

An exploration of topic setting and questioning techniques in new media talk shows

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Abstract: *In recent years, with the diverse development of communication media, new media interview programs have emerged on major website platforms. How to choose the right topic to anchor the show and improve the questioning skills to get the guests in the mood has become the key to the development of new media interview programs. This article analyses the current development of new media interview programs, topic setting and questioning techniques. In turn, it analyses the capabilities of new media talk shows that need to be improved, in the hope of providing new ideas for the development of the programs.*

Keywords: *Talk Show; Topic Setting; Questioning technique*

1. Introduction

Interviews are an important part of the current genre of new media programs. There is a strong sense of authenticity and speculation throughout the program. Not only does it provide an effective channel for people to express themselves with freedom of expression, but it also attracts a lot of media due to its low production cost and high efficiency. The main elements are the host, the topic, and the guests. The topic is the selection of the program, which is the guarantee of the program to attract viewers and achieve a high increase in ratings. The success of the choice of topics determines the quality of the program. The importance of the presenter as one of the core people of the program cannot be overstated, so presenter questioning skills are also one of the focuses of this article. This article will explain the development of new media interview programs at this stage, sets how new media interview programs can establish topic diversity, get close to audience needs, create a good communication environment, and improve questioning skills, in order to provide ideas for the topic setting and questioning skills for current new media talk shows.

2. The current state of development of new media interview programs

The diversity of styles, interactivity and formats of new media talk shows, and their relatively simple production and high viewership have led to their increasing share of all types of programs. The low-cost, high-revenue nature of the show has led many producers to choose new media interview programs. At the same time, the strength of regulation and the homogeneity of the subject matter is gradually becoming apparent.

2.1. Regulation needs to be strengthened

The development of the medium has provided many viewing channels for everyone, breaking down the original limitations of television viewing. All kinds of network broadcasting platforms computer end mobile phone end, public, short video platforms and so on can be watched in real-time, to achieve the media events, and the content of the program multi-screen relay^[2]. It can be said that where there is a network, there is a network program, and all kinds of programs are no longer confined to fixed places but can be watched selectively anytime and anywhere according to preference, achieving a large increase in the scale of users, social benefits and economic benefits.

The variety of online interview formats requires more expertise than television interviews, while the number of people responsible for supervision has not increased. In terms of age composition, there is less fresh blood resulting in a more conservative approach to regulation, so the pace of regulatory renewal is far slower than the pace of program renewal. In the event of a problem, an outright ban is often applied, which makes the industry "chaotic if you don't care, but dead if you do".

The relevant regulatory laws are an effective guarantee of the strength of the regulation of new media interview programs, but at present, the regulatory laws are not fully up to date and cannot be supplemented in time when there are blank areas. In particular, the previous lack of regulation of online platforms has led some restricted traditional media practitioners to turn to online programs in search of fame and fortune. This also makes some programs "hang sheep's head to sell dog meat", what fire to follow what, innovative thinking greatly weakened, the regulator needs to enter a more comprehensive and in-depth study of the current situation of the industry, to further improve laws and regulations, and strive to achieve a standard across the network so that the industry can be healthy and stable development.

2.2. Homogenization of the subject matter is not expressive enough

In the course of the medium's development, new media have launched online talk shows that meet the needs of the market to satisfy viewers. Although the genres are diverse, many platforms rely heavily on the financial support of advertisers for their self-produced programs. Advertisers are quicker than others to recognize the benefits of small group media products, i.e. segmented groups, and programs of all kinds are gradually narrowcast. In particular, talk shows are keen on celebrity-celebrity collaborations because behind the stars is a market of traffic and a fixed audience. Examples include Youku's The Round Table and Tencent News' My Bronze Age and Only Three Days Visible. In fact, entertainment-oriented programs have gradually ceased to satisfy the emptiness caused by the drying up of knowledge. Interview programs with celebrities as their core selling point tend to fall into the routine of celebrities talking about their old stories and the hardships of the acting road, etc. Although some ratings are relatively high, in the long run, this will lead to homogenization of the content of new media interview programs and a lack of innovative expression.

