

Research on Value Realization Strategies of Online News Reporting-based on Analysis of Parts of the 2017 Online Journalism Awards Winners

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Abstract

The Internet is very popular and highly developed nowadays. Online news has increasingly become an important source of public access to information. How to retain audiences through high-quality content and product experience greatly concerns many online news producers. Based on highlights of parts of the 2017 Online Journalism Awards winners, this paper elaborates on how online news reporting differs from traditional reporting in terms of content narrative, forms of expression, audience participation, and transmission of journalistic news values. This paper also explores how to enhance product experience of audiences in reading online news from four aspects which are promoting technical innovation and taking content into account, integrating high-quality resources and taking advantage of media convergence, tapping potentials of audience participation, and last meeting personalized and diversified needs.

Keywords: online news, forms of expression, product experience, Online Journalism Awards.

Introduction

According to the 4th World Internet Conference (December, 2017), the total number of Internet users worldwide reached 3.89 billion, with a coverage rate of 51.7 % by June, 2017 (*Report on World Internet Development, 2017*). With the rapid development and proliferation of the Internet, Internet-based news has become an increasingly important source of public access to information. An American professor in San Jose State University pointed out that online journalism not only conveys in-depth information as print journalism does, but also has timeliness of television because it can instantly update and provide live videos and audios (Richard, 2005). Audiences can reach any website to learn more if they are willing to check online. In addition, the standards and forms of online news have still been continuously changing. At present, more and more journalists are flocking to participate in online news reporting and struggling to explore it further, which lead to endless online news reports. For one thing, those reports are conducive to meeting audiences' needs of requiring information. For another, the uneven quality of online news reports may tire audiences. Therefore, how to attract audiences and enhance stickiness through better content and product experience via ever-changing technology in such a new field is still a top priority that most online news producers are worried about and need to think deeply and then resolve.

There are numerous researches on online journalism. Relevant works are almost about the following three aspects: trust in online journalism, audiences' role and influential factors of online news production.

Some scholars are keen on analyzing trust in online journalism and treats of why it matters and how it works. Katherine M. Grosser (2016) focuses on its contemporary significance and points out that “more and more people are turning to online journalism in today’s digital age, and hence trust in online journalism is increasingly important”. To guarantee trust and draw audiences’ attention, journalistic quality is an important part. Ville J. E. Manninen (2017) favors “careful source selection” to make news reliable. Further, Manninen figures out five distinctive rationales of source use: “the ideological, the pragmatic, the cynically pragmatic, the consensual, and the contextual trust”. He concludes that “different trust discourses are associated with different source types, influences, and forms and degrees of source critique”. Moreover, integrating user-generated content (UGC) can also influence the journalistic quality, and regarding the mode of integration, the verification of UGC to some extent positively increases trustworthiness (Katherine, Valerie & Florian, 2017).

In addition, many scholars are concerned about audiences’ role in online journalism and conduct related researches. For example, Peter Dahlgren (2013) combines professional online journalism with web-based civic participation, pointing out that “Participatory journalism unavoidably evokes normative issues that professional journalism has always grappled with”, and interfaces with horizons of civic cosmopolitanism and those of a dilemma-ridden professional journalism are comprised in the final section. Some scholars also notice the new landscape of online journalism under citizen participation in news, and compare different online news systems in terms of how much power they give to citizens at each stage of the news production process based on the analysis of 32 online news systems (Jonathan, David & Pauline, 2015).

The third aspect that some scholars are interested in is to study influential factors of online news production. Rapidly evolving internet technologies and the interest in monitoring web traffic numbers have influenced and changed the basic journalistic work processes (Dimitrios, Efstathios, Sotiria & Andreas, 2018). The innovative techniques are also helpful to maximize production of online news. Steen Steensen (2009) attaches great importance to individual action and says “individual action has been downplayed in previous research as a determinant for processes of innovation in online newsrooms”.

