

Cognition, Guidance, and Interaction: An Analysis of Innovation Paths in Commentary Programs—A Study Based on the "Breaking the Circle" Phenomenon of *Fengping*

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Abstract. In the context of the era of integrated media, TV news commentary programs are undergoing profound changes. Since 2023, the Elephant News Center has emphasized "integration," breaking down the barriers between media such as radio, television, newspapers, websites, and mobile apps. All communication platforms and business entities have essentially achieved a shift from mere physical "addition" to a chemical "integration." In terms of building a commentary matrix, the Elephant News Center has successively launched commentary and interview brands such as *Elephant News* and *Fengping*, based on previous programs like *Dialogue in Central Plains*. "Let thoughts be sharp, and let consensus be strong." *Fengping* pioneered mobile video commentary for Henan Broadcasting, adhering to the high-end discussion of high-end topics. It has continuously produced viral commentary over its hundreds of episodes, reviving traditional commentary with new vitality on the internet. However, as a "newborn" product, *Fengping* still has room for improvement. This paper takes the video commentary program *Fengping* as a case study, using the "uses and gratifications" theory to examine the "breaking the circle" phenomenon of this video commentary program in the era of integrated media and to analyze its innovative paths, aiming to explore valuable experiences for the innovative development of commentary programs.

Keywords: *Fengping*, uses and gratifications, news commentary, media image, media convergence

1. Introduction

From the 2014 Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integration of Traditional and Emerging Media to the 2020 Opinions on Accelerating the Promotion of Deep Media Integration, China's media convergence development has entered a new stage. In the context of the integrated media era, TV news commentary programs, with their distinct characteristics of guidance and mass appeal, have increasingly gained public attention and popularity [1].

"Setting the agenda, daring to speak out, expressing opinions, and guiding public opinion." After nearly a year of exploration, the Elephant News Commentary Center of Henan Broadcasting and Television has created a high-end commentary matrix, consisting of the flagship commentary program *Fengping*, high-end dialogue programs such as *Qingting*, *Dialogue in Central Plains*, and *Elephant Forum*, as well as rapid commentary programs like *Zhongting*. In 2023, the Elephant News Center was selected as one of the pilot units for media convergence by the National Radio and Television Administration. As an important component of Henan Broadcasting and Television's "dual-platform" development strategy, it encompasses content production and promotion, platform construction and operation, and more. It exhibits four major characteristics: comprehensiveness, innovation, strength, and trendiness. This includes diversified communication platforms, precise all-media dissemination, integrated news resources, and the construction of a new all-media production system that adapts to contemporary trends.



Figure 1. Elephant News and Fengping Program Logos

"Let thoughts be sharp, and let consensus be strong." This is the slogan of *Fengping*, a high-end commentary program of the Elephant News Center. Founded in the midst of media convergence innovation, *Fengping* pioneered mobile video commentary for Henan Broadcasting, bringing fresh perspectives and authoritative voices on major issues and societal hotspots. As a "coordinate of thought amidst the noise," *Fengping* never shies away from speaking out, offering rational and objective commentary to convey ideas and relieve emotions. The program adheres to high-end topics and high-end expressions, with numerous episodes gaining viral popularity. For example, episodes like *Why is Luoyang the New Hotspot*, *Together with Yu and Ji*, and *Medical Anti-Corruption: Don't Throw Mud on the Frontline Workers* garnered over ten million views online, injecting new vitality into traditional commentary. Many netizens have labeled it as a "breaking the circle" phenomenon. However, the research on "breaking the circle" should not stop at macro-level social analysis or superficial discussions; it should also focus on the psychology and behavior of the audience for a more micro-level investigation. In this regard, the "uses and gratifications" theory has been widely applied.

In 1977, Japanese scholar Ikuro Takeuchi made several supplements to the basic model of the "uses and gratifications"^① process proposed by communication scholars such as Katz [2], as shown in Figure 2.

