

# Study on the Function of Social Media in Rural Health Communication in the Context of Media Convergence

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**Abstract:** In today's era, the rapid development of Internet technology is driving profound changes in the media landscape. Media convergence, an irreversible development trend, is penetrating into multiple dimensions such as form, technology, platform, market, organization and users. In the all-media era, the deep integration of communities, neighborhoods, regions and cultures is having a profound impact on China's media ecosystem. With the advent of the network era, health communication is facing unprecedented new opportunities and challenges. The application of advanced technologies such as algorithms and cloud computing has provided a brand new way to popularize health knowledge. This not only makes the dissemination of health information more efficient, but also allows more people to access health-related knowledge conveniently. However, in China's rural areas, health communication still faces many problems. The China New Media Development Report reveals in detail the current situation of rural health communication in terms of creation, content, dissemination, and influence, pointing out problems such as lack of subject, insufficient traffic, and insufficient media capacity. The report emphasizes that the construction of health culture is of great significance to rural revitalization. This study aims to promote the development of rural health communication, so that the dividends of technology can truly benefit the countryside and improve the health of rural residents. To this end, we need to actively explore and practice to find effective solutions to promote the progress of rural health communication in China.

**Keywords:** Media Convergence; Health Communication; Social Media.

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of Internet technology has profoundly changed the pattern of media, and made the form of media and the way of communication also change constantly. In order to better meet the public's demand for various information, media convergence has gradually become an important trend in media development. Here, media convergence in the narrow sense mainly refers to the "fusion" of different forms of media to form a new media form. For example, e-magazine is a typical product of media convergence. However, the concept of media convergence in the broader sense is much broader, which includes the convergence of all media and their related elements. This involves not only the form of media, but also the convergence of technology, the convergence of platforms and markets, the convergence of organizational structures, and the convergence of communication and users. In the process of media convergence, various forms of media are no longer isolated, but intertwined and influenced by each other. This fusion not only makes the forms of media more diversified, but also makes the functions of media richer and more powerful. At the same time, media convergence also brings new challenges and opportunities. For media practitioners, how to better meet the needs of the public and provide richer and higher-quality information services in this convergent environment is an issue that needs to be thoroughly studied and explored. In recent years, with the continuous development and progress of science and technology, new breakthroughs and achievements have been made, and China's media industry is also undergoing a profound transformation and upgrading, gradually moving towards a more advanced stage of development. The concept and practice of media convergence has been widely applied and promoted in China, and all-media, as a brand-new media form, has emerged. The emergence of all-media is the formation of

an all-round and three-dimensional communication platform through the effective fusion and integration of various aspects such as community, community, region and culture. This brand-new media form has brought significant impact and change to China's social and economic development. All-media has a strong penetrating power, able to penetrate into all levels and corners of society, while its high degree of adhesion to the environment makes it better able to adapt and respond to various environmental changes. All-media also strengthens the function of social networks, realizing the rapid dissemination and sharing of information through social media, online communities and other platforms. At the same time, all-media has reconstructed the relationship between time and space, breaking the traditional time and space restrictions and making the dissemination of information more flexible and free. These unique features and advantages of all-media have profoundly influenced and changed China's media ecosystem and communication model, and promoted the development and progress of China's media industry.

American scholar Rogers defines health communication as a kind of behavior that transforms medical research results into health knowledge for the general public and, through attitudinal and behavioral changes, aims to reduce the prevalence of disease and mortality and effectively improve the quality of life and health standards. In the context of the network era, algorithms and cloud computing are becoming more and more prosperous, providing new opportunities for health communication and also bringing new challenges. The previous China New Media Development Report, based on the key year of the implementation of the healthy countryside strategy, researched the communication development status of countryside health short videos on the two representative short video platforms in 2022 from the perspectives of the creative body, released content, communication logic and influence effect, which is of great practical significance for promoting countryside health communication, meeting the

health demands of countryside netizens, and realizing the technological dividend in the digital era. It is of great practical significance to realize the dividends of technology in the digital era. In the health communication in the countryside, there are problems such as the absence of the main body, the scarcity of traffic, the lack of health information due to the weak ability to use the media, and the superstition of rumors. "Health culture" is the soul of rural revitalization, and only a real "health culture" can realize self-health and spread health.

