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An Analysis of the Construction and Development of County-Level Converged Media Centers in the Context of Big Data (Postprint)

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Abstract

According to central requirements, the construction of county-level media convergence centers was essentially completed by the end of 2020. These centers have gradually transitioned from quantitative growth to quality improvement and optimization, enhancing their “Four Forces” through convergence practices. Taking the Shimen County Media Convergence Center in Hunan Province as a case study, this paper analyzes the current construction status, identifies the challenges faced by county-level media convergence centers, and proposes future development trends, aiming to provide valuable reference for the development and construction of other county-level media convergence centers.

Full Text

Preamble

Analysis on the Construction and Development of County-Level Media Convergence Centers Under the Background of Big Data: A Case Study of Shimen County Media Convergence Center, Hunan Province
(Shimen County Media Convergence Center, Changde, Hunan 415000)

Abstract: In accordance with central government requirements, the construction of county-level media convergence centers was essentially completed by the end of 2020. These centers have gradually transitioned from quantitative growth to quality improvement, enhancing their “Four Capabilities” through integrated practice. Taking Shimen County Media Convergence Center in Hunan as an example, this paper examines current construction status, identifies existing challenges, and proposes future development trends to provide valuable reference for other county-level media convergence centers.

Keywords: county-level media convergence center; Four Capabilities; big data; smart broadcasting; credibility

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1.1 Overall Deployment and Strategic Planning

As a crucial practice for deepening media integration in the era of intelligent media, county-level media convergence centers have emerged as an important breakthrough for strengthening mainstream public opinion at the grassroots level. On September 26, 2020, the *Opinions on Accelerating the In-Depth Development of Media Integration* mandated promoting media integration across institutional, management, talent, and technological dimensions. Subsequently, the 14th Five-Year Plan emphasized implementing all-media communication and building robust county-level media convergence centers. To 打通 the “last mile” of in-depth media integration development, the Party Central Committee issued a series of policies standardizing construction criteria and implementation details for county-level and provincial platform construction. Building upon top-level design, various provinces formulated their own implementation plans and management measures for county-level media convergence centers, thereby facilitating the development of new mainstream media at the grassroots level.

1.2 Overview of County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

Counties typically possess multiple media outlets including county radio and television stations, government websites, information newspapers, WeChat and Weibo accounts, and client applications. Content redundancy and institutional fragmentation make platform integration an inevitable trend and a prerequisite for optimizing communication effectiveness. This integration transforms the previously closed, dispersed, and inefficient state of various media outlets, enabling high-quality and diversified content production, rich communication channels, and effective resource consolidation. Currently established county-level media convergence centers are led by local county Party committee propaganda departments, with staffing determined by establishment offices and budgets formulated by finance departments. They operate through a “central kitchen” model and “brand-hanging” system, aiming to build “regional new mainstream media” by integrating county media resources—including newspapers, radio, television, websites, microblogs, and client applications—into an organic matrix that transforms isolated operations into coordinated synergy.

Construction timelines for these centers have been relatively rapid, with most leveraging local radio and television stations as the foundation and provincial technical platforms as support for deep media integration. While strengthening news content production, these centers actively explore integrated media operation models, develop “government affairs + commerce +” initiatives, and ensure the amplification of mainstream melodies and positive energy. They enhance communication between government and citizens, striving to become the “mouthpiece” for publicizing county Party committee and government policies, a platform for gathering public opinion, a stage for enriching citizens’ spiritual lives, a window for showcasing achievements in civic civilization initiatives, and a connector to emerging media applications.

2. Specific Manifestations of County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

Since 2021, county-level media convergence centers have achieved significant progress, evolving from initial establishment to continuously advancing public opinion construction, platform services, and information transmission. Through enhanced operational capabilities that strengthen their “self-financing” function, they have gradually achieved a leap in high-quality development.

2.1 Consolidation of Mainstream Media Credibility

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a severe test for county-level media convergence centers’ capacity to respond to emergencies. During this challenge, all-media communication matrices were fully activated, with resources, channels, and workflows integrated and upgraded to enable effective and beneficial convergence. Currently established centers, led by local county Party committee propaganda departments with staffing and budgetary support, have built “central kitchen” operations. By transforming “individual operations” into organic coordination, they have achieved diversified reporting content and formats, timely dissemination of the Party Central Committee’ s voice, authoritative release of public concerns and scientific knowledge, and public opinion guidance through in-depth reporting and special columns. In serving the “last mile” of grassroots communities, they have fully leveraged their role as the anchor of mainstream media at the grassroots level, not only consolidating the spiritual strength of the people but also enhancing all-media communication power and the influence of convergence centers.

Shimen County Media Convergence Center in Hunan distributed over 200,000 copies of its “Special Pandemic Edition” and launched special columns such as *Anchor Talks on Prevention and Control* and *Winning the Prevention and Control Battle*. Reports including “*Bride-to-Be*” Reporter Takes Off Wedding Dress to Join the Battlefield, *Medical Warriors: Most Beautiful Retrograde on the Frontline*, “*If I Don’ t Make It Out, Please Take Care of My Family!*” – *Shimen County People’ s Hospital Head Nurse Guo Qiong, Over 10,000 Poverty-*

Alleviated Citizens in Shimen County Assist in Prevention and Control, and *Party Member Anti-Pandemic “Cavalry” Roams Countryside for Propaganda* each achieved over 200,000 views within a single day. Through the empowerment of traditional and new media integration, a three-dimensional communication matrix has been constructed, enabling county-level media convergence centers to “reach people wherever they are.” This effectively responded to social concerns and public doubts, achieving multi-channel mobilization, guidance, and service of the broadest masses while ensuring pandemic prevention propaganda reached every corner. Shimen County Media Convergence Center also provided online services to assist the education department in implementing “suspension of classes without suspension of teaching and learning,” while its New Shimen App enabled local residents to access “cloud grocery shopping” and “cloud shopping” services.

2.2 Smoothing of Authoritative Information Channels

To alleviate negative public emotions during emergencies, county-level media convergence centers collaborate with provincial, municipal, and central media platforms to promptly release authoritative information and scientific knowledge, clarify facts, and dispel rumors, thereby effectively curbing the spread of misinformation. They fully leverage all-media advantages for integrated multi-point dissemination, activating the synergistic role of newspapers, radio, television, websites, microblogs, client applications, and village broadcasting platforms. Through village loudspeakers, square screens, television sets, PCs, mobile devices, and other channels, the voices of the Party and government reach the masses, guiding them not to spread, believe, or panic over rumors while disseminating positive energy and mainstream values, thus consolidating powerful spiritual strength at the grassroots level.

Moreover, county-level media convergence centers have played an invaluable role in responding to major natural disasters. On July 6, 2021, Panping Village in Nanbei Town, Shimen County experienced the largest landslide since 1949. Shimen County Media Convergence Center leveraged its integrated media advantages to rush to the frontline and present the complete scene to audiences. The all-media report *Landslide Erupts at Geological Disaster Hazard Point in Nanbei Town, No Casualties* was promoted on *Xinwen Lianbo* and across the entire network. Due to effective prevention, preparedness, early warning, and decisive handling—coupled with strong publicity—the successful disaster avoidance at Leijiashan was recommended by the Hunan Provincial Party Committee as a model for flood prevention and disaster resistance to be referenced nationwide.

2.3 Strengthening of Local Information Hubs

2.3.1 “New Infrastructure” Activates Development Opportunities

The 2021 China Digital Economy Development White Paper indicates that in 2021, China’s digital economy accounted for 36.2% of GDP, contributing 67.7% to GDP growth. The digital economy continuously drives China’s economic trans-

formation in “deep water areas,” with new infrastructure providing productive forces for its development. The State Council’s government work report proposed “two new and one major” initiatives, wherein new infrastructure construction not only stimulates digital economic growth and promotes “intelligent +” upgrades but also provides transformation opportunities for the future development of county-level media convergence centers.

2.3.2 Smart Broadcasting Enables Upgrading and Transformation

With 5G research and application reaching new peaks, broadcasting innovation has achieved rapid development, boosting the intelligent and digital transformation of county-level media convergence centers and ensuring efficient support for video collection, production, transmission, and application. The 2021 China Online Audio-Visual Development Research Report shows that audio-visual applications attract a large number of 下沉 users, with China’s online audio-visual user base reaching 944 million, an increase of 43.21 million since June 2020, representing a 95.4% usage rate. China’s short video users reached 873 million, spending an average of two hours daily on short videos. Notably, 72.2% of new users came from third- to fifth-tier cities, with short videos being the most significant driver of new internet users at 15.2% [5]. To adapt to this market 下沉 trend, county-level media convergence centers utilize big data monitoring and analysis to improve news planning, production, and distribution, leveraging digital intelligence to enhance communication effects and build smart media serving local communities. In 2021, Shimen County Media Convergence Center established a short video studio with full personnel, financial, and material support. Focusing on key livelihood projects, hot topics, and difficulties—especially policy implementation—the studio produced 989 short videos throughout the year for platforms including Shimen Media Video Account, Douyin, Kuaishou, and the New Shimen client application. Over 30% of these videos exceeded one million views, significantly enhancing the communication power of grassroots mainstream media and 打通 the “last mile” of smart and diversified community service.

2.3.3 Live-Streaming Sales Assist Rural Revitalization

As urbanization accelerates, the urban-rural “digital divide” continues to narrow. By June 2021, the difference in internet penetration rates between urban and rural areas in China had shrunk to 24.1% [6]. In the critical period of comprehensive rural revitalization following decisive poverty alleviation, county-level media convergence centers have made indispensable contributions. To open sales channels for agricultural and sideline products post-pandemic, first, provincial platforms facilitate connections—Mango TV collaborated with Shimen County Media Convergence Center to organize agricultural assistance events such as “Tangerine Action,” “Let’s Harvest Together,” and “Shimen Media Public Welfare Alliance Live-Streaming Sales.” Various county-level media convergence centers in Hunan Province, 依托 New Hunan and Red Net provincial platforms, partnered with JD.com to launch “green channels for agricultural products.” Second, county-level

media convergence centers leverage localized advantages to solve sales difficulties. Taoyuan County Media Convergence Center in Hunan launched *Cloud Assistance*, Dingcheng Media Convergence Center launched *Assistance in Action*, and Shimen County Media Convergence Center launched *Cloud Grouping*, achieving total live-streaming sales of over 9 million yuan and transforming “unsold” agricultural products into “best-sellers.” Shimen County Media Convergence Center also organized online events such as “Spring Breeze Action” and “Live-Streaming Job Posts” to assist urban-rural employment during the pandemic.

2.4 Expansion of “Media+” Services

2.4.1 Assisting Grassroots Social Governance County-level media convergence centers, as the most grassroots mainstream media, have become a driving force in building a new national governance 格局. With integrated government service platforms now operational, a five-tier service system “covering urban and rural areas, coordinating vertically and horizontally, with clear hierarchies” has been essentially established. As county-level comprehensive service platforms, these centers adhere to the principles of orientation as the soul, content as the king, and mobile as the priority. They not only strengthen grassroots Party building and public opinion guidance but also integrate platforms across screens and industries, establishing various high-tech information network infrastructure systems [4] to advance grassroots governance. Shimen County Media Convergence Center’s “one center, ten platforms” all-media matrix integrating newspapers, radio, television, websites, microblogs, and client applications connects with multiple departments. By uniformly managing 32 Party and government department websites and 26 township (farm) street websites, it integrates livelihood information resources to build a digital government, consolidate grassroots informatization achievements, and construct a localized grassroots social governance system, thereby enhancing the “Four Capabilities” of county-level media convergence centers in the process of promoting integrated grassroots social governance.

2.4.2 Assisting County-Level Comprehensive Services County-level media convergence centers utilize advanced technology and information technology as carriers to integrate social governance and media big data, enabling data sharing and functional connectivity. They deeply explore diversified functions in government affairs, public benefits, and information services, focusing on building integrated service systems that deeply converge news, commerce, operations, smart cities, smart Party building, rural revitalization, cultural tourism development, and education and training. Changde City 依托 the “Changde Media” client application launched “Palm Changde,” processing over 120,000 government affairs items.

Shimen County Media Convergence Center’s “New Shimen” client application features sections including township clouds, Shimen current affairs, Shimen 同

城, traffic 先知, event live-streaming, media matrix, and department consultations, along with an “online service hall” to enhance integrated service levels for resource allocation and local management. Taoyuan County 依托 its county-level media convergence center launched the “Xanadu” client application, deeply integrating media with industry to create cultural tourism product sales platform “Taoyuan Vision” and agricultural product sales platform “Taoyuan Hui,” extending industrial chains to drive high-quality county economic development.

2.4.3 Promoting Various Social Supervision County-level media convergence centers serve as bridges connecting Party committees, governments, and the people. They not only gather public opinion but also supervise and follow up on hot and difficult issues of public concern. Shimen County Media Convergence Center’s “one center, ten platforms” all-media matrix centered on the “New Shimen” client application relies on big data platforms for public opinion monitoring, collecting, organizing, analyzing, and providing early warnings to offer strong reference for county Party committee and government decision-making. Simultaneously, it establishes collaborative platforms with the county Party committee and government to innovate inquiry and supervision mechanisms, enabling all county administrative units to 入驻 “New Shimen” while providing 39 categories of services and 50 public benefit activities.

2.5 Enhanced Operational Capabilities

2.5.1 Effective Cross-Border Cooperation The central government has gradually increased financial support for county-level media convergence center construction, with a 3.4% increase in 2020. However, fiscal budget allocations can only maintain basic operations [7]; high-quality development requires these centers to continuously enhance internal vitality and operational competitiveness to improve their self-financing capabilities. Cross-border cooperation between broadcasting and new media platforms has become a major trend in media integration, particularly in expanding short videos, audio, social media, e-commerce, and finance, where county-level media convergence centers demonstrate prominent capabilities and increasingly expand their “Media + Commerce” initiatives.

2.5.2 Continuously Elevating County Media Brands County-level media convergence centers 依托 influential county characteristics to serve the overall situation, launching various major thematic reports and activities in modular, intensive, all-media, and interesting formats. Through deep integration of the entire process from planning to distribution, they achieve consistent propaganda pace across all county media outlets, constructing a new omnipresent county media ecosystem and creating localized media brands that drive local industry and cultural development. Shimen County, with its two pillar industries of citrus and tea, leverages the “Shimen Media” brand and its “one center, ten platforms” all-media matrix to promote Shimen Silver Peak tea and China’s first early-ripening tangerine county across the entire network, helping tea and citrus

farmers increase income while elevating the county media brand and showcasing Shimen' s positive image to the world.

2.5.3 Steady Revenue Growth County-level media convergence centers continuously explore “Media + Services” and “News + Commerce” models to enhance revenue generation and achieve sustainable development that feeds back into core news production. Shimen County Media Convergence Center has built a “one center, ten platforms” media matrix centered on “Shimen Media,” undertaking livelihood projects such as “village broadcasting.” By leveraging media resources to organize large-scale events, exhibitions, and professional video production, it advances industrial upgrading. Integrating real estate, rural revitalization, environmental protection, live-streaming sales, and event revenue, it has innovatively activated its “Media+” initiatives, launching platforms such as “E-commerce in Action” and “Shimen Impression.” In 2021, the center generated over 12 million yuan in revenue, with new media accounting for over 60%, demonstrating increasingly strong self-financing capabilities.

3. Challenges and Solutions for County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

While achieving remarkable results, county-level media convergence centers have also exposed certain shortcomings: first, traditional institutional mechanisms are incompatible with big data era development; second, talent shortage and brain drain at the grassroots level constrain content production and integrated communication effectiveness; third, uneven development across centers due to economic, resource, and historical factors increasingly affects overall progress and effectiveness [8]. Future development will gradually transition from extensive expansion to quality improvement, shifting from construction booms to rational reflection, entering a fast track through building multi-level communication matrices and technology-driven integrated organizational structures.

3.2 Institutional Reform: “Change Brings Innovation”

The all-media development landscape in the big data era compels county-level media convergence centers to innovate thinking and deepen institutional reforms, creating cross-regional, cross-industry, and cross-level integrated platforms that introduce the latest technological achievements. This enables big data connectivity and interaction, content dissemination across networks and screens, and cross-business integration, while building management systems adapted to digital and intelligent transformation. Institutional reform seeks optimal balance between employee protection and performance incentives, as well as between social and economic benefits. County-level media convergence centers possess dual attributes of public welfare and market orientation, with most restructured as public welfare Category II institutions directly under county Party committees and governments. Fiscal support at all levels provides funding guarantees for infrastructure, operational maintenance, and personnel salaries,

while key financial support adds vitality and transformation momentum, freeing county media from unstable funding.

As a public welfare Category II institution, Shimen County Media Convergence Center has benefited from a three-year special national fiscal plan for county-level media convergence center construction since 2019, supplemented by municipal and county finances. The center has also innovated its personnel system, separating editorial and operational functions according to principles of need-based position setting, ignoring “establishment” status, and minimizing administrative intervention. All employees undergo competitive selection and performance-based assessment, with last-place elimination, rewards for diligence and penalties for laziness, and survival of the fittest. Assessments create income disparities that stimulate internal vitality, while the center “tailors” solutions to its own conditions, ensuring creative transformation and innovative development from the source of institutional mechanisms.

3.2 Talent Guarantee: “Motivation Brings Vitality”

Most county-level media convergence centers are restructured from local radio and television stations, historically suffering from aging staff, talent shortages, generational gaps, and brain drain. These issues result in insufficient development momentum, internal vitality, quality content, and lagging communication methods, thereby affecting construction quality and effectiveness. To strengthen human resource allocation and efficient operation, Shimen County Media Convergence Center has implemented several measures: first, collaborating with human resources, organizational, and establishment offices to formulate effective policies for introducing interdisciplinary talent, prioritizing fairness, scientific rigor, and sustainability. From 2020 to 2021, the center recruited six full-time master’s degree graduates in journalism and communication; second, shifting from “high salaries retain talent” to “high-performance motivates talent,” implementing performance assessment, zero-base salary system, full-staff competition, data click assessment, and last-place elimination to cultivate versatile “one-person, all-positions” talent capable of filming, writing, editing, and broadcasting; third, training and cooperative incubation to foster talent transformation toward all-media capabilities. Through strategic cooperation with Hunan University of Arts and Science, the center established internship and industry-academia-research training bases, gathering diverse talent resources while developing integrated media curriculum systems to provide media talent training services for Party committees, governments, and administrative units 入驻 the “New Shimen” App. This has created an all-media talent team that “can write with a pen, speak through a microphone, shoot with a camera, and disseminate across multiple platforms,” with activities such as “Shimen Media Monthly Lectures” and “Weekly Editorial Board Excellence Awards” further motivating the team.

3.3 Platform Integration: “Connectivity Brings Strength”

The most critical factor for county-level media convergence center development is building a high-tech-supported integrated media development platform. As foundational national media, county-level media platforms require substantial support at all levels to ensure healthy and sustainable industry development. Central and provincial media should establish cooperative open platforms for sharing high-efficiency technical resources and media talent, leading and promoting deep vertical and horizontal cooperation [9]. Hunan Province established a county-level media convergence center alliance to share platform resources and regularly collaborate on public welfare and major thematic projects, achieving mutual improvement through assistance, resource sharing, and pairing. In September 2021, Shimen County Media Convergence Center collaborated with provincial and municipal media to launch “Harvest Shimen” through live-streaming sales of agricultural products in Weixin Town, achieving innovation and breakthrough in provincial-municipal-county integrated media live broadcasting and creating a cross-regional resource integration platform.

3.4 Integrated Media Development: “Competition Brings Excellence”

County-level media convergence centers must deepen media integration by integrating various advantageous resources across traditional and new media to compensate for communication deficiencies and continuously optimize communication structures [10]. They must strengthen their own brand building—in today’s fast-paced information environment, a communicator’s brand significantly influences public information reception. As grassroots local mainstream media, county-level convergence centers inherently possess authority. By leveraging all-media methods to amplify their advantages and increase market influence, they can maintain an invincible position in competition.

Conclusion

The construction of county-level media convergence centers is an ongoing journey. Only by closely following central top-level design, maintaining the principle that Party media belongs to the Party, and achieving deep integration in technology, content, platforms, talent, and institutional mechanisms—while adhering to content-as-king and mobile-first strategies—can these centers achieve high-quality sustainable development. Through innovative development, enhanced operations, and deepened self-financing capabilities, they must adapt measures to local conditions to improve grassroots service levels, activate innovative talent strategies, implement multi-dimensional evaluation and supervision mechanisms, promptly identify and solve problems, and continuously optimize operational structures to better guide and serve the masses.

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

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