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Persistence and Breakthrough: A Study on the Survival Path of County-Level Converged Media Official Accounts—A Case Study of “Today’s Changle” WeChat Official Account (Postprint)

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Abstract

With the continuous development of information technology and the Internet, the influence of mobile social media continues to grow, heralding the arrival of an era of media convergence that integrates traditional media with new media and facilitates interaction between media and audiences. County-level media convergence centers, situated at the grassroots level, have implemented a “mobile-first” development strategy and established WeChat publishing platforms with their own distinctive features, thereby accumulating valuable experience in the exploration of media convergence development. As county-level media convergence centers, only by adhering to correct public opinion guidance, fully leveraging resource and brand advantages, building a new media communication matrix, continuously innovating communication methods and means, highlighting distinctive characteristics, and creating standout features can they further enhance their communication power, guiding power, influence, and credibility.

Full Text

Persistence and Breakthrough: Exploring the Survival Path of County-Level Media Convergence WeChat Official Accounts—A Case Study of “Today’s Changle” WeChat Official Account

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Abstract

With the continuous development of information technology and the internet, the influence of mobile social media keeps rising, ushering in an era of media convergence that integrates traditional and new media as well as media-audience interaction. County-level media convergence centers, positioned at the grassroots level, have implemented the “mobile-first” development strategy by establishing distinctive WeChat publishing platforms, gaining valuable experience in media convergence exploration. For these county-level centers, only by adhering to correct guidance of public opinion, fully leveraging resource and brand advantages, building new media communication matrices, continuously innovating communication methods and approaches, and highlighting distinctive features can they further enhance their communication capacity, guidance, influence, and credibility.

Keywords: county-level media convergence; mobile-first; diversification; communication effects; mobile live streaming

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As media convergence development continues to advance, the era of media convergence has arrived, injecting new vitality into the development of county-level media convergence center WeChat official accounts. How these centers can implement the “mobile-first” strategy, leverage their own resource and brand advantages, effectively manage new media platforms such as official accounts and apps, and comprehensively enhance the communication capacity, guidance, influence, and credibility of mainstream media has become a crucial challenge for practitioners. This paper analyzes the communication characteristics and current development dilemmas of county-level media convergence center WeChat official accounts, using the four-year operational practice of “Today’s Changle” WeChat official account from Changle County Media Convergence Center in Weifang City, Shandong Province as a case study, and explores development paths within the media convergence ecosystem based on these challenges.

1. Current Communication Status and Characteristics of County-Level Media Convergence WeChat Official Accounts

WeChat official accounts, leveraging advantages such as multimedia graphic and text push notifications and convenient interaction, have become favored channels for users to obtain information and knowledge. In the process of advancing media convergence development, the heavily promoted WeChat official accounts of county-level media convergence centers have played an important “feedback”

role, securing more attention for traditional print and broadcast media while enhancing their own communication capacity and influence. As representative new media platforms prioritized by county-level media convergence centers, these official accounts exhibit distinct media convergence characteristics, with many exploratory initiatives clearly imprinted on their communication content and methods. These are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

1.1 Content Characteristics

Before media convergence, county-level media convergence centers were mostly county-level radio and television stations or newspapers serving as the “mouthpiece” of local party committees and governments, possessing good authority and credibility. They adhered to promoting mainstream themes and positive energy, primarily pushing political news and people’s livelihood hotspots to local cadres and masses. Consequently, the column setup and content of county-level media convergence WeChat official accounts are deeply influenced by traditional media, bearing obvious “political news coloration.” Taking the “Today’s Changle” official account as an example, it has established columns such as “Live Streaming,” “WeChat Matrix,” “Panorama Changle,” and “Party History Learning Education,” mainly pushing official political and people’s livelihood news, with local party history learning education featured as a distinctive column. Simultaneously, each push notification’s title features a “typified” characteristic, with eye-catching typified tags such as “Authoritative Release,” “Epidemic Prevention and Control,” “Travel-Related,” “Latest Weather,” and “Please Share” placed before each title to attract audience attention and stimulate reading interest.

