

Research on the Construction and Operation of Broadcasting Community for the Elderly

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Abstract: In the mobile Internet era, community-based vertical communication is becoming increasingly widely used in broadcasting programs. In the past, the contents of broadcasting programs are produced by professional broadcasting teams alone. However, this pattern has been completely broken. Nowadays, the audience is no longer just listeners. Instead, they also create and provide broadcasting contents. The audience of broadcasting programs pays more attention to the experience and desires to participate in the programs in an interactive manner. In this study, the characteristics of community-based communication, operation problems and operation procedures of some broadcasting programs for the elderly were analyzed. In addition, four conditions necessary for the construction and operation of broadcasting community for the elderly were determined. It is hoped that this paper may provide some reference for building a perfect community ecosystem for these programs, realizing the commercial transformation and speeding up the transformation and development of media.

Keywords: Community-based broadcasting; Media transformation; Community operation; Broadcasting programs for the elderly

1. Introduction

In the context of media convergence, community has been turned into a channel for broadcasting programs to link listeners, collect information and receive feedbacks quickly. A community may contain high-quality contents to be used as important program materials. Through the high-frequency interaction among the listeners in the community, the program contents can be spread from one community to another. That's how community-based vertical communication is realized in broadcasting programs. For broadcasting stations, most of the audience is elderly. Therefore, it is vital for these stations to attract the elderly audience and connect them together to achieve the media transformation. Following the trend of community-based communication, numerous radio and television media have adopted the community pattern where content is taken as the core and the elderly as the center and special attention is paid to social interaction and diversified communication. This further explores and practices developing broadcasting programs for the elderly on the basis of community.

2. Characteristics of Community-based Communication of Broadcasting Programs for the Elderly

2.1. Interaction, the distinctive feature of communication

Through the frequent participation and interaction of audience in community, the contents of broadcasting programs are created and spread. For broadcasting programs, the essence of community-based communication is community interaction^[1]. In the broadcasting community for the elderly, these listeners not only interact with the host, but also communicate with each other frequently. It is through the close communication among the listeners in a group that the information is spread during the interaction. This is how community-based communication works for broadcasting programs. As a valuable information resource, the interactive communication among group members is sticky and attractive. Besides, many broadcasting programs for the elderly no longer rely on their program staff to create the contents only. Instead, through the interaction and participation of community members, part of the program content is determined. So, the role community relations play in communication is becoming more and more obvious.

2.2. High-value content, the direct driving force for communication

A user must be motivated, either materially or spiritually if it is hoped that he would join a community and continue to follow it. Both the middle-aged and elderly people are loyal listeners of radios. They are keen on group activities and happy to share. In addition, they have enough time and fear being alone. If the content provided by the community operator happens to satisfy the elderly audience, they will share it with their elderly friends and encourage them to join the community, thus attracting new members to the community.

High-quality broadcasting program is what draws the attention of elderly listeners to a program continuously. It should also be noted that elderly listeners are especially fond of high-quality contents related to knowledge (like health care, finance, law and history), services (like policies for the elderly and use of smart products) and experiences (like travel, friends making and hobbies) provided by the program. They are also more active in interaction under such condition. Among the programs produced by Radio Beijing, Friends of the Elderly is the only one program for the elderly, which focuses on the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly and the trends of the pension industry. This program has a large number of loyal elderly listeners. It has also organized an activity, "The Elderly Talent" for several times to show the elegant demeanour of the elderly and spread their moving stories. As a result, more than 100,000 middle-aged and elderly people from Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei Province are attracted to this activity. Some talented elderly are invited by this program to open various online courses such as "How to Use and Choose Silk Scarves", "Paper Cutting" and "Flower Arrangement". Attracted by the benefits and the opportunity to interact with the talented elderly, the elderly listeners are happy to join the community. Besides, this broadcasting program is combined with new media platforms to continuously offer high-quality contents to meet the needs of the elderly audience. Community members are motivated to interact when they get what they need. Only in this way can we keep them active in the community.

2.3. Complex relation network, the important way to spread

Although the social relations of the elderly listeners in a community are loose and complex, the interpersonal communication within the community is independent of real interpersonal interactions. Connections among community members will be generated if they interact with each other, thus forming a network of audience relations with different scales. Social interaction is crucial to the elderly as they are willing to share and communicate with others. Therefore, it will greatly promote the spreading of a broadcasting program on the basis of community if a complex relation network is formed through the interaction above.

