

Reflections on the Industrial Transformation and Development of Chinese Radio Programs in the New Media Economy Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

With the advent of China's new media communication era, the traditional broadcast news program industry has suffered significant economic blows; simultaneously, it has also created more development opportunities for the broadcast program industry. As an important representative of China's traditional communication media, radio, after undergoing decades of rapid development in China, has also encountered tremendous impact in this new media era, compelling it to undertake a new transformation. Why does radio need to transform under the new circumstances? How should it transform? These are the focal points of contemplation and investigation in this paper.

Full Text

Preamble

Industrial Transformation and Development of Chinese Radio Programs in the New Media Economy Era

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Abstract: With the advent of China's new media communication era, traditional radio news programs have suffered significant economic impact, yet this transformation has also created new development opportunities. As a key representative of China's traditional media, radio experienced decades of rapid growth before facing massive disruption in this new media age, compelling it to undertake transformation. Why does radio need to transform under these new circumstances, and how should it transform? These are the central questions this paper examines.

Keywords: new media; radio programs; industrial transformation; editorial system; management system

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1. Research Background

Radio first emerged during World War I in the early 20th century. With the rapid development of broadcast communication technology during World War II and its critical role in keeping people informed about war progress, radio became an indispensable part of daily life worldwide. Following China's reform and opening-up, rising economic standards brought radios into ordinary households, strengthening the connection between radio programs and everyday life. During this period of vigorous growth, beyond traditional news broadcasting, various innovative radio formats emerged, including traffic radio dedicated to drivers, literary music broadcasts, and later reality entertainment shows.

As China's internet and information technology advanced rapidly, traditional text, video, and voice content gradually detached from broadcast carriers, finding new development and dissemination channels through mobile internet. This mobile-based media form possesses characteristics of instant interactivity, extensibility, and rapid dissemination, representing a platform that fully integrates audio, video, text, and images from traditional media into a digitalized, highly interactive system. The unprecedented freedom offered by new media aligns perfectly with today's fast-paced lifestyle, fundamentally transforming traditional information acquisition methods and profoundly impacting conventional radio programs at their core.

1.1 Authoritative Data Release

Through long-term steady development, China's network broadcasting has become a dominant force in traditional media, conducting authoritative information releases across various professional fields. It delivers diverse news information to the public, enjoys widespread societal trust, and maintains powerful functions for guiding public opinion.

1.2 Mature Editorial System Structure

With continuous development, radio has established a highly mature and comprehensive program production and editorial management system. The editorial business network provides comprehensive coverage, and technical talent is relatively professional. Radio stations of considerable scale have built their own

journalist stations that penetrate key frontlines of social news reporting. However, with the swift rise of the internet and the sudden emergence of new media—bolstered by China’s 1 billion netizens—new media has almost instantly shattered the living space of traditional broadcasting.

2.1 Current State of Media Industry Transformation

The new media communication era refers not only to the rapid development of China’s new media industry but also, more narrowly, to its encroachment on traditional media’s development space. In fact, as new media continues to advance, the entire social ecosystem of news media has undergone tremendous changes. It enables deep mining of important information resources in human society and facilitates more diversified information processing and comprehensive utilization through modern technological means. Information that people once could not receive promptly through traditional media has become accessible with the arrival of the new media network era. Citizens can now follow national anti-corruption processes in real-time and even exercise counter-supervision through new media, pressuring relevant departments to disclose the truth of events. This essentially represents the release of public discourse power and the enrichment of channels for expressing opinions, achieving stronger public opinion supervision. Consequently, new media—characterized by greater freedom of speech and faster message delivery—has gained public acclaim.

Its greatest harm to traditional media lies in lowering the threshold for entering the media industry, allowing virtually everyone to become an information sender. While this has created information quality issues, it cannot erase the public’s enthusiasm for self-media. New media has seized the microphone from traditional media, leading to the decline of traditional media’s advertising industry, weakening its economic benefits, and ultimately causing the decline of traditional radio programs.

3. Current Challenges in Radio Industry Transformation

3.1 Rigid Management System

China’s radio industry has long suffered from the special situation of unclear boundaries between government and enterprise, and between public and private operations. Although market economic systems have prompted reforms in many broadcasting enterprises, many backward and decaying management mechanisms cannot be improved through simple patchwork fixes. For instance, the channel system and central system have virtually framed the development direction of the radio industry, making it difficult for radio to undergo rapid transformation like television programs, which can compete with new media through variety shows and absorb new media traffic. Radio can only seek limited changes within a rigid system, and local public broadcasting struggles to achieve effective integration, preventing the formation of group-scale operations.

