

The Digital Transformation of Newspapers

- Taking People's Daily as an Example

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Abstract: People's Daily is one of the most important party newspapers and one of the largest comprehensive dailies in China, with the main task of reporting on the major policies of the Party and the State, social, economic and cultural development. With the rapid development of information technology and the popularity of the Internet, traditional media are facing great challenges. The circulation and influence of paper newspapers and magazines are gradually declining, while the rise of digital media has brought a brand new competition pattern and development opportunities to traditional media. By analyzing the digital transformation process of People's Daily, this paper concludes that *People's Daily* has effectively used digital technology to expand multimedia content and enhance social media interaction, and these measures have significantly increased its influence and reader engagement. Through the case of *People's Daily*, it can be seen that digital transformation is of great significance in optimizing the national information dissemination system and promoting the diversification and democratization of social information dissemination. It is hoped that the digital transformation of People's Daily can be used as an example to provide reference and guidance for the digital transformation of other traditional media.

Keywords: *People's Daily*, digital transformation, newspaper, social media platform

1. Introduction

Against the background of the rapid development of information technology and the popularization of the Internet, traditional media are facing great challenges. As one of the most important party newspapers in China, *People's Daily* carries the important mission of reporting on the major guidelines and policies of the Party and the State, as well as social, economic, and cultural development. It is also one of the largest comprehensive dailies in China, whose history, status and influence cannot be ignored. However, with the rise of digital media, traditional media's paper circulation and influence have gradually declined, ushering in a new competitive landscape and development opportunities. This study aims to explore the history, status, and influence of *People's Daily* in depth through the case study method, and introduce the impact of the digital era on traditional media and the concept and significance of digital transformation. The importance of the study is not only to deepen the understanding of the challenges and opportunities of traditional media in the digital era but also to provide reference and guidance for the digital transformation of other traditional media. In addition, the optimization of the national information dissemination

system, the promotion of pluralism and democratization of social information dissemination, as well as the inheritance and development of Chinese media culture, are also of great significance to this study.

2. Digital transformation process of the *People's Daily*

2.1. Creation of the official website (1997) - *People's Daily* Online

In 1994, China accessed the Internet for the first time, and its unique openness, interactivity, mass and personalization prompted the transformation of paper media from a single form to a digital form [1]. January 1, 1997, the online version of *People's Daily* was officially launched, which for the first time replicated the original newspaper's content, colors and layout on the Internet; in January 1998, the online version of *People's Daily* was launched in English; in August 2000, the online version of *People's Daily* was officially renamed People's Net, which built a graphic database of *People's Daily*, integrated internal and external resources, and built a comprehensive portal site. In August 2000, the online version of *People's Daily* was officially renamed as People's Daily.com, and a *People's Daily* graphic database was set up, integrating internal and external resources to build a comprehensive portal website. Internet penetration on average does reduce the overall growth of newspaper revenues [2]. 2005 saw the launch of "Mobile People's Daily", which was the first mobile phone website operated by the mainstream media; and on August 1, 2009, *People's Daily* was launched in Tibetan, which was also China's first Tibetan-language website. On August 1, 2009, the Tibetan edition of the *People's Daily* was published, making it the first organ of the Party Central Committee in China to be published in the languages of ethnic minorities.

2.2. Social media registration for official accounts (2010s)

Digitization has fundamentally changed and disrupted the dynamics of the economy, society, and markets [3]. At a time when the Internet is in full swing, every industry has thrown itself into the creation of a new media matrix [4]. After 2010, social clients such as WeChat and Weibo appeared, and *People's Daily* registered WeChat and Weibo official accounts while plowing into the *People's Daily* website. "The WeChat public number of *People's Daily*, with the slogan "Engage in communication, record the times", has more than 3 million active followers, and the number of followers of *People's Daily*'s microblog has exceeded 150 million. 2011, *People's Daily* began to register accounts on overseas social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter; in November 2019, five new sub-accounts were added, each focusing on cultural tourism, scientific and technological achievements, business dynamics, fashion and entertainment, and outputting more refined and diversified high-quality content to overseas social media users through pictures and videos.

