

# Dingxiang Doctor: Exploration of Health Communication on the Commercial Content Platform

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**Abstract.** In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), in the part of "improving the people's livelihood and strengthening and innovating social governance", it was clearly stated that "implementing the healthy China strategy". With the emergence of COVID-19 in 2020, the health problem has once again aroused heated discussion among the whole society. How to do a good job in health communication has become a difficult problem for the media. COVID-19 has brought more new health media platforms into the vision of Internet users, and this kind of health communication media has become an emerging channel for users to obtain health information and seek medical advice. This paper taking Dingxiang Doctor as a specific case, analyzes the communication factors and commercial factors that lead to the success of a commercialized new media platform for health knowledge. At the same time, combined with the example of Dingxiang Doctor being banned due to its content, it analyzes the development difficulties of health communication in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, and puts forward suggestions for improvement according to the current situation.

**Keywords:** Dingxiang Doctor; health communication; new media.

## 1. Introduction

According to the 50th China Statistical Report on Internet Development, by June 2022, the number of Internet users in China had reached 1.051 billion, including 1.027 billion instant messenger users, 962 million short video users, 716 million webcast users, and 300 million online medical users. They accounted for 97.7%, 91.5%, 68.1% and 28.5% of the total share of netizens respectively [1]. Due to the rapid increase in network users' number, social media has rapidly become an important tool for medical science popularization and an important channel for the public to obtain health science information. In the new media environment, the practice of science communication has undergone many changes compared with the past, and more diversified subjects have participated in the process of science communication by using various new media technologies, which has accelerated the speed and diversified forms of scientific information communication.

The vigorous development of the WeChat public platform provides new opportunities for health communication. In recent years, although the number of public accounts in the field of health is increasing, health communication is different from other communication. Because it involves the medical field, it has higher requirements on the communication content, communication subjects, operation mode and other aspects of the account.

As a leader in the industry, Dingxiang Doctor's public account is of certain enlightening significance for the follow-up development of similar WeChat public accounts. This paper is based on the analysis of the success factors of the health communication we media—Dingxiang Doctor and the construction of its new media matrix. Through the study of the communication taboo caused by the content anomie of Dingxiang Doctor in 2022, this paper analyzes the risk factors that health communication media should pay attention to in the development process.

## 2. The Success Factors of "Dingxiang Doctor"

### 2.1 Overview and Characteristics of "Dingxiang Doctor"

"Dingxiang Doctor" is a new media content product of the medical knowledge community "Dingxiang Garden" for mass users. The public account of "Dingxiang Doctor" was opened in 2014. It is a leading online medical and health platform in China, covering health popularization, knowledge service, online consultation, e-commerce of health products and offline diagnosis and treatment. Both the number of account users and content activity rank first in the health WeChat public account all year round. Dingxiang Doctor's content is good at touching users' "anger points" (exposing pseudoscience and debunking social rumors); "Pain points" (addressing the need for low-cost consultations); "Topic points" (select topics with social heat to trigger user interaction and forward discussion with networked language).

### 2.2 Interesting Statement of Hot Topics from a Scientific Perspective

The production of health information itself is highly professional and requires the identity, qualification and experience of the content producer. However, in the Internet era, the audit mechanism and the role of professionals who used to play the role of "gatekeeper" have been weakened, reduced or even absent. As a result, the production and release of health information are fast and direct, which is more likely to lead to scientific and normative problems of health information.

As a health communication platform, the accuracy and credibility of the communication content have a crucial impact on the communication effect. Through the professional accumulation in the early stage of "Dingxiang Garden", the trust bridge between users is built. Professional doctors are invited to write popular science content, and a peer review mechanism is adopted.

A popular science article is endorsed by several professional doctors, which solves the trust problem of popular science of medical knowledge. According to a specific classification and analysis of 185 popular health science articles published on the WeChat official account "Dingxiang Doctor" from August 1 to 31, 2021, it can be seen that the source of the articles labeled "Dingxiang Doctor" accounts for 100%, the number of articles introduced by relevant experts accounts for 65%, and the number of articles labeled with references at the end of the article accounts for 51% [2]. "Dingxiang Doctor" highlights the scientific content through the foreground annotation of endorsement, so that the audience and users know where the content comes from, is evidence-based and provenance, and has a solid basis.

There is a huge information asymmetry and trust asymmetry in the healthcare industry. Information asymmetry itself is a great conflict. The more information a platform can provide to users, the stronger its sense of value, and the more contradictions it can grasp. Dingxiang keenly captures the conflict between science and pseudoscience, as well as the conflict of ideas between different age groups, thus gaining the attention of the young group with higher consumption power and communication activity.

