

---

AI translation · View original & related papers at  
[chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202310.00714](https://chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202310.00714)

---

## How to Break Free from the Predicament of “County-Level Media Convergence Constrained by Institutional Factors”

**Authors:** Yuan Jinquan

**Date:** 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

### Abstract

Owing to regional disparities in economic and social development, county-level media convergence initiatives exhibit varying construction standards and hierarchical levels, with several prominent and non-negligible issues emerging in top-level design, institutional mechanisms, talent development, and financial support. This paper examines the impact of county-level media convergence center institutional frameworks on the convergence process, analyzing the author's own institution to identify pathways for overcoming institutional constraints. Furthermore, it seeks to draw the attention of local Party committees and governments toward developing more practical and viable institutional approaches for the comprehensive, in-depth, and high-quality development of county-level media convergence.

### Full Text

## How to Escape the Dilemma of “County-Level Media Convergence Constrained by Institutional Factors”

**Author:** Rudong County Media Convergence Center, Rudong, Jiangsu 226400

**Abstract:** Due to variations in regional economic and social development, county-level media convergence initiatives exhibit differing levels of advancement. Notable challenges have emerged in top-level design, institutional mechanisms, talent cultivation, and financial support that warrant serious attention. This paper examines the impact of institutional factors on county-level media convergence centers, analyzing the author's own organization to identify pathways for overcoming institutional constraints. It aims to prompt local party committees and governments to develop more practical and feasible institutional solutions for the comprehensive, high-quality development of county-level media convergence.

**Keywords:** county-level media convergence; institutional reform; capital investment; technical support; healthy development

**CLC Number:** G632

**Document Code:** A

**Article ID:** 1671-0134(2022)01-075-03

**DOI:** 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2022.01.021

**Citation Format:** Yuan Jinquan. How to Escape the Dilemma of “County-Level Media Convergence Constrained by Institutional Factors”[J]. *China Media Technology*, 2022(01): 75-76, 96.

---

The rapid development of information technology and increasingly sophisticated intelligent devices have created unprecedented opportunities and convenience for media convergence. From central to local levels, media convergence across China is flourishing, giving rise to regional mainstream media collectives with enhanced dissemination power, guidance capacity, influence, and credibility.[1] Within this landscape, county-level media represent a unique segment. However, due to regional disparities in economic and social development, these initiatives display varying construction standards and levels. Prominent issues have surfaced in top-level design, institutional mechanisms, service functions, talent development, operational management, and financial support,[2] which seriously constrain the healthy development of county-level media convergence. This paper specifically examines the institutional challenges confronting county-level media convergence.

## 1. Insufficient Investment Restricts the Path of County-Level Media Convergence

As President Xi Jinping has emphasized, “The success of ideological work concerns the future destiny of the Party, the long-term stability of the state, and the cohesion and solidarity of the nation.” [3] At the 2018 National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work, he further stated: “We must solidly advance the construction of county-level media convergence centers to better guide and serve the masses.” [4] County-level media constitute the most fundamental units in the media convergence ecosystem—the “foundation” of a pyramid that extends upward through provincial and central levels. Unlike the convergence of central media such as CCTV, Xinhua News Agency, and *People’s Daily*, or even provincial-level media, county-level convergence involves integrating traditional broadcast, television, and newspaper outlets with more recently developed web platforms.

The central-level media convergence experience offers important reference points. According to the *Plan for Deepening the Reform of Party and State Institutions*, in 2018, China Central Television (China International Television), China National Radio, and China Radio International were consolidated to form the new

“China Media Group” (CMG) as a public institution directly under the State Council and supervised by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee. CMG’s primary responsibilities include promoting Party theory and policies, coordinating major propaganda campaigns, organizing radio and television production, creating and broadcasting high-quality content, guiding public discourse, strengthening and improving public opinion supervision, advancing multimedia convergence, enhancing international communication capacity, and telling China’s story effectively. The reform aimed to strengthen centralized Party leadership over key ideological positions, enhance the overall strength and competitiveness of radio and television media, accelerate the integration of traditional and emerging media, and expand international communication capabilities.[5] Similarly, Xinhua News Agency and *People’s Daily* have pursued convergence through internal media integration and expansion, moving beyond traditional text and photo distribution to invest heavily in cutting-edge internet technologies like big data and cloud computing while expanding into audio-video and live-streaming platforms. Their content forms have diversified progressively from websites, Weibo, and WeChat to mobile apps, webcasting, and new online communities, with information production, distribution channels, and reception terminals undergoing tremendous transformation—all requiring substantial financial investment.

