

Postprint: An Analysis of the Development of County-Level Converged Media Center Official Accounts

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Abstract

The construction of county-level media convergence centers constitutes not only a fundamental trend in revolutionizing operational models of county-level media, but also an inevitable requirement for the development of the media industry within the context of the new era. By virtue of their operational advantages, WeChat Official Accounts have inevitably become an essential component of media convergence center construction. This paper, based on interpreting relevant concepts and clarifying the significance of county-level media convergence center development, analyzes the challenges faced in the development of county-level media convergence center Official Accounts, and proposes strategies for enhancing operational levels in conjunction with practical realities, thereby providing reference for Official Account development and laying a solid foundation for improving the operational standards of county-level media convergence.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: An Analysis of the Development of County-Level Converged Media Center Official Accounts

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Abstract: The construction of county-level converged media centers represents not only a fundamental trend in revolutionizing county-level media operation models but also an inevitable requirement for media industry development in the new era. Due to their operational advantages, WeChat Official Accounts have naturally become essential components of converged media center construction. Based on an interpretation of relevant concepts and clarification of the significance of county-level converged media center construction, this paper

analyzes the problems facing the development of county-level converged media center official accounts and proposes practical strategies for improving operational levels. These insights provide references for official account development and establish a solid foundation for enhancing county-level converged media operation standards.

Keywords: County-level converged media center; WeChat Official Account; Attributes; Integration of official accounts; Industrialized operation

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Introduction

According to relevant statistics, by 2019, WeChat's monthly active users exceeded 1.1 billion, making it China's largest app by user base. Meanwhile, the number of WeChat Official Account creators surpassed 20 million, establishing it as a significant form of new media operation. Against the backdrop of continuously improving county-level converged media center construction systems, effectively analyzing and addressing operational problems while building new operational models constitutes a practical challenge that must be resolved to enhance county-level converged media center development levels.

1.1 Converged Media Era

Converged media is a novel concept arising from the continuous improvement of new media operations. It refers to the organic integration of traditional and new media, encompassing the consolidation of operational carriers, content, and human resource allocation. This integration transforms the competition-dominated model of traditional media systems into a development pattern where different media forms complement each other's strengths.[1] The development of converged media represents a fundamental pathway for resource sharing and efficiency enhancement in the media industry, constituting a basic requirement for the healthy development of the sector.

1.2 County-Level Converged Media Centers

County-level media represents the grassroots media closest to the masses, playing a crucial bridging role in public opinion and propaganda work. However, against the backdrop of complex transformations in media operation systems, most county-level newspapers have ceased publication, while radio and television stations have managed to survive in various operational states. In an era of continuously advancing new media development, relying solely on traditional radio

and television platforms can no longer meet the needs of grassroots public opinion guidance and information dissemination. Consequently, the construction of county-level converged media centers has become a fundamental requirement for propaganda work.[2] From a theoretical research perspective, no precise definition of county-level converged media centers has yet been established. In terms of operational models, a county-level converged media center typically refers to a new media operation model that, driven by competent authorities and built upon county-level radio and television stations, integrates multiple media forms including WeChat Official Accounts, Weibo, websites, and client applications. Through the reconfiguration of media formats, it ultimately achieves innovative and deepened media services.

1.3 WeChat Official Accounts

Official accounts generally refer specifically to WeChat Official Accounts, a new media format operating on the WeChat Official Account platform. Individuals or enterprises can apply to operate these accounts, using text, images, audio, video, and other formats to achieve comprehensive communication and interaction with specific groups, thereby facilitating online-to-offline interactive marketing. WeChat Official Accounts were launched in August 2012 and, leveraging WeChat's rapid growth, quickly developed into a novel media operation model with effective communication outcomes.[3] The application interface for WeChat Official Accounts is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

2.1 Attributes of County-Level Converged Media Centers

Against the backdrop of new-era development and the impact of rapid new media growth, traditional media can no longer meet the basic requirements of public opinion propaganda. The construction of county-level converged media centers occupies a significant position in building grassroots ideological and propaganda positions. Only by clarifying their fundamental attributes can we achieve continuous improvement in construction and operation levels. First, the security and regulatory situation in the ideological domain has imposed higher demands on the construction of grassroots ideological and cultural positions, representing the fundamental objective of county-level converged media center construction. Second, the construction of county-level converged media centers plays a positive leading role in reforming China's media industry operation system, providing multifaceted references for future media industry reforms. Third, the construction and operation of county-level converged media centers can guide grassroots media units to change traditional work mindsets and achieve transformation in the new era.

