

“TouTiao.com” PK “Buzz Feed”——Inspiration for Digitization of Traditional Media

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Abstract. TouTiao.com and Buzz Feed, welcomed in China and America respectively, are both websites as news aggregators, with their estimated market prices of respectively 500 million dollars and 1.5 billion dollars so far, which has drawn a heated discussion among new industry. Undoubtedly, the successful experience of TouTiao.com and Buzz Feed is well worth learning for the digitization of traditional media. This paper uses comparative research method to analyze the similarities and differences as well as the successful experience of the two websites from the perspective of their products, contents, users, and resources systems. The author thinks that the digitization of traditional media can benefit from professional team of data analysis, the user-focused principle, and channels to increase profits.

Introduction

TouTiao.com and Buzz Feed, welcomed in China and America respectively, are both websites as news aggregators. The number of users of TouTiao.com has exceeded 480 million since it went online in 2012, taking up the top three of News apps all the way. According to *The Marketing Research Report of Domestic Mobile News APPs of the First Quarter of 2015* released by CNIT-Research, TouTiao.com, the only mobile news app with its degree of satisfaction over 90%, is most recognized by its users and has been being among the top three since 2014. Based on *State of the News Media 2015* released by Pew Research Center on April 29, 2015, HuffingtonPost tops the list of unique visitors for digital-native news entities, successively followed by Buzz Feed, BleacherReport, BusinessInsider, CNET, Mashable, Slate, Vice, Gawker, and Vox. BuzzFeed, set up in 2006, has vaulted to the third place among American news websites.

TouTiao.com PK Buzz Feed

In the app innovation field of mobile internet, now that TouTiao.com and BuzzFeed are extremely popular in China and America respectively, comparison between the two news websites will make a pleasant breakthrough in the digitization of traditional media. This paper compares the similarities and differences of the two websites from the perspective of their products, contents, users, and resources systems, exploring how TouTiao.com stands out in the intense market and how Buzz Feed makes itself the third place among American news websites.

Product Dimension

On the one hand, TouTiao.com orients itself to be a recommendation engine based on data mining, which is its core function. On the other hand, BuzzFeed purports to be a self-service supermarket for information with sharing being a priority, which is its operation principle.

Dimensions for comparison		Buzz Feed	TouTiao.com
Strategic position		Based on a search engine or an artificial collection, aggregating information and viewpoints from kinds of media; a self-service supermarket for information.	A recommendation engine for generic information based on data mining; channels dominate.
Products	Main versions	IOS、Android	Main platforms including IOS、and Android
	Key functions	Social contact, and video development	Personal subscription, commentation, and social interactions
	Styles of user interface	Layout design of waterfall, the omnipresent button of sharing	Mainstream news app, add-on design
contents	Content position and features	Aggregation of online news, including political news, arts coverage, videos, and interesting articles	Aggregation of online news without its own news, focused on individuation of generic information
	columns	Including News, Buzz, Life, Quizzes, and Videos, each with some subclasses	43 columns, including recommendations. hotpoints, Beijing, society, entertainment, science and technology, automobiles, sports, and economics
users	User volume	150 million visits per month	User volume over 480 million, registered users over 90 million, daily active users over 47 million
	Characteristics	The generation after 1980s	The young public
Profits condition	Business model	Profit model of native advertising instead of standard media	Precision advertising, product cooperation(including“we media” open platform, app exchanging, and native contents cooperation), electrical business cooperation of sales today
	Profits condition	Annual income in 2014 is reported to be 120 million dollars	Advertising income is reported to be 10 million per month, and the earnings can support the company’s normal operation
Resource system	Membership group	Digital media subordinate to HuffingtonPost	Beijing Byte Dance Science and Technology Ltd.
	Staff size	Over 500 so far	Over 200 so far
	Investment situation	50 million dollars is invested by Andreessen Horowitz, and the estimated market price is 850 million dollars.	TouTiao.com has gained the third circle of financing, which is estimated to be 500 million dollars.

Note: data in this table are partly from the data supplier and online public information.

