

An Analysis of Current Development and Breakthrough Strategies for Converged Media Platforms: A Case Study of the “Central Kitchen” Model (Postprint)

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Abstract

The development of Internet technology has spurred the proliferation of new media, while simultaneously posing tremendous challenges to newspaper and periodical media. The introduction of the media convergence concept has presented traditional print media with an opportunity to reverse this situation, with the central kitchen model further catalyzing the development of converged media platforms. However, the current promotion of the central kitchen model within media convergence has encountered certain bottlenecks, necessitating heightened attention from industry practitioners to identify breakthroughs and establish a new development paradigm. This paper briefly elaborates on the concepts and advantages of media convergence and the central kitchen model, analyzes the development bottlenecks confronting central kitchen platforms, and proposes recommendations for reference.

Full Text

Preamble

An Analysis of the Development Status and Breakthroughs of Converged Media Platforms: A Case Study of the “Central Kitchen” Model

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Abstract: The development of Internet technology has spawned new media outlets like mushrooms after rain, while simultaneously posing enormous challenges to print media. The concept of converged media offers traditional print media an opportunity for reversal, and the central kitchen model has provided further

impetus for the development of converged media platforms. However, current converged media initiatives have encountered certain bottlenecks in the promotion of the central kitchen model, requiring heightened attention from industry professionals to identify breakthrough points and establish a new development landscape.

This paper briefly outlines the concepts and advantages of converged media and the central kitchen model, analyzes the development bottlenecks confronting central kitchen platforms, and proposes recommendations for consideration.

Keywords: Internet technology; converged media; central kitchen; print media; converged media bottlenecks

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1. The Genesis and Development of Converged Media

1.1 The Genesis of Converged Media

The concept of converged media first emerged in 2010, when new media proliferated under the development of Internet technology, posing certain challenges to the survival and development of the traditional media industry. Faced with a situation where both new and traditional media had their respective strengths, converged media—integrating the advantages of various media—emerged strongly, ushering in multimedia-style development for originally “isolated and weak” traditional media [2]. A converged media platform merges news collection, planning, editorial organization, and distribution into a single integrated process, enabling the same raw material to generate multiple news products. Its establishment aims, on one hand, to “alleviate” the predicament of traditional media amid the proliferation of new media, and on the other hand, to break the pattern of mutual independence and separate operations among traditional media, thereby further strengthening news dissemination and coverage.

In early 2019, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held its twelfth collective study session on all-media era and media convergence development. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that promoting media convergence and building all-media had become an urgent task before us. Consequently, media organizations across the country intensified their converged media construction and made corresponding plans to enhance news production efficiency and improve response speed to public opinion, thereby achieving fur-

ther development in both readability and diversity of news production [3]. As Weibo, WeChat, and other mobile apps emerged, print media also found ways to horizontally expand news content using new media. Previously, newspaper news collection and editing often required photographers to carry equipment to news scenes, but nowadays, a single smartphone can achieve on-site information recording and multi-platform live reporting, making collection and editing work more efficient [5].

1.2 Development and Achievements of Converged Media

In the converged media era, traditional newspaper industries face audience fragmentation, making transformation the only path for development [1]. Under the leadership of General Secretary Xi Jinping, converged media development has achieved considerable success, most notably in television and print media. As converged media platforms integrate various processes in news production, the model of “using one material multiple times” has not only improved news production efficiency but also enhanced news coverage through dissemination across multiple media forms. Outstanding examples include well-known platforms such as CCTV.com and Mango TV, which won the title of “Top Ten Most Influential Radio and Television Converged Media” on the 2018 converged media-related rankings, setting a benchmark for radio and television converged media development. In early 2019, the “National County-Level Converged Media Smart Platform” of China Media Group was launched, effectively promoting the development of county-level media platforms and advancing national converged media initiatives. Print media has also gradually transformed and developed in the converged media era [4].