Differently, this paper focuses on the online news operation. Based on analysis of recent excellent online news works, it sums up the huge advantages brought by new resources of news and new technologies which make online news reporting differentiate from traditional one. Then, this paper further discusses the value realization strategies of online news reporting, hoping to provide reference for more excellent works in the future.

Method

Design

This paper used a conventional approach to content analysis. The advantage of this approach is gaining direct information from study participants without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives. (Hsiu & Sarah, 2005). 10 participants (5 males and 5 females) at random were recruited for this type of study and they are all interested in online news reporting. They were required to read three of the 2017 Online Journalism Awards winners that can be

repeatedly used. Later, these participants would be asked open-ended questions to know what attracted them mostly and why was it.

Sample selection

According to the official website of Online Journalism Awards, "The Online Journalism Awards (OJAs), launched in May 2000, are the only comprehensive set of journalism prizes honoring excellence in digital journalism around the world." In China, the authoritative media, People's Daily Online (a large-scale online news publishing platform built by the People's Daily, one of the ten largest newspapers in the world) pointed out that the American Online Journalism Awards, as the philanthropy news awards, are to reward outstanding works and institutions of the journalism industry. Meanwhile, they are also the highest awards of online media and known as the "Online Pulitzer". As awards have been further categorized, the types of entries and winners have been continuously enriched and their highlights have been more prominent. In this regard, these awards can provide more reference for other traditional news reporting.

Materials

To understand the participants' reading experiences better, we posed the following open-ended questions:

1. What are the most successful aspects of these online news reports in your mind?
2. Which ways among those successes specifically attract you?
3. Are you aware that you are actively participating in online news coverage?
4. If so, which aspect contributed to your participation and how did you feel?
5. If not, what do you think stemmed your participation?
6. What do you think these online news reports have brought to you?
7. What do you think are the shortcomings of current online news coverage? Do you have any expectations for future online news reporting?
8. What else do you want to say about online news coverage?

Through these interviews, we integrate participants' feedback with our own understanding about those 2017 Online Journalism Awards winners and give the following details.

Analysis: operational advantages of online news reporting compared with traditional news reporting

Hypertext narrative features: openness and diversity

Encyclopedia Britannica defines "hypertext" as follows: Hypertext, also called Hyperlinking, the linking of related pieces of information by electronic connections in order to allow a user easy access between them. Hypertext links can also connect text with pictures, sounds, or animated sequences. The hypertext is an electronic form of non-linear writing, which allows audiences to link to more information resources through a multi-linear word network. Through this interactivity, audiences can link to texts and go through them freely, and even they can establish their own links (Alexandra, 2010). In terms of online news, due to its unique media attributes, it is doomed to be different from traditional news reporting in content narrative and these differences are more likely to be exemplified in hypertext narrative features: openness and diversity.

In terms of openness, hypertext allows audiences to use hyperlinks that can link various types of texts on the Internet platform to form an open mesh information system, which

effectively gets rid of closeness and limitations of texts in traditional reporting. In terms of 2017 Online Journalism Awards winners, *The Wall*, *Trump Charities* and other reports have successfully added related hyperlinks. Taking *The Wall* as an example, there are many hyperlinks in the entire news, and they mostly link to outer texts, which effectively extend content of this report. To be specific, it not only covers the building details of process and its impact, but also provides the complementary information for relevant persons and source news to enhance credibility of conclusions. For audiences, they can selectively read according to their own information preferences. While enjoying more efficient access to more information, they are enjoyable to read due to enhanced readability.