3. Problems in Community-based Communication of Broadcasting Programs for the Elderly

3.1. Lack of community operation and service

It is undeniable that a broadcasting community makes it convenient for the host to communicate with the audience and to better determine what the audience needs. However, it is easy to find that many communities are used as the tool for program preview only. Besides, there is no community management and service for the elderly audience. What these programs do is just gathering together a group of elderly listeners who are interested in the programs and trust the hosts. So, the members are neither motivated or encouraged to participate in the communication and interaction. The result is that many members become silent in the group and block the messages and even withdraw from the group. Such groups are bound to fail. In this way, what these programs create is a group rather than a community.

3.2. Vague positioning of the community and lack of objectives

Every community has a number of goals, whether they are big or small, long-term or short-term. To realize these goals, all community members will work hard and closely with each other^[2]. Many programs set about building communities without clear goals in mind: What is the positioning of this program community? How to carry out daily operations? What services can the program provide for the elderly audience? What feedbacks and interactions does the program expect from the elderly audience? Without goals, it is impossible to build a properly positioned community for the elderly. In addition, communities built in this way lack their own features and may fail to attract and unite the

elderly. Besides, these communities can hardly give its members a sense of belonging and will lose the value to exist gradually. Therefore, the initial attempt to spread and develop the communities may fail. Even the image of the program may be damaged.

3.3. Poor supervision of interactions and risks exacerbated

False information has always been a common problem for many broadcasting communities for the elderly. The reason is simple. The programs supervise the communities poorly and fail to review what the members communicate daily in a strict manner. It is difficult for some elderly people to tell right from wrong. These people may be easily cheated by the exaggerated headlines, rumors, and commercial marketing means on the Internet. What's worse, they feel free to share the information in other groups as they have mastered the ways to express their feelings on the Internet such as likes, comment and forwarding. This further expands the spread of junk information. In addition, the elderly are generally serious and language conflicts and contradictions may break out occasionally in the community during communication. This is a severe psychological burden to the elderly listeners and harms the harmony and stability of the community. Without proper supervision, any broadcasting community for the elderly will be eventually turned into a channel to spread junk information and vent emotions.

3.4. Low sense of belonging and satisfaction

The core of a community should be emotional destination and value identification. In the early days, most of the broadcasting communities were actually groups of hardcore fans who really loved the program or the host. These broadcasting communities were built upon "strong relations". However, things are different today. Due to various Internet platforms, hosts are more accessible. Besides, the "two-way communication" feature of users is also obvious. Therefore, the members of fan groups are more casual and join the group with specific purposes and would not stay there for a long time. So, broadcasting communities tend to be ones with "weak relations"^[3]. A lot of broadcasting communities for the elderly don't organize activity to enable their members to interact with each other. As a result, it is hard to maintain their emotions for these communities and the connections among the fans. These communities lack not only an in-depth understanding of the real needs of the elderly but also a sincere heart to serve their members. Attention is paid to the dimension of community operation only. Such a community is neither warm nor vital. The elderly listeners attach little importance to these communities as their sense of emotional belonging and satisfaction to them are rather low. As time goes by, these communities will finally get completely quiet.

4. Construction and Operation of Broadcasting Community for the Elderly

4.1. Clear community positioning to highlight audience needs

The business model of Logic Show was successfully transformed since it took the initiative to build the community. Logic Show mainly serves the groups born between 1980 and 2000 who desire to read and obtain knowledge. It is committed to building a value chain of "we-media - community - industry". The slogan put forward by Luo Zhenyu was "Building A Internet Knowledge Community"^[4]. For any community desiring to succeed, the very first thing is to find the right positioning and goals, regardless of whether it is a commercial community or a media community. Currently, the existing communities in the market are mainly related to the following aspects: brands, services, products, education, resources, learning, interests and values. Two points differ the broadcasting communities for the elderly from ordinary commercial communities: the first one is the media attributes and the second one is the consciousness to serve the audience. TingTing FM, the official audio client of Beijing Radio, created an online education brand for the elderly in 2021, which is called "Academy for the Elderly". It offers courses in reading, recitation, and dressing and has also established relevant learning groups for the elderly users. The goal in the first stage is to pull in new users and promote activities, thus laying a solid foundation for paid courses. Attracted by the free online courses and guidance services from professional teachers, elderly listeners rush to join the community. They complete their individual assignments in the small programs. Then the teachers will review their works and guide them in the community. Their works can be posted in the moment of Wechat or sent to friends to be further spread. With a clear positioning of "learning for the elderly", this community is featured by online education and focuses on the needs of the elderly for recitation, dressing, reading and learning. Its corresponding

operation plan is also distinctive (watching programs + completing assignments + guidance from teachers). Besides, it has set goals for each stage. All these contribute to the formation of a sound community ecosystem.