2.2 Necessity of Integrating WeChat Official Accounts

During the current construction of county-level converged media centers, although WeChat Official Accounts can be incorporated into the operational

system, understanding of the necessity and importance of this integration remains inadequate. First, the operational foundation of converged media center construction lies in the organic integration of traditional and new media. WeChat Official Accounts, leveraging the WeChat app's high daily usage frequency, strong information dissemination virality, and close integration with WeChat Moments, can better satisfy grassroots masses' information dissemination needs.[4] Second, regarding county-level converged media center construction, most regional construction efforts remain in the preliminary experimental stage, with the actual effectiveness of various new media constructions and operations yet to be observed. Through the integration of WeChat Official Accounts, more operational data can be accumulated to evaluate the actual effectiveness of converged media center operations, enabling more optimized approaches to address operational issues and promote the improvement of grassroots news and information dissemination systems.

3.1 Rigid Operational Thinking

Influenced by the original operational models of county-level media, the construction of county-level converged media centers predominantly centers on radio and television stations, with staff primarily sourced from these institutions. Traditional media and new media operational models like official accounts exhibit significant differences, with substantial changes in news content creation materials, editing, and graphic design. Simultaneously, daily live broadcasting and filming consume considerable time and human resources. However, in actual operations, most staff still adhere to traditional operational thinking, employing conventional methods in organizing and coordinating creative and editorial workflows. Insufficient attention is paid to the new skills required for gathering and editing work, resulting in inadequate innovation. WeChat Official Account operation follows its own patterns, and failure to grasp and adapt to these patterns restricts content quality, making it difficult to achieve the fundamental objectives of converged media construction.

3.2 Insufficient High-Quality Original Content

Currently, the number of WeChat Official Accounts of various forms nationwide has reached over one million, with more than one hundred thousand maintaining normal operations. The sheer volume of official accounts significantly limits public attention to any single account. Against a backdrop of continuously improving content quality, diversifying creative formats, and rising audience reading standards, county-level converged media center official account operational systems feature extremely limited original works—accounting for less than 50% of total output. Most content consists of reposts from higher-level media platforms and other official accounts, with even fewer high-quality original creations. This scarcity of premium original content, coupled with inadequate creative quality to meet audience demands for news and information, gradually erodes public interest in these official accounts and makes it difficult to encourage content

sharing, resulting in weak momentum for future development.

3.3 Complex Operating Environment

Official accounts themselves constitute a fundamental type of new media, possessing distinct advantages in competition and integrated development with traditional media, yet simultaneously facing diversion and competition from other new media forms such as short videos. The operation of county-level converged media center official accounts primarily focuses on news and information within county-level administrative regions, representing an important foundation for their survival and development. However, in actual operational practice, social self-media started earlier, produces more down-to-earth programs, maintains higher interaction levels with audiences, and can more accurately grasp audience psychological needs. For county-level converged media center official accounts with certain official backgrounds, achieving a balance between news information rigor, authenticity, and entertainment becomes necessary, imposing certain restrictions on content selection and creative formats. This complexity makes the operational environment more challenging and hinders breakthroughs.

3.4 Low Fan Stickiness and Activity

In their early stages, WeChat Official Accounts primarily featured text and image layouts, later gradually incorporating video formats. Despite experiencing rapid overall development, several factors constrain county-level converged media center official accounts, resulting in low fan stickiness and activity. First, the entry points and traffic guidance mechanisms for WeChat Official Accounts within the WeChat ecosystem are relatively cumbersome, making it difficult for the public to actively follow them. Particularly during periods of rapid official account growth, failure to capture attention upon initial contact inevitably leads to loss of continued interest. Second, in recent years, short-video new media platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou have risen abruptly, significantly diverting audiences from text-based official accounts and platform accounts, causing declining attention to official accounts. Third, most operational staff lack practical experience, resulting in low interaction efficiency with audiences. Under a pure push-based operational model, audience groups are unwilling to engage in information interaction, losing the essential interactive characteristics of new media.

3.5 Lack of Creative and Editorial Talent

In the process of creating news and information for official accounts, content quality directly impacts dissemination effectiveness. However, current official account creative and editorial personnel mostly transitioned from traditional media staff, facing limitations in creative thinking on one hand and obvious deficiencies in platform application technologies on the other. Particularly as production platforms become more complex and production requirements continuously increase, these staff members can no longer meet practical work de-

mands. Moreover, during the initial stages of converged media construction and operation, most centers face human resource shortages, with staff having to handle various forms of creative and editorial work. Constrained by the lack of systematic training programs and individual self-improvement opportunities, they cannot efficiently enhance their professional capabilities, limiting improvements in official account quality.

3.6 Incomplete Profit Model

Currently, China's county-level converged media center construction has entered a period of rapid development, with most county governments providing certain support for center construction. However, this support primarily focuses on hardware equipment construction and initial operational investment. To achieve sustainable development of official accounts, they must possess certain "self-sustaining" capabilities.[5] Currently, most official account operations derive platform-based revenue from two main sources: first, advertising income distributed by the platform based on traffic data, and second, red packet tips from audiences after reading. However, the former generates extremely limited income, particularly negligible for initial operators, while the latter carries substantial uncertainty. Therefore, for county-level converged media center official accounts, identifying a third, more suitable profit model beyond fiscal support constitutes an important foundation for maintaining long-term healthy operation.