In terms of diversity, hypertext is mainly exemplified in adapting innovative multiple narrative carriers including words that is the only carrier in the tradition news reporting, and more and more new carriers making it possible to present various types of materials. The award-winning work *Fragments of a Life: A Curbside Mystery* is a proper example to engage audience and make use of vision in narrative. This report adapts real scenario creation, pictures, sounds and other forms of expression to convey information, and it features UGC (User Generated Content) which means audiences are regarded as the central force. All of these contribute to the integrated informative content of this report. The winner “The Wall” uses the self-developed tools to turn data into sound, and these sounds are applied to map the border through a wall sonification. This brilliant use of audio narrative thinks outside of the box and completely allows the unlimited possibilities of the online reporting. On the one hand, this innovative “auditory” approach immerses audiences in news reports; on the other hand, it also proves that sounds can not only be applied on the screen to join the narrative, but also serve directly to present information in the new media era.

Creative forms of expression supported by multimedia convergence

With the continuous development of new media technologies, innovative forms of content expression based on the integration of different technologies in online news reporting have a new surprising power compared with traditional news reporting. Generally, all the 2017 Online Journalism Awards winners integrate various forms of expression (such as audio, video, live broadcast, animation, maps, data, hyperlinks, comics, VR technology, etc.), and make use of expression methods to serve content narrative. There is no doubt that the proper use of new technologies can really add color to news reporting and also provide more possibilities of meeting audiences’ needs. For example, the award-winning works *Doctors & Sex Abuse* and *Dope Sick* invariably both use a short video to tell stories. This short video is a highly refined version of the text in order to selectively convey information. Besides, this form provides a great deal of convenience for audiences to obtain information, and it is also conducive to meeting different reading needs of audiences. In addition, the “immersive” experience VR (Virtual Reality) technology brings is a unique highlight in online news. Virtual reality itself emphasizes audiences’ participation in the artificial scene, so it enables audiences to experience visual and emotional effect from the perspective of witnesses. Some works apply data visualization to convey massive information in order and provide audiences with convenience to receive messages, like *Francesco Totti King of Rome*, *Trump Charities* and *Weigh Anchor*. All of above visual narrative based on different forms of expression aims to guarantee audiences a wonderful sensory experience. Therefore, audiences are no longer limited to only knowing information, but more importantly, have their thoughts and feelings echoed in the overall product experience.

In addition, online news producers are often not only satisfied to apply a single or a collection of technologies, but also pursue the innovative content-oriented applications. For

example, *After Solitary*, which won Excellence in Immersive Storytelling, applies the original VR technology to synthesize thousands of real prison photos into panoramic images and further explores the boundaries of immersive reporting, providing new reference for topic presentation. Another example is *Election 2016*, WBUR. This work presents a live-updating, town-by-town map of Massachusetts voting results embodied via NPR (National Public Radio) and AP (Associated Press). Intriguingly, this map pairs with live coverage and analysis, demonstrating the great values and advantages of social media as reporting tools.

Advantages of online reporting and multimedia narrative in promoting audience participation

“Mass-orientation” is one of the core principles that must be addressed in production and promotion of online and print news. However, it is obvious that online news reporting based on the Internet and new media technologies is more effective to attract audiences. On the one hand, it attributes that technologies themselves hold that can drive audiences to participate in narration. For example, the VR panoramic technology creates an immersive feeling for audiences. Audiences as the subjects will actively participate in news, and understand hidden meanings by themselves. On the other hand, the application of multimedia and multi-channels contributes to audience participation. For example, *Fragments of a Life: A Curbside Mystery* took advantage of real-time interaction with audiences via Facebook, effectively stimulating them to participate in the whole process of news reporting; thus, maintaining this report as a hot spot. *The Wall* also ingeniously posts topics and cooperates with NPR to invite audiences to make their own music at Snap Judgment for the #wallrapchallenge. These above examples will undoubtedly show that online news reporting has huge inborn advantages in attracting audiences. To summarize, they can promote audience interaction through multiple technologies, and they can also easily get rid of their own limitations with the aids of other channels and multimedia.

Multi-dimensional news values transmitting system

Both news itself and its values extension are the focuses in traditional and online news coverage. Although they have many similarities in presentation and transmission of news values, online news reporting has the multi-dimensional transmitting advantages and even conveys more values with a more profound influence due to unique attributes of online media.