Content Dimension

In terms of topic selection, Buzz Feed has three main traits. First, the topics Buzz Feed selects, are rich and various, and both traditional ones and extraordinary ones have strong cultural tolerance. Second, information Buzz Feed conveys is brief and simple, and is often expressed in oral language. Third, Buzz Feed puts emphasis on viral element and theatricality development in its news.[1]

Buzz Feed is famous for its lightweight, low-barrier, and orderly virus-like contents. With a link address, the readers of Buzz Feed have access to the article composed of many pictures and terse but forceful words. Some of its pictures are displayed in multimedia, by which the readers can interact with them. It's obvious that editors of Buzz Feed tend to interesting topics and light words during the process of compiling and planning. The articles are mainly pictures with words only taking up 10%, which makes reading easy and relaxing. A netizen named *Nayn kitty to the 2nd power* comment, "I enjoy using Buzz Feed and I use it more than other apps. Buzz Feed provides you with personalized news, so I can only read what interests me." At present, the number of its visitors has reached 150 million each month [2]

The two figures below demonstrate Buzz Feed's vertical integration of people making stuff and the network integration based on relevant data. As we can see from the following figures, the process of integration, on the base of a search engine, data analysis, and user feedback, is fairly complicated.



Fig.1:The content of the Buzz feed production process

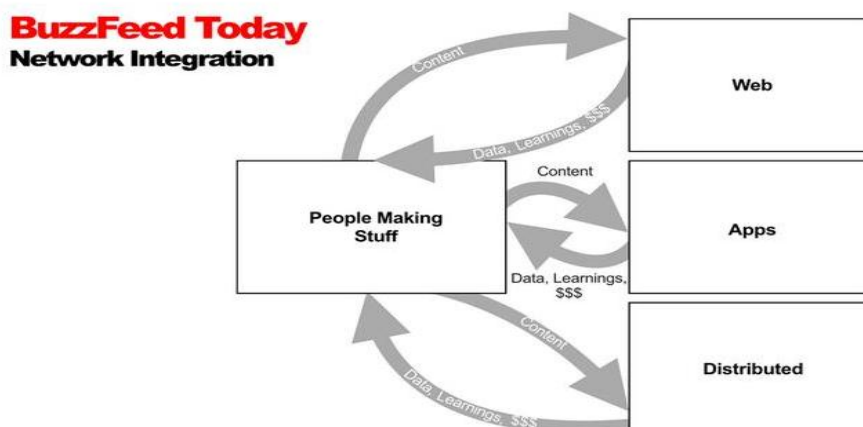


Fig.2:Buzz Feed's content production optimized by data based on the contents

Note: Fig1,2 are from online information

Different from Buzz Feed, TouTiao.com itself doesn't produce news as it's a platform or channel for sharing contents. The interface is mainly designed as typical news app overlapped with multi-modules. There are 24 Personal Channels including Recommendation, Hotspots, Local news, and Videos, as well as 22 more channels. Its users can add or delete the channels at their will. Its

engine technology provides users with easy access to high-quality and interesting news.

TouTiao.com doesn't produce news without its own editing team, completely depending on its technology of machine to recommend different news for different users and profiting from its elaborate transmission. That makes TouTiao.com labeled as "remover" and "robber". As TouTiao.com purports that headline are what users care, it pays more attention to individual subscription of news and information.[3] In terms of users' needs, TouTiao.com and Buzz Feed happen to hold the same view.

User Dimension

Buzz Feed and TouTiao.com have similar overall orientation, so their target users don't differ much. The former orients its users to be young people, namely the generation after 1980s. From the perspective of user scale, the number of unique visitors of Buzz Feed has reached 150 million a month, which has been reported by public media. In addition, Buzz Feed has 4 million subscribers on YouTube.

TouTiao.com takes the popular route with its users' age span larger than Buzz Feed--ranging from teens to 50s or 60s. Nowadays, TouTiao.com has more than 90 million registered users and about 120 million monthly active users. Therefore, its user scale is matchless among the mobile news apps. Compared with other news apps in China, the target readers of TouTiao.com are much younger and more common.

