Postprint: Prospects for Television Program Production and Broadcasting in a Media Convergence Environment

Authors: Lü Min

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Abstract

In the media convergence environment, how television programs should evolve represents the central research question of this paper. This article first delineates the developmental transformation of television program production modes from the traditional integrated production-broadcast paradigm to the separated production-broadcast model and the online autonomous production model. Through comparative analysis, it clarifies why the latter is more appropriate for contemporary Chinese television program production practices. It further elaborates on the catalytic role of the Internet, wireless hotspots, and mobile terminals in propelling the development of television media. Through a comprehensive analysis of current Chinese media communication modalities, this study further anticipates the developmental prospects of television program production and communication methods within the media convergence landscape.

Full Text

Abstract

This paper examines the developmental trajectory of television programming within China' s converged media landscape. It begins by tracing the evolution of television production models from the traditional integrated production-broadcast system to the separation of production and broadcasting, and subsequently to online self-production models. Through comparative analysis, the paper demonstrates why the latter approaches are better suited to contemporary Chinese television production. The discussion further explores how the Internet, wireless hotspots, and mobile terminals have catalyzed the development of television media. By synthesizing an analysis of current Chinese media dissemination patterns, the paper projects future prospects for television program

production and distribution within a media convergence environment.

Keywords: Separation of production and broadcasting; Integrated production and broadcasting; Media convergence; New television programs

1.1 Integrated Production-Broadcast Model

Traditional television in China has a storied history dating back to May 1, 1958, when programming first aired on what became Beijing Television Station. For over six decades, television stations have functioned as key government departments, imbuing broadcast content with significant political character. Institutions such as China Central Television, Xinhua News Agency, and the National Radio and Television Administration have long served as vanguards in government propaganda, cultural education, and information dissemination. This institutional framework gave rise to China' s integrated production-broadcast model, wherein production and broadcasting functions are unified within a single organizational structure.

This integrated model enables unified program management and direct oversight of production processes, ensuring alignment with national policies and ideological guidelines. It facilitates the promotion of correct public opinion orientation and enhances capacity for narrative control. Moreover, television programs produced under this system have established considerable authority among audiences. The comprehensive, integrated management structure also allows stations to rapidly mobilize their best resources when undertaking major propaganda campaigns, flexibly coordinating various functional departments, channels, and programs to form cohesive units capable of delivering comprehensive, multi-dimensional coverage. For instance, during the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, China Central Television dispatched 32 teams comprising over 680 journalists across the disaster zone, deploying more than 90 camera units and activating mobile satellite transmission systems to create both a comprehensive and a three-dimensional reporting network.

However, as times have changed, traditional television' s continued reliance on the integrated production-broadcast model has revealed significant limitations. This "self-produce, self-review, self-broadcast"approach lacks market adaptation and social supervision, resulting in administrative rigidity, high production costs, bloated organizational structures, and outdated content. In today' s media environment, audience expectations have evolved from passive, non-selective viewing to active, selective consumption. Audiences now seek out content that interests them rather than accepting whatever is broadcast. This shift in viewing behavior has created an impasse for traditional integrated production-broadcast television, necessitating urgent transformation.

1.2 Separation of Production and Broadcasting

The concept of separating production from broadcasting originated with the 1982 launch of Channel 4 in the United Kingdom, which introduced a commissioned production system. This separation represents an inevitable path for China' s television industry development. By spinning off program production and advertising operations into independent companies, content creation can operate according to market principles and corporate governance structures. As China' s market economy has matured, this model allows program viability to be determined by audience preferences, with the television remote serving as the ultimate arbiter. Popular programs thrive while unpopular ones are naturally eliminated.

Under this separated model, numerous programs have gained audience favor in recent years. As foreign entertainment industries have increasingly penetrated the Chinese market, many international variety show formats have been imported. This has evolved from simply broadcasting foreign programs to purchasing copyrights and producing localized Chinese versions, particularly marking a period of deep integration between Chinese and South Korean entertainment industries.

In May 1988, the United Nations News Committee designated the Internet as the "fourth medium," marking the beginning of online media. As a communication platform, the Internet enables unidirectional, bidirectional, and multidirectional transmission characteristics, which have fostered the emergence of self-produced online content and significantly accelerated television program development. In China, the earliest representative of online media was Tudou.com, a video-sharing website established in 2004. This milestone marked the beginning of China' s Internet video-sharing platforms as important components of the digital ecosystem, making video viewing and sharing a ubiquitous practice.

