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Analysis of Improvement Techniques for County-level News Programs in the New Media Context: Postprint

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the current status of county-level news programs and their content selection in the development process, and subsequently proposes enhancement strategies from the perspectives of audience identification, planning enhancement, format innovation, style cultivation, and team construction, aiming to provide insights for the innovation of grassroots news programs.

Full Text

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Keywords: new media; county-level news programs; current situation analysis; content selection; enhancement techniques

News programs constitute the most fundamental and direct vehicle for broadcast media to fulfill their public opinion guidance function. They represent the “primary language” of radio and television stations and form the very foundation of their existence. The quality of news programs and the strength of their service orientation directly influence audience ratings. Against the backdrop of rapid new media development, county-level radio and television stations, as the most grassroots mainstream media, face similar impacts on their news programs. How county-level news programs can break through development bottlenecks, leverage their strengths while avoiding weaknesses, and forge a suitable path

for sustainable development remains a long-term consideration for grassroots broadcast professionals.

1. Current Situation Analysis of County-level News Programs in the New Media Era

County-level radio and television stations play an irreplaceable role in publicizing the Party and state's policies. However, in today's environment of rapid new media development and increasingly fierce competition, county-level news programs struggle with severe limitations in funding, technology, talent, and coverage, making their development prospects far from optimistic.

1.1 Insufficient Innovation Drive Leading to Poor Audience Retention

Currently, with new media emerging incessantly, county-level television programs—news programs in particular—fail to retain audiences. They have not genuinely implemented the “Three Closenesses” principle (closely aligned with reality, life, and the masses). Outdated concepts result in monotonous content, stale formats, and low quality. Some county-level stations even use hierarchical rank as the sole criterion for story placement, causing news content to lose its “newness” and diminishing audience viewing experience.

1.2 Inadequate Incentive Mechanisms Resulting in Low Program Quality

Meeting and inspection-related news often constitutes the entirety or majority of county-level news programs. With few journalists on staff, county-level stations frequently operate in a reactive mode, which inadvertently fosters a passive “wait, depend, and demand” mentality among reporters. This results in news programs featuring excessive activities and lengthy coverage. Compounded by a lack of clear planning consciousness in topic selection, reporters work in a disorganized manner. Furthermore, the absence of effective performance evaluation systems for journalists leads to poor initiative, with assignments relying on mandatory arrangements, severely constraining program quality.

1.3 Inefficient News Production Processes Slowing Dissemination

While low ratings for county-level news programs stem from multiple factors, poor timeliness represents a primary cause. Constrained by various factors, some stations cannot achieve the goal of “same-day production and broadcast,” allowing news to accumulate and become “old news.” This is particularly problematic for time-sensitive stories with high public concern, which, when not reported promptly, erode news credibility. The value of news lies in its “newness.” To improve timeliness, county-level stations should strive for prompt broadcasting, even if they cannot establish the round-the-clock, rolling, high-density broadcast systems of larger networks.

1.4 Weak Team Building Undermining Program Production and Broadcast

Operating at the grassroots level with poor conditions and low compensation, county-level stations struggle to attract professionally trained graduates. Additionally, the absence of fixed broadcast durations for news programs further contributes to low ratings.

2.1 Delivering the Mainstream Voice and Fulfilling Mainstream Media Responsibilities

As the foundation of county-level broadcasters' program systems, news programs must fully embody their role as the "throat and tongue" of the Party, bridging the "last mile" in publicizing Party principles, policies, and guidelines with emphasis on accuracy and timeliness. News production should align with reality to enhance influence. Journalists must thoroughly study Party principles and policies, stay informed about central government work priorities, and immerse themselves in grassroots communities to understand public sentiment, demands, and difficulties. By adhering to the "Three Closenesses" principle and focusing on mainstream reporting, news programs can enhance their appeal and impact.

2.2 Strengthening Local News and Telling Local Stories

County-level broadcasters hold a crucial position within their specific coverage areas, making them the preferred choice for local audiences. People are most interested in what happens around them and information relevant to their daily lives. Consequently, county-level news programs possess strong appeal for local viewers. This news "localization" is irreplaceable by CCTV, provincial satellite channels, or prefecture-level stations.

2.3 Enhancing News Value and Focusing on Livelihood Issues

To enhance news value, programs must continuously innovate in both content and format, emphasizing key points, strengthening layout, and optimizing structure. Yu Jiaqing's *Dictionary of Journalism* defines news value as "the social demand embodied in news facts, comprising five elements: timeliness, importance, prominence, proximity, and interest. The richer these value elements are in a news fact, the higher its news value. Reporters and editors should select, compare, evaluate, and choose news events based on these criteria." Following the "Three Closenesses" principle, news programs should incorporate three content areas: current political affairs, special reports, and livelihood concerns. These complementary components enrich news content, enhance relevance, timeliness, appeal, impact, and cohesion, and expand the power of public opinion guidance.

