Senior High School in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province, the CCTV "ONE ON ONE" team made the social audience feel the spirit of self-sacrifice; through the interview with Lang Ping, the former head coach of the national women's volleyball team, the "spirit of women's volleyball" was spread more deeply into the hearts of the audience.

4.2. Practising the Four Forces requirement and nurturing core competencies

A television talk show is a form of face-to-face interpersonal communication that reproduces or recreates everyday conversations through the medium of television, usually with a host, guests and a live audience on the set around a topic or case.^[6] The role of the host plays a significant role in the success of a television talk show in which the interview process is presented to the audience. This requires hosts to first bear in mind the four forces of news and public opinion, namely communication, guidance, influence and credibility, when creating their programmes. The programme is created with the aim of realising these "four forces", achieving effective dissemination of the effects of the talk show, leading social opinion with correct guidance, and truly achieving communication to the eyes and ears, and to the mind and heart, so that the programme can form and win the trust of the audience in the long-term communication practice.

Secondly, to achieve this goal, the facilitator is required to practise the other "four powers", namely brain power, eye power, foot power and pen power. "The host of the interview programme should practice "foot power", go deep into the front line of the interview, feel the great changes of the times, listen to the people's voices, so as to achieve "soil under the feet, true feelings in the heart "The hosts should enhance their "eyesight", develop a keen sense of observation, discover vivid stories of people from the ordinary, distinguish between right and wrong, and grasp the correct guidance of public opinion; enrich their "brain power", think hard, plan the interview format and design the interview content; and finally, enhance their writing power. In the era of media convergence, the writing power is required in the writing of scripts, planning of scripts and expression of interviews, which also requires the hosts to pay attention to the improvement of the comprehensive ability of picking, editing, broadcasting and writing. With the aim of achieving "communication, guidance, influence and credibility", and practising "brain power, eye power, foot power and writing power" as the method, cultivating the core competencies of TV talk show hosts is a basic requirement of the new era.

4.3. Innovative programme content and expanded distribution channels

First of all, in the era of media convergence, hosts should still adhere to the principle of "content is king" in programme creation, not to go off the beaten track, and take content innovation as the fundamental direction to move forward. The first is the innovation of the programme format. The hosts has to get out of the studio and move away from the confines of the studio, choosing to go to the environment where the interviewer lives and works as a venue for the interview. This is a breakthrough from the traditional interview format, breaking the impression that the programme is "high and mighty" in the minds of the audience and leading them into the stories of the interviewees, bringing the programme closer to them. For example, in 2021, "YANG LAN ONE ON ONE" started a new series, "The Wind Waker", which has been broadcast for three seasons as of December 2022. The programme was well received by the audience as host Yang Lan went into the lives of 19 interviewees, spanning more than 10 industries. Secondly, the innovation of the style of the programme. The hosts no longer pursue the stereotypical, serious style of the previous programmes, but rather conduct interviews in a more light-hearted and relaxed manner. The programmes are ultimately aimed at the audience, whose approval is one of the important references for the success of the programme creation. As mentioned above, in this day and age, the visualisation of data provides an easy way to fully understand the aesthetics of an audience. In the preparation stage of programme creation, the host can collect the interview guests and interview questions of interest to the audience through the new media platform, and incorporate these factors into the creation of the programme, so that the audience can feel the heart and temperature of the programme, and sincerely get close to the heart and create a deep empathy with the audience in order to achieve a good programme effect.

Secondly, hosts should follow the trend of the times, establish a sense of media convergence and further innovate and develop. Hosts should not be limited to the solid thinking of the past, but rather create a personalised style to enhance their appeal. Hosts can learn to operate through self-media, in the Douyin, microblogging, small red book and other self-media platform, to create a unique persona as a talk show host, to host the perspective of the daily sharing of talk show shooting footage and creation process, to meet the audience's curiosity, in order to enhance the attractiveness of the program; the

program team can also operate its corresponding official self-media account, with the traditional media industry influence and new media integration, select the important segments of the talk show in the self-media platform for display, to grasp the current fragmentation of the video trend, to meet the needs of the times. In addition to the mutual cooperation between traditional and new media in terms of means of communication, hosts should also have a media convergence mindset in the creation of their programmes. The change in user consumption habits in the mobile era has led to a new trend of light output and vertical viewing in fragmented time, in line with the characteristics of mobile communication, mainly on mobile phones.^[7] New age talk show hosts should make full use of large and small screens, horizontal and vertical screens to create simultaneously. The programme "Talking to Strangers" produced by Tencent Video has completed the breakthrough from horizontal to vertical screens, by creating vertical screen interview programmes, attracting audiences with a novel format and completing the effective dissemination of the programme's content. Since the programme was broadcast, the first to fourth seasons of the programme have all scored over 9.0 on Douban, which has provided a guide for the innovation of interview programmes.

5. Conclusions

In the era of media convergence, facing the challenges of the status quo of the traditional TV talk show industry, as a host, you should adhere to your professional ethics, keep your original intention, cultivate your core hosting ability, fully grasp the opportunities brought by the media convergence environment, continuously learn about media convergence, use new technology and media convergence thinking to continuously innovate and progress in communication content and means, improve programme quality and enhance the attractiveness of the programme. In this way, you will be able to follow the trend of the times and break out of your cocoon to become an excellent interview host in line with the requirements of the times.

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