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Telling Rural Revitalization Stories Through Converged Media Thinking: A Case Study of “Hello Maker” from Zhumadian Radio and Television Station (Postprint)

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Abstract

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the strategic guideline of “comprehensively promoting rural revitalization,” which presents both opportunities and challenges for traditional media. [Objective] The article seeks breakthroughs for radio broadcasting’s dilemmas amid emerging new media communication forms and transformed user information reception methods. [Method] Drawing on the exploratory practices of the “Hello, Makers” program at Zhumadian Radio and Television Station over the past two years in breaking through radio broadcasting’s predicament within the new-era rural revitalization strategy, developing radio through convergent media thinking, and effectively narrating rural revitalization stories. [Result] Segmenting user markets, innovating program formats, and promoting deep media convergence. [Conclusion] Only through flexible application of convergent media thinking and a focus on the relevance of radio program content and communication forms can highly acceptable popular radio programs be created, rural revitalization stories be effectively told, and a development path for radio broadcasting in the new era be explored.

Full Text

Telling the Story of Rural Revitalization Through Converged Media Thinking: A Case Study of “Hello, Makers” from Zhumadian Radio and Television Station

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Abstract

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the strategic policy of “comprehensively promoting rural revitalization,” presenting both opportunities and challenges for traditional media. **[Objective]** This article seeks to break through the dilemmas facing radio broadcasting amid the emergence of new media communication forms and shifts in user information reception patterns. **[Methods]** Drawing on the practical exploration of Zhumadian Radio and Television Station’s “Hello, Makers” program over the past two years, this study examines how the station has used converged media thinking to develop radio broadcasting and tell compelling stories of rural revitalization, thereby cracking the predicament of radio in the new era’s rural revitalization strategy. **[Results]** The approach involves segmenting user markets, innovating program formats, and promoting deep media convergence. **[Conclusion]** Only by flexibly applying converged media thinking and focusing on the relevance of program content and communication forms can radio create highly accepted, high-traffic broadcasts that effectively tell rural revitalization stories, thereby exploring a development path for radio in the new era.

Keywords: Converged Media Thinking; Radio; Rural Revitalization; Media Convergence; Development Path for Radio

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In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to “comprehensively promote rural revitalization” and “solidly advance the revitalization of rural industries, talent, culture, ecology, and organizations”[1]. As a traditional media outlet that has long played an important role in agricultural publicity, radio broadcasting—within the broader context of rural revitalization and media convergence—can actively contribute to the comprehensive rural revitalization strategy and the construction of beautiful villages by innovating forms of agricultural publicity and reporting and telling good stories about rural areas and rural revitalization. This article primarily elaborates on the dilemmas and challenges faced in practical operations to better serve the rural revitalization strategy.

1. Dilemmas and Challenges

The rapid development of the internet and mobile terminals has spawned diverse media environments and accelerated the growth of self-media, shattering the traditional media landscape dominated by radio, television, and newspapers. The rise of new media and the arrival of the 5G era have fundamentally transformed information dissemination and reception patterns. Scholar Peng

Lan argues that we have entered a “boundless media era” where “everything is media” and “everyone is media” [2], while Yang Baojun positions this as the “post-journalism era,” suggesting that the traditional “tripartite” structure of newspapers, radio, and television has been broken, with all-media platforms and converged media platforms becoming the new norm [3]. In this context, radio broadcasting, once the main channel for agricultural communication, faces issues of insufficient innovation and development momentum.

1.1 Shrinking Rural Listener Market

In the past, rural residents were the primary audience for radio. However, with the popularization of television, internet technology, and smart mobile devices (smartphones), radios have become rare in rural areas. According to a market survey conducted by the author, most people who still own radios are elderly individuals, and these devices often serve merely as accessories for opera players. Elderly listeners primarily consume news content, and apart from listening to opera and storytelling, they barely engage with other content. Younger audiences, meanwhile, rely mainly on smartphones or in-car radios, using smartphones primarily for short videos and only tuning into car radios when using phones is inconvenient. Due to this shrinking listener market, many local radio and television stations have already canceled agricultural broadcasts and programs.