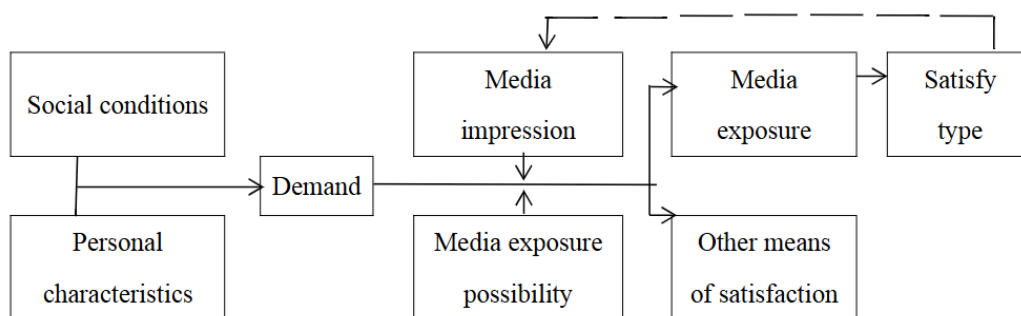


Figure 2. Basic Model of the "Uses and Gratifications" Process

As a new video commentary program launched by the Elephant News Center in 2023, *Fengping* has produced several episodes that have entered the "breaking the circle" stage. However, this does not necessarily mean that the program itself has fully "gone mainstream." This paper uses the commentary program *Fengping* from Henan Broadcasting as a case study to analyze its features such as cognition, guidance, and interaction. Based on the basic model of the "uses and gratifications" process, the paper examines and analyzes the "breaking the circle" phenomenon and the innovative paths of this news commentary program in the era of integrated media.

2. Cognition: Breaking Tradition, Simplified Presentation

With the rapid development of digital technology and integrated media, people, in the context of diversified information, engage with media to understand specific events and satisfy their own specific needs. The occurrence of actual media engagement generally requires two conditions: first, the possibility of accessing the media; and second, the media impression^②, which is the evaluation of whether the media can meet one's practical needs. In the internet era, with the widespread use of mobile devices,

^① Uses and Gratifications Theory: Proposed by E. Katz, this theory focuses on the audience's perspective by analyzing what needs are satisfied through their media exposure, examining the utility that mass communication brings to people. (1974)

^② Media Impression: Proposed by Katz during his study of the uses and gratifications theory, suggesting that the audience's media impression influences their media exposure.

media can use their technology and platforms to connect with audiences more quickly and conveniently [3]. People choose specific media or content based on their previous media experiences to initiate specific engagement behaviors.

As of August 2024, *Fengping*, as a video commentary program, has seen its official Douyin account (under the account name "Commentator Xia Jifeng") grow its fanbase from 25,000 in May to 60,000. *Fengping* has continuously produced viral commentary episodes, including the *Ask the City* series, *Why Has Luoyang Become the Hotspot*, *Together with Yu and Ji*, and *Medical Anti-Corruption: Don't Throw Mud on the Frontline Workers*, all of which have garnered more than 10 million views online. In the "content is king" era, such continuous "breaking the circle" phenomena are inseparable from the strong appeal of the content itself. Other commentary content is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Excerpts from *Fengping* Program Content

Release time	Publish content	Related fields
2024.05.07	Comment Doctors should not be allowed to save lives, heal the wounded, and set off their plans at the same time	Social livelihood events
2024.04.08	Comment Children's "CEO Dream" and Adults' "Allergies"	Social livelihood events
2024.03.22	Comment The Tragedy of Bullying, the Pain of Youth, the Hardship of Being Left Behind, and Legal Issues	Social hot events
2024.03.01	Comment What kind of 'children' does China really need?	Social hot events
2023.10.31	Comment Whose old iron and whose leak are you?	Social hot events

2.1. Coexistence of Online Sensibility and Platform Authority

Users' reliance on media is the fundamental source of media discourse power, and this reliance is primarily reflected in the trustworthiness of the information source, the perspective, and its scarcity [4]. The Elephant News Commentary Center of Henan, with its official background, professional team, and extensive influence, has established a high level of authority in the industry. *Fengping*, part of the Henan Broadcasting and Television Elephant News Commentary Center, pioneered mobile video commentary for Henan Broadcasting. As the official commentary program of Elephant News, *Fengping* plays an important role in information dissemination, policy interpretation, and guiding public opinion. In its commentary reporting, *Fengping* focuses on the interpretation of policies and promotional trends, leveraging its authoritative media image to elevate the promotional reach of the commentary program.