Winners of the 2017 Online Journalism Awards express different news values, and the relative universal value was people-oriented. Based on this concept, through content extension, platform promotion, audience participation and other linkage effects, news values will be extended in multiple directions. For example, *Dope Sick* stands out for its hypertext advantages. Its openness and diversity contribute to transmit news values, and massive researches of authoritative departments are quoted to tell stories. So audiences will have deeper understanding about lethality of fentanyl and narcotics in the very shocking storyline. Meanwhile, educational significance for individuals and society stand out again. Another example is “immersive reporting”. It consists of the following steps: sensory information presentation, intuitive information acquisition, experience-based spiritual insights—to extend and enrich content, promoting audiences to truly experience this event while also effectively enriching news values. In addition, the unlimited openness of online media allows online news values to spread in a large scale. Another point is that these excellent works also pay more attention to ethical issues. For example, *Doctors & Sex Abuse* deals with the sensitive privacy issue by using cartoons to recreate real events, carefully processing details in video, etc. Thus, journalistic professionalism and journalistic ethics obviously unfold in this coverage. Besides, website designers deliberately provide a help channel to cope with sexual misconduct with patients, deliberately spreading an

obvious value that patients especially females need more protection and respect. To conclude, all the above show that online news reporting possesses advantages of transmitting multi-dimensional news values, and humanism is the main focus. This trend is commendable in the new media era.

Promoting technical improvement and innovation, and taking content into account

As far as the current media environment is concerned, the continuous development, perfection, and innovative use of digitization, interaction, and other forms of multimedia are undoubtedly trending. Forms function, to a large extent, as the content to convey information, and some scholars even put forward that forms are part of the content. Therefore, how to build more new reporting modes and promote more experiences through improvement and original use of multimedia technologies and their extensive tools is the direction that many news practitioners must stick to. Specifically, the implementation of technological perfection and innovation is still supposed to insist on "people-oriented" principle. For example, webpages, as the most basic vehicles for online news, should carry related elements for audiences' comfort, and other kinds of auditory and visual expression is also supposed to adhere to this principle. For example, in the immersive news that applies VR panoramic technology, some issues need more careful consideration like whether audiences can be immersed into the virtual scenarios as the protagonists, whether the report can truly achieve the highest degree of ideal immersion and whether this innovative form can be accepted by most audiences, etc. At the same time, new technologies should be compatible with the media literacy levels of audiences and properly deal with the negative impact of "over-medialization". In addition, in terms of innovative use of technology, practitioners can neither pursue quick success nor accept the status quo. Instead, they should actively explore and expand technological appliances with the aids of existing technological advantages, taking into account audiences' demands and serving the purpose of reporting the real news.

These awards honor data journalism, visual digital storytelling, investigative journalism, public service, technical innovation and general excellence. It is obvious that content creativity and technological innovation are core values throughout the evaluation system of Online Journalism Awards. They are great reminders for the majority of online news producers that the originality of content must be taken into consideration even though more attention is paid to formal innovation at present. The principle of "Content is king" will not disappear with the rise of technology, but will instead play a more important role in online news reporting. Specifically, many news principles, such as "objectively reporting", "accurately and faithfully presenting facts" and "balancing multiple sources" from traditional news reporting, require news practitioners to internalize and utilize in practice. Based on these, online news reporting maintains and enhances online news values, and also caters for reasonable demands of audiences.

Integrating high-quality resources and taking advantage of media convergence

At present, media convergence has become an important feature in the whole media ecological environment. How to make the most of these integrated and high-quality resources has been an urgent issue for journalists to think about.

The advantages of media convergence are first manifested in integration and linkage of media technologies, functions and the content, which strongly break the cycle of the specific content and the specific media platform binding. Practitioners should realize this point and make full use of it. Taking *Dope Sick* as an example, the report uses a webpage to cover many forms of information, including texts, pictures, authoritative data, hyperlinks, charts, interview videos, etc.,

and integrates them appropriately. Therefore, audiences can read freely in the open text rather than past closed stories to understand the storyline and even profound extensive significance in a deeper way.