1.2 Diversified Expression Modes

County-level media convergence centers have mostly transformed from traditional news media. After integration, the resource advantages of print media (excelling in text), television media (excelling in visuals), and radio media (excelling in audio) have achieved optimal aggregation. WeChat official accounts of county-level media convergence centers fully leverage this integration advantage, utilizing each medium’s expressive strengths to deliver information rich in graphics, text, audio, and video to audiences. Simultaneously, these centers use the development of WeChat official accounts to promote transformation in content production, presentation methods, and product packaging for traditional radio, television, and newspapers. For each information push, the “Today’s Changle” WeChat official account strives to include text, images, audio, and video. It also uploads the digital version of the print media *Changle Daily* and the local television news program *Changle News* to the menu column below the official account, enabling users to experience all multimedia information products of Changle Media Convergence through a single platform.

1.3 Strong Regional Focus, Narrow Audience

County-level WeChat official accounts have strong local characteristics, with limited readership groups, and their regional positioning creates difficulties in increasing followers and readership. Simply relying on publishing local political and people's livelihood news, or repackaging the same news content as "reheated leftovers," can no longer escape the discerning eyes of today's readers. Moreover, local political news lacks any appeal or resonance for a broader audience in terms of proximity or interest. Taking "Today's Changle" as an example, information such as "This Place in Changle Receives National Honor" holds no practical value or relevance for readers from other regions, who will simply bypass such headlines or even directly unfollow the account.

2. Communication Challenges Facing County-Level Media Convergence WeChat Platforms

Due to geographical limitations and the lack of independent operation teams and professional new media talent, county-level media convergence WeChat official accounts face numerous problems and dilemmas in their operation.

2.1 Talent Shortage

County-level media WeChat official accounts rarely have professional teams comprising planning, collection, editing, art, and technical personnel for operation. Instead, they rely on the secondary reorganization and transformation of traditional newspaper or television practitioners, who tend to be older, conservative in thinking, and lack understanding of new media development, making innovation in technology and content difficult. The staff of the "Today's Changle" WeChat official account primarily consists of editors and reporters from former television and print media, resulting in a shortage of new media professionals. Moreover, due to issues such as staffing quotas and compensation, talent drains away significantly, making qualified editors extremely hard to recruit.

2.2 Insufficient Innovation, Lack of Quality Content

The content production of county-level media convergence center WeChat official platforms features limited originality, with most content being superficial coverage that remains "broad and general," lacking quality consciousness. Moreover, most information consists of "forwarding" directives issued by higher-level publicity departments, essentially reposted verbatim, let alone demonstrating creativity or innovation. Among the four daily articles on "Today's Changle," only half are original, and these are merely "recreations" of television and newspaper news. The rest mainly involve reuse and secondary processing by editors of Changle-related content from authoritative media, basically only satisfying the dissemination of local news and information. There are few targeted WeChat articles with deliberate topic selection, planning, collection, editing, and opera-

tion, lacking quality masterpieces like Xinhua News Agency' s WeChat official account' s “Super Burning 100 Seconds!”

2.3 Impact from Self-Media, Declining Communication Capacity

With the popularization of mobile phones and the development of network technology, self-media has rapidly occupied public attention. People can simply pick up their phones, take a shot, and share it online to become a disseminating medium.[1] Social self-media represents privatized, civilian, universal, and autonomous communicators who, compared to the three-review-three-proofreading process of mainstream media, enjoy greater freedom and autonomy, with information release sometimes faster than authoritative media in certain situations. Consequently, the influence of county-level media convergence center WeChat official platforms naturally gets diverted. Taking Changle County as an example, the “Today' s Changle” and “Voice of Changle” WeChat official platforms of Changle County Media Convergence Center must compete with self-media platforms such as “Changle Online” and “Know Changle” in information dissemination and push notifications, resulting in diverted communication capacity and influence.

3. Communication Strategies for County-Level Media WeChat Official Accounts

Some scholars believe that two standards measure the development of WeChat official accounts: first, the number of users subscribing to the newspaper' s official account; second, the degree of user interaction.[2] Whether pushing articles or releasing videos, meeting users' information needs and gaining their recognition constitutes the ultimate purpose of operating a WeChat official account. This paper argues that the survival and development of county-level media convergence center WeChat official accounts can proceed from the following four aspects.

3.1 Integrating County Media Resources to Build a News Dissemination “WeChat Matrix”

To build the most authoritative and influential new media platform within Changle County, Changle County Media Convergence Center has strengthened internet thinking, adhered to complementary advantages and integrated development between traditional and emerging media, and achieved converged development across media forms including websites, WeChat official accounts, and apps, with comprehensive presentation through text, images, video, H5, and other expression modes. Since its launch, the “Today' s Changle” WeChat official account has leveraged advantages such as high political quality, solid writing skills, strong integration capabilities, and strict gatekeeping from original media news collection and editing personnel, while incorporating new media

advantages of speed, large capacity, and strong interactivity, forming an all-around, three-dimensional, and diversified new media communication matrix.

To establish county-level media convergence centers as mainstream public opinion strongholds and fully exert their guidance role, it is essential to effectively integrate all available resources, including various party-government self-media and social self-media. Particularly, party-government self-media within the county can compensate for insufficient resources and limited coverage of county-level media. Changle County Media Convergence Center has gradually integrated information resources from various county departments, units, and town/subdistrict self-media platforms to achieve information sharing and content sharing. The “Today’s Changle” WeChat public platform has established direct liaison mechanisms with WeChat platforms of various departments, units, and town/subdistricts, creating WeChat groups to grasp in real-time the information content to be released by party and government self-media daily. Livelihood information concerning people’s vital interests is communicated and released immediately, with other self-media subsequently conducting secondary forwarding. Additionally, “Today’s Changle” has established a dedicated “WeChat Matrix” section, assembling all available media within and outside the county to form a news and information dissemination WeChat matrix characterized by speed, large capacity, and strong interactivity.

3.2 Timely Release to Enhance Communication Capacity and Influence

Western new media circles once stated: “No matter how significant a news event is or how prominent the figures involved are, news value will sharply diminish over time.”[3] News reports on recently occurred facts must emphasize timeliness; without it, news becomes old news. Only by accurately grasping the optimal timing for news reporting and editing appropriate reports at the right time can news resources be fully utilized, public concerns effectively addressed, and news value maximized.

Supported by mobile internet technology, new media platforms demonstrate prominent advantages in breaking news dissemination. Particularly, WeChat official accounts, with their characteristics and advantages of transcending time and space, wide radiation, high communication capacity, and being savable, reviewable, and cumulative, have been widely applied during epidemic prevention and control. County-level media represent grassroots media, serving as the “last mile” for media convergence, connecting with the masses, and enabling grassroots governance.

After the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the “Today’s Changle” WeChat official account under Changle County Media Convergence Center responded swiftly, immediately launching the “United in Fighting the Epidemic” column and pushing large amounts of protection knowledge and prevention information, fully playing the main force role in publicizing protection knowledge. To tell Changle

stories well and spread Changle' s voice, journalists from Changle County Media Convergence Center proactively went to the frontlines of epidemic prevention and control for interviews and reporting, releasing on the "Today' s Changle" WeChat public platform timely pieces such as "Fighting the Epidemic, I' m on the Frontline | Chen Jiafeng Goes to Weifang for Centralized Treatment," "Changle Convergence Media Host Connects with the Most Beautiful Reverse Runner Zhang Qingqing," "Battling Wind and Snow, Fighting Severe Cold | Changle Epidemic Detection Point Public Security Police Stick to Their Posts in Fighting the Epidemic," and "I' m a Party Member, If I Don' t Step Up, Who Will!" –The Most Beautiful 'Reverse Runner' in Wutu Subdistrict' s Epidemic Fight," boosting morale for frontline epidemic prevention personnel and helping win the battle against the epidemic.

3.3 Upholding the Foundation with Quality Content to Shape and Strengthen the Soul

Quality content has always been the lifeblood and foundation of media, requiring WeChat official account articles to feature both aesthetically pleasing layout and high-quality content. In the all-media ecosystem, frontline journalists conduct preliminary news gathering and creation through in-depth interviews. After these primary creations with complete news elements are uploaded to the media convergence news collection and editing system, a strong editing team reprocesses and packages them to produce works suitable for new media platforms. Compared with traditional media, editors play a more crucial role in determining content quality during new media platform operation. Editors must truly settle down to identify content suitable for new media broadcasting from massive information, discover value points that match audience needs, and consider what presentation methods and expressive means can achieve optimal communication effects.

The "Today' s Changle" WeChat official account, combining the news dissemination requirements of being "close to reality," "close to life," and "close to the masses," starts from good deeds around us and public concerns to excavate news closely related to Changle people' s production and life, pushing it to users in a timely manner. The article "67 Seconds of Life and Death | Emergency Rescue, This Changle Surveillance Video Goes Viral!" uses surveillance footage from an elevator capturing a doctor' s rescue scene, grasping crucial time nodes of the rescue. The text is segmented by time, accompanied by decomposed gif animations, recreating the medical love that "one second ago they were strangers, one second later they were entrusting each other with life and death, when life encounters danger, they always rescue desperately, pulling lives back from the hands of death," evoking society' s respect and reverence for medical staff. "200 Milliliters of 'Life Source' | Veteran Ge Liang Donates Hematopoietic Stem Cells to Save Leukemia Child" also reached over 100,000 reads at one point, telling the story of Changle' s post-90s young man Ge Liang who voluntarily donated hematopoietic stem cells to save a leukemia child on the brink of death,

composing a touching life anthem with selfless dedication and benevolent love. In the new media era, journalists must keep pace with the times, using new media tools to tell stories well; simultaneously, they must tell stories in ways that people enjoy and can easily accept, excavate more fresh and typical cases, and move and influence people with genuine emotions.

3.4 Excelling in Mobile Live Streaming as an Additional “Weapon” for Attracting Followers

Mobile video live streaming is a convenient and diversified live form. Compared with early television live broadcasting and video recording, mobile video live streaming significantly lowers the investment threshold—people only need a smartphone and a registered mobile live streaming application account to participate in live streaming anytime, anywhere.[4] In the all-media era, with the commercial operation of 5G communication technology, media content production and communication methods increasingly trend toward video, making mobile video live streaming the primary communication method for various media convergence matrices and a powerful tool for promoting their development.

As the “China Sapphire Capital” and hometown of “China Watermelon,” the annual China (Changle) Gem Expo and China (Changle) Watermelon Festival attract not only attention from county residents but also high interest from merchants and audiences both inside and outside the province and even internationally. They follow the “Today’ s Changle” WeChat publishing platform through mobile live streaming, substantially increasing its follower count and article readership. Since its establishment, the “Today’ s Changle” WeChat official account has conducted over 100 mobile live streams, with an average viewership of over 10,000 per stream, some even exceeding 100,000+. The 2020 China (Changle) Gem Expo live stream alone added thousands of followers.

On October 15, 2020, the China (Changle) Gem Expo was held. At this exhibition, an exclusive video platform live stream was newly launched, with a two-person live streaming team conducting comprehensive, uninterrupted coverage of Halls 1 and 2. The live event began at 10:18 with the opening ceremony. During the broadcast, the host interacted well with enterprise exhibition personnel, covering jewelry explanations and introductions to participating enterprises. The video platform attracted over 200,000 online viewers, drawing a large number of friends interested in Changle’s sapphire industry and receiving unanimous praise.

During the continuous construction and development of media convergence, there is a need to accelerate user return and aggregation onto autonomous media convergence mobile platforms. On such platforms, users can experience rich content and community interaction, and user retention can be achieved, which is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable development of media convergence platforms.[5] Each live stream on the “Today’ s Changle” WeChat official account platform not only achieves real-time synchronous display of video, images, and

text but also has dedicated backstage staff interacting with fans. After screening, important questions raised by fans related to the live broadcast are fed back by the host through interviews with experts and organizers. Excelling in media convergence live streaming has greatly enhanced the platform's visibility and influence. The "Today's Changle" WeChat official account platform also employs media convergence reporting methods, launching 360-degree panoramic photos of Changle County town on the WeChat official account platform, providing netizens with novel visual experiences.

Although the development of county-level media convergence center official accounts faces numerous difficulties in talent team building, quality content creation, follower growth, and readership enhancement, leveraging the advantages of media convergence can help these official accounts break through bottlenecks and achieve new development. Against the backdrop of media convergence development, county-level WeChat official account platforms must not only base themselves on local characteristics, drawing on and integrating traditional media resources and various social leading creative forces, but also practice the mobile-first strategy. With richer content and higher professional quality, they should develop into new media platforms with outstanding advantages and distinctive features, providing better services for audiences.

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

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