1.2 Insufficient Acceptance of Agriculture-Focused Programs

This problem relates to both the diverse media environment and internal media factors. First, there is conceptual bias. For a long time, traditional media has emphasized one-way communication while neglecting scientific investigation and analysis of rural audience markets, resulting in a lack of targeted content. Second, there are mistakes in program format, mistaking “earthy flavor” for being outdated and excluding fashion and entertainment from programming, relying instead on traditional forms like opera, storytelling, and folk arts. Third, there is poor interactivity. Accustomed to passive audience reception, traditional radio has failed to adequately consider people’s rights to independently select information, express their thoughts and attitudes, and share their lives on media platforms [4]. Compared to the two-way communication and high participation of new media, traditional radio’s lack of interactivity is particularly pronounced, leading to low listener motivation and insufficient reception momentum for agricultural programs.

1.3 Systemic Difficulties Hard to Overcome

These difficulties manifest in two aspects. At the policy level, despite consistent national and Party attention to rural areas, agriculture, and farmers—from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization and beautiful village construction—there remains a lack of policy guidance for agricultural publicity. This is mainly reflected in insufficient government investment to support policy-based program

production and market-oriented agricultural programming. At the institutional level, although local radio and television stations have merged and established their own converged media centers, fragmentation and departmental silos persist in practice, with “convergence without integration.” Agricultural radio programs generally suffer from poor all-media operational capabilities, outdated methods, and insufficient staffing—programs like “Hello, Makers” are essentially run by a single host.

2. Connotation of Converged Media Thinking

Converged media thinking originates from Internet thinking, which is essentially Internet thinking applied to the media sector. According to Baidu Baike, Internet thinking was first proposed by Baidu founder Li Yanhong [5]. It refers to a way of re-examining markets, users, products, corporate value chains, and even the entire business ecosystem against the backdrop of continuous technological development in (mobile) Internet+, big data, and cloud computing. It encompasses nine aspects: user thinking, simplicity thinking, extreme thinking, iterative thinking, traffic thinking, social thinking, big data thinking, platform thinking, and cross-boundary thinking [6]. What began as a business concept has now extended to many fields, including journalism and media, where it is known as converged media thinking or media convergence thinking. Shanghai University Professor Hao Yu argues that “converged media thinking” is not merely about using converged media for information production and dissemination, but rather about adapting content production and innovative expression of forms and formats to the three-dimensional, multi-dimensional, and diverse nature of converged media [7]. Others believe that for media, converged media thinking is an audience-centered mindset that creates news products easily accepted by the public from the perspective of their minds and eyes [8].

3. Exploration and Reflection

“Hello, Makers” is a live entrepreneurship program launched by Zhumadian Radio and Television Station’s FM102.4 Economic Radio in October 2020. The program focuses on innovative entrepreneurs as interview subjects, emphasizing the excavation and sharing of their entrepreneurial experiences and stories to correctly guide innovation and entrepreneurship. Although not a dedicated agricultural program, the show has encountered many new agricultural entrepreneurs as the state places increasing emphasis on agriculture and more makers see promising prospects in the new era’s new agriculture. To produce this program effectively, the production team proposed integrating converged media thinking, using all-media methods to plan and innovate the program, employing all-media three-dimensional communication to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, and genuinely telling rural revitalization stories while playing a role in promoting agricultural product sales and the local conversion of rural surplus labor—thereby making attempts and explorations in advancing rural revitalization and beautiful village construction.

3.1 Innovating Concepts to Run Radio

Innovating concepts means using converged media thinking to create programs, developing video radio, all-media radio, and internet mobile digital radio to tell local stories and gain more traffic [9].

