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Postprint: A Study on the Development Path for County-Level Converged Media to Boost the Rural Revitalization Strategy

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Abstract

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed comprehensively advancing the rural revitalization strategy. As a national strategic initiative, rural revitalization positions county-level converged media centers as the “last mile” connecting with the masses. These centers function as a critical conduit for conveying national policies and guidelines while maintaining close contact with the public, thereby possessing unique advantages as the principal grassroots stronghold for Party and state propaganda. Whether in the dissemination efforts for COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control or in providing online services essential to the daily lives of grassroots communities, county-level converged media have played a significant role and exerted an extremely important influence throughout this process.

Full Text

Research on the Development Path of County-Level Converged Media in Facilitating Rural Revitalization Strategy

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Abstract

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed comprehensively advancing the rural revitalization strategy. As a national strategic priority, rural revitalization relies on county-level converged media centers as the “last mile” connecting with the masses, playing a crucial role in conveying national policies and maintaining close ties with the people. Serving as the primary front for Party and state propaganda at the grassroots level, these media

centers possess unique advantages. Whether in propaganda work for COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control or in providing online services essential for grassroots daily life, county-level converged media have consistently played a significant role and exerted substantial influence throughout these processes.

Keywords: Rural Revitalization; County-Level Converged Media; Development Path

China has been an agricultural civilization since ancient times. Among the country's 1.4 billion total population, rural residents exceed 500 million, making "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers" issues perennial matters of national importance. In October 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the rural revitalization strategy, which became a major policy decision for "three rural" work in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In August 2018, Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work that "we must solidly grasp the construction of county-level converged media centers to better guide and serve the masses" [1]. The report of the 20th National Congress proposed comprehensively advancing the rural revitalization strategy and prioritizing agricultural and rural development, representing the top priority for resolving "three rural" issues in the future. Against this backdrop, counties constitute a crucial link and fundamental unit in implementing the rural revitalization strategy. County-level converged media, as one of the channels closest to grassroots populations and the most grassroots-level new mainstream media, serve as vital hubs connecting the Party with the people—factors that determine their great potential in facilitating this national strategy.

I. The Great Potential of County-Level Converged Media in Facilitating Rural Revitalization Strategy

As of June 2022, the 50th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by CNNIC showed that China's internet user base reached 1.051 billion, with internet penetration reaching 74.4%, indicating that the era of universal internet access has long arrived. Rural internet users numbered 293 million, accounting for 27.9% of total users, with rural internet penetration at 58.8% [2]. China's internet coverage continues expanding, and grassroots populations' access rates keep rising. The thriving internet has empowered individual expression, enabling everyone to have a voice in cyberspace. This proliferation of actors, combined with the immediacy and digital nature of networks, has created a deluge of diverse and ever-emerging online content. In today's rapidly developing internet era, China's top-down media convergence has entered a critical phase. As the primary front for the Party's grassroots propaganda work, county-level converged media should strengthen public opinion guidance at the grassroots level, foster a positive social atmosphere, effectively integrate various media resources across the county, produce quality reports on the rural revitalization strategy, actively publicize Party policies, promptly feedback rural revitalization developments to the masses, enhance user interaction, and

encourage deeper public participation.

Converged media centers must prioritize rural revitalization strategy propaganda, fully utilizing established new media matrices for comprehensive, multi-angle integrated reporting on issues closely related to the masses—such as agricultural benefit policies, latest implementation achievements, and exemplary rural figures. County-level converged media must penetrate deeper into people’s daily lives. As the primary front for grassroots public opinion, they must continuously enhance their communication capacity, influence, guidance, and credibility to effectively become a booster for implementing the national rural revitalization strategy.

The overall requirements for rural revitalization can be summarized as industrial prosperity, ecological livability, rural civilization, effective governance, and affluent living. County-level converged media centers represent new all-media big data platforms built upon internet thinking and supported by big data, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence technologies. They can meet comprehensive data application needs and achieve “precise” and “refined” services [3]. As new mainstream media, county-level converged media constitute important fronts for grassroots communication. They must fully leverage their communication advantages, establish awareness of serving the masses, and become important actors participating in the rural revitalization strategy.

