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## Challenges and Solutions in the Development of County-level Converged Media Centers (Post-print)

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### Abstract

In recent years, various regions throughout China have been actively promoting the construction of county-level media convergence centers. However, due to differing foundations of media development across localities, no standardized solutions or established guidelines exist that can serve as a reference. Furthermore, the construction of county-level media convergence centers is not an undertaking that can be completed overnight; it entails considerable complexity and is bound to encounter numerous difficulties in practice. Therefore, how to break through the predicament and successfully bridge the “last mile” of media convergence becomes critically important. In view of this, this article focuses on exploring the dilemmas encountered in the construction of county-level media convergence centers and potential solutions, as a reference for readers.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

**Title:** An Exploration of the Challenges and Solutions in County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

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**Abstract:** In recent years, China has actively promoted the construction of county-level media convergence centers across various regions. However, due to differing local media development foundations, no standardized blueprint or ready-made formula exists for reference. Moreover, building these centers is not an overnight task; it is highly complex and inevitably encounters numerous difficulties in practice. How to break through these dilemmas and successfully bridge

the “last mile” of media convergence has become critically important. This article focuses on examining the challenges faced in county-level media convergence center construction and proposes solutions for readers’ consideration.

**Keywords:** media convergence center construction; communication system; public opinion environment; national governance; professional talent

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## 2. Current Status of County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

Although current county-level media convergence initiatives suffer from insufficient funding and technology, their innovative approaches and integration development remain promising, with relatively rapid progress. This is evident in several aspects:

First, leveraging central media to launch convergence center construction. Building county-level media convergence centers represents a key priority in China’s media work, requiring full functionality and high configuration. The construction process demands fresh positioning grounded in local realities, establishing reliable centralized command systems, and integrating media resources through shared manuscript databases, information collection, hot topic aggregation, editorial coordination, and feedback on dissemination effectiveness to ensure construction progress and quality.

Second, establishing news-service complexes. During construction, it is essential to emphasize the integration of news and services, selecting content based on innovative stress models and user resource consolidation to ensure high returns and efficient development. Focusing on social services and e-government construction, centers should prioritize achieving organic online-offline integration to provide comprehensive services including business entertainment, education, learning, and news information. Currently, county-level media convergence centers have largely improved their event planning and advertising business systems, though profitability models and funding issues remain to be resolved.

Third, implementing mobile-first strategies. Many regions building county-level media convergence centers have emphasized concentrating and storing resources,

prioritizing the development of mobile new media systems. This has accelerated the construction of mobile battlefields centered on “two micros and one app” (WeChat, Weibo, and news clients), launching micro, fast, accurate, and innovative clients. These initiatives have actively responded to concepts of regional interaction circles and current affairs news portals, deeply exploring unique values that resonate with communities and the public, thereby demonstrating their role as the “mouthpiece” of local party committees and governments. However, due to regional disparities, the effectiveness of county-level media convergence center construction varies considerably, leaving substantial room for improvement in mobile strategies.

### **3. Challenges in County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction**

Despite notable achievements in domestic county-level media convergence center construction, practical implementation faces several difficulties and challenges, specifically manifested as follows:

#### **3.1 Internal Integration Deficiencies Confined to External Media Consolidation**

Constrained by uneven economic development across China, affluent districts and counties have invested substantial financial and human resources, achieving remarkable media convergence results. However, some underdeveloped regions have invested less fiscal capital, resulting in inadequate technological innovation, human resources, and basic hardware equipment. Additionally, some county-level leaders have failed to clearly recognize the value of building media convergence centers, focusing more on investment attraction and production. This has caused media convergence in underdeveloped counties to merely represent the “addition” of various traditional media platforms, remaining at the “physical convergence” level without achieving genuine internal integration or possessing unified standards and overall planning. After merging with new media, some outlets have not been effectively utilized; their dissemination and production methods remain stuck in the past, and their content fails to meet audience needs, naturally receiving poor public evaluations.