3.1.1 Using Multimedia Means to Promote Three-Dimensional Communication

With the development of 5G and smart technologies, live broadcasting has become a popular form of immediate, scene-based communication. From its inception, “Hello, Makers” adhered to the principle of “producing indoor radio outdoors,” drawing on the experience of influencer livestreaming by moving the studio to interview locations and story sites. For agriculture- and rural-related topics, the program moved its studio directly into fields and production areas. On September 6, 2021, the program featured an interview with Qi Xinglei, the “Father of Xianan Cattle” from Biyang County, under the title “A Cow Pulls a Ten-Billion-Yuan Industry.” As an outstanding national Party member, Qi Xinglei and his team embarked on a 21-year scientific research marathon to cultivate Xianan Cattle, filled with moving stories and episodes. After the program, these highlights were edited into short videos for the station’s video channel and Douyin account, helping people better understand Qi Xinglei and Xianan Cattle, promoting the development of the Xianan Cattle industry and beef product sales, and achieving dual benefits of expanded program influence and agricultural assistance.

3.1.2 Cultivating Opinion Leaders to Expand Social Influence

The popularity of networks and mobile terminals has made opinion leader a specialized profession. To enhance its influence and reputation, traditional radio must also cultivate its own opinion leaders. Initially, “Hello, Makers” adopted the traditional guest-plus-host model, but soon discovered that guests often struggled to connect topics, forcing the host to awkwardly bridge conversations and affecting overall program quality. Later, the program began collaborating with the entrepreneurship guidance team at Huanghuai University, inviting university entrepreneurship experts as special guests to serve as program opinion leaders. They would analyze topics, provide guidance, lubricate conversations, and connect discussions. Their insightful comments and timely interventions not only avoided topic disconnection but also guided discussions, receiving widespread acclaim in online and mobile user dissemination. In the 15 episodes broadcast in 2022, these experts participated in every episode, joining the host and entrepreneurs in the fields. Through audio-visual synchronous livestreaming, they shared the entrepreneurial experiences and stories of rural agricultural entrepreneurs, showcasing the vitality of the new era’s new countryside and the vigorous spirit of entrepreneurs, achieving excellent program effects. By December 2022, the program’s official account had accumulated 300,000 reads, its Douyin account had over 3 million plays with more than 20,000 interactions, and its video channel had over 1 million plays with more than 10,000 interactions, significantly expanding the program’s social influence and reputation.

3.2 Innovating Forms to Produce Radio

Innovating forms means breaking radio's inherent patterns and focusing on relevance to create programs that audiences love to hear and watch.

3.2.1 Live Broadcasting into the Fields, Presenting Original Rural Nostalgia Sound was once radio's advantage—a small box that allowed people to understand world affairs without leaving home. However, as users have more ways to receive information, especially with the popularization of smart mobile terminals and the impact of 5G-era short videos, radio's traditional advantages are gradually disappearing. Therefore, when planning this program, the team proposed using multimedia and converged media means to present the program. On July 8, 2022, the program featured Li Min, an 80s-generation founder of Laiwang Network who returned to her hometown after graduating from Peking University's economics and finance department. Most of this interview was conducted in the fields of Li Min's agricultural product production demonstration base. With entrepreneurship mentors, agricultural experts, the entrepreneur, and the host sitting on small stools in the fragrant soil, telling rural stories and discussing new agricultural experiences, the audio-visual synchronous livestreaming allowed listeners and viewers to interact via WeChat and video bullet comments. This field-infused program format attracted immediate attention and praise. On August 19, 2022, the program interviewed a local innovative loofah water company that assists farmers, with the studio set up in their industrial park—behind them stood loofah trellises over six feet tall, and before them were dazzling arrays of loofah products. The visually rich audio-visual livestream garnered nearly 10,000 interactions in less than 30 minutes. Through the livestream, many people heard and saw the ongoing rural changes and the achievements of rural revitalization [10].

3.2.2 Using Localized Language to Tell Good “Three Rural” Stories

While adhering to traditional broadcasting standards, the program has continuously explored how to use language forms that resonate with the masses to tell good “three rural” stories and new-era agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship stories. Since the program's inception, the production team has fully considered specific cultural and emotional connections [11], designing several language modes in the program: Mandarin, Zhumadian dialect, and Zhumadian-style Mandarin, allowing guests to choose freely. Since many entrepreneurs are local natives, whether they chose to start businesses locally from the beginning or returned to their hometowns after achieving success elsewhere, they all have strong hometown sentiments and prefer to use so-called local Mandarin or full dialects to tell their entrepreneurial stories and feelings. This familiar language and regional cultural proximity make guests more comfortable and listeners more relaxed, easily generating emotional resonance. As a local radio station, this linguistically distinctive program format has become a highly recognizable signature. On International Women's Day, March 8, 2021, the program invited a women's federation leader in charge of women's innovation and entrepreneur-

ship and a female entrepreneur. Among the three participants, the host used Mandarin while the two guests used dialect and Zhumadian Mandarin respectively. This multilingual approach not only enabled seamless communication but also enhanced program effects. The episode achieved high online listening/viewing rates and interaction volumes and was awarded as an outstanding radio and television program in Henan Province, receiving the Henan Provincial Annual News Award.

3.3 Open and Shared Program Production

After a century of development, radio broadcasting in the converged media context requires all-media presentation, and relying on a single host to handle everything has become a thing of the past. Successful specialized interview programs require support from social forces and professional teams. To break through institutional limitations, the program proposed an open and shared approach to radio production.

3.3.1 Taking Initiative to Secure Support from All Sides Since television's emergence and popularization, radio, which relies on sound to convey content, has long been undervalued. Although radio and television stations have now merged, radio remains underappreciated in major topic publicity. Therefore, when planning the program, the team actively communicated with propaganda, human resources, and agriculture departments, explaining the program's purpose and dissemination channels to secure their support. While this support may not directly translate into revenue, it helps resolve many practical difficulties and problems. For instance, with the human resources department's support, "Hello, Makers" quickly obtained contact information and lists of innovative enterprises and makers, paving the way for rapid program launch. With the propaganda department's support, the problem of difficult rural interview access that plagued the production team was resolved.

3.3.2 Team Effort, Pooling Collective Wisdom As media convergence deepens, achieving multi-format media dissemination of radio programs and creating quality programs that people love to hear and watch requires team support. Many local media outlets have made good explorations in this regard, such as establishing multimedia studios around famous programs, hosts, and reporters. Due to incomplete institutional reforms, forming an in-house team is genuinely difficult. Starting in 2021, "Hello, Makers" collaborated with the Media School and Entrepreneurship School of local Huanghuai University, working together on topic selection, content structure, program format, rhythm and segments, venue selection, audio-visual dissemination, and program packaging, examining every detail and pooling ideas to comprehensively improve program quality. Taking the short video trailers for each episode as an example, with the support of an excellent production and planning team, the program combined content promotion with rich local cultural promotion using the "small program, big culture" approach [11]. These big-culture promotional clips have won high

click-through and forwarding rates each episode, being actively promoted and forwarded by propaganda and culture-tourism departments, thereby not only enhancing program influence but also promoting local culture and showcasing the new era' s beautiful villages.

3.4 Precise Production of Content

Precise production involves segmenting user market demands, aligning with the broader rural revitalization context, breaking away from the past 粗放 (extensive) model of simply covering seasonal topics, and adhering to user thinking to precisely produce radio programs and content products that users and markets need [12].

3.4.1 Focusing on Rural Revitalization for Targeted Approach The rapid development and popularization of networks and mobile terminals have changed how radio audiences receive broadcasts. The past linear “we-speak-you-listen” broadcast model has lost its market. In the current media environment, listeners are not only program consumers but also content customizers, possessing more autonomy and choice in program production, dissemination, and reception. Particularly for agriculture-focused programs targeting “three rural” issues and rural revitalization, careful planning is essential to make content appealing and engaging, focusing on promoting rural revitalization and industrial development. On November 16, 2021, “Hello, Makers” invited a local innovative rice production enterprise. Initially planning to highlight green, high-quality rice, the production team discovered during field research that while their premium rice sold very well, their simultaneous promotion of rice paddy art tourism was little known. Therefore, the program highlighted rural tourism as a key focus alongside green agricultural products, interviewing and promoting it. This approach not only pleased the enterprise but also introduced many listeners to the rice paddy art through short videos and synchronized audio-visual program displays. Soon after broadcast, the rice fields were packed with tourists, and the local rice paddy art became a popular rural tourism check-in spot, increasing industrial income.

3.4.2 Connecting with Agricultural Product Sales to Support Rural Revitalization Unlike some local radio stations that conduct live commerce through video, “Hello, Makers” has been positioned as a public welfare program from the start, focusing on assisting agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship rather than live selling. As a public welfare program, while telling rural revitalization stories, it also targets markets to promote and introduce products from agricultural benefit and assistance enterprises, but in an experiential manner. This impartial, experiential approach makes audiences find the content more credible and acceptable. On August 19, 2022, when “Hello, Makers” visited a local innovative loofah water company, the entire program intuitively demonstrated the production mechanism and process through interviews with three entrepreneurs, with the host simply experiencing the scene without any product

introduction. Many listeners and viewers learned about and understood loofah water through this objective process, promoting product sales. On September 1, 2022, when the program visited a local grape industrial park, it similarly allowed listeners and viewers to get close to the products through face-to-face interviews with the entrepreneur and the village' s first Party secretary and tours of the grape garden and packaging workshop, subtly promoting their product sales.

3.5 Upholding the Position for Communication

Using converged media thinking to run radio and presenting rural changes and rural revitalization achievements through all-media methods has become the consensus of radio media professionals. In operating “Hello, Makers,” the program has always upheld the main position of radio, correctly handling the relationship between converged media and radio, and using various converged media means to present radio content.

3.5.1 Sublation and Iteration This is a common issue facing traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers. Many media scholars and practitioners have discussed it, with some even questioning the necessity of traditional media' s existence. In this regard, the author believes that whether media convergence or new media, mediums, and communication methods, all represent iterative upgrades of one' s own media rather than sublation and replacement. To run radio well, one must uphold its position, use converged media thinking to cultivate its foundation, and use new media nutrients to strengthen itself, truly telling good rural stories and rural revitalization stories.

3.5.2 Video and Radio Radio visualization compensates for radio' s disadvantage of single audio dissemination and invisibility. This audio + video + live + VR communication method enriches user experience [13], but at the cost of sacrificing the imaginative space of sound. In operating “Hello, Makers,” some proposed replacing radio entirely with full video, but they overlooked whether excessive visualization would repeat television' s development dilemmas. Radio has its own rationality, significance, and characteristics that have allowed it to survive to this day, and full visualization is not advisable. Therefore, in program planning and operation, the team insisted on synchronizing audio with slow video only when visualization is unsuitable, seeking to maximize communication effects while maintaining both audio and video elements.

Rural revitalization is a national strategy and a major undertaking. In the new media communication environment and the context of media convergence, breaking through the limitations of traditional radio' s fleeting linear transmission and invisible attributes through media convergence and multi-platform dissemination has enhanced the breadth and depth of radio communication and enriched the radio user experience, laying a solid foundation for radio to do a good job in publicizing new agriculture and rural revitalization in the new era. However, to truly tell good rural revitalization stories and build radio into an IP

for rural revitalization and agricultural assistance, it is necessary to base efforts on radio itself, use converged media thinking to produce radio and programs, strengthen program planning and topic selection, focus on program content details, and use high-quality content that is both audible and watchable to attract fans for new-era radio.

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