The protection of intellectual property rights has made producers reluctant to spend large amounts of money on programs, and the homogenization of a large number of programs has led to a decline in the quality of programs, loss of viewers, and a shortening of their lifespan. Secondly, presenters with personalities are hard to find. Some hosts lack the professional background, have weak cultural discovery ability, or even have completely followed the interview process and advanced prepared questions, it is difficult to resonate with the guests to actively interact, resulting in the scene sparking less program performance is not enough.

3. Topic setting for new media talk shows

3.1. To convey positive energy and be guided by the social functionality of the chosen topic

Public opinion guidance and propaganda is an important task carried out by all media, and the more the media develops to its climax, the more its initiative and orientation towards society become apparent. In August 2019, the Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of the Radio, Television and Internet Audio-visual Industries issued by the State Administration of Radio and Television proposed that: with socialist core values as the leader, reform and innovation as the driving force, adhering to righteousness and innovation, strengthening resource integration, enhancing support and guidance, constantly optimist the structure and layout of the radio, television and internet audio-visual industries, improving the modern industrial system and market the system, and better meeting the people's new expectations for a better life^[1].

It is thus clear that new media programs should focus on social benefits and their selection should be oriented towards social functions^[4]. For example, the fourth season of the excellent online interview program Talking to Strangers started broadcasting in October 2021, with its Douban rating of over 9, the first place in the weekly list of Douban's domestic variety show reputation, and the annual excellent online audio-visual special program of the General Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), which has been on the Hot 100 many times during its broadcast. Its choice of guest topics has generated great discussion among netizens: Bringing up the dream of reversal. The doctor who is with you. The god of keying, Letters from outside prison. The crew digs into the personalities to talk about the times. The story of the "Live Village" is a novelty when you first see it, but in the end, it comes down to the responsibility for the family, the upbringing of children, and the affection for loved ones. The stories of these interviewees are twisted and fascinating, but behind the bizarre experiences remains a common humanity.

The choice of topic should also be immediate, showing current and highly topical developments in society. Although the immediacy may be too rushed to leave a repeatedly pounded, intriguing classic.

But in terms of audience viewing psychological needs, even capturing the hotspots can go a long way in satisfying them.

3.2. Break the conventionalities and build topic diversity

The aesthetic and interest tendencies developed by each person will be different depending on their identity, education, experiences, and life circumstances. In order to stand out in the sea of online programs, many programs are becoming more and more subdivided and vertical in their choice of topics, not seeking to be more but more comprehensive, but striving to be small and precise in order to achieve differentiation. At the same time, precise audience and detailed positioning become a necessary way to personalize the subject matter to attract the core audience, analyze the audience's needs through pre-survey statistics and set the content to their liking. However, it is also important to note that the more segmented and vertical you are, the more you can't generalize, and often this core audience will have a higher-level of knowledge about the topic. They have been able to skip the initial level of passive need to know, thus creating higher level psychological needs such as knowledge seeking, participation, and recognition, which is not enough for a few writers, and work doers in the program team alone. Therefore, when designing topics, writers and directors need to use outside brains, consult more with their niche audience, and come from and go to the audience.

How to make the topic more eye-catching. In a fast-paced era where particularly sparse stories may not be able to get people's attention, going for highly topical personalities and topics of general interest to society has become one of the goals of most talk shows. Talking to Strangers has linked up with PUA gurus struggling with poverty, who are reviled for the physical and emotional damage many of their actions cause to many girls. The public does not know why PUA gurus make so many girls sad and even suicidal. In the eyes of the "PUA gurus" they are successful, but these successful people are afraid to admit their identity online and in the real world. In this case, the team managed to contact an experienced guest. Once broadcast, this episode quickly generated a lot of discussion among the general public. And a selection that actively engages audience feedback is a good selection. It is important to build topic diversity, but also to be aware of the universality of the topic; only topics that are relevant to the audience will feel relevant to them and will motivate them to watch.