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II. Innovative Paths for County-Level Converged Media to Facilitate Rural Revitalization Strategy

(1) Facilitating Industrial Prosperity

Industrial prosperity is the focus of rural revitalization. Both ecological livability and affluent living depend on industrial economic support—only industrial prosperity can lay the economic foundation for rural revitalization, highlighting the importance of industrial development. In April 2020, during his inspection in Shanxi, the General Secretary pointed out that “e-commerce, as an emerging business form, can both promote agricultural and sideline products, help the masses escape poverty and become prosperous, and drive rural revitalization—it has great potential.” The “converged media + e-commerce” model represents both an inevitable trend for converged media platform development and an im-

portant path for implementing rural revitalization. Nowadays, with converged media platforms flourishing, many localities have begun actively exploring new “converged media + e-commerce” models to assist agriculture. In the process of industrial development, county-level converged media can play important roles by building comprehensive service platforms based on the internet to publicize Party agricultural benefit policies and disseminate relevant production information. They can integrate county resources to launch e-commerce models that assist farmers, helping them promote and sell agricultural and sideline products online. The greatest advantage of county-level converged media centers in developing e-commerce lies in combining with local specialty products to obtain the freshest and most authentic characteristic agricultural products and handicrafts. This not only benefits county economic development but also opens sales channels for local products, enriches platform content, and enables county-level converged media to penetrate deeper into people’s daily lives.

In 2019, Junan County in Shandong Province launched the province’s first converged media e-commerce platform, “Kaiyuan Happy Shopping.” Focused on building an authoritative and efficient regional brand, this e-commerce platform possesses distinctive advantages, fully leveraging its unique characteristics and innovating public opinion guidance elements. Adhering to the concept of “rooted in Junan, serving Junan,” the platform personified local specialty agricultural products into warm, down-to-earth animated characters for the e-commerce platform. This approach not only highlights regional characteristics but also creates greater affinity among local residents, enhancing internal cohesion among regional populations while establishing a distinctive external image. Using converged media e-commerce as a platform carrier can also extend outward to form a community economy, exploring multiple innovative measures for rural development. Although today’s rapidly evolving internet is driving drastic transformations across industries, it also provides technical support for building quality community models that serve others and contribute to society, ensuring support for the elderly and revitalizing rural communities for the era.

(2) Promoting Ecological Livability

Ecological livability represents a new goal for rural human settlement environment governance. Improvements to living environments concern farmers’ vital interests and affect their quality of life. Therefore, creating a comfortable and livable rural environment is particularly important in current development. County-level converged media centers can leverage their platform’s propaganda capacity to interpret and promote relevant policies, disseminating the development concept of ecological livability to the broad masses and advancing the implementation and popularization of ecological livability policies. As new mainstream media, county-level converged media must actively conduct series reporting activities with strong sense of responsibility and mission to play greater roles in rural revitalization construction.

Rural ecology emphasizes harmonious coexistence between humans and nature,

where agricultural production and daily life form positive interactions with natural environmental protection. Rural livability focuses on safeguarding farmers' daily lives, including infrastructure construction and maintenance for toilets, roads, streetlights, and other facilities. The toilet revolution constitutes an important measure for building ecologically livable rural areas. In advancing this revolution, various challenges emerge, including rural brain drain, village "hollowing-out," and weak public awareness. As an important tool for grassroots government social governance, county-level converged media must actively play a guiding role, using special issues, short and long videos, interactive H5, and other graphic-rich formats to publicize and advance toilet revolution construction, thereby assisting rural revitalization.