Meanwhile, as a new media, the construction and development of the "clove doctor" rely on high-quality creators and content in a variety of forms, including text, pictures, videos and other modes, and use colloquial and entertaining expressions to close the distance between readers and text, and deconstruct obscure medical expertise. In order to achieve a better persuasion effect, "Doctor Clove" is committed to building the identity of user groups. After experiencing the downturn of user growth in 2017, the brand positioning of "Doctor Clove" has expanded from medicine to the field of big health, the content boundary has been widened, and the user group has also been expanded; The perspective pays more attention to life details and the attitude pays more attention to humanistic care. After the outbreak of COVID-19, "Doctor Clove" continued to follow up on the report, updated the epidemic situation and related health information in real-time, gained the attention and trust of many users through professional and scientific content, shared meaningful space with readers with people friendly expression, and on this basis, encouraged readers to participate in expression and self-

empowerment. It creates "social currency" through social media forwarding to achieve sustainable growth [3].

### 2.3 Platform Matrix and Audience Vertical

At present, under the platform of "Dingxiang Doctor", an all-media communication matrix has been established including Dingxiang Doctor APP, Weibo, Douyin, Zhihu, website, mini program and WeChat public account. As one of the most active disseminators in health communication, "Dingxiang Doctor" has far exceeded other similar accounts in the two major social platforms of WeChat and Weibo in the number of followers and reading. On the WeChat platform. In addition to the establishment of an official account, "Dingxiang Doctor" has also developed a WeChat mini program to provide WeChat users with more convenient information acquisition conditions and expand users' use channels. In 2018, Dingxiang Doctor saw the potential of short video platforms and officially registered an account on Douyin to popularize health knowledge through more interesting and vivid video forms. On Zhihu, an Internet question-and-answer platform, "Dingxiang Doctor", as an excellent answer on medical topics, has attracted millions of followers in just a few years. The huge communication matrix of "Dingxiang Medical" not only releases the broad brand effect and strengthens the communication effect of the existing platform, but also provides a huge amount of audience resources for the WeChat public account of "Dingxiang Medical"[4].

The WeChat official account of "Dingxiang Doctor" is a matrix platform integrating health communication, online consultation, online prescription and other functions. After accumulating a certain number of users, the public platform of "Dingxiang Doctor" launched a series of customized paid knowledge products in order to obtain development funds through "knowledge realization". In order to meet the needs of multi-level audiences, Dingxiang Doctor set up a number of public accounts, such as "Dingxiang Garden", "Dingxiang Mother" and "Dingxiang Life Research Institute", to subdivide the needs of different groups, accurately push on demand, and achieve vertical communication of differentiated target groups through the cross-platform operation. The public account of "Dingxiang Doctor" has adopted a knowledge service system combining the free model and the charge model. In terms of free services, "Dingxiang Doctor" has launched columns such as "Good Things", "Health calendar" and "dispelling rumors". By means of message push, it provides free health knowledge popularization to users who have already paid attention to it. The high-quality free health products build a good reputation for the "Dingxiang Doctor" public account, accelerate the drainage of the platform, and lay a solid foundation for the introduction of paid knowledge products.

### 2.4 Completed Online Medical Construction to Meet Users' Needs

"Dingxiang Doctor" gives full play to its advantages and practices Internet + medical treatment and new media + medical treatment. In order to ensure the consultation effect as much as possible, all the doctors on the platform have passed the strict qualification audit of "Dingxiang Doctor", and the unit, title, direction of expertise and patient evaluation of each doctor are very transparent. Users can choose doctors from different departments for paid consultation according to their own conditions. It solves the medical shortage caused by the uneven distribution of medical resources and the limitation of regional space, and enables patients to obtain expert medical advice at relatively low economic cost and time costs. It also meets the needs of specific groups for Internet medical services, and provides conditions for the sustainable development of the public platform of "Dingxiang Doctor".

While the COVID-19 epidemic is still ongoing, the spread of related rumors has also become an important issue causing social risks. Described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an "Infodemic", it is attracting the attention of researchers because it accurately describes the current situation of information confusion, information overload and social information ecosystem imbalance caused by COVID-19 [5, 6]. Obviously, spreading the truth, namely promoting the dissemination of information and refuting rumors, is an important measure to control the information epidemic. During the pandemic, Dingxiang Doctor launched the COVID-19 map, becoming a major source of data on

the global COVID-19 epidemic. "Dingxiang Doctor" uses multiple mechanisms, such as the Dingxiang Garden community, the combination of machine capture and manual review, to "super speed" dispelling rumors, and answer questions for the public in various forms with a sense of interaction [3]. At the same time, the online consultation function has solved the problem of shortage of medical resources during the epidemic.