2. The Concept and Advantages of the Central Kitchen Model

2.1 What is the Central Kitchen?

Literally, “central kitchen” refers to a standardized kitchen model in the catering industry, where ingredients are centrally purchased, distributed, and cooked in a large kitchen—commonly used in the context of chain restaurant operations as an important pathway for the catering industry to expand operations and strengthen brand communication. The migration of this concept to the media field began in 2007, when Guangzhou Daily established a “Mobile News Department” tasked with aggregating and processing various news resources. In 2014, People’s Daily began constructing its central kitchen platform, aiming to establish a new media operation platform for unified news material collection, editing, and processing [6]. In 2016, People’s Daily’s all-media platform integrating the central kitchen concept was officially launched, becoming the “first to try” in the promotion and application of the central kitchen platform. Its platform establishment and innovation in various news processing and production links

undoubtedly set a benchmark and model for later adopters. Since its launch, People's Daily Central Kitchen has delivered numerous rich and high-quality news products to audiences, demonstrating the platform's extensive functionality and strong compatibility. It has not only established an advanced platform for effective development of high-quality content in the all-media industry but also provided resource and channel sharing for its various media outlets, immediately spurring rapid development of the central kitchen concept in the media field.

2.2 Advantages of the Central Kitchen Model

The advantages of the People's Daily central kitchen platform can be mainly divided into three aspects. First, it restructures the news production process by breaking down original spatial barriers, establishing a chief editor's dispatch room, creating a connected platform for news collection and editing, and implementing a unified command model for different departments in news production. This restructuring makes the platform more suitable for diversified news distribution environments under converged media [7]. Second, it promotes news content innovation: unified acquisition, processing, and distribution of news materials brings unified management among departments. Under this model, the performance appraisal system is strengthened, further stimulating departmental staff's work enthusiasm and innovation potential. Coupled with new management and incentive mechanisms, both the content and form of news products have achieved certain development. Third, it improves personnel team building: central kitchen platform construction means merging separated departments and spaces. Through effective integration of various resources, all links in news production receive unified command and arrangement. Previously, media operations suffered from low news production efficiency due to departmental silos and redundant staffing. However, based on the spatial and departmental integration of the central kitchen, news production team building can be further streamlined and optimized, while news production efficiency can also be improved.

3. Bottlenecks in Central Kitchen Platform Development

3.1 Space Platform Construction Questioned

While the central kitchen model undoubtedly promotes converged media development, its platform construction—as an emerging model—has inevitably encountered skepticism in practical application. The central kitchen platform mainly comprises three components: space platform, business platform, and technical platform. The space platform is established to facilitate unified processing and distribution of news materials, but redesigning existing space often consumes substantial funds, causing potential adopters to hesitate before such massive investment. First, traditional media office spaces were separated between departments, and even as the industry evolved and departments enhanced commu-

nication and integration, they remained distant from the central kitchen model's requirement for unified process management and centralized resource allocation. Therefore, establishing a space platform is a necessary prerequisite for smooth central kitchen implementation. However, with numerous news media departments, concentrating all departmental staff in one location is challenging—site resources are one concern, but corresponding facilities, equipment, and environmental construction all require reconsideration and redesign, with considerable costs. In addition to enormous construction costs, operational expenses are also quite high, making whether to invest such huge costs in space platform construction a troubling question.

3.2 The Dual Nature of Business Platform Development

The central kitchen was originally established to enhance the adaptability of traditional media such as print media to diverse news distribution channels through the reorganization of traditional news production processes. Therefore, it advocates multi-department and multi-media centralized operation in the same space, maximizing the value of a single news material by producing multiple news products. From a media operations perspective, this model achieves broad coverage and high dissemination of news products, but from a business perspective, when multiple departments process the same material, the resulting news products inevitably suffer from content homogenization. For instance, departments originally skilled in political commentary, in order to comply with centralized production and improve their news production efficiency, have to abandon their distinctive features and follow trends to create new media products. Consequently, they inevitably struggle to maintain their previous competitive advantages in fierce inter-media competition.