4.1 Innovate Operational Thinking

Although county-level converged media center official accounts face multiple problems during development, their overall high-speed growth stage necessitates greater emphasis during actual operations to continuously improve development levels. First, county-level culture and propaganda departments should initiate reforms from the operational model perspective, increasing resource support for official account construction. Second, integrate official account construction organically with other media forms, enabling public groups to understand the significance of official accounts through multi-faceted interpretations of news events, thereby improving attention to official accounts. Third, fundamentally change the "official media" image of official accounts by selecting more down-to-earth hot topics, narrowing the distance between official accounts and the public, and allowing grassroots masses to participate in social governance through more flexible methods. This continuous improvement in participation levels promotes healthier official account development.

4.2 Adhere to Content Innovation

Although WeChat Official Accounts have innovated in creative formats, maintaining long-term healthy development still requires content innovation as a fundamental operational principle. Supported by increasingly standardized original content protection for WeChat Official Accounts, on one hand, unnecessary

reposts should be minimized to effectively enhance original content levels. On the other hand, backend editing and data analysis should be utilized to deeply explore hot topics of interest to audience groups, promptly interpreting news events from more novel perspectives. Although the official account operational model lacks timeliness to some extent, this provides sufficient time for content innovation. News editors should fully leverage this advantage, continuously improving their innovation capabilities to create more high-quality works that attract larger audiences.

4.3 Enhance Information Content Credibility

As a fundamental component of converged media center construction, while adhering to official account content innovation, compliance with basic requirements of media industry development and comprehensive enhancement of news information credibility remains essential. At the content level, the bottom line of news creation must be maintained, upholding authenticity and objectivity in news content while adhering to correct public opinion guidance. Particularly, the favorable opportunity of converged media center construction should be leveraged to form a development matrix integrating official account creation with radio, television, video livestreaming, and other media formats. Only by genuinely pushing practically meaningful news content to followers can audience groups maintain good attention levels and promote sustained healthy development of official accounts.[6]

4.4 Improve Interaction Levels

Currently, official accounts feature two interaction forms. One involves leaving comments directly under posts, which editors can choose to hide or display and respond to accordingly. This direct interaction enables direct communication between editors and audience groups, allowing more audiences to see comments and engage in deeper-level interaction. The other involves audience members and editors being WeChat friends, where after one party forwards a content link, interaction occurs through comments below the link. This indirect interaction requires mutual WeChat friendship. Due to these interaction format limitations, editorial staff can fully leverage the diversified platform construction advantages of converged media centers to divert audience traffic and achieve more direct interaction, making content creation better aligned with audience reading preferences.

4.5 Strengthen Talent Introduction and Training

For the development of county-level converged media official accounts, the construction and operation process must adopt a “walking on two legs” approach to talent team building. On one hand, selections should be made from existing staff, choosing personnel with firm stances, good innovative thinking, and operational capabilities to form the core official account operation team. On the other hand, recruitment efforts at the societal level should be intensified. By leveraging the

flexibility and diversified operational mechanisms of new media operations, a high-level writing team should be established to operate in more flexible ways, effectively improving overall operational standards. Simultaneously, as official account operations enter different development stages, corresponding training must be conducted promptly to ensure operation and maintenance personnel can continuously renew their work thinking, more accurately grasp audience psychological needs, and timely adjust creative styles to attract more followers.

4.6 Promote Industrialized Operation Model Construction

To achieve long-term healthy operation of county-level converged media center official accounts, existing platform limitations of WeChat Official Accounts must be changed. By leveraging the advantages of converged media centers, the construction of industrialized operational models should be actively promoted. First, technical means can be utilized to develop lifestyle service functions, including water, electricity, and natural gas bill payments. Second, service projects such as second-hand market transactions and recruitment information can be developed. Third, platform operations can be integrated with the promotion and sales of local specialties by developing e-commerce platforms and live-streaming sales. While better serving public social groups, these initiatives can also generate certain revenues, gradually improving platform operation levels, minimizing fiscal investment, and achieving self-sustaining healthy development.[7]

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of new-era development, grassroots masses engage in increasingly complex activity forms, with continuously growing demands for news and information across all societal aspects, particularly in social life, exhibiting diversified development characteristics. However, new media development also presents certain problems, such as the proliferation of false and invalid information in news dissemination. When grassroots masses lack discrimination capabilities, news and public opinion directions can deviate in multiple ways. County-level converged media construction can achieve unified operation requirements for multiple media forms, combining with the actual needs of grassroots masses' daily lives to timely push different forms of information content in government affairs, public cultural services, electric power undertakings, and entertainment services. While serving as comprehensive service platforms and information hubs, they can better satisfy grassroots masses' yearning and pursuit for a better life.

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

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