#### **3.2 Difficulties in Implementing Institutional Mechanisms and Lack of Organizational Vitality**

Some county-level media organizations suffer from rigid structures, lacking reform momentum, incentive constraints, and innovative personnel and distribution mechanisms, resulting in insufficient internal vitality to meet current market demands. Although national support exists for media convergence construction, local implementation often falls short. Since convergence center construction is typically managed by county party committees and governments, many tasks—including personnel allocation, business decision-making, and in-

centive measures—require reporting and authorization before implementation, which naturally hinders institutional reform and makes achieving significant results difficult.

### **3.3 Shortage of Professional Personnel and Superficial Construction**

Constrained by economic conditions, some regions face considerable difficulties in talent recruitment. Without guaranteed professional and technical personnel, innovation capacity suffers. In some areas, county-level media employ only contract workers without formal establishment, leading to high personnel turnover and weak organizational commitment. Some staff recruited through public service examinations also exhibit low average educational qualifications and mismatched professional backgrounds. Objectively speaking, county-level media operate on a relatively small scale with serious personnel aging, and media staff rarely have opportunities for self-improvement. Even guaranteeing at least one annual external exchange or learning opportunity proves difficult, leaving relevant personnel's professional capabilities stagnant. Moreover, unscientific talent cultivation systems make it difficult for county-level media convergence centers to attract excellent talent; even when recruited, retention remains challenging, causing construction efforts to stagnate and remain superficial.

### **3.4 Funding Shortages and Weak Revenue Capacity**

Professional technology, scientific operation, and comprehensive services are key to ensuring steady media convergence center construction, all of which require sufficient funding. However, most county-level media convergence centers currently struggle to generate adequate revenue, relying primarily on government fiscal appropriations—a situation that cannot meet long-term construction needs. Chronic insufficient profitability represents a key factor hindering development. County-level media convergence centers should utilize media income to ensure normal operations, clarify profit models, and achieve healthy development.

### **3.5 Failure to Effectively Present Local Regional Characteristics**

Compared with large-scale media convergence centers, county-level centers possess richer local life characteristics and closer proximity to grassroots communities and the public, making them more likely to gain grassroots support. In today's information age, people can access desired information through multiple channels with great convenience, but this also creates new problems, such as information redundancy, which significantly wastes limited time. In response, how county-level media convergence centers can differentiate themselves from other media and effectively leverage their regional characteristics becomes crucial. However, currently few county-level media convergence centers successfully present authentic local characteristics.

## 4. Solutions for County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

### 4.1 Leveraging Multiple Channels to Advance Media Convergence

Building county-level media convergence centers cannot occur in isolation. Achieving ideal construction results requires substantial investment of money and time. Centers should actively seek cooperation and external support to promote sound media convergence. For instance, they can collaborate with provincial and municipal media centers, well-known traditional media outlets, and technology companies to obtain support in strategy, platforms, technology, and data. Technology, in particular, represents the primary element ensuring steady construction. To address technical personnel shortages, centers can attempt exchanges and cooperation with technology companies that have accumulated considerable experience in county-level media convergence. Additionally, cooperation with provincial and municipal media can create favorable provincial-county co-construction scenarios. For example, Beijing's Yanqing District Media Convergence Center, by collaborating with People's Daily Media Technology Company, developed the distinctive "Yanqing Model" of deep Beijing media integration—the first "central kitchen" combining broadcasting and newspaper media in China, providing valuable experience for domestic county-level media convergence centers. Similarly, Jiangxi Daily, as a provincial media outlet, has assisted in establishing 34 county-level media convergence centers across Jiangxi Province through resource sharing.