3.3 Technical Platform Establishment Still Needs Exploration

As a beneficial pathway for print media transformation to converged media, central kitchen construction inevitably involves establishing a technical platform—referring to platforms that enhance media coverage and dissemination, improve profit models, and alleviate the current insufficient profitability of traditional media. In the converged media era, traditional newspapers transform from print publication to converged media to broaden development paths and restore commercial profitability. However, after boarding the “big ship” of central kitchen, print converged media have focused heavily on news product dissemination and coverage. Faced with immature commercial profit models, many media organizations have no choice but to continue exploring, inevitably causing some hesitation. While an uncertain profit model may represent a challenging attempt for large media platforms, it signifies a huge crisis for county-level media platforms. Therefore, how to balance news product dissemination with commercial revenue generation in establishing central kitchen technical platforms is currently the issue of greatest concern to media organizations.

4. Breakthrough Paths for Converged Media in the Central Kitchen Model

4.1 Strengthen Self-Positioning

To enable converged media platforms to break through current development dilemmas, taking the central kitchen status as an example, media organizations that have established central kitchen platforms or plan to use them for development should first clarify the prerequisites for central kitchen space platform creation, namely, the establishment of development direction. Generally, the core function of a central kitchen all-media platform is to provide as many materials as possible for news products, characterized by integrating the advantages of various media rather than enabling equal development of all media. Therefore, determining the main development direction of a media platform is crucial to effectively prevent distinctive media departments from being weakened by homogeneous news products. For example, urban newspaper media should position themselves around people's livelihood and current affairs, screening news collection materials to better align with public concerns, while unified news processing should favor new media forms such as short videos to highlight the intuitive nature of urban public welfare news products and their close connection with the people [8].

4.2 Improve Platform Construction

Central kitchen platform creation requires certain material conditions and institutional foundations. Therefore, relevant media organizations should establish corresponding space platforms according to their development positioning, ensuring departmental staff can smoothly share information and jointly produce news in the same space. Media organizations can adopt renovation methods in their original office spaces by removing non-load-bearing walls to facilitate easier communication between departments and enhance the office atmosphere to mobilize departmental staff's work enthusiasm. County-level media platforms should construct central kitchen space platforms according to their specific needs and conditions. Regarding business platforms, relevant media should adjust production relations between departments to allow the advantages of major media departments to flourish, while further exploring the application methods of central kitchens in daily operations to avoid "using a sledgehammer to crack a nut" in daily news production. Additionally, media organizations should emphasize platform system construction, fully utilizing incentive mechanisms to further stimulate platform personnel's work enthusiasm and innovation capacity.

4.3 Innovate Characteristic Development

In the converged media era, only by developing their own characteristics can media organizations ensure competitiveness and stand out among numerous outlets. Although central kitchen platforms have enriched news product content and form compared to previous news products, products lacking distinctive fea-

tures can only result in a media organization that is extensive but not intensive—like a large platter or stew that fails to capture key points. To innovate characteristic development, analyzing audience needs remains the constant prerequisite. First, news collection and editing staff should closely monitor current hot topics and extend their focus to best-selling books, online public opinion, and the dynamics of Weibo “big Vs,” thereby collecting public needs from multiple angles. Second, staff must strengthen their capture of detailed information, find angles overlooked by other media, and conduct in-depth exploration to create unique analytical perspectives for their media organization. Finally, during the news content processing stage, departmental staff should cooperate with management to complete news material allocation, ensuring news manuscripts reach editors in relevant fields smoothly, allowing editors’ talents to be displayed, and making news products both characteristic of their respective fields and distinctive—such as adding literary flavor or entertainment style.

4.4 Optimize Team Building

Talent is the key subject supporting effective platform operation. A lean talent team can both improve overall quality and accelerate central kitchen development to a certain extent, reducing unnecessary labor costs. Therefore, relevant media organizations can reestablish positions for various departments through talent selection mechanisms, make specific responsibility divisions for positions to avoid redundant staffing and situations where individuals “drift with the tide.” For positions with weak functionality, media organizations may consider abolishing them and reassigning original staff to appropriate departments where their abilities can be better utilized. Regarding the central kitchen principle of integrated talent utilization, media units must also strengthen talent team transformation to equip them with multi-channel information collection and integration capabilities, news editing and layout innovation capabilities, thereby enriching and refreshing news information content presentation [8].

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

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