Insufficient scale means the radio industry cannot integrate industry resources for overall reform or invest substantial funds to compete with new media for traffic. The radio industry struggles to adapt to market economic system development, becomes increasingly marginalized, and faces continuously compressed development space, with industry crises growing more severe.

3.2 Poor Advertising Management

Although advertising business constitutes the primary revenue source for most radio stations, its management often appears highly unreasonable. First, China's radio advertising industry management system remains relatively complex and extensive, making cross-regional and cross-industry scaled advertising operations difficult. As a time-linear broadcast medium, advertising content airtime is extremely limited, with content remaining at relatively low quality levels. Advertising media resources are difficult to integrate effectively, and some advertisers resort to unscrupulous means to secure higher profits, lowering advertising prices and triggering "advertising price wars" that cause tremendous waste of advertising resources.

Second, radio's profit management system overly relies on hard advertising, substantially increasing overall operational risk, while relatively advanced advertising agency management systems are rarely employed in China's radio advertising industry, resulting in overall management chaos.

3.3 Lack of Program Attractiveness

With the rapid and steady development of domestic new media, the market share of overseas broadcasting for domestic radio stations is shrinking and being divided rapidly. Radio's information dissemination capabilities are continuously weakening, and new media's crowding-out of radio industry resources has reached a predatory level. New media not only transmits information faster and more widely than radio but also far surpasses radio in traditional strengths like audience interaction. Radio programs can only repeat formats like music appreciation, phone-ins, and information forecasts, which fall far short of actual public demand in today's richly diverse entertainment landscape. Program formats are overly monotonous.

Additionally, new media's market impact has caused massive talent drain in radio program production, leading to increasingly crude production and lack of auditory appeal. Furthermore, since radio programs must be produced in-house, production costs are high. Direct program purchases from production companies also face difficulties in speed and production cycles.

3.4 Single Communication Method

As modern technology accelerates and technology life cycles shorten, society has entered an era of massive information explosion, continuously weakening radio's important role in information transmission. Radio stations can develop local

broadcasting networks tailored to their characteristics and target regional audiences, considering geographical differences in culture, customs, and consumption preferences. However, radio's single transmission method ignores the long-term benefits brought by internet and mobile platforms, pushing the industry into a slow death spiral.

4. Transformation Strategies for Radio Industry

4.1 Reform Management Systems and Build Radio Brands

Management system reform is imperative. Removing decaying institutional elements is essential for industry rebirth. During industrial transformation, radio must dare to break traditional central systems, handing programs over to the market, the audience, and hosts. Let the market discover popular program IPs, and boldly promote innovative newcomers to inject new vitality into the system.

Broadcasting enterprises should utilize multiple communication channels and technical means to build their own brands and establish strong brand images. They must develop genuine brand value awareness, understanding how to redefine their corporate brand image by combining past development with current trends. After establishing a corporate brand image, a series of brand promotion tools should be employed to achieve comprehensive brand personality promotion. This can include planning large-scale promotional activities and establishing public welfare images to provide personalized brand marketing services for clients.

Radio brands need not be limited to the broadcast platform itself but can use popular programs on certain channels as IPs. Using IPs as hot spots can gradually expand channel brand awareness, ultimately achieving brand establishment for the entire radio channel. For example, Jiangsu Traffic Radio Network's "Happy Steering Wheel" is a well-known entertainment program built on traffic broadcasting. The celebrity effect of hosts Chen Ming and Liang Shuang can rapidly enhance Jiangsu Traffic Radio Network's brand recognition.

4.2 Target Audiences and Innovate Profit Models

From an economic perspective, precise audience positioning directly determines a program's survival. Therefore, understanding the audience is crucial. Currently, 90% of the radio market focuses on traffic broadcasting, where Didi and taxi drivers represent the largest audience group. Their needs for entertainment, relaxation, and traffic weather information are key to precise audience targeting.

First, determine media objectives based on the radio audience and conduct precise positioning according to three principles: First, based on China's geographical differences, local radio media should create locally suitable broadcasting networks according to different cultural customs, traditions, and consumption preferences. Second, based on group psychology differences, different economic

and social strata and job nature largely determine audience needs, requiring precise positioning. Third, based on various humanistic proximities, demographic and geographic statistical analysis can accurately divide humanistic audience levels and meet their different needs.