### **3. The Development of Health Communication During COVID-19 and the Warning of the "Dingxiang Doctor" Gag Crisis**

#### **3.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Pushed the Development of Health Communication Platforms**

In the context of media integration and development, mainstream media and major medical institutions are also building their own discourse power on the Internet. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China's official new media accounts, represented by People's Daily and CCTV videos, have made a lot of achievements in updating epidemic information and dispelling public panic. As the most representative commercial health media in China, "Dingxiang Doctor" has more flexible and diversified explanations on relevant scientific issues. Objectively, it makes up for the lack of formal innovation in the release of scientific information by the mainstream media, effectively promoting the scientific information to get more attention, and the "popular" works produced by the new media accounts are likely to be quoted by the mainstream media again, bringing more extensive communication. However, it is worth noting that some "we-media" also express diversified views on controversial scientific issues, thus causing more in-depth and extensive discussions. Promoting the in-depth development of media integration requires that in the future all media communication system has excellent public opinion guidance ability, consensus cohesion ability, public service ability, and a more basic ability to respond to and meet the needs of the people [7].

According to the specific practice after the outbreak of the epidemic, the scientific communication activities jointly participated by multiple subjects under the new media environment, on the one hand, promoted widespread scientific knowledge, scientific thinking and scientific thinking as much as possible; However, on the other hand, the amount of information is huge, the speed of transmission is fast, and the scope is wide. A large number of mixed false information will also have a negative impact on human health, such as false news as the wrong method of preventing and treating COVID-19. In addition, the phenomenon of lack of social trust caused by scientific rumors, information lag or dislocation makes us realize the necessity of further examining the communication practice of multiple communication subjects.

#### **3.2 Content Crisis of Health Communication Platform "Dingxiang Doctor"**

Health communication, as a branch of communication, is a definition proposed by American scholar Everett Rogers in 1994 [8]. He believes that health communication is a way to transform medical research results into health knowledge that can be easily read by the public, and reduce the morbidity and mortality of diseases through attitudinal and behavioral changes. Actions aimed at effectively improving the quality of life and health of a community or country. As the head account in the field of Internet medicine, DVE aims to connect doctors, researchers, patients, hospitals, biomedicine enterprises and insurance enterprises through professional and authoritative content sharing and interaction, rich and comprehensive medical data accumulation and high-quality digital medical services. This is exactly the strategy of the series of accounts "D+C" (doctor+consumer).

On Dec 2, 2017, Dingxiang Doctor published a book titled "Mind-washing medicine sold at a staggering 750 million yuan a year, Please Leave China's elderly alone" to expose the false publicity of eye drops to treat cataracts, which triggered widespread online discussion and alerted the Food and Drug Administration. In December 2018, Dingxiang Doctor published "10 billion health care Empire Quanjian, and the Chinese Families under its Shadow", which triggered a huge discussion and became

the trigger for the collapse of Quanjian Group with a market value of 10 billion. The incident also made the Dingxiang doctor famous and attracted a lot of traffic. Since then, it has continued to speak out on many hot topics of anti-counterfeiting. After years of development, DVE Media Matrix has won a large number of users, and its influence in the field of medical science cannot be underestimated. In August 2022, all the accounts of the new media platforms under the company were in a state of silence. The sudden stop of the account of "Dingxiang Doctor", which updates 5 articles a day on average, further aroused users' attention and discussion. Dingxiang Doctor, from its establishment to its maturity, has attracted attention precisely because of its use as a voice against authority, but also because of its sharp wind

The production of health information requires a certain degree of professionalism, authority and public welfare. However, driven by interests, the production of health information on the new media platform has become the channel and way to make profits [9]. For "we media" platforms, various ways such as subscription fees and commodity sales will be adopted to increase the income of creators and platforms, which to some extent leads to the separation of health information from public welfare and strong commercialization. The fast and agile nature of the Internet makes it easy for all information to spread quickly. However, the particularity of health information lies in: on the one hand, people will guide their own behavior after receiving health information, and then have a good or bad impact on the body; On the other hand, the dissemination of health popularization information on the new media platform is mostly the spontaneous behavior of the content publishers. In addition to the questionable authenticity and effectiveness of the content, the platform also lacks the necessary audit mechanism to falsify health information. When health information is released, some people are persuaded to take action, while others seek confirmation through various channels [10]. There is a lack of platform verification and falsification channels, so people have to turn to professionals for help through contacts and various channels. However, not all people have the way and channel to verify, which increases the potential risk of health information transmission and threatens people's health, and also easily makes people fall into the dilemma of being isolated and unable to verify health information.

#### 4. Conclusion

Dingxiang Doctor is not a charity, but a commercial company. How to keep the boundary and bottom line between science popularization and business is what "Dingxiang Doctor" and content producers in the same field need to think about. In the current post-pandemic era, health communication is more closely related to people's lives.

Based on the analysis of the development of Dingxiang Doctor and the analysis of the platform's gag crisis, this paper puts forward several suggestions for the media to adhere to several principles when carrying out health communication. First, each media platform should put social responsibility first in health communication. Secondly, the health media should meet the health needs of the audience on the premise of understanding the characteristics of the post-epidemic era. Thirdly, strictly abide by the professionalism of health communication in the process of disseminating information and knowledge. In addition, media platforms should adopt multi-channel and all-around ways to carry out regular communication, timely smash rumors, interpret new knowledge, and provide professional and scientific health knowledge for the audience.

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