Two things need to be completed before the construction of a broadcasting community for the elderly. The first one is to identify the audience group while the second one is to find the target group. Then efforts will be made to find out what they like and need and how they think. Their core needs should be thoroughly analyzed and the service area be subdivided. Later, the positioning of the program community can be determined by taking into account the demands and characteristics of the program. It is then feasible to seek solutions for community users and set goals for various stages.

4.2. Specialized production + user production

The contents of traditional broadcasting programs are comprehensive and complete. So, it is evident that these programs can hardly meet the individual needs of audience. The best way to create contents with high value is to subdivide the areas. The emergency of UGC (user-generated content), a new production mode of broadcasting program contents has brought innovation power to the traditional broadcasting production. It indicates that the contents of integrated media broadcasting are produced by professionals and users together^[5]. Joining hands with Friends of the Elderly, TingTing FM has started an online IP program called The Fashion Life of Our Parents. This program pays special attention to the interactions between the host and fans and between the fans themselves. During the epidemic, many elderly people in the community complained that they had difficulty using their smartphones. Newly emerged modes like health codes and online grocery shopping went against their traditional lifestyle and they felt it impossible to adapt to this in the short term. When the program learned about these situations, it began to look for smartphone experts in the program community and then set up a teaching team. In addition, it also started a special program called Being a Good Player of Smartphone to introduce the basic functions of smartphones and the way to use them. One episode was about the making of WeChat memes, in which the host and guest taught the elderly how to make WeChat memes step by step. They also encouraged the elderly to follow the instruction to make their own personal memes and post them in the program community. The elderly listeners were active in making memes, including weird memes, angry memes, joyful memes, cute memes, GIFs, memes with texts and memes with props. The group members liked and commented on the memes. They said witty words frequently and interacted with each other actively. The host demonstrated the active interaction of members in the program community to other listeners in the live room through video. This attracted a large number of new listeners to join the community and share their memes.

To keep a broadcasting community for the elderly active, it is necessary to inspire both the host and the members to seek ideas for the program and share high-quality contents. Interaction among community users is a vital link in the production of broadcasting contents.

4.3. Planning organizational structure and developing management rules

Only when a community is well organized and has relevant rules can the community members act in unison. The closer the community members are connected, the greater their energy will be and the goals are more likely to be realized. To improve the management of community members, it is necessary to plan the organizational structure of the community and develop a management system for the community.

4.3.1. Organizational structure of the community

The organizational structure of a community can be planned by taking into account two aspects: operation and community members. The community is operated in a flat and horizontal manner. Different operators undertake specific tasks. For example, consultants and customer service staff will tell the listeners the right operator responsible for solving their problems such as event registration or prize collection. The perspective of the community members is also important. Therefore, it means that various roles should be assigned to the community members to make them diversified and multi-personalized. If all community members share a same style, it will only make the community less active. When a community is newly built for the elderly, its members may feel that others are just strangers. The elderly usually prefer to communicate with their acquaintances. So, we may get distrust and resentment from them if we overemphasize the construction of close relationships. Therefore, we can build a community with close relationships by giving people different roles to interact with each other through common goals and activities to slowly enhance mutual trust. There are also significant

differences in the roles of different types of community members. “Soul figure” is a crucial role in the community members. In a broadcasting community for the elderly, this person is often a host, an industry expert or an elderly talent. It is necessary to determine the soul figure soon after a community is established to attract people of different types to join the group in a planned manner. “Opinion leader” is the one who leads the community members. Their opinions about one topic may seem unique. Compared with ordinary group members, they are more influential and have a stronger sense of responsibility. Besides, they have the ability to tell right from wrong when reading information in the community. There is also a role called “volunteer listeners”. They are good at improving the atmosphere, making users active, giving feedbacks and expressing demands. They help to spread the community and maintain its order. They serve as the strongest link between community users and operators. Generally speaking, these people are the most loyal listeners of the program, which will get increasingly obvious during the daily operation of the community.