County-level converged media possess considerable potential in building beautiful rural areas with ecological livability. With internet information being redundant and voluminous, county-level converged media must become the most direct authoritative information providers for grassroots populations among numerous media platforms releasing massive amounts of information. They must rapidly and timely release authoritative information, actively interpret benefit policies, and enable the broad masses to understand national policies and guidelines through accessible means. Based on local geographic characteristics, economic levels, and cultural customs, they must scientifically determine governance tasks for their regions, clearly understanding that economic development must never come at the cost of ecological environmental sacrifice. Good ecological environments represent rural areas' greatest advantages and precious wealth—we must respect, accommodate to, and protect nature. We must resolutely implement the scientific development concept of "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping. In propaganda processes, county-level converged media can enrich reporting formats according to local audiences' listening and viewing habits. In the internet era, they can innovate communication content through audio, short and medium-length videos, graphics, and other formats tailored to different platform characteristics to attract users' attention and enable the masses to truly grasp green development concepts.

(3) Building Rural Civilization

As an important component of the rural revitalization strategy, rural civilization construction constitutes the cultural foundation for driving rural revitalization development [1]. Strengthening rural civilization construction must rely on county-level converged media platforms to actively carry out reports promoting excellent traditional culture, carry forward local outstanding traditional culture, enhance the spiritual outlook and rural civilization level of new-era new countryside, conduct targeted activities around rural groups based on local exemplary figures and characteristic folk culture, and boost local populations' self-confidence and pride. County-level converged media centers must serve as disseminators and publicists of excellent rural culture, deeply exploring local

cultural backgrounds and model figures' relevant deeds for series reporting to create strong cultural atmospheres. They must also deeply explore and report on characteristic cases in rural revitalization, using outstanding achievements to guide rural civilization construction. By collaborating with other counties, they can enrich communication content and launch special series reports, allowing the civilized breeze to blow into the broad masses' daily lives.

To high-quality advance rural civilization construction in the new era, we must also explore establishing an indicator system for rural civilization construction to promote its long-term effectiveness. Rural civilization represents the soul-casting project of rural revitalization and requires simultaneous attention to both “hardware” and “software.” We must continue increasing financial and resource investment, improve supervision mechanisms for fund usage, and fill gaps in rural infrastructure construction [2]. We must consolidate collaboration mechanisms between economically developed and remote areas, and within policy-controllable scopes, encourage social forces to actively organize public welfare activities and participate in rural construction. We must pay attention to the diverse emotional and living needs of left-behind children, women, and elderly people. County-level converged media can adopt electronic ordering and delivery of various square dance and rich children's programs, develop more public welfare cultural internet platforms, satisfy rural youth groups' cultural consumption habits, and emphasize rural cultural life during Spring Festival and other holidays to reduce opportunities for undesirable behaviors such as gambling gatherings.

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(4) Improving Effective Governance

In the internet era, county-level converged media centers not only undertake traditional media functions but also serve the masses, becoming essential means for social governance in the new period. Through functions such as government affairs information, convenience services, and public opinion supervision, county-level converged media assist grassroots governments in strengthening social governance work. The “media platform + comprehensive services” provided

by county-level converged media integrates instrumental rationality and value rationality, representing both means for participating in rural social governance and important connotations for achieving rural society's comprehensive development [3]. The essential attribute of county-level converged media is the media platform. As the media closest to the masses, their important function is providing local information to county populations, enabling them to know what's happening around them. For example, the "Local Information" section of the "Beijing Changping" converged media APP covers guides for handling affairs, government announcements, convenience maps, and human resources information. Local residents can quickly and accurately obtain relevant information through the app. In daily life, only by closing the distance with the masses and more precisely understanding their real needs can we better satisfy their aspirations and pursuit for a better life.

In the new era, we must gather government affairs, business, cultural tourism, and user data to transform county-level converged media centers into county-level information hub platforms. Using big data analysis and other technologies, we can achieve intelligent management of grassroots information, enhance county-level converged media's intelligent governance capabilities, and truly make them the core tool for grassroots social governance [4]. County-level converged media platforms' participation in rural social governance work represents an inevitable requirement for social development in the new era. With active exploration by county-level converged media in many regions in recent years and continuous deepening of construction processes, mass media's service functions in rural revitalization have become increasingly prominent. County-level converged media should clarify their advantages and shortcomings, revitalize regional media resources, enhance regional user stickiness, and explore more "news +" models.