In the fast-developing internet era driven by new media technologies, news commentary has embraced the trend of innovation by integrating with online media, granting commentary programs more potential. *Fengping* has clearly defined its media positioning, exploring new commentary models and communication approaches, while effectively utilizing new media technologies to innovate the format of news commentary reporting. The program aims to shape a new media form that combines "information supply + entertainment services." For example, a commentary released by *Fengping* at the end of October 2023, titled *Who Are You Loyal To? And Who Treats You Like a Tool?*, showcased a distinct sense of online humor and sensibility. By breaking away from the traditional serious tone of commentary, the program reshaped the audience's stereotypical perception of news commentary^①. The combination of online discourse and official rhetoric successfully attracted a significant following.

2.2. Supporting Science Popularization Promotes Simplification of Text

Scholar Richard West and others believe that to fully explain and understand the meaning of information, one must consider both "the historical context of speech acts" and "the interaction between participants" [4]. As shown in Table 1, *Fengping* uses topics of interest to the general public as its entry point, with content largely focused on social and livelihood-related issues. For example, in the commentary released on May 7, 2024, titled *Doctors Shouldn't Have to Both Save Lives and "Calculate Profits"*, commentator Xia Jifeng comments on the phenomenon of hospitals refusing to admit "complex patients." This issue is related to

^① Stereotype: In social psychology, this refers to a generalized and fixed view that people form about a certain thing, assuming that the entire group or entity possesses a specific characteristic while ignoring individual differences.

the current implementation of the DRG policy^②, which remains unfamiliar to many members of the public. Commentaries that fulfill the audience's cognitive needs emphasize providing information to enrich public understanding. The program adopts a format of "animated illustrations + explanatory examples" to clarify complex concepts for the public. Important points are presented with subtitles and visual aids, enhancing the structure and coherence of the commentary. The commentator supplements the news events or social information (such as professional terminology) with auxiliary explanations to remove barriers to audience comprehension, thereby promoting stronger information reception.



Figure 3. Screenshot from the video "Doctors Shouldn't Have to Both Save Lives and 'Calculate Profits'"

Fengping dares to experiment with new commentary formats, intertwining online discourse with official rhetoric, transforming didacticism into explanation, and closing the gap between the program and its audience. Additionally, through the use of visual aids, complex information is simplified. By focusing on the interpretation and promotion of national policies and relying on its official authority, the program successfully shapes a media image that is recognized by society and accepted by the public.

3. Guidance: Rational Argumentation, Emotional Elevation

In the complex and chaotic landscape of public opinion, media platforms must not only transmit information but also play the roles of "regulator" and "mediator." Value guidance is the primary goal of commentary programs. As new media continue to develop and merge deeply, competition among programs has reached a fierce level. The professional competence and role positioning of hosts or commentators indirectly affect the quality of the programs [1].

Fengping guides the public to think rationally with correct public opinion and is dedicated to addressing pain points and challenges in daily life. Public opinion is the "skin" of society, acting as its protective outer layer [5]. Neumann^③ believes that public opinion plays an important role in maintaining social cohesion, similar to how the skin, as a "container," prevents the disintegration of society caused by excessive opinion fragmentation [2]. In the face of major social events, media platforms place significant emphasis on the application of emotional factors in the dissemination of public opinion, aligning with the audience's tendency toward emotionally charged reading. By deeply exploring the emotional aspects of report materials, commentary aims not only to present rational authority but also to evoke empathy and convey warmth. *Fengping* extracts emotional elements from rational materials, building value resonance with its audience. It integrates appropriate emotional expression into the commentary, maintaining an ideological orientation while correcting irrational voices from the internet.