In addition to technological integration of media, online news producers should confront media industrial revolution properly, that is realizing advantages of overall strategic and structural platform integration. Taking STAT (a national story-telling publication for health, medicine, and scientific discovery) as an example, in the early days, it received some success by sending News Briefing and Morning Rounds via email every day, and then it used Facebook and Twitter to further expand its influence on online news. Together with its own advantages of professionalization, STAT has developed into a technology media covering health, medical and science and other areas at present. The development of STAT are paved with changes in management modes of media organizations to confront media convergence, and the transformation and development of media organizations are also supported by ideas of news production.

And further, on the one hand, this requires journalists to promote social communication based on audience-oriented principle, so that the open text and audience interaction can guarantee the integration between news values and the mainstream ideologies; On the other hand, it is also necessary for online news to exert its unique superiority to attract audiences by providing rich story content in various forms, in order to stimulate thinking so that a large scale of audiences will exchange ideas on the open digital platforms and produce an online collection of related topics, ultimately bringing better product experience for audiences.

In addition, while integrating high-quality resources and taking advantage of media convergence, producers are supposed to figure out the boundary, especially in the integration of various forms of technology, and utilize these technologies properly. It is noticeable that too many forms of information may bring an overwhelming burden for audiences.

Building a community of users and tapping potentials of audience participation

In the era of Internet Communication, competition within journalism is fiercer, and a set of users have difficulty in comprehending content on the online platforms. There is no doubt that if online news reporting only has a list of content and low audience engagement, it is difficult to have a long-term developmental prospect. Online news should take advantage of "participatory culture" and involve audiences with high-quality content and innovative forms. Creating and maintaining high-quality network community is also a good choice to give audiences freedom to play their role in narrative. For example, *Trump Charities*, a Topical Reporting winner, has high audience participation with a subtle and deliberate design. Webpages present content in different forms of expression to help audiences understand facts, and have a collection of interactive topics discussed via multiple transmitting channels, ultimately achieving extensive participation of audiences. In addition, online news producers should also pay attention to give out the subjective initiative of audiences, involving audiences and their original works in news production. When audiences have better opportunities to get involved, news will be more substantial, and potentials of audience participation will be effectively tapped.

Meeting personalized and diversified needs, and taking into account wholeness and details

With the continuous development of technology, personalized recommendation services are widely used in media. On the one hand, the personalized custom service based on large data

algorithm can indeed meet audiences' demands; on the other hand, the excessive use of personalized service will get audiences trapped in a situation that they only receive selective information, resulting in narrowing down information reception scope and tiring audiences. Therefore, online news should not only meet the personalized needs via better product experiences, but also make full use of resources to provide more diverse and high-quality content that caters for needs of majority and minority, and to some extent give more options to audiences.

In addition, in the era of news overproduction, the popularity of products not only links to general design and the excellent experience of audiences but also the handing of details. For example, *Weigh Anchor*, which won the Explanatory Reporting, takes full account of how every element will influence audiences. The concise and eye-catching interface, moderate-sized fonts, and various read indicators are all well received among audiences.

Conclusion

With the flourishing development of new media and new technologies, online journalism shows unique advantages in news production. Thus, online news reporting has relatively operational advantages and provides reference for online news works in the future. But at the same time, the new technologies cannot shake the principles of professionalism and production that are born in the traditional news reporting and even require that online news producers have to promote new and better quality news on the basis of inheriting the excellent traditions. In addition, in the new media ecological environment, the single form of information transmission gradually recedes, and the content-based models which can bring a certain experience to audiences prevail. Therefore, content is not the only focus, and the more important is how to give audiences more excellent product experiences through content creativity and technological innovations, maintenance of interactive online community, humanistic design, which will probably remain as a top priority for journalists for a long time.

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