4.3.2. Community management rules

The community management rules should be set in a rigorous and simplified way to ensure the quality of the group members and make it convenient for the elderly listeners; to avoid false information, quarrels and message blocking, corresponding management regulations should be formulated and strictly implemented; full play should be given to the role of community managers and listeners are welcome to participate in community management. “Academy for the Elderly” of TingTing FM has set up a team of volunteers and selected outstanding volunteers to assist managers with the management. According to various operation tasks, these volunteers would publish relevant content and activities in the corresponding communities at different times. They are also responsible for guiding users to participate in activities, maintain the order and security of the community, answer questions raised and provide feedbacks of the community to the program timely. Community members are much more active in interaction this way to prevent this community from becoming an advertising group or getting inactive completely. It also helps to improve the operation efficiency of the community.

4.4. Enhancing the cultural identity of the community

Shared cultural awareness is the prerequisite and foundation for community members to be active in a community. In a broadcasting media community, the elderly are different from other people. Due to their deep affection for broadcasting programs, they’ll subscribe a program continuously if they like the host and program. Relatively speaking, they have plenty of time and like group activities and social interaction. The elderly are not the representatives of old school any more. Instead, they are eager to live a colorful life and are concerned about whether their self-worth is realized. With younger consumption concepts and maturer consumption psychology, they are more open to new things. Their mentality is getting increasingly younger. Relying on the host alone to enliven the community atmosphere can no longer make a cohesive community as there is no interaction among community members. For broadcasting communities, the only way to survive and thrive is to form their unique cultures by enhancing the interaction among community members. For the elderly people with young mindset, the community culture needs to be youthful and relaxing to provide them the opportunity to show themselves and improve their sense of self-worth. This is the only way to keep them active in the community. The best way to improve the cultural identity of a community is to implement various activities, both online and offline.

As a well-known charity organization for the elderly in Beijing, Reading Community for the Elderly has managed to gather a group of elderly people fond of reading. It is founded by Xue Xiaoping, a retiree who loves reading as well. Xue attaches great importance to the cultural identity of a community during its daily operation. Through morning cards, daily sentences and sharing of what they learn in reading, the community members get active in interaction. Activities like online topic interaction are held to help them trust each other to make it feasible to hold offline activities. Reading drama, stage play, micro film about the Winter Olympics, catwalks and other offline activities are held to improve the communication and trust of the elderly in the community. Reading Community for the Elderly is decentralized and every member is the main character. As indicated by the culture recognized by all members, everyone should love reading and develop the ability and courage to share. The elderly people in a community will get more united when this community is better organized.

Since many broadcasting communities for the elderly don't hold activities to improve the cultural identity, there is no way to make them trust each other. When the interaction in a community gets less active, activities similar to topic interaction can be applied. A question can be raised to encourage the

group members to discuss and interact with each other. Rewards can be provided as well to make the community active and create a unique cultural atmosphere. There is a large number of listeners for the broadcasting programs for the elderly. By holding online interaction activities continuously to get them active and make them trust each other, it will promote the development of offline activities. This helps to get community members closer and enhance their cultural identity of the community.

5. Conclusions

In the Internet era, WeChat costs less than other link modes and is accepted by most of the middle-aged and elderly people. A community serves as a convenient channel for broadcasting programs to communicate and interact with the elderly audience. During the operation of such communities, the programs need to provide sincere and patient services for the elderly audience. However, many communities are not experienced in community-based communication and operation. As a result, these communities fail to perform the linking function. It is worth operating a community for the elderly when the program is attractive and the host influential. In the era of integrated media, it is unwise to rely on professional teams alone to produce program contents. It should be noted that the interaction and participation of elderly users are vital to content production as well. Any broadcasting community for the elderly aspiring to succeed must determine its positioning clearly and develop a proper organizational structure, a rigorous management system and a sound content production mechanism. In addition, it is necessary to hold interaction and experience activities for community users continuously. Only by doing so can we turn the community into a source of high-value content and foster a unique community culture. This helps to develop the community in a systematic, mature and large-scale manner and lay a solid foundation for the commercial transformation of a sound community ecosystem, which is also the final stage of community construction.

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