Resource System

In terms of the establishment background and team composition, Jonah Peretti, the founder of Buzz Feed, also founds Huffington Post. At the beginning of its establishment, Buzz Feed was just a pilot program used by editors to test, trace, and create viral contents, which may spread online on a large scale. In 2011, Jonah Peretti began to develop Buzz Feed with all his strength after Huffington Post had been purchased by America Online. And Buzz Feed has more than 550 employees now.

On the other hand, TouTiao.com is a purely grassroots enterprise. Zhang Yiming, the initiator and CEO, majors in Microelectronics and Software Engineering and graduates from Nankai University. Zhang once co-founded Kooxoo, Hainei.com, Fanfou.com, etc..Before setting up Beijing Byte Dance Technology Limited Company in March, 2012, Zhang spent three years in analyzing more than 100 News apps at home and abroad. "I am a cautious man. I won't make any decision before I make sure that it will succeed eight out of ten." [4] Said Zhang. At present, the company, which has more than 200 employees, has finished series C financing of 100 million dollars with its estimated value over 500 million dollars.

Buzz Feed: Sharing Takes Precedence; TouTiao.com: Users Come First

To sum up, TouTiao.com and Buzz Feed, which are both excellent news website, though extremely similar in many regards, differ in the following aspects.

Different Philosophies

The philosophy of Buzz Feed is that sharing is more important than searching. Buzz Feed's editor team is responsible for selection of news which are most interesting and fit for sharing. And Buzz Feed proves to be a success. The viral contents such as beautiful pictures, jubilant animals, ridiculous responses to global events by the users, and various rankings has attracted a lot of clicks and sharing each day.

The slogan of TouTiao.com—what you concern makes our headlines—also clearly embodies its philosophy: All that you like is our orientation. TouTiao delivers whatever its users like. From public news to mass decentralization, to minority demands and finally to personal subscription, TouTiao.com is ever optimizing its transmission strategies. And its precise transmission methods are worthwhile learning by traditional media.

Different Contents

On one hand, Buzz Feed has its own edited and processed original contents such as its native ads, namely advertorials written by its editors. After being financed, Buzz Feed establishes a new contents-making department—Buzz Feed Distribute. On the other hand, TouTiao.com, as a total remover, has no original contents. TouTiao.com is a new client without editors, completely depending on computers to make the selection.

Different Operation Modes

Buzz Feed operates by machines and manual work, through which mass information is filtered and the contents that interest users are selected. TouTiao.com, however, completely relies on the technology of algorithm and crawler of the intelligent recommendation system.

Summary

The new digital media is occupying the market and ads of traditional media for advanced technology constantly lower the threshold of production of media contents. How to grasp the readers' attention and get their support in the tide of mass information become new challenges for media people. The author thinks that the successful experience of Buzz Feed and TouTiao.com can be learned for reference.

Establishment of Professional Team of Data Analysis

Buzz Feed's professional team of data analysis includes more than 100 people, who are mainly technicians of IT, engineering, products, and operation. To locate users' favorite contents, the team use a tool named Wrike to trace the released information, of information transmission which helps to assess the effect of information transmission and provides feedbacks for editing and operation teams. Therefore, human resources are the key. News media should rely on high-quality talents and make full use of data resource to seek, integrate, and process news information and to satisfy users' demand. Therefore, positions like data analysts or data mining engineers or an independent technical team should be set for data mining and analysis.

Perseverance of User-Focused Philosophy

At the time of its transformation into new media, traditional media must think what users need on earth. The author thinks that the user-focused philosophy will be never outdated. Zhang once said when receiving an interview, "Why did we still make it when there had been tens of millions of online news apps in China? We support our users with technology and know of their interest, which differs TouTiao.com from other news apps."

Expansion of Profit Channel

Peng Lan, professor of Journalism School of Renmin University of China, once commented, "In the future, traditional media will concentrate on the consumer market of fields including education, economy, real estate, cosmetology, and health care as well as the consumption needs of particular groups when developing internet industry." As is said by Peng, TouTiao.com develops special contents for users to satisfy their needs, and provides corresponding value-added services such as sales and movie tickets on sale. Traditional media can also make an attempt in the field.

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