

Innovative Research on the Interactive Communication of Political News in the Convergence Media Era by Taking the Newsgames Products of Mainstream Media for Example

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ABSTRACT. *In the context of convergence media, there have been tremendous changes in the field of public opinion ecology, media patterns and means of communication. The mainstream media in China are quickening their pace of transformation to adjust themselves to the change of the times, giving birth to innovative convergence media products such as newsgames. Taking political newsgames products as the research project, this paper views the phenomenon from the perspective of the two-way interaction between communicators and audience, aiming to analyze the strategies those political newsgames products apply in order to optimize and improve the interaction between the two subjects through the innovation of technology, content and model. Furthermore, this new kind interaction strategy may also shed some light on the methods to promote the mainstream public opinion propaganda innovatively and reshape the social and cultural value system in the upcoming 5G era.*

KEYWORDS: *Convergence media; Mainstream media; Political news; Interactive communication; Newsgames*

1. Definition of newagames

The concept of “newsgames” was first proposed by Uruguayan game designer Gonzalo Frasca when he founded the news game website Newsgaming.com in 2003, referring to video games with new values.[1] More representatively, according to *Newsgames: Journalism at Play*, written by newsgame innovators Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari, and Bobby Schweizer, the authors define newsgames as “a term that names a broad body of work produced at the intersection of videogames and journalism.”[2]

2. The feasibility of the interactive communication embodied in political newsgames products

On the one hand, the presence of newsgames products optimize the political news reports; on the other hand, audience's preferences and their media literacy can help to improve the development of newsgames as well as immersion news. What's more, the mainstream media's edge over other unofficial and ordinary media organizations in the aspect of communication channels also accelerates the formation and development of news game reports.

2.1 The possibility of the combination of games and news

News and games are not in such a situation of binary opposition. In fact, news is not necessarily serious or boring, and being presented in an interesting way can also become a major feature of news, which helps to enrich the expression of news. At a time when people's values are diversified and the audience's attention is scarce, how the traditional mainstream media can better serve the function of providing entertainment to target audience, transmitting the information in the form that the audience accept willingly and exerting the guiding role of public opinion, have become an urgent problem to be solved.

2.2 Human being's instinct of playing games and the improvement of audience's media literacy

Game therapy theory believes that playing games are a natural tendency of human beings. People grow up in the environment of games, and through the interactive way of games, they can improve mutual understanding and communication, let alone obtaining the information they need for their personal development. Thanks to the prosperity of technology and the popularization of education, audience's ability to interpret information hidden in news is also increasing day by day.

2.3 Demands for innovation and platform advantages of mainstream media

In the media convergence era, reporting political news effectively is not only the main means for the mainstream media to guide public opinions, but also the difficulty of reforming the traditional ways of news reports. Thus, in order to prominently increase the communication power and influence of news media, the mainstream media needs to enhance their ability to attract audience in current political news reports.

3. Innovative research on the interactive communication of political news

Political newsgames is a kind of creative convergence media news product,

whose audience are featured with strong willingness to select things they like and get participated in interaction with those newsgames. Different from the one-way communication in the past, media and audience are highly involved in the two-way interactive communication nowadays. Viewing things from the perspective of media and audience, this part mainly focuses on the innovation of political newsgames in the context of interactive communication.

3.1 Media-led interactive communication

To achieve the expected communication effect, the media, with the help of creative convergence media products such as newsgames, enhances audience's sense of participation and interaction in the face of political news through the innovation of its communication technology, communication methods and communication content.

(1) Innovation in interactive technology

Apart from H5 interactive games, micro-video and other traditional communication technologies, AR, VR and AI technologies are also included in the list of technologies mainstream media uses nowadays. Here are some typical examples. People's Daily launched the H5 game at the advent of 90th anniversary of the Army Day – “*Look at it! This is my photo in the military uniform*”. Users can upload their personal photos to an image processing system of Tencent, which can help audience “walk through time and space” and experience the feeling of wearing different military uniforms in different historical periods of China. The link had been visited hundreds of millions of times in 10 days since its launch. Numerous people were involved in interacting, sharing and commenting, making this newsgame a burst. On top of that, the newsgame, “*Have a test, can you be a reporter for the two sessions?*”, developed by Xinhua News Agency, used the VR panoramic camera to capture the panoramic picture to represent the two sessions; “*G20: Little Elf Go Go Go*” set up three panoramic scenes to present natural and cultural attractions in Hangzhou, China. What's more, the mainstream media in Western countries are standing at the forefront of technology and applying AR technology, for instance, the interactive game developed by the BBC in May 2018 to promote media literacy among youth[4]. In the game, player can play a role of a reporter in the BBC Newsroom, producing news as they were in the real editorial department. The game uses social media pages as a content carrier, which makes player capable of receiving video calls and chatting with others.

(2) Innovation in interactive modes

The in-depth development of media convergence has enabled the interactive communication mode of political news to evolve from the initial simple quiz to today's scene interaction and experiential participation, from simple one-way communication to today's multi-directional and three-dimensional communication, strengthening audience's feeling of reality. The initial newsgames are characterized by quizzes, multiple-choice questions, etc., such as “*Take a walk along 'One Belt, One Road' to see who is the strongest brain*”, a newsgame launched during the Belt

and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017. In the form of multiple-choice questions, together with the style of anime, the game let the players gain some historical knowledge about the “One Belt, One Road” in the process of answering questions. It uses a shallow text narrative to introduce news events and knowledge to the audience in a textual language, and to convey information while guiding public opinion. Nowadays, newsgames are putting more emphasis on the interaction and immersive experience of the scene. Subverting traditional ways of relating and expressing things, the news information is no longer just an ABSTRACT.text narrative, but more specific and sensible.

(3) Innovation in interactive contents

On the one hand, newsgames focus on social hotspots under specific time and space conditions, using multiple elements to make interactive content rich and vivid. For example, players may choose the way the game progresses, such as selecting different street objects, selecting different gestures, etc., and finally getting different experiences under different conditions. On the other hand, the content spread by news games is more in line with audience’s use preferences and reading habits. Audience in the mobile Internet era are blessed with unprecedented autonomy power, whose value of giving instant feedbacks are also highlighted. In that case, traditional modes of news communication cannot satisfy picky audience anymore, leading to a decrease in audience’s recognition towards the values mainstream media hold. Therefore, the mainstream media need to innovate the news contents as well as interactive modes in order to spread the mainstream values effectively.

2.2 Audience-centered interactive communication

The design of political newsgames is based on the needs of audience, providing them with a brand-new experience ranging from choice making to cognitive behaviors. While the audience are playing an increasingly important role in interactive communication, their discourse right is also constantly improving. They are changing their roles from passive information receivers to active communication participants, helping to enhance the communication effect of political news.

(1) Audience’s selection

The multi-distribution of newsgames brings diversity to the channels in which audience get participated in political news. Compared with the traditional communication era, technology also changes audience’s preferences for channels nowadays. In the past, Weibo, WeChat and news clients were main sources of information for audience in China; nowadays, short video platforms, live video streaming platforms and professional game applications have become new channels to release AR, VR and other kinds of newsgames, in which case, users can get access to the interactive interface by scanning the QR code or following the media’s official account without any difficulty.

(2) Audience’s cognition and emotion

Considering that newsgames present news in an interesting and authentic way,

audience tend to show more interest in and pay more attention to political news, becoming more likely to trust those political events, having increasing faith in mainstream media and getting participated in modern democracy life more willingly.

(3) Audience's behaviors

In the traditional mass communication era, the audience only passively receives the information like robots. The sensory system invoked in this process is only visual. After the audience reads the information, the character code is converted for thinking and interpretation. When it comes to some serious political issues, audience may just give a cursory browsing, remember information selectively. Newsgames have changed the traditional one-way communication to a socialized spreading pattern characterized with “interactive genes” and “transformation genes”. For example, “The two sessions invite you to join the group chat” to use the characteristics of social communication smartly to enhance the user’s sense of participation through interactive forms such as @users, handing out red packets (giving audience certain amount of money), and liking friends’ WeChat moments. Through its attempts to attract users to share and forward the link of the newsgame on social media, the page was viewed 6 million times in less than 24 hours.

4. The innovative propaganda of mainstream public opinion contributed by interactive communication of political news

4.1 Propaganda which contributes to audience’s acceptance based on their own selections and choices

Traditional political news usually tries to convey mainstream values directly and arbitrarily without thinking about the feelings of their audience, embodying their values among lines. Such method of propaganda may bring about prominent effects in a short period of time, but in the long run, it seems hard to infuse those values and opinions to audience’s minds, let alone having a subtle but continuing influence on their audience’s cognition, emotion or behaviors. However, in a clever way, the newsgames do not deliberately or forcibly infuse a certain kind of mainstream value opinion. Instead, the values are hidden in the newsgames. The audience selectively accepts the propaganda of the mainstream media through the self-selected game endings. In 2016, the Qingwei Studio of the Communist Youth League Central Committee, together with the Orange Light Games, launched a newgame called “*Re-take the Long March*”, which was adapted from the Long March history to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Long March victory. As a member of the Long March, players can touch the history of flesh and blood at close range. There are totally 50 different kinds of endings in the game – maybe you are able to finish this tough journey with unimaginable hardship; maybe you will sacrifice on half way... Whatever the ending is, the precious experience and spirit of the Long March will be remembered and cherished by those players.

4.2 Propaganda which targets at certain audience under certain conditions

Taking advantages of certain hot social topics, the mainstream media designs contents accordingly and send the information to target audience at the right time. In addition, due to the unique expression forms of games and their long development cycle, some news topics which can be transformed to newsgames are limited. Current newsgames developed by mainstream media are usually based on news simmering for a long time, which is suitable for periodic reports, such as the two sessions, the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening up, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and so on. This strategy will not only help newsgames to catch up with latest news events, but also bring more popularity and social attention to the news with the promotion of newsgames.

5. The Innovative construction of social and cultural values with the help of interactive political news

5.1 Citizen's awakening of participation consciousness and the increasing of their participation rates in political issues

At present, the newsgames products produced by major mainstream media are mostly related to political news topics. As "the ninth category of art", newsgames are featured by high interaction rates, greatly improving audience's attention towards political issues. Some news games even provide citizens with a platform to voice their opinions and interests about political life. In that case, newsgames serves as a channel for people to express their opinions and suggestions to the government and officials. During the 19th Communist Party of China National Congress, the interactive game, "*The 19th Communist Party of China National Congress invites you to join the WeChat group chat*", released by the People's Daily, representing the form of WeChat group chat vividly. In the group chat, Xi Jinping delivered a speech on the 19th National Congress. Later, some of the well-known representatives such as Ding Ning, Wang Endong and Jing Haipeng expressed their opinions and thoughts on the future in the group. As participants, the audience were also invited to express themselves.

5.2 The reconstruction of citizen's collective memories and their interaction based on "imagined communities"

An imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in 1983 to analyze nationalism. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. He thinks that nationalism is a product of modern society, which is an imagined and virtually constructed one, and the construction of nationalism depends on collective memories of certain groups of people. Xinhua News Agency and NetEase have planned a creative convergence media project – "*Sounds throughout forty years*", which takes "Musical Experience" as the starting point and comprehensively utilizes

advanced technologies such as face recognition and AR technology to actively create immersive experience scenes offline for audience. What's more, it also tries to stimulate the audience's emotional resonance in the form of interviews, flash mobs, interactive experiences and so on. For example, by inviting over 50 popular stars to share their stories about music, record talk shows, shoot music flash mobs, the newsgame encourage more people to look back on their past, thus showing the collective emotional memories during 40 years of China's reform and opening up and forming a positive momentum in the cyberspace.

According to ritual view of communication theory which is raised by James Carey, Xinhua News Agency constitutes a media ritual focused on major themes through online newsgames and offline interactions, awakening the public's historical memory by "cultural performance". Historical memory is an important emotional bond that unites the collective memory of the masses and forms their identities. Each nation and country have its own historical development tracks. These pieces of history are passed down from one generation to another continuously through interpersonal communication and mass media communication, forming the sharing, participation and construction of the people. To summary, the collective memory, which is formed based on lots of discussion and participation of citizens in public space, contributes to the formation of "imagined communities".

6. Conclusion and future prediction

The birth of newsgames has provided a new possibility for mainstream media nowadays to spread their ideas and values more efficiently, making political news more readable and acceptable for their audience in the convergence media era. With the development and maturity of 5G technology in the upcoming future, newsgames will change the structure of communication industry more profoundly, deepening people's cognition of political affairs and major events and fully achieving the goals and values of the mainstream media.

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