However, constrained by local economic conditions, most county-level media convergence initiatives across China suffer from funding shortages. Fiscal budgets typically cover only personnel costs for established positions, while expenses for training, capacity building, and equipment upgrades remain severely inadequate. Particularly concerning is the lack of investment in technical equipment, which fails to meet the rapid development needs of informatization and technological advancement. This fundamentally restricts media convergence progress.

For instance, new media integration requires significant equipment investment. The “Central Kitchen” model, pioneered and advocated by *People’s Daily*, breaks down traditional media silos by establishing a chief editor’s dispatch center and integrated editorial platform to coordinate reporting, editing, and technical resources, achieving a “one-time collection, multi-format production, multi-channel distribution” workflow.[6] For county-level media convergence centers, establishing such a “Central Kitchen” represents a massive investment. Similarly, mobile live-streaming technology differs fundamentally from traditional television broadcasting. While TV broadcasting relies on field transmission vehicles or cable signals relayed to production centers for processing and satellite uplink, mobile streaming is simpler and independent of weather and channel constraints, yet requires robust mobile platform construction, comprehensive technical application systems, and procurement of wired fiber-optic equipment, wireless microwave systems, HD switchers, and central control hosts. With 5G networks currently being deployed and soon to be widely adopted, equipment updates and new purchases will demand substantial additional investment.

## 2. Rigid Mechanisms Make Integration of Editorial and Technical Staff Difficult

In practice, county-level media convergence has largely remained at the level of “physical integration” among news departments. Before 2003, county-level newspapers existed both with and without official publication numbers nationwide. Since the central government’s cleanup and restructuring of county newspapers in 2003, some regions have abolished the organizational structure of newspapers without publication numbers, yet these continue to exist in forms such as “news centers” or “information centers,” remaining separate from local radio and television stations as distinct news units. Prior to media convergence, these entities operated independently, with broadcast outlets producing audio-visual news and newspaper units producing text and photo journalism. Although the establishment of convergence centers has nominally merged newspapers with radio and television stations, creating the appearance of institutional integration, substantive integration in news gathering and editing remains elusive.

The primary reasons are threefold: First, unclear thinking about media convergence, lacking top-level design, insufficient understanding of media convergence in the information age, and limited methodological approaches. Second, the need for a gradual process to enhance the capabilities of editorial and technical support personnel. Third, inadequate hardware equipment guarantees.

Currently, county-level media convergence centers are explicitly required to belong to the Party committee system, sharing the same institutional nature as other county-level departments and participating in their performance assessments. However, as the analysis above reveals, these centers represent a major convergence of former radio and television stations, broadcasting bureaus, and newspaper offices, resulting in complex personnel compositions including public institution staff, enterprise employees, and labor dispatch workers. Some convergence center leadership even includes concurrently serving civil servants, creating a fundamental distinction from other county-level administrative departments.

County-level media convergence centers are not administrative agencies, yet they operate under administrative management models. While other county-level departments receive comprehensive budgetary allocations from county finance covering salaries, benefits, performance bonuses, office expenses, infrastructure, and projects without revenue generation concerns, convergence centers must generate substantial income through their own operations. Although they receive some budgetary funds, these only cover—or barely maintain—salaries and benefits for civil servants and public institution employees. Over 60% of total expenditures, particularly major equipment investments, must be self-generated through business operations to sustain center functioning and development.

Furthermore, constrained by the current institutional framework, some convergence centers suffer from inflexible mechanisms and continue using legacy management systems. Regarding fund usage, all revenue and expenditures fall under

county-level fiscal management. Bonuses, benefits, and equipment procurement can only be applied for after meeting certain revenue targets. Due to various factors, advertising revenues that county-level media have long relied upon for survival have declined dramatically nationwide in recent years, making it difficult to meet established revenue targets. Even when annual revenue goals are achieved, funds cannot be used without prior budget approval, leaving centers without operational autonomy. At the implementation level, editorial and technical staff face disparate pay for equal work due to personnel classification issues. A considerable portion of county-level convergence center staff hold enterprise or labor dispatch positions, creating significant disparities in salary and benefits compared to public institution employees, which severely dampens morale. Regarding talent recruitment, rigid mechanisms make it difficult to attract outstanding editorial and technical personnel. Taking Rudong County Media Convergence Center in Jiangsu Province as an example, the center has recruited multiple anchors and photojournalists, but all eventually left for other positions due to inability to secure formal establishment status and low salaries. While formally recruited personnel possess theoretical knowledge, they cannot quickly adapt to practical editorial work. This creates an awkward situation where needed talent cannot enter, be recruited, or be retained.

