

Postprint: Key Operational Issues and Countermeasures for County-level Converged Media Centers

Authors: Zhai Yanan

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Abstract

The construction of county-level converged media centers constitutes a major strategic deployment by the Party Central Committee in the modernization of the national governance system and governance capability, as well as in consolidating and expanding grassroots public opinion positions. However, during actual operations, issues such as insufficient reform momentum, weak operational capabilities, and a shortage of professional talent persist. This study utilizes unstructured interview methods and systematic research approaches to propose corresponding solutions to these problems, aiming to provide conceptual, strategic, and practical recommendations for the operation and management of regional media convergence.

Full Text

Research on Key Operational Issues and Countermeasures for County-Level Media Convergence Centers

Abstract: The construction of county-level media convergence centers represents a major strategic deployment by the Party Central Committee to modernize the national governance system and capabilities while consolidating and expanding grassroots public opinion positions. However, practical operations face challenges including insufficient reform momentum, weak operational capacity, and a shortage of professional talent. This paper employs unstructured symposium methods and systematic research approaches to propose corresponding solutions to these problems, aiming to provide conceptual, strategic, and practical recommendations for the management and operation of regional media convergence.

Keywords: county-level media convergence center; Party control of media; management mechanism innovation; operational system construction

2. Key Operational Issues and Causes in China's County-Level Media Convergence Centers

The media industry is an industry “standing on the shoulders of technology.” The development of intelligent technologies centered on 5G and even 6G wireless communication—including high-speed mobile internet, big data, cloud computing, Internet of Things, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence—is powerfully driving changes in media forms and shifts in the public opinion ecology.

On one hand, traditional media organizational forms struggle to adapt to the needs of productivity development; on the other hand, the task of using socialist core values to guide social thought and build social consensus has become increasingly arduous. In response, the state has issued a series of policies to ensure the reconstruction of a modern communication system on the digital track [1], create a favorable public opinion environment, and accelerate the modernization of the national governance system.

On August 18, 2014, the fourth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform passed the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media,” elevating media convergence to a national strategic level. The policy emphasized promoting deep integration of traditional and emerging media in content, channels, platforms, operations, and management, grasping both integration and management, to form a three-dimensional, diverse, and integrated modern communication system. On August 21, 2018, the term “county-level media convergence center” first appeared at a national-level meeting. At the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that in practice, we need to continuously deepen our understanding of the laws of propaganda and ideological work, maintain correct public opinion orientation, and enhance the dissemination power, guidance power, influence, and credibility of news and public opinion to consolidate and strengthen mainstream ideological opinion. We must solidly advance the construction of county-level media convergence centers to better guide and serve the masses.

On November 14, 2018, the fifth meeting of the Central Committee for Comprehensively Deepening Reform passed the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of County-Level Media Convergence Centers,” emphasizing that “we must strive to build county-level media convergence centers into mainstream public opinion positions, comprehensive service platforms, and community information hubs” [2]. On January 15, 2019, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the National Radio and Television Administration organized the compilation of the People's Republic of China Radio and Television Recommended Industry Standards—“Specifications for Provincial Technical Platforms of County-Level Media Convergence Centers” and “Construction Specifications for County-Level Media Convergence Centers.”

The construction of county-level media convergence centers has become an important carrier for the national “Four Capabilities” construction. This repre-

sents a major measure to deepen cultural system reform in the new stage and also means that the focus of promoting media convergence has extended from provincial-level and above media to grassroots media, and from trunk media to branch media—the reform of grassroots and branch media will promote the full activation of the national media system [3]. In a sense, the construction of county-level media convergence centers is a major strategic deployment by the Party Central Committee to modernize the national governance system and capabilities, and to consolidate and expand grassroots public opinion positions.

Currently, most county-level media convergence centers adopt the approach of building new media ports such as Weibo, WeChat, mobile apps, and websites, integrating traditional media resources, and implementing intensive management and branded operations [4]. In practice, due to constraints from systems, talent, funding, and technology, the convergence progress varies significantly across regions.

2.1 Inadequate Understanding of “Media Convergence” and Insufficient Reform Momentum

Media convergence in many regions remains at the “co-location” stage, merely a simple “addition” rather than true “integration.” The perspective that views integration as addition focuses on individual media, whether new or old, mistaking media change for linear evolution. What is overlooked is that although different communication technologies and means are linear expressive elements, the formation of their communication power is multi-dimensional and should not be simplistically reduced to one medium’s active adoption and appropriation of another [5]. Such reforms often evolve into “incremental reforms” that dare not touch existing stock. Without adjusting systems and mechanisms, fundamental problems cannot be solved. During policy implementation, due to the lack of timely follow-up policies, a situation has emerged where county-level media convergence construction systems dare not reform, do not know how to reform, and do not want to reform. Moving from “addition” to “integration,” from “you have me, I have you” to “you are me, I am you,” essentially requires breaking free from self-inertia and creating a new “media channel form,” achieving an iterative upgrade in cognition.

2.2 Weak Operational Capacity and Insufficient Self-Sustaining Capability

County-level media convergence centers are public institutions with corresponding financial guarantees, but these are insufficient to cover operational costs in the digital media era. Moreover, having previously faced no local competitors, they lack market-based competition and selection mechanisms, resulting in deficient operational capacity and insufficient self-sustaining capability. Some centers’ equipment cannot meet new media production requirements, directly leading to low content production quality and declining audience appeal. The director of the mobile platform operations department at a media convergence

center in Z County, H Province, noted during a symposium that when discussing issues, one must “speak based on their actual resource constraints.” Although national-level documents have been issued to promote media convergence center construction, there is a disconnect in corresponding policy documents at the implementation level. Currently, the basic operational model established by pilot projects is “news + government affairs + services.” However, due to the numerous departments providing government affairs and services within the county, data resources across various ports are fragmented, and departmental data resources are not externally connected, especially vertically managed data resources. This results in high total operational costs, low efficiency, and low user stickiness.

2.3 Shortage of Professional Talent and Difficulty Retaining Talent

County-level media convergence centers are mostly executive departments without autonomous reform authority. Decisions regarding personnel, distribution, and other matters require approval from higher-level relevant departments, making reform difficult. The professional competence of existing talent pools struggles to meet the actual needs of media convergence development, and relatively low compensation advantages make it difficult to attract outstanding talent. An analysis report on the construction of county-level media convergence centers nationwide found that for county-level grassroots units that have not yet established media convergence centers, the construction difficulties ranked from high to low are: limited talent reserves, limited financial capacity, institutional integration difficulties, and insufficient attention from various levels of units. Among these, “limited talent reserves” accounted for 88.9% of survey responses [6]. This indicates that most media platforms believe that the effective and practical advancement of media convergence construction depends largely on the matching of corresponding talent.

3.1 Following the Evolution Path of “Transfusion First, Then Hematopoiesis”

County-level media convergence centers are grassroots media under Party leadership and represent the propaganda positions of the Party and government. They must adhere to the basic principle of “Party control of media” to better guide and serve the masses. In particular, they must strengthen public opinion construction, unequivocally uphold truth, firmly refute falsehoods, and consciously undertake the mission of holding high the banner, gathering public support, nurturing new talent, promoting culture, and presenting a positive image.

The wise adapt to the times, and the knowledgeable adjust to circumstances. Only by achieving a leap in ideological understanding can we break through dilemmas and open new work situations. In promoting media convergence, we must clearly recognize that media convergence center construction is an urgent and arduous task. In the short term, to address the problems of insufficient

dissemination power, weak guidance power, limited influence, and inadequate credibility of county-level media, we cannot rely solely on county-level media building in isolation. Strong administrative promotion from Party committees and governments, along with supporting guarantees in relevant policies and finance, are essential. Following the evolution path of “transfusion first, then hematopoiesis” can better and faster achieve these goals.

3.2 Building Fair and Efficient Internal Management Mechanisms

Progress in information technology requires even greater efforts in information organization innovation to connect and debug. Without scientific and rational top-level design, even the highest goals cannot be achieved. Building institutional mechanisms suitable for all-media development and using quality platforms to gather “collective wisdom” are key to advancing media convergence.

In organizational construction, integrating media belonging to different institutions or departments within a county through personnel convergence, business convergence, and institutional convergence—especially incorporating government affairs new media originally embedded in the administrative system and traditional radio and television stations into the same communication system—can both address the insufficient productivity of non-professional operational personnel within the administrative system and reduce the costs of separate operation and management. On January 15, 2019, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and the National Radio and Television Administration jointly issued the “Construction Specifications for County-Level Media Convergence Centers,” which states that the technical system of county-level media convergence centers consists of collection and aggregation, content production, comprehensive services, planning and command, data analysis, content review, convergent distribution, network security, operation and maintenance, and monitoring and supervision components (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]) [7]. This demonstrates that the functional module settings and business process design of media convergence organizations have already produced enormous differences from traditional media organizations, requiring reorganization of institutional structures in top-level design and entirely new planning for business process management.

In platform construction, emphasis should be placed on data continuity and iterative technology design. Static data from the past lacks core value, while regional media construction aims to achieve “smart communities,” taking communities as long-term service targets to realize dynamic data interaction. Through technological connectivity and pre-planned open technology iteration design, user experience can be continuously optimized to achieve service effectiveness and service security.

In content production, emphasis should be placed on reconstructing the end-to-end business process of “planning and command—data analysis—information collection—content production—convergent distribution,” forming a work situa-

tion of “one-time collection, multiple generation, diversified dissemination, and comprehensive coverage.” Attention should be paid to producing high-quality content, creating a clean and upright cyberspace, innovating discourse methods, enhancing the connotation and persuasiveness of disseminated information, and improving the precision, stratification, and interactivity of content dissemination. Create independent IPs and build content with unique styles, selling points, and intellectual property rights. Through a “USB drive-style survival” approach, leverage various platform channels to become online commercial resources, and indirectly reap the dividends brought by IP offline [8].

In talent management, separate editorial and operational functions, establish separate standards for talent selection, cultivation, and retention, and strengthen positive incentives. The essence of separating editorial and operational functions is whether “professional skills” and “resource accumulation” can continuously promote talent cultivation and development, avoiding desperate and short-sighted behaviors during the transformation and convergence period. On one hand, editorial teams should be streamlined and upgraded, encouraging editorial personnel to focus on in-depth high-quality news reporting and commentary that can “thoroughly explain reasoning” and “deeply analyze.” On the other hand, many existing employees can be encouraged to transition through incentive policies and incorporated into teams specializing in operational services. The decentralized convergence of media literacy and skills is a more authentic and deeper-level convergence [9]. Drawing on the Jiangsu Pizhou model, break the identity distinction between establishment and non-establishment personnel, implement “open competition for middle management positions and two-way selection for grassroots employees” [10], or outsource projects to external teams, adopt market-oriented corporate management, provide value-added services, and continuously improve self-sustaining capability.

3.3 From Traffic to Stock, Turning Stock into Increment

Only through effective services can effective connections be established, and only by achieving operational closed loops can sustainable development capability be attained. County-level media convergence centers are sub-platforms built on large platforms and represent all-media convergence. Platform functions should follow communication laws, start from the concerns and needs of the people, and strengthen service provision based on user value. Emphasize the high unity of principle and flexibility to comprehensively enhance media service capabilities for the overall situation and business innovation capabilities—building new mainstream media with both “news propaganda” and “comprehensive service functions” to achieve the dual attributes of guiding the masses (focusing on propaganda) and serving the masses (focusing on stickiness). Comprehensive service functions mainly include e-government, e-Party building, smart communities, public education, medical services, entertainment services, e-commerce, and social communication. By enhancing connection stickiness to achieve user

dependence, the goal is to move from traffic to stock and turn stock into increment.

Each county-level media convergence center needs to integrate corresponding businesses based on its actual situation and characteristics. For example, the Xiangcheng Media Convergence Center in Henan, starting from government inquiries, public inquiries, and needs inquiries, grasped the needs of government, people, and markets, integrated traditional and new media, and built a three-dimensional communication platform centered on APP live streaming, encompassing newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations, WeChat public accounts, Weibo, websites, and mobile apps across eight dimensions. Particularly noteworthy are its “supermarket-style supply” and the construction of the “Government Inquiry Column.” The media convergence center also incorporated public cultural resources such as libraries, cultural centers, Henan opera troupes, and town cultural stations into its network, breaking through the “last mile” of cultural benefit to the people [11], providing a demonstration for the construction of county-level media convergence centers nationwide.

Promoting the industrial operation of county-level media convergence centers is a viable option for cultivating self-sustaining capability. First, they can rely on professional teams to build publicity and display service windows for relevant departments, provide self-media operation and maintenance services, and incubate an in-system market. Second, they can conduct user operations, mine information and data, or utilize accumulated resources such as industry connections and networks to provide diversified commercial services for users, meeting their needs in “clothing, food, housing, transportation, entertainment, and tourism.” Third, they can assist rural revitalization by tapping into service categories with local characteristics and productizing and marketizing them, such as agricultural product e-commerce and characteristic tourism services. Fourth, in the development of upstream related industries, they can participate in research and development and export integrated collection and editing systems externally, providing certain support for the main business.

Since platform construction considers continuous data collection from the beginning, long-term accumulation and sedimentation help the government make more scientific social governance decisions, using rule management and point systems to promote the implementation of “guiding the masses.” For example, residents with high comprehensive point rankings within a community can obtain the title of “model resident” and receive corresponding material rewards.

County-level media convergence centers carry the significant mission of consolidating grassroots public opinion positions and advancing the modernization of the national governance system. In practical work, strong administrative promotion from Party committees and governments and supporting guarantees in relevant policies and finance are essential. Building fair and efficient internal management mechanisms, constructing a user-value-oriented operational service system, and completing the evolution path of “transfusion first, then hematopoiesis” are necessary. We must continuously deepen our understand-

ing of the laws of propaganda and ideological work, enhance the dissemination power, guidance power, influence, and credibility of news and public opinion, better guide and serve the masses, and ultimately enable this national “nerve ending system” to become a solid force in the Party’ s governance system that is closest to the internet, closest to big data, and closest to the people.

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(Author’ s affiliation: Media Convergence Communication Research Center, Hebei Institute of Communications)

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