In terms of *Fengping's* discourse logic, the program places great emphasis on the relevance and proximity of its arguments, presenting both rational logic and emotional reasoning simultaneously. Behind the emotional material lies rational insight. In addressing the tragic incident of a middle school student in Handan who was bullied to death, *Fengping* expressed deep sorrow over the tragedy while highlighting relevant social issues such as "left-behind children." Citing a report from the Women's Federation, the program pointed out that at one point, left-behind children accounted for 70% of juvenile crimes. Additionally, *Fengping* provided commentary on the widely discussed case of a boy who expressed his ambition to become a bank president and inherit his family's wealth. The commentator offered personal insights, stating that as educators or adults, the focus should be on guiding the child's healthy development, rather than publicly "exposing" him through a form of denunciation. However, some netizens argued that privacy and healthy development should take a back seat to societal concerns and that the boy's family background should be thoroughly investigated. In response, the commentator remarked, "A child's dream of becoming a bank president is not a problem; what is problematic is the public's deep scrutiny and criticism of that dream." Regarding the act of publicly sharing the boy's video, the commentator questioned, "Where are his rights? Who will protect the child's privacy?" The commentator simplified profound truths, using a rhetorical tone to provoke thoughtful reflection from the audience.

^② DRG: Diagnosis-Related Groups, an important tool used to measure the quality and efficiency of medical services and for healthcare payment systems.

^③ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann: A German mass media scholar and political scientist, author of *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social Skin*, published in 1980. (1916–2010)

Fengping is adept at considering issues from the perspective of the public, fully respecting the emotional demands of various interest groups. In terms of topic selection, the program often chooses subjects closely related to the daily lives of the people. "Concerns about people's livelihoods and the country's future" have always been focal topics at the annual National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. On March 1, 2024, Elephant News' *Fengping* released a commentary titled *What Kind of 'Children' Does China Really Need?*, which was shared by the China Media Group (CCTV) and featured on the homepage of the People's Daily app, gaining over 10 million views across the internet. In this commentary, commentator Xia Jifeng put humanistic care into practice by using the platform to present the demands of students and reflect real-world problems, while also encouraging deeper audience reflection. The question "What kind of 'children' does China really need?" actually addresses the broader issue of what kind of future China requires. Yuan Pingfang, Deputy Secretary-General of the Network Culture Work Committee of the China Culture Management Association, pointed out that *Fengping* posed this profound question as a critique of the lack of soul in the current educational system.

Fengping consistently ensures that it does not miss or remain silent on important events. While highlighting the rationality and responsibility of authoritative media, it also reinforces the audience's rational thinking through the emotional material presented. The program fulfills the audience's need for both information and emotional connection. By offering commentary on major reports, *Fengping* guides the audience to uncover the rational insights behind societal events, constructing a comprehensive and profound commentary system, thereby achieving the goal of positively guiding public opinion.

4. Interaction: Multi-Platform Synchronization, Insufficient Integration

Focusing on the people is the core purpose of news commentary programs. As a media form that emphasizes both content and interaction, one of the prominent advantages of integrated media is its ability to facilitate real-time communication between the media and the audience [6]. The Elephant News Center underwent institutional reforms to stimulate internal drive through media integration, aiming to build a diversified, integrated, and modern communication system. It focuses on news and key programs, covering a range of formats including television, radio, text, and video. Flagship programs such as *Dialogue with People's Livelihood*, *Qingting*, and *Fengping* have been established, achieving simultaneous broadcasting on both large and small screens with the Elephant News app for four hours daily. In the era of integrated media, advancements in media technology have transformed the ways in which news is produced and disseminated. As a mobile-end video commentary program of Henan Broadcasting, *Fengping* is not limited to platforms like Douyin short videos and WeChat public accounts. The Elephant News website is also one of its main platforms for dissemination. The program uses a combination of video, text, and images to achieve multidimensional communication, leveraging the advantages of integrated media to transform commentary reporting into a youthful and internet-friendly expression.

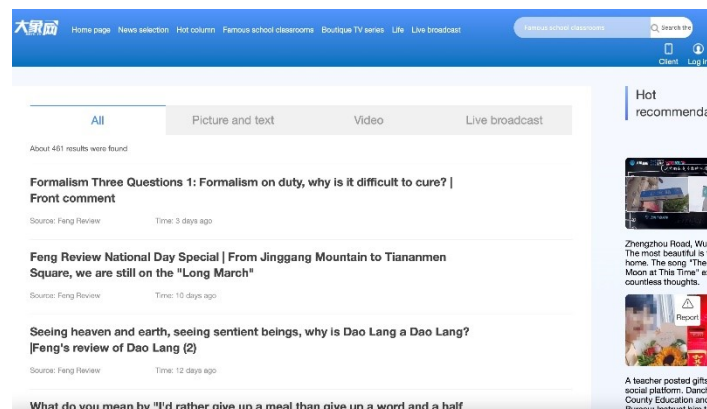


Figure 4. Screenshot of *Fengping*'s Web Page on PC

In the era of integrated media, interactivity has become an indispensable part of commentary programs. "Breaking the circle" is essentially about communication and integration, which form the foundation for achieving innovation. As shown in Figure 4, *Fengping* is primarily divided into two main categories: text and video. Although it includes a live broadcast section, no search results are available. The text content is mostly derived from video screenshots, presented in an alternating format of "text + video screenshots," while the videos are mainly centered on narrations without background music or sound effects. Overall, the interactivity between *Fengping* and its audience is relatively weak. For example, on Douyin, the fan base and the number of likes are not particularly high compared to other commentary programs. For instance, *Xiao Qiang's Quick Commentary* by the Guangdong Broadcasting and Television News Center was launched in 2020, and within a year, it garnered more than 3 million followers.

The success of "breaking the circle" means that a work or individual can transcend its original boundaries and reach a broader audience, thereby gaining more attention and influence. In the author's view, *Fengping*'s so-called "breaking the circle" should not be limited to commentary on certain public opinion events. What truly determines the success of "breaking the circle" lies in the enthusiasm of core fans, the engagement of ordinary followers, and the curiosity of the general public. How *Fengping* evolves from "small-scale" circle-breaking to a "phenomenon-level" circle-breaking remains a current focal point.

Based on the above analysis, the program could enhance its content by adding vivid visual charts, appropriate sound effects, or using animation and simulated imagery technologies to attract more viewers. For instance, *News 1+1*, a deep-dive news commentary program by CCTV, places great emphasis on the presentation of data, which strengthens the persuasiveness of its commentary reports and increases audience engagement. According to McLuhan's media theory^④, the use of any medium alters the balance of human senses, generating different psychological effects and shaping our perception of the external world [2]. Taking *Fengping*'s web-based platform as an example, the program could utilize the live broadcast section (as shown in Figure 4) by creating online live streaming rooms where audience comments and messages are displayed on a large screen in the studio in real-time. Through this form of online interaction, viewers can "watch and chat" simultaneously, enhancing their engagement and participation. By incorporating live questions and feedback into the broadcast, the live section could be fully utilized, thereby strengthening the viewers' attachment to the media product and fostering long-term loyalty among users.

5. Conclusion

Fengping boldly experiments with new commentary reporting models, intertwining online discourse with official rhetoric, incorporating supportive popular science explanations, and transforming didacticism into accessible explanations. The program simplifies profound truths and uses a rhetorical tone to provoke audience reflection. *Fengping* strives to achieve a balance in its commentary by conveying rational authority while also appealing to emotions and delivering warmth, thus fulfilling both the informational and emotional needs of the audience. The program presents both rational logic and emotional reasoning simultaneously, extracting emotional elements from rational materials and reflecting rational insights behind emotional content. This approach builds value resonance with the audience and maintains an ideological guiding principle, correcting irrational voices on the internet and shaping a media image that is both socially recognized and well-received by the public. In doing so, *Fengping* aims to create a harmonious online environment for its audience.

The development of media convergence promotes technological upgrades in news dissemination practices, allowing traditional media to leverage internet thinking for content empowerment. Through an examination of the "breaking the circle" phenomenon of *Fengping*, the author concludes that this commentary program showcases innovative forms of dissemination and content presentation in the era of integrated media. The breakthrough of the linear dissemination model indicates that the development of commentary programs in the integrated media era requires maintaining professionalism and depth while continually expanding dissemination platforms, innovating content formats, enhancing interactivity, and strengthening media brand building and operation. For *Fengping*, the concept of "breaking the circle" should not be limited to commentary on certain public opinion events. To achieve true phenomenon-level "breaking the circle," both content innovation and brand building and operation are indispensable.

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^④ Marshall McLuhan: A 20th-century original media theorist and thinker from Canada, best known for his work *Understanding Media*, among others. (1911–1980)