### 3. In the Information Technology Era, We Must Overcome the “Last Mile” of Media Convergence

Media convergence has become an inevitable development trend. Local authorities must address current institutional constraints, earnestly advance county-level media convergence center construction, overcome the “last mile” of media convergence, and achieve genuine, effective integration. Four key strategies emerge:

First, break traditional management models and establish integrated teams adapted to the new information technology landscape. Using Rudong County, Jiangsu Province as an example, the Rudong County Media Convergence Center began early. In 2004, the Rudong County Radio and Television Bureau (Station) and Rudong Daily underwent institutional integration, achieving “physical convergence” of the three traditional media. In 2010, the Rudong County Cultural, Radio, Television and Media Center (Group) was established, with broadcast, television, and newspaper outlets becoming internal departments. In 2011, a New Media Department was created, establishing the preliminary framework of a county-level media convergence center. By June 2017, Rudong County Media Convergence Center development accelerated rapidly. In December, internal structures were renamed and departmental functions adjusted, achieving “chemical convergence” of news production and dissemination platforms. The center’s broadcast, television, and newspaper divisions eliminated their separate reporting and editing teams and independent production workflows, establishing a unified Interview Department that no longer distinguished between television, radio, or newspaper reporters. All journalists became media con-

vergence reporters, transforming from belonging to single platforms to serving all platforms, providing news products for all distribution channels. Personnel selection became fully two-way and competitive. By early 2018, the Rudong County Media Convergence Center was operating under full convergence mode, officially launching on June 25, 2019, becoming one of the first county-level media convergence centers in Jiangsu Province to pass inspection and obtain the *People's Republic of China Internet News Information Service License*.

Second, transform ideological concepts and prioritize the “mobile-first” principle. In integrating traditional and new media, all journalists must embrace their primary identity as new media reporters, with all news resources converging toward new media platforms. To stimulate internal vitality and unleash staff potential, the focus should be on training and strengthening capabilities through practical operations. News production should implement comprehensive planning, intensive interviewing, specialized editing, coordinated reviewing, refined production, and segmented distribution. To enhance all-media editorial capabilities, the center has adopted various training methods, including inviting experts in and sending staff out for professional development. In recent years, Rudong Media Convergence Center has invited numerous experts and scholars to deliver nearly 20 specialized lectures and dispatched over 50 staff members in 10 batches to Shanghai Media Group and Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation for hands-on training. The center has also actively collaborated with CCTV, Dragon TV, and the Yangtze River Delta Satellite TV Alliance to regularly conduct large-scale live broadcasts and joint reporting activities. Additionally, the center organizes no fewer than four major news campaigns annually to exercise all editorial staff.

Third, restructure boldly and reinvent media convergence production workflows. The core of media convergence lies in reinventing news production processes. Rudong County Media Convergence Center has established a comprehensive system to ensure normal operation of the new organizational structure, creating a Chief Editor's Committee with six departments under its authority: Chief Editor's Office, Media Convergence Interview Department, New Media Department, Radio Department, Television Department, Newspaper Department, and Technical Support and Broadcasting Department.[7] The center has clarified the work responsibilities of the Chief Editor's Committee and its subordinate departments, established workflow norms and quality evaluation criteria for all stages of news production, formulated monthly and annual assessment methods for all departments, and created incentive mechanisms for external publicity and excellence awards. This has gradually formed an institutional system that meets the internal requirements of media convergence development and establishes a news production organizational structure featuring leading-level planning, unified collection, layered development, targeted production, and integrated (multi-channel) distribution. The Chief Editor's Committee maintains control over public opinion orientation, timely planning of key propaganda themes, and comprehensive process control through daily pre-editorial meetings and monthly news conferences.

Fourth, eliminate identity boundaries among editorial staff and reward based on “performance as the sole criterion.” Rudong Media Convergence Center adopts a people-oriented approach that disregards administrative, public institution, enterprise, or labor dispatch status, promoting the capable and demoting the incompetent. Editorial staff undergo regular rotation...

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

*Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.*