After a decade of development, China' s online audio-visual industry has become the primary destination for Internet users' time and attention. In response to this boom, major video platforms have experimented with low-cost self-produced programs. Companies including iQiyi, LeTV, Youku Tudou, PPS, and 56.com have ventured into self-production, substantially elevating the overall quality of online self-produced content. Online media is now bringing new opportunities to China' s entertainment industry, as television programming inevitably moves beyond traditional distribution models toward marketization. This transition presents tremendous opportunities for Internet enterprises and represents the greatest potential for future online media self-creation in China.

2.1 Emergence of Triple Network Convergence

The evolution from traditional television networks to digital television, from communication networks to comprehensive 4G coverage and emerging 5G technology, and from early Internet to fiber-optic networks has created a convergence trend among three previously distinct networks: telecommunications net-

works, computer Internet, and broadcast television networks. This convergence has given rise to the triple network integration phenomenon.

Triple network convergence refers to the process whereby telecommunications, Internet, and broadcast television networks evolve toward next-generation Internet, digital television, and advanced broadcast networks through technological transformation. This process results in converging technical capabilities, overlapping business scopes, and interconnected, resource-sharing networks capable of providing integrated voice, data, and broadcast services. This fusion does not imply physical merger of the three networks but rather convergence at the level of high-layer applications. For example, smart televisions now enable users to listen to radio, browse websites, and watch television programs. Similarly, high-end smartphones support not only calls but also web browsing and live television streaming, while computers can simultaneously access the Internet, listen to radio, and watch live television broadcasts. This transmission model has substantially promoted television program development, improved ratings, and established a solid distribution foundation for new television formats.

2.2 Explosive Growth of Wireless Hotspots

Mobile WLAN and home WiFi routers have become increasingly prevalent, representing convenient data transmission systems that use wired fiber optics to emit wireless signals through routers within a certain coverage area. This simple access architecture enables users to transmit information anytime, facilitating seamless connectivity. In any location with wireless hotspot coverage, users can now connect smart terminals (mobile phones, tablets, etc.) to the Internet and watch live television programs instantly. Years ago, CMMB mobile television emerged as an early product of media convergence, but it suffered from numerous limitations. With the popularization of 3G networks, the development of smart mobile terminals, decreasing smartphone prices, and the proliferation of news and video applications, the explosive growth of wireless networks has integrated television and mobile phones in terms of both medium and content. This has fundamentally transformed traditional television program distribution and expanded the reach of information dissemination.

As wireless cities develop and home networks become ubiquitous, an increasing number of people watch video programs on smart terminals. Both smartphones and tablets support anytime, anywhere video viewing, while wireless networks provide convenient access channels that accelerate the transformation of television program distribution methods.

2.3 Diversification of Application Software

The proliferation of smart terminals and wireless networks has made application software critically important. As tablets and smartphones have become widespread, the public has grown accustomed to accessing the Internet through APP clients. Currently, all major Chinese video websites have developed their

own application clients, signaling the emergence of APP clients as a significant commercial platform. Mobile devices running iOS and Android systems are quietly transforming business models through their convenience, touch interfaces, and high-definition experiences. Mobile APP applications represent a massive market within the mobile Internet industry.

Major media organizations have developed their own mobile clients that allow users to watch video programs anytime, anywhere. Examples include CCTV' s CNTV client and Hunan Satellite TV' s Mango TV. Meanwhile, online media companies have also tapped into the mobile Internet market, with dozens of video platforms including iQiyi and LeTV launching their own mobile clients. This enables audiences to conveniently access programs by simply opening the desired client on their mobile terminal, significantly promoting the dissemination and development of television programs.

3. Future Development Trends of New Television Programs in a Media Convergence Environment

Media convergence has enabled television programs to transform their distribution methods and rapidly adapt to convergence trends. Throughout this evolutionary process, convergence has served as the vanguard of change for new television program development.

3.1 Expansion of Source Materials for New Television Programs

Since the first simultaneous broadcast of television images and sound in 1930, television has evolved over nearly a century to become the most important medium for program dissemination. China' s television industry has experienced remarkable development since broadcasting began in 1958, with television viewing becoming a crucial form of leisure and entertainment for decades. Today, building upon continuous network innovations, new television program development keeps pace with the times. Traditional television programs have innovated based on new media, creating numerous programs derived from online platforms.

Currently, numerous news events and neologisms are widely created and disseminated through the Internet, providing extensive source material for new television programs. New talk shows have specifically targeted the Internet as a high-yield source of news, mining this territory extensively. Many variety shows represent important applications of media convergence through cooperation between television and online platforms, leveraging the interactivity that traditional television media lacks. This represