

The Changing Media Image of the Host in the Perspective of Dramaturgical Approach

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Abstract: The advent of the media convergence era has led to dramatic changes in the media ecological environment. The various media forms and the smart media era of information explosion have brought new thoughts to the construction of the media image of the host. This paper analyses the different concepts of the media image of the host in the traditional media ecology and the media convergence era from the change of media ecology, through the analysis of Goffman's dramaturgical approach to derive the framework construction of "non-role performance" of the host, analysed and derived the key point "backstage transparency" for the construction of media image of the host in the media convergence era by studying and comparing the different media image transformation of the host in the traditional media era and the new media convergence era. It also put forward some new challenges to the professionalism and media image construction of the host in the future.

Keywords: Change of Media Ecology, Media Image, Dramaturgical Approach, Non-role Performance, Backstage Transparency

1. Introduction

With the advent of the media convergence era, all areas of society have changed. As the most important part of a radio and television program, the importance of the host is obvious. From traditional radio and television to the media convergence era, the media image of the host has developed all the way to innovation and progress. Especially in recent years, in the context of the intellectual media era of information explosion, many positive leading roles brought by the hosts in the epidemic era are more noticed compared to the previous. At the same time, the professionalism of the host in the media convergence era has been more clearly shown on the screen, and the construction of their media image has also produced a new concept different from the previous. Thus, it can be seen that the construction of the media image of the host in the media convergence era has become an inevitable trend that cannot be stopped by history and is bound to give rise to new thoughts. Through the analysis of Goffman's dramaturgical approach, from the traditional media era to the media convergence era, the feature of "backstage transparency" becomes more and more obvious.

2. The concept of media image of the host under the change of media ecology

2.1. Study on the positioning of media image of the host under the traditional media ecology

The host has always been the core figure of a TV program, and Professor Wu Yu once defined the host as "the communicator who directly faces the audience and guides the process of the program." Throughout the history of radio and television, the host is only one part of the process, but it is the key to connecting and guiding the audience and the content in a program. In communication science, McLuhan once mentioned the concept of "host media". He said, "The formation of the media has gone through three stages: the film media, the television media, and the host media. These three stages completed the transfer from cold media to hot media." This was also the first time the host media was defined. McLuhan positioned the host as a communication subsystem, the key to serve the media communication, the "hot media" as compared to the "cold media".

In Understanding Media, McLuhan makes a definitional distinction between hot media and cold media. He said, "The difference between the two is that the hot media only extends a sense and it has a high definition. The hot media is less involved, while the cold media is more involved. It requires the acceptor to fill and complete." [1] So in the traditional media ecology, the host is only a "single-sided"

broadcaster, a symbolic “single-sided person”, a patterned “megaphone”[2]. Therefore, for years, the impression of some audiences of CCTV hosts is that they are upright, strict, and “do not eat the food of common mortals”. This resulted in the audience having absolute authoritative recognition of the CCTV hosts, but it deepened the sense of distance and unreality. Then a program’s emotional delivery and content output will get even less feedback.

It is due to the limitations of the traditional media era. In the traditional media ecological limitations of the environment, there are no better and more channels to make the host more “fresh” and more “intimate”. In the traditional media era, the single newscast function of radio and television hosts can meet the audience’s demand for information, but in the media convergence era today, the single-side communication of traditional media has become difficult to attract the audience in the era of information explosion now.

2.2. The necessity of constructing a new media image of the host in the media convergence era

The advent of the media convergence era has opened up more possibilities for mass communication. Various communication channels and information platforms have formed a phenomenon that “everyone can be a host” and “everyone is a journalist”. With the abundance of various social communication software and platforms, people are more and more accepting of their true selves. Under the change of media ecology, the construction of media image of the host is a historical inevitability[3]. During the epidemic, CCTV hosts have shown the great role of hosts in the media convergence era when leading the “live streaming that help farmers sell goods”. A number of high praise host programs also showed people the more “id” side of the host in the media convergence era. And this expectation is now developing in a more positive trend. “Survival of the fittest” applies to the hosts in the media convergence era as well. Therefore, the construction of a new media image for the host in the future will be more and more worthy of deep consideration.

3. Seeing the framework construction of “non-role performance” of the host in the media convergence era from Goffman’s “dramaturgical approach”

Goffman mentions six points in his “dramaturgical approach”, which are “performance framework, area and area behavior, drama team, foreground and backstage, the art of impression management, and performance”. Among them, we can roughly divide the framework of “performance” into three aspects, which are “script, performance subject, and performance area.” With this framework, we can build a framework for the “non-role performance” of the host. From this, we can see the new changes in the media image construction of the host in the media convergence era more clearly.

3.1. Script: the construction of the media image of the host in the media convergence era

China has been a country of rules and legal system since ancient times. The rules here are actually a country’s legal system “script” that from the national legal system to the individual code of conduct. The laws of the country are for better management and to maintain the stability of the country. The individual code of conduct is aimed at helping people to become more civilized and educated. When we are at school, we follow the school rules, attend and finish classes on time, and complete the learning tasks set by the school. After leaving school, we follow the rules of the country and society, which is a long-standing social tacit understanding and a stable “script” between us. Goffman says that life is a big stage and everyone is playing their own role with their own specific performance script. But the “script” Goffman mentioned here represents a “code of conduct” on the social level. It is because “roles are individual behavior patterns that are limited by social expectations” that it can be said “the script represents the objective requirements of the social structure for the individual actor.”

The host also has his own “script” that refers to the production team and the editor, camera and other pre-production staff through the program’s theme positioning, audience positioning and content output analysis, combined with the host’s own characteristics and professional ability to complete such a connection, guidance and also to face the unexpected situation of the script.

In the traditional media era, there are not many opportunities for the host to contribute to the “script”. One of the reasons is that the types of media and technology in the traditional media era were less sophisticated, and the number and diversity of programs were not as great. In such a situation, a program has to be of high quality and no mistake, so the script of the program in which the host participates must be no mistake. In the traditional media era, programs were basically taped in advance, and there would

be no communication between the hosts and the audience, therefore, the host in the traditional media era had very little opportunity to contribute to the “script”.

The best aspect of the media convergence era is the diversity of media forms and the rapidity and efficiency of communication. A typical phenomenon of the rapid development of the internet era is audience engagement. The audience can see all the programs without leaving home, with a mobile phone and the network. It is also more convenient and efficient to interact, suggest and supervise the program of the host. In such a fast-paced entertainment atmosphere, people's growing need for a better life demands more TV programs, more diversity in TV programs and topics. The increasing demand for audience interaction with the host has dictated that the host has more involvement and flexibility in the “script” of the program in the media convergence era. For example, the “online audience” and “public judges” of various CCTV programs, the host needs to interact with the online audience and judges during the program, and guide the program in the direction predetermined in advance. As a result, the media image of the host in the media convergence era becomes more familiar to the audience, and many of the previous inherent impressions of the host are broken. For example, some of the previous news hosts, we only know the state of his broadcast news, but in a variety show, he showed a different side of high emotional intelligence and good at stepping in for the rescue of the mistakes, the audience will have a new media image of him. The creativity and completion of the “script” of the host in the media convergence era has also created a new media image for them.

3.2. Performance subject: the changing role of the host in the media convergence era

The “performance subject” here is the “drama team” mentioned by Goffman in the performance. Like the drama team, the host is the subject of “non-role performance”, and the “foreground” behavior is the professional characteristic of the host's own professional ability combined with the content of the program[4]. In a host program, in addition to the host as the main body, there are also pre and post-production personnel involved in the production of the program. They help the host to complete the program, and are called the “performance subject” together with the host.

In a program, the host, as the core figure, is tasked to make the program as perfect as possible with the desired effect and content output. But the program can't be done by him alone, it has to be completed by the entire program team working together. Whether the program production team, the live stage set-up personnel, or post-lighting music and other department personnel, the “performance body” is not perfect without any of them.

In the traditional media era, the “performance subject” of the host may be more obvious to some extent, and those who are not seen on the screen will not appear in front of the camera. But in the media convergence era, the audience is more demanding for the fun of the program, and the curiosity of the audience about the front and backstage of a host program is more obvious. More and more TV programs are bringing the personnel in front of and behind the screen, and it works to a good effect as expected. Sometimes the prep and behind-the-scenes footage of a program gets even more views than the main feature. On reality TV shows, there will be directors and producers on site to interact with the hosts and guests, these are also what the audience like to see. The audience can see the intention and difficulties of the host and the production team in the process of the program in the footage, which can make them know more about the program team and the host, and have a new understanding of the media image of the host.

3.3. Performance area: the “foreground postposition” of the host in the media convergence era

3.3.1. The “foreground” performance of the host

In theatrical performances, the foreground and backstage refers to the stage area and the audience area bounded by the side curtain. Such a clear separation of boundaries makes the audience feel more distant from the actors and the mystery of the actors more obvious. We found that the same foreground and backstage behavior of the host applies here. The foreground behavior of the host is his or her own professional ability and human qualities, in compliance with social norms, professional norms, in line with the positioning of the program, the performance of the “self” in line with the program script[5].

In the traditional media era, because of the two limitations of “script” and “performance subject”, the host's performance area is basically only in the “foreground”, and the audience can only see the “self” that the host is trying to present according to the “role” of the program. In the media convergence era nowadays, TV programs are no longer confined to “indoor” or “in front of the stage”, and there is no

longer a “specific place to perform”. The specific place here is the “foreground of the host”, that is, the part in front of the stage and camera shows the audience. Also the “foreground layout”. We can see that today’s host programs are more improvised situations, such as behind-the-scenes footage, as well as unexpected recordings in reasonable situations that do not violate the legal and ethical codes of professionalism, in which the hosts are no longer in the foreground mode of just following the prescribed procedures to express their “self”, but more or less incorporate their “backstage behavior”. This shows that in today’s media convergence era, the pure “front office model” of the traditional media era is no longer applicable to the media convergence era. With more exposure of hosts in sudden non-program style in front of the audience and without the act of advance preparation, the audience has a different and new understanding of the media image of the host in the media convergence era. This is one of the changes in the path of media image construction for the host in the media convergence era.

3.3.2. “Foreground postponement” of the host

Goffman believes that the backstage is where the foreground inhibitions are expressed and released. “When a person’s activity is presented to others, he will try to expressively emphasize some aspects of the activity, while other aspects of the activity, which may be detrimental to those actions that he wants to create an impression of, and will be strenuously suppressed. Obviously those facts that are highlighted tend to appear in the front area, while in the back area or backstage of another area, only those things that are covered up are highlighted.”[6]

As an individual role, different hosts are bound to have different uniqueness. Therefore, the “backstage behavior” of the host will definitely have an impact on his “foreground behavior” and his image. In the media convergence era nowadays, the “backstage behavior model” of the host will definitely become an important consideration when choosing a host for a program.

Along with the rapid development of the internet era, each media platform has used new media means to reshape the media image of the host in order to expand their influence and improve the effectiveness of the host’s program. Traditional media began to change, with the major live audio and video platforms, short video Vlog, AI anchor, artificial intelligence anchor, virtual anchor and other ways to change the traditional positioning of the host and performance area. The host has also started to actively use these channels for self-image presentation. The host in the media convergence era can go beyond the professional framework to show more of the real “me” in life[7]. They use social media platforms such as Weibo and Tik Tok to present another side of the program that is unseen and different, and interact with the audience in the comment section. With the test of time, the audience and the program team were able to delete and select their own hosts who fit the program’s positioning. This also increases the trust and stickiness of the audience to this program. The audience prefers to see a program with the host they recognize and like. This shows that the trend of “foreground postponement” of the host will become inevitable in the future.

4. The trend of “backstage transparency” poses new challenges for future hosts

In the media convergence era, the “backstage transparency” of the host has become an inevitable trend. With the advancement of modern mass media technology and means, the audience’s aesthetic needs and viewing level are constantly improving, which poses new challenges to the future hosts.

On the one hand, hosts in the media convergence era need to take the initiative, adapt to learn new forms of media, and bravely show their unique and authentic side. Try more new forms of programs in different media, using the characteristics of the media platform, combining their own positioning with the program, and the advantages of the platform, to pull the program effect to the maximum.

On the other hand, the trend of “backstage transparency” of the host is bound to put forward higher requirements on the comprehensive ability quality of the host. The host should not only improve the professional professional ability in the program, but also be strict in all aspects of life, abide by the national legal and ethical norms, and abide by professional norms.

What’s more, the host in the media convergence era needs to keep learning and get closer to the audience. In the media convergence era, programs with multiple material themes are frequently produced, and talents of various professionals are emerging. The host, as the core of a program, must not be left behind, and needs to understand and learn more specialized areas of knowledge to enrich and improve their knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The special profession of the host, whether in front of the stage or behind the scenes, must assume some social roles, media-type roles, and personal roles. In the media convergence era, the “backstage transparency” of the hosts has become an inevitable historical trend, and the host needs to have higher professionalism and learning ability in order to meet the “survival of the fittest” in the market. The new media image of the host in the media convergence era will also continue to create new concepts.

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