2.4 Strengthening Visual Elements and Pursuing Format Innovation

County-level news programs attract the greatest attention from both audiences and advertisers. Timely, fresh content consistently appeals to viewers, while the psychological need to understand local happenings, perceive environmental changes, and obtain personally relevant information is precisely what county-level news programs fulfill.

The revamped *Toksun News* has made substantial efforts in visual elements, format innovation, and style development, creating a favorable public opinion environment for Toksun's economic and social development. In a survey asking "Do you regularly watch *Toksun News*?" 73% of respondents answered "yes."

3. Enhancement Techniques for County-level News Programs in the New Media Era

President Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work: "We must maintain correct orientation of public opinion, improve the dissemination, guidance, influence, and credibility of news and public opinion, and consolidate and strengthen mainstream ideological discourse. We should innovate communication methods and discourse styles to allow the Party's innovative theories to 'fly into ordinary people's homes.'" He further noted that county-level news programs must innovate and achieve localization—meaning they must stay grounded. Only grounded news programs can thrive with vitality.

3.1 Audience-Centered Programming

From the perspective of audience psychology, viewers prefer watching events happening around them. Shared living areas, similar languages, and common lifestyles facilitate acceptance. When people see themselves or their neighbors on television, they become more engaged, forming a stable local viewership centered on the local audience.

To serve local audiences effectively, county-level news programs should focus on ordinary people in their coverage topics and structure content to align with viewers' daily lives. Programming should adopt an approach based on audience reception habits, incorporating everyday life perspectives, civilian viewpoints, and livelihood content. Program writing and anchor delivery should employ colloquial, accessible language, using narrative storytelling, engaging commentary, and people-friendly interpretation to enhance affinity, appeal, impact, and influence.

3.2 News Planning as the Foundation

While we cannot manufacture news itself, necessary news planning is essential. As the grassroots tier of China's media system, county-level outlets typically

produce low-quality news programs. At the author's station, *Toksun News* broadcasts daily in both Uyghur and Chinese. Previously, inadequate planning led to disorganized reporting, low program quality, audience disinterest, and leadership dissatisfaction, creating a vicious cycle.

This year, *Toksun News* has emphasized and strengthened planning by having program leaders coordinate with relevant personnel to actively discuss Party committee and government priorities at each stage. Combined with news reporting principles, they have launched thematic sections such as “Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of New China: Witnessing Changes,” “I Struggle, I Am Happy,” “Glorious 70 Years, Struggling in the New Era: Impressions,” “Glorious 70 Years, Struggling in the New Era: My Country and I,” and “Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Keeping Our Mission Firmly in Mind,” thereby refining the county-level news program.

3.3 Innovation in Presentation Techniques

County-level news programs serve as an important window to the outside world and a key channel for audiences to understand local customs and culture. To enliven news programs requires format innovation.

Hunan's *Chenzhou News* incorporates elements such as aerial photography and 3D animation in its production, inserts visuals during synchronous audio playback, and adds background material to news reports, making programs more dynamic. By applying these advanced practices, the author's news program has also achieved continuous improvement.

3.4 Developing a Distinctive Style

The goal of building a branded news program is to establish a unique style that reinforces brand identity. Style marks a program's maturity and requires stability. For example, CCTV's *Xinwen Lianbo* has maintained its distinctive, largely fixed structure for 41 years despite changing content. County-level news programs should follow suit, avoiding frequent shifts in segment arrangement and overall style. Altering stylistic features means abandoning brand equity, and rebuilding a brand from scratch demands substantial investment—acquiring a new customer typically costs 4–7 times more than retaining an existing one.

3.5 Team Building as the Breakthrough

President Xi Jinping emphasizes: “Talent competition is the key to media competition; talent advantage is the core of media advantage.” To overcome challenges, county-level stations must focus on talent cultivation, institutional innovation, and exchange cooperation. Although most staff lack formal journalism training, many are dedicated, hardworking broadcasters with noble professionalism, tireless work ethic, and unwavering commitment. These individuals form the cornerstone of county-level broadcasting. Therefore, stations should establish long-term training systems, adopt “going out” and “bringing in” approaches to

enhance professional skills, and send more personnel to higher-level broadcast departments for hands-on learning that integrates theory with practice.

In conclusion, county-level radio and television stations should leverage their unique strengths, identify their development direction, innovate their approach, establish incentive-based competition mechanisms, build their brand reputation, and strive for excellent service to achieve satisfaction among audiences, society, employees, and supervisory departments. By maximizing both social and economic benefits, county-level broadcasters can usher in a new spring of development.

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

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