## **2. The Function of Social Media in Rural Health Communication in the Context of Media Convergence**

### **2.1. Information Dissemination Function**

Through social media, the public can not only interact with friends anytime, anywhere, and release and receive communication information in a timely manner, but also be able to transmit the latest news to the outside world anytime, anywhere when various emergencies occur. Social issues and hot issues that the public is concerned about can be rapidly spread through social media such as microblogging and wechat, providing a convenient communication platform for the public to fully understand and participate in society. Similarly, social media also play an important role in the rapid transmission of health information. During the epidemic period, the earliest news about the epidemic appeared in the WeChat group/circle of friends, and despite the initial error of information, social media delivered the information in the epidemic, playing the role of epidemic awareness and risk warning. And the biggest advantage of social media is efficient and convenient information transfer, during the new crown epidemic, social media platforms represented by microblogging has become an important official information dissemination channel, major mainstream media, local official government new media, and many opinion leaders in related fields are involved in microblogging to release information in a timely manner. Social media shortened the communication channels and saved the golden period for crisis management, while avoiding the problems of misinterpretation and loss caused by multi-level communication.

Moreover, in the new media era where "audience" is transformed into "users", user-produced content is very common, and short rural health videos on short-video platforms such as Shutter, Shake and other short-video platforms are of great significance in realizing the digital dividend for the benefit of the people. While official media focus on rural health issues, status quo and policy interpretation, commercial media, such as Dr. Chunyu, Good Doctor and other medical commercial media, with their professional medical, content production and distribution teams, target rural areas through a combination of popularization of knowledge, online consultation and offline clinics for health dissemination. The personalized and social tone of some bloggers enhances the emotional connection with the general public and the authenticity of the video content, and the health information disseminated has become an important channel for the public to obtain health information, and user-generated related content also occupies an important position in rural health communication.

### **2.2. Interaction and Participation Functions**

Social media can promote the participation of rural

residents in health activities. The best example is the "microblog fight against abduction", which initially originated from a microblog initiative, and was forwarded by netizens in a fission-like manner, eventually forming a powerful force of public opinion, which was responded to by the general public, various types of media, social organizations and relevant government departments. In just a few months, a combination of online and offline anti-trafficking and begging actions have been launched nationwide, producing good social benefits. Rural residents can receive timely and up-to-date information through social media, which attracts the attention of residents and will change their cognition, attitude, and behavior, and residents will go to forward videos, articles, etc., and will further explore the authenticity and reliability of the information. In addition for consumers, the information disseminated by social media will induce consumer behavior.

The enhancement of interactivity makes the delivery of health information more accurate and effective. On the social media platform, interactive communication between users provides great convenience for health consulting services and lays a solid technical foundation for its vigorous development. Among the official institutions in China's healthcare field, more and more have begun to recognize the important role of new media in health communication, and gradually apply it in practice. For example, "Zhejiang Microblog Doctor" and "Capital Health Microblog Platform", etc. Their emergence makes health education no longer just one-way propaganda and top-down teaching, but transformed into two-way interaction and equal dialog, which is This is crucial to the dissemination of health information. In this way, we can carry out prevention advocacy and behavioral intervention more effectively, thus better protecting people's health.

### **2.3. Social Support Functions**

Social media plays an important social support role in rural health, providing information, communication and support to rural residents and promoting health knowledge dissemination, disease prevention and mental health. Social media platforms have become a venue for rural residents to share health knowledge, leading to wider dissemination of health information. This helps to raise the level of rural residents' awareness of health issues and increase their awareness of disease prevention and treatment. Social media can be used to publicize knowledge about disease prevention, such as promoting vaccinations and hygiene habits, to increase rural residents' attention to disease prevention and reduce health risks. Establishing a rural health community on social media allows residents to share health experiences and ask questions on this platform, forming a health community that helps each other. Social media provides an open environment where rural residents can share their life stresses and troubles, gain understanding and support from community members, and positively impact mental health. Rural residents can use social media platforms to consult with doctors online, obtain health advice, and improve the efficient use of medical resources. Social media platforms can also serve as a bridge to provide telemedicine services, enabling remote medical diagnosis, monitoring and rehabilitation through Internet technology, so that rural residents can enjoy more convenient medical services.

Social media, as an emerging communication tool, provides an unprecedented social support system for rural health by connecting rural residents together. By providing a

rich variety of health-related information, this support system enables rural residents to keep abreast of the latest health news and research findings, thereby improving their health awareness. At the same time, social media is also committed to building an online health community where rural residents can share their health experiences and learn from others, thus forming a favorable interactive health atmosphere. Social media also plays a role in promoting rural health mutual aid. Through social media platforms, rural residents can easily find health support groups in the same area or join volunteer organizations to participate in health public welfare activities. This not only strengthens the ties between rural residents, but also stimulates their spirit of solidarity and mutual help, and jointly contributes to the cause of rural health. While making full use of social media to promote the development of rural health, we must also pay attention to the problems that exist. First, the information on social media is complicated and authenticity is difficult to guarantee, which may lead to rural residents being misled by wrong information and affect their health judgment. Secondly, the privacy protection of social media should not be ignored. Once the personal information of rural residents is leaked, it may lead to a series of security risks.