(5) Ensuring Affluent Living

Against the backdrop of the "Internet Plus" era, county-level converged media construction must actively explore new business forms in the media industry, continuously extend industrial chains, and boost the in-depth development of internet poverty alleviation [5]. County-level converged media can extend industrial reach in all directions, combine local regional advantages, create "converged media + e-commerce" models, and promote local economic development. In facilitating the rural revitalization strategy, county-level converged media should focus on building brand images, as brands with local characteristics can better drive economic development and cultural dissemination. By combining local regional features to establish distinctive brand images, clarifying their positioning, and continuously improving brand innovation, they can spread local specialty products and county landscapes through brands in the internet era. For example, Jiaozuo's iron stick yams can be promoted through short videos and live broadcasts showcasing their planting, harvesting, and interesting stories during growth. This helps enrich the brand image of Jiaozuo yams, and the

development of corresponding peripheral cultural and creative products further enhances brand influence.

The county-level converged media center in Pizhou, Jiangsu Province, stands as a particularly distinctive pioneer in the county media convergence process, forming the unique “Pizhou Model” that has played a prominent role in facilitating rural revitalization. Pizhou Radio and Television combined its locally characteristic ginkgo elements with converged media to create the distinctive “Ginkgo Converged Media” brand [1]. By integrating various forms of media resources within the region, it built a new media matrix centered on the “Ginkgo World” client with multiple parallel channels. Focusing on publicizing and advancing the rural revitalization strategy, Ginkgo Converged Media once planned and launched the series report “I Take Charge in My Village’s Revitalization,” deploying over 20 teams of all-media journalists to go deep into streets, village groups, fields, and farmers’ homes, focusing on more than 400 village party secretaries across the city, and using methods that resonate with the people to document the leadership and contributions of these “pacesetters” in rural revitalization as they guide villagers along the path to rural revitalization [2]. By creating county-level converged media IP and shaping online influence through branding, we can enhance county-level converged media’s own “blood-making” capacity, enabling them to play more important roles in the rural revitalization strategy and boost broader rural development for the future.

Compared with provincial and municipal-level converged media, county-level converged media possess unique advantages of being closer to the broad masses and more intimately connected with people’s daily life scenarios. In response to this situation, county-level converged media can achieve personalized communication based on regional characteristics, providing users with more real-time experiences and better-adapted services. Serving as bridges connecting provincial/municipal media with streets, villages, and communities, county-level converged media play roles in transmitting information both upward and downward. They must not only perform information dissemination functions, conveying the voice of the Party and state, but also build comprehensive service platforms to enhance their capacity to serve the masses, reflect people’s voices, and increase their influence [4]. As rural revitalization advances and county-level converged media construction proceeds vigorously, county-level converged media centers will bring information technology and the digital economy to the grassroots level, satisfy public needs, and fully assume the roles of builders, advocates, and drivers of “digital villages.”

As Party-led grassroots media, county-level converged media should clarify their positioning and, under the premise of Party media management, better guide and serve the masses. In the rural revitalization process, they must enter and take root among the people, encouraging broad public participation and interaction to become new mainstream media with strong communication capacity, guidance, influence, and credibility. The difficulties and challenges encountered in implementing county-level converged media centers must largely be resolved

through the promotion and implementation of the rural revitalization strategy—the construction of county-level converged media centers and rural revitalization policies are inseparable. County-level converged media centers represent an important exploration of mainstream media in the wave of media convergence in the internet era. By relying on technology platforms and innovative concepts, they can innovatively build mainstream public opinion fronts, allowing the Party’s voice to spread wider, broader, and deeper among grassroots populations.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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