3.3. Pay attention to the needs of the audience and satisfy their desire to know

The audience, as the endpoint of a talk show's distribution, is a prerequisite for the show's existence and to some extent becomes the judge of its success or failure. In a sense, the television economy of our time has been slowly transformed into an "attention economy", or "eye-candy". The grabbing of viewers' attention has become a major means of achieving social and economic benefits of new media organizations today. Therefore, one of the basic principles of online talk shows is to fully consider the needs and direction of the audience, and only when the emotional needs of the audience are met is the delivery of value accomplished.

In addition to pre-program research, pay attention to the needs of the audience, pay attention to the freshness of the topic and don't go for topics that other talk shows have already done to avoid speculation and lower the expectations of the audience. During the recording of the program, the presenter must also always bear in mind the need to satisfy the audience's desire for knowledge. Often, in order to create a real and good communication environment, the people behind the scenes often try not to interrupt the recording session once it has started, preserving the full conversation as much as possible. This is a time when the people behind the scenes of writing and directing have much less control over the show. If the presenter simply followed a pre-set flow of questions, a lot of detail would be lost throughout the program. This requires the moderator to be both a conversation leader and a curious audience member when asking questions, putting himself in the audience's shoes and thinking about what questions would be of interest to the audience.

Post-creation can make new media interview programs more polished and out of the loop. One of the major advantages of new media talk shows compared to traditional media is that they are less restricted. This is why it is possible to continue to strengthen the topic in a more condensed way when creating the second edition of the show, to bring the audience's curiosity forward. After the broadcast, it is important to keep an eye on the audience feedback, ratings, comments, dwell rates, etc. In order to grasp and adjust the topics for the next episode.

4. Questioning techniques for new media talk shows

4.1. Focus on humanistic sentiments and create a good communication environment

New media talk shows are one of the highly presented formats on screen today. It is loved by audiences because it demonstrates the full integrity of interpersonal communication. The way people look, the little movements, the speed of their speech, and so on during the conversations are all visible and very real. Secondly, it shows respect for the fundamental right of all people to speak and express their ideas equally, no matter what they are. How to make it better and more comfortable for guests to express themselves requires attention to human feelings and creating a good communication environment. One of the major advantages of new media interview programs is that the choice of venues can be more varied^[3]. This reflects the professional interests of both parties to the interview and also governs the choice of sign and medium, a contextual element that cannot be ignored in both the encoding and decoding processes. This means that different scenes bring different excitement and that each guest is unique and suited to a different scene. The multiple overlapping scenes are set up to create a stable basis for later communication.

Take *Thirteen Invitations* as an example, the venue for the interview with Hao Lei in the eighth issue of the fifth season switched three times, a gallery, a video shop and a bar, where different sparks could be rubbed out in different scenes to extend different views. For example, during the bar interviews, the bar's slightly drunken atmosphere explores the changing nature of popular styles. What was once the mainstream is gradually being niche-sized, while the flow of fresh meat stars has become the mainstream today. Low-childhood has become the aesthetic of today's younger generation, avoidance has even become the norm, and people are unwilling to face up to the problem, only to pass away in the general stream. It was also in the interview that we discovered Hao Lei's almost childlike innocence, her real solitude, her real resilience, her real sensitivity, and vulnerability, even taking the initiative to talk to the host about more details.

The clever use of props is also a prerequisite for creating a good communication environment. When inviting Li as a guest, Xu zhiyuan soothed her with a special drink when they first met and opened up the conversation. We also learn in advance about the guests' personal information, their interests, where they are from, etc. All this preparation is aimed at bringing the interviewees closer together.

4.2. Construct a multi-dimensional perspective and avoid bringing in too many personal views

The host of a talk show is both the organizer of the talk show scene and the interlocutor of the conversation, requiring excellent presentation skills and excellent organizational skills. In an event-based talk show, the host is a rational analyst and judge and needs to understand the horizontal and vertical context of the event. And many new media interviews now combine the two and no longer completely separate them from each other. This requires the host to both drive the atmosphere to establish communication and output ideas, but also to do more information gathering in advance to avoid not being objective and neutral enough to bring in too many personal views, resulting in an awkward scene without reaching a real exchange. It is also important to bear in mind that the pursuit of entertainment and high ratings has resulted in a narrowing of the guests' image, such as overly simplistic and facetious character positioning^[5].