2.3. Creation of an independent official application - multimedia convergence

Under the new media environment, information channels have become more diversified, information explosion and overload have become the norm, providing users with high-quality content has become a must for every mobile news client, and the concept of "content is king" is still prevalent. In 2014, the *People's Daily* launched a news client, and within six months it reached 25 million downloads, and in February 2015, it reached 100 million downloads. downloads, and in February 2015, its downloads reached 100 million. For paper media, going towards media integration means going towards new media, providing an Internet platform for the content produced by paper media, and launching news clients. This is an important initiative of media integration, which is not an electronic version of

newspapers, but a mobile network news platform with stronger timeliness, a larger news capacity and more characteristics.

3. The People's Daily digital transformation strategy

3.1. Cross-platform communication

Many people use their mobile devices to consume news, and Pew Research studies have shown that most people get their news directly from their mobile devices, primarily smartphones [5]. Increasing the stickiness of the media matrix and enabling linkages between platforms is key to digital transformation [6]. Since the *People's Daily* founded the *People's Daily* website, it has not only focused on the electronic publication of newspapers and magazines, but also, as one of China's largest comprehensive dailies, has continued to expand the reach of its news content on the ever-changing Internet platform. Especially with the short video platform of Jitterbug as an example, mainstream media stationed in the operation of short video accounts can achieve the integration and development of their high-quality material and Jitterbug's creative advantages, which can not only expand the effect of news dissemination, but also bring a better news viewing experience for the public [7]. Mainstream media, with high authority and credibility, have certain advantages in the push mechanism and traffic distribution of the ShakeEn platform, and their video news will be actively presented in the "Recommended" column, so that the news can quickly attract the attention of the public, expanding the scope of the placement, increasing the traffic, and achieving the expected dissemination effect. The official account of *People's Daily* Shake has now reached 170 million followers, with an average of 1.124 million video likes.

3.2. Cross-cultural communication

Focusing on global hotspots and international affairs, *People's Daily* reports news and developments around the world on time. Through in-depth analyses and commentaries on international issues, *People's Daily* conveys China's voice and position to readers and promotes mutual understanding and exchanges between China and the world. With more languages and greater cultural inclusiveness to let the reports cover and reach a wider range of people, the extension of communication positions is both the title of news dissemination and the use of digital transformation [1].

3.3. Improvement of technical skills

Technological innovation (particular digitalization) is creating drastic changes in many industries in ways that go beyond expected Schumpeterian shocks to patterns more reflective of chaotic systems [8]. In the Web 2.0 era, mainstream media began to cross the border to build the "two micro one end" news dissemination matrix, which opened up a new situation of news content production and distribution [7]. *People's Daily* has followed the trend of technology development and actively introduced and applied new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data and cloud computing, to improve the intelligence of content production, dissemination and service. Being recognised as an emerging factor of today's journalism within the digital environment, immediacy continues to pose a conflicting value for conventional media that has been undergoing digital-first transformation [9]. For example, artificial intelligence technology is used for news content recommendation and public opinion analysis to improve the accuracy and efficiency of information services. Digital transformation has been carried out in content production to improve the efficiency and quality of content production by introducing digital tools and technologies. Digital reorientation strategies focus on the development of new resources and capabilities that support emerging business models and subsequently lead to successful organizational transformation [8]. At the same time, it focuses on

the digital presentation of content, such as adopting visual and interactive ways to display news content and enhance readers' reading experiences. *People's Daily* collects and analyses user data to understand readers' needs and preferences, providing data support for content production, dissemination and services.

3.4. Cross-circuit communication

Media convergence is fundamentally a comprehensive strategy adopted by traditional communication organizations to cope with the impact of the digital era [1]. *People's Daily* provides diversified content for users of different ages. For young users, it focuses on providing cutting-edge information on fashion, science and technology, and culture; for middle-aged and old-aged users, it focuses more on social, health, and education reports. Meanwhile, the customization service of the *People's Daily* section allows users to choose specific news sections or topics according to their interests and needs, a service that applies not only to different age groups but also to users of different social statuses. In the *People's Daily* App, interactive and social functions have been added, such as commenting, sharing, and liking, etc. These functions help to break down the barriers of age and social status, so that users from different circles can participate in the discussion of news. For some reports involving social hotspots and sensitive topics, *People's Daily* will adopt a more in-depth and comprehensive interpretation approach to help users understand the reasons and background behind the events. This strategy not only helps to meet the needs of users from different circles but also serves to educate and guide them.

4. Insights from the Digital Transformation of the People's Daily

4.1. For the party media

The digital transformation practice of the *People's Daily* shows that party media need to keep pace with the development of science and technology and actively embrace digital trends. The introduction of new technologies and applications can enhance communication efficiency, expand the scope of communication, and better serve the cause of the party and the people. Party media have rejuvenated themselves by boldly embracing the infotainment [10]. Digital transformation also provides party media with more diversified content presentations and richer information sources. At the same time, party media need to focus on content innovation and create quality content with local characteristics to meet the diversified needs of readers. As a party media, *People's Daily* has always adhered to the attributes of party media in the process of digital transformation, and conveyed the voice and policies of the party. So in the process of digital transformation, the party media needs to adhere to their mission and responsibilities and strengthen their function of guiding public opinion. Through in-depth coverage of social hotspots and livelihood issues, it delivers the party's voice and policies promptly, guides the direction of social opinion, and maintains social stability and harmony.

4.2. For traditional newspapers

The digital transformation practice of the *People's Daily* shows that traditional newspapers must accelerate the pace of digital transformation to adapt to the development trend of the digital era. This includes building official websites, developing mobile applications, using social media platforms, and other ways to expand information dissemination channels and enhance readers' interactive experiences. The digital transformation has made information dissemination more rapid and widespread, but content is always the core competitiveness of the media. Traditional newspapers need to pay more attention to content innovation and create high-quality content with local characteristics to meet the diversified needs of readers. It is also important to focus on the timeliness

and depth of content to provide valuable information and opinions. Digital transformation has also promoted cross-border integration and innovation in the media industry. Traditional newspapers can actively integrate with new technologies and applications, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality, to explore new ways of information dissemination and business models. At the same time, they can also engage in cross-border cooperation with other industries to jointly create digital products and services with local characteristics.

5. Conclusion

The *People's Daily's* path of digital transformation provides valuable experience and inspiration for the traditional media industry. Digital reorientation is a technology-enabled, simultaneous and multilevel change that transforms the organization's core architecture and the way it serves its customers [8]. In the process of transformation, it has effectively utilized digital technology, expanded multimedia content and enhanced social media interaction, measures that have significantly increased its influence and reader engagement. By analyzing the data and content, we can see that the digitally transformed *People's Daily* has attracted more readers' attention and engagement, proving the effectiveness of its transformation strategy.

This study not only delves into the challenges and opportunities of traditional media in the digital era but also provides lessons and guidance for other traditional media. Through the case of *People's Daily*, it can be seen that digital transformation is of great significance in optimizing the national information dissemination system and promoting the diversification and democratization of social information dissemination. At the same time, it also injects new vigor into the inheritance and development of Chinese media culture.

However, this study also has some shortcomings. The limitations of data sources and the lack of horizontal comparison with other physical newspapers make the comprehensiveness and objectivity of the study's conclusions somewhat affected. Future research can further broaden the data sources and increase cross-sectional comparisons to more comprehensively assess the effects of digital transformation. Looking ahead, with the rapid development of AI technology, whether newspapers and magazines can appear in a more convenient form to the public through AI technology is a direction worthy of in-depth research. This will open up new paths for the digital transformation of traditional media and bring greater innovation and change to information dissemination.

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