### **3. Impact Factors and Challenges**

#### **3.1. Social Media Usage Habits**

In different life cycle stages, people's application of social media shows diverse characteristics and patterns. Teenagers and college students, who are in the energetic and exploratory stage of life, show great enthusiasm and addiction to social media. At this stage, they use social media to establish and maintain social relationships and share life moments, as well as to obtain information and entertainment. Their social media use is often proactive and an important way of self-expression and self-identity construction.

In middle age, people's life rhythm gradually stabilizes, and their use of social media is more rational and conservative. Middle-aged people's self-presentation on social media is more inclined to show their achievements and status, and their interactions on social media tend to be more cautious and restrained. At this stage, people use social media more to obtain valuable information, such as industry news and current news, and also use social media to maintain and expand professional relationships. As people move into old age, social media becomes an important channel for them to maintain social connections and gain social support. Older people use social media to keep in touch with family and friends and share the joys of life. At the same time, social media also provides a platform for them to learn new knowledge and skills, enabling them to keep up with the times and enjoy the convenience of technology. At this stage, social media becomes an important bridge for them to communicate with the outside world and an important channel for them to acquire information and knowledge.

There are also significant differences in the health concerns of different age groups on social media. For the young generation, they live a fast-paced life and work under great pressure, so they are more concerned about their skin health, mental health such as anxiety, and physical health such as hair loss. As for the middle-aged and old-aged groups, they are more concerned about gastrointestinal health, sleep quality and other issues that are directly related to the quality of life. Therefore, people of different age groups pay attention to

different health information on social media, and there will be differences in their media contact behavior and user output content on social media. These differences not only reflect the life status and needs of people of different age groups, but also affect the way and effect of health information dissemination.

#### **3.2. Authenticity and Credibility of Information**

The widespread dissemination of new media technologies has fundamentally changed the pattern of knowledge and information dissemination. In the past, authoritative organizations held almost all knowledge and information, but today, with the spread of new media technologies, this monopoly has been broken. However, this open online environment has also given rise to a large amount of pseudo-health information. Studies have shown that social media are the main source and dissemination channel of these pseudo-health messages. While these media allow a large number of individual experiences and opinions to converge into collective knowledge, their decentralized design also undermines the authority of healthcare providers and puts professional healthcare advice at risk of being drowned out by a plethora of amateur information.

Today, the Internet has become our primary means of accessing information. However, the quality of information on the web varies. In the era of new media, we can no longer live without the Internet, both the Internet and mobile Internet have been deeply embedded in our lives. The network has become a more convenient and diversified way to obtain information, and has become an important channel for information flow. Health information is a kind of information that we have a great demand for in our daily life, and we are all more willing to get this kind of information from the convenient network. However, health information on the Internet is a mixed bag, making it difficult for people to recognize the truth. At present, the development threshold of self-media is relatively low, and the mass media, in order to pursue timeliness, have also appeared a series of false health information and erroneous health information, misleading the audience. Meanwhile, in social media with strong communication power such as microblogging and circle of friends, although they increase the amount of information we are exposed to, at the same time, they also bring some redundant and even false information. Health information is more specialized and has a higher contact threshold, which requires professional media or self media to interpret it. The medical and health field is a more vertical field with very strong specialization. The professionalism of journalists in the field of healthcare still needs to be improved. Therefore, we need mass media and self-media of professionals or organizations to assist in dissemination. If the individual communicator does not have a good grasp of medical and health information and knowledge, the communication may be inaccurate. Therefore, we need more professionals and organizations to participate in the dissemination of health information to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information.

### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Health communication, as an important medium that closely links the medical and health professional fields with public health issues, plays an indispensable role. It can not only awaken the public's attention to health and enhance the

health level of the whole society, but also effectively improve the public's health literacy, thus influencing decision makers to formulate health policies that are more in line with the public's health needs. In today's era of information explosion and rapid development of new media, health communication also presents some new features. These features are mainly reflected in the fact that new media communication platforms have become the main channel for health information dissemination, and the interactivity of information is greatly enhanced and feedback is more timely. However, in such an era where information is flooded with information and it is difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood, the health literacy of the population is particularly important. The concept of health literacy first appeared in 1974 in a U.S. paper titled Health Education and Social Policy, and has been widely accepted by international and domestic scholars. Health literacy is defined as a person's ability to obtain, understand and evaluate basic health information and services, and to use them to make correct health decisions, so as to be able to effectively maintain and improve one's health.

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