For example, when *Thirteen Invitations* invited Takuya Kimura, the program opened with Mr. Xu Zhiyuan appearing on the streets of Tokyo with an umbrella, looking into the distance and quickly qualifying his interviewee. He is the first superstar of the idol-making industry and it's not free to be an idol seems to be no big problem, which is also the popular definition of an idol. But what is not right is to place this popular impression, too absolutely, on an individual - Takuya Kimura is a super idol, he must not be free, and if he says he is free, he must be distorted. In the follow-up interview, it is easy to see that Xu Zhiyuan asks questions with a prejudiced and inevitably out-of-the-box mentality, trying to get Takuya Kimura to redefine himself. But the reality is that Xu Zhiyuan asked his guests if there would be a time when they would be as fake as in the *Masked Hotel*. Takuya Kimura gave an answer that was very different from the presenter's prejudice I myself am not two-faced. Xu Zhiyuan continued to ask Wouldn't it be more interesting to have a life with many different masks? Would you envy these people? Because in his mind, those moments in the spotlight as a genre-level super idol must have been performed. Long after the two were not on the same page, Xu Zhiyuan still felt that Takuya Kimura's response to the confrontation was a sign of his lack of freedom from being bound by dogma for too long.

While it is true that *Thirteen Invitations* boast of looking at the world with prejudice, it is important

to remember not to be stubborn about one prejudice through to the end when actually starting an interview, otherwise, it is easy to avoid a real conversation. The subject of the interview is still the guest, and the host should be careful to bring in too much of his or her own opinion to guide the guest, turning it into a personal show for the host. There should be a multi-dimensional construction of perspective, a more substantial excavation of detail, and more expressions by the guests.

4.3. Break out of linear questioning and ask more story-neutral eliciting questions

The moderator's questions are the heart of the talk show, and most of the questions asked consist of both closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions quickly give the audience and the presenter basic information, such as "Do you love lamb?" Secondly, for some sensitive questions, it is often possible to get more truthful answers than open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are more likely to open up the conversation, and there is no limit to the variety of answers possible.

A good interview show is one that uncovers more of the guest's story, and story-neutral questioning allows the interviewer to encourage the guest to express himself freely and fluently without pressure to suggest otherwise. Asking complex questions in a story-like manner not only arouses curiosity but also quickly draws the person closer and lowers their guard. This is paired with neutral questions that will greatly reduce the other person's psychological defense, as if this interview is just a family conversation. Of course, complete peace and quiet will lower the audience's expectations, and this is where leading questions are crucial.

Use conflicting points of view to create confrontation and tension. Throughout the discursive space, there is a conscious effort to separate the expression of each other's points of view, allowing for a fiery clash of views between the host and Guest. It is important to remember not to say too much and leave room for the audience's imagination. But the scale is difficult to control, and there are times when the host gets so caught up in the tension that he or she may not even pay attention to what the guest is saying, but pushes the other person in order to get the answer the host himself or herself envisages. So the host has to be tight on the outside and loose on the inside, so that no matter what the scenario is, he or she doesn't mess up, be mindful and not be carried away by the guests.

5. Conclusions

New media talk shows cater well to the individual and diverse lifestyles of today's youth. The rapid development of the medium has also led to a mushrooming of new media talk shows, but with this development also comes with some problems. In the study, it was found that no mechanism can solve all problems, that no sword can be used, and that each platform should adopt the right structure and mechanism for its own environment and personnel conditions. And the topics should be set in a way that is more diverse and close to the audience to understand their needs; a more multidimensional perspective on questioning techniques; the choice of scenes should capture their characteristic diversity. This is how new media talk shows can find a better outlet.

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