### 4.2 Utilizing County Resources and Cultivating Professional Talent

The shortage of talent represents a widespread challenge in county-level media convergence center construction, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Since they cannot provide attractive promotion prospects and compensation packages, recruiting high-end talent proves difficult. To address this issue, centers should break through identity and educational restrictions, deeply tap into local talent pools, and gather suitable personnel based within the county. Under the auspices of provincial and municipal media departments, training programs and relevant agreements should be formulated to establish scientific and transparent talent cultivation platforms for county-level media convergence, thereby ensuring access to needed professional, technical, and management personnel. Moreover, talent cultivated through such pathways exhibits strong self-identification and can devote greater enthusiasm to hometown construction, activating internal production dynamics and effectively resolving long-term talent shortages.

### 4.3 Establishing Sound Institutional Mechanisms to Revitalize Media Convergence Centers

Deep media integration cannot neglect institutional mechanisms. Currently, many county-level media practitioners lack formal establishment, working only on contract terms without reasonable incentive and evaluation mechanisms, re-

sulting in high personnel mobility. Meanwhile, those with formal establishment often resist innovative reforms. Furthermore, media convergence centers merge multiple county-level media outlets with different operational mechanisms, creating poor integration. Therefore, establishing scientific and rational management mechanisms becomes imperative. In concrete implementation, on one hand, public institution management methods should be reformed by attempting to incorporate enterprise management models, operating convergence media departments like cultural industries. On the other hand, to inject more vitality, overall organizational structures should be reconstructed, and more comprehensive evaluation mechanisms and operational models established. For example, Zhejiang Province's Changxing County Media Convergence Center has attracted numerous study groups largely because it broke establishment restrictions and established a comprehensive compensation system that stimulates employee enthusiasm through performance-based pay, quantified assessment, equal pay for equal positions, and position-based salaries. The center also launched a series of incentive mechanisms offering transparent promotion pathways, such as a five-level promotion system and chief correspondent system.

#### **4.4 Conducting Cross-Sector Cooperation to Strengthen Revenue Capacity**

While public service and political attributes have traditionally characterized county-level media convergence centers, advancing their construction requires reshaping business models and expanding revenue and service capabilities based on core operations. Currently, many county-level media convergence centers in China have yet to achieve profitability, but numerous examples have emerged that have overcome losses and achieved good returns, such as Jiangsu Province's Pizhou City Media Convergence Center, Zhejiang Province's Anji County Media Convergence Center, and Jiangxi Province's Fenyi County Media Convergence Center. Through active exploration and continuous practice, these centers have developed profitable models that lay a solid foundation for long-term development. For instance, Pizhou City deepened "media + industry" based on a "project system," with its education training and liquor agency projects generating over 5 million yuan in revenue in 2017. Another example is Hunan TV's innovative "screen-crossing" live broadcast approach for its poverty alleviation program "Go for It, Brothers!" The main stage featured television live broadcasts with hosts and guests competing in games and talent shows to promote agricultural product sales, while a secondary small-screen mobile livestream featured influencers selling products simultaneously through vivid introductions that stimulated audience purchases. The program also extended to thousands of live broadcast rooms in fields and rural areas. According to statistics, over 550 million people participated in this "screen-crossing" interaction, truly achieving a successful integration of product sales, dissemination, branding, and traffic.

#### 4.5 Building Local Characteristic Content to Enhance Influence

In the information age, people have numerous channels for accessing information. As the news dissemination medium closest to grassroots communities, county-level media convergence centers should develop distinctive features to attract more audiences. For example, centers should focus on innovative content based on local characteristics, further aligning with public life and using vivid imagery and accessible language to evoke audience empathy. Additionally, they can utilize internet clients to interact with audiences in real-time, further highlighting their leading position at the grassroots level and enhancing their influence.

In conclusion, county-level media convergence center construction represents a new exploration in the deepening development of media convergence in the information age. It is far from simple addition and constitutes an important step in building a comprehensive modern communication system. While many county-level media convergence centers in China have encountered various difficulties in practical construction, as long as they can address these challenges by exploring corresponding solutions and focusing closely on the concept of “convergence,” they will surely succeed in bridging the “last mile” of media convergence.

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

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