In this new media era, audience demand positioning must follow different proximity cultural principles. Only by grasping radio programs' cultural survival strategies can the industry balance service and traditional entertainment. For instance, 2018 online talent shows "Idol Producer" and "Produce 101" became phenomenal successes, as did 2020' s "Sisters Who Make Waves." These talent shows captured fan groups behind each idol, fully grasping audience needs and achieving explosive profitability. Since 2005, talent shows have emerged continuously, with fan groups evolving from initial scale to later maturity. Fan groups integrate fan interests and have clear organizers. Research shows fans construct meaningful, orderly communities on platforms like Weibo, Baidu Tieba, Douban groups, QQ groups, and WeChat groups, creating and sharing personal emotional value experiences without disturbing others. Communities establish clear management norms, hierarchical organizations, internal legal mechanisms, and order. Fan group incentives are emotional connections to idols. Driven by emotional forces, fans actively participate in online and offline support activities, forming collective action power. By effectively guiding audience needs, satisfying special preferences, and reasonably releasing spiritual needs, programs can achieve innovative profitability.

4.3 Diversify Program Content and Formats

Ultimately, radio must continuously improve its program content, as programs are the core competitiveness of the industry. Broadcasting platforms must produce quality programs and build strong brands. In terms of content and production technology, as a traditional news media, radio already possesses high-level content production capabilities and dissemination power. By leveraging new media technologies and capitalizing on news program characteristics, radio can produce timely, convenient broadcast news programs that enhance market competitiveness.

New media platforms are both competitors and, to some extent, important drivers for China' s radio industry transformation. Radio must innovate reporting and digitize content production. During production, it should fully utilize FTP and 3.5GB technology, moving beyond single UGC information sources to mobilize user creativity for material mining and creation. For example, Heilongjiang Radio and Television' s emotional program "Ye Wen Has Something to Say" host Ye Wen is a powerful host IP. Her sharp, fast-talking style has attracted a large fan base that spontaneously forms fan circles attracted by the "star" effect.

Professional, high-quality radio programs can attract high-quality, high-quantity community members, maintaining high community activity through

program broadcasting. Radio and television programs with service orientation and knowledge-based content communities tend to have stronger cohesion. For example, Longguang Home Decoration program “I Love My Home,” broadcast for 10 years, is a household name in Heilongjiang’ s home decoration industry. The program team created five “Longguang I Love My Home Decoration Design Exchange Groups” with approximately 3,000 members, providing professional answers for listeners with decoration difficulties. The WeChat platform “Longguang Kaiqi Studio” has been operating for 20 years with over 310,000 followers. These communities provide users with strong trust through high-quality radio programs. Traditional radio stations can leverage their authority to hold various events, promote commercial advertisements, activate community relationships, and expand media visibility. For instance, the annual “Longguang Tree Planting Festival” attracted over 20,000 online registrations within three days.

By transforming from traditional single, linear program editing models to diverse digital editing models, program content can be greatly enriched. Reporting styles also need innovation, moving beyond uniform low, steady, and gentle tones to include intense and fiery styles. Radio programs can be segmented from long formats into shorter pieces, adapting to today’ s fast-paced work life and aligning with audience fragmentation time, gradually rejuvenating radio programs in the new era.

4.4 Expand Communication Channels

In the new media era, frequency transmission should not be the only method. Internet radio, Apps, and other platforms can all become radio formats, such as music channels and crosstalk channels cooperatively launched with music players.

Currently, mobile internet is developing most rapidly, with a massive mobile terminal market. Technically, 4G base station coverage has exceeded 98% nationwide, with 5G continuously expanding. There are no network issues for listening to radio programs on mobile phones. With vast information online, the primary challenge for digital communication is making products stand out among competitors. Emerging media hopes to expand communication channels through better product classification, creating increasing demand for segmented markets.

Radio websites contain many sections. For example, ifeng.com’ s navigation includes finance, fashion, entertainment, technology, games, sports, automobiles, and video. People’ s Daily Online includes finance, local, international, automobile, and viewpoints. These navigation columns contain many sub-functions, and massive online information creates a favorable environment for meeting audience preferences. Market segmentation leads to niche audiences, while information aggregation helps audiences focus on information, thereby achieving promotion of broadcast products through different channels. Refined product

sections also cater to mobile terminal communication needs. As the most immediate fragmented-use tool, mobile phones allow audiences to listen during any fragmented time—such as commuting, lunch breaks, or waiting before meetings—while providing excellent interactivity that satisfies social needs, maximizing new media platforms while preserving radio program characteristics and taking root in new era mobile platforms.

5. Conclusion

Radio is a traditional media form. To avoid being swallowed by the development tide of the new era, it must actively identify its problems and correct them promptly. Everything has its extinction period unless it continuously innovates characteristics that align with era development. Therefore, this paper examines the current situation of radio programs being squeezed by new media, analyzes four existing problems—rigid systems, monotonous content, single communication methods, and poor advertising management—and proposes effective recommendations for building radio brands, targeting audiences, and enriching program content and communication channels. It is believed that through market tempering, the radio industry will be reborn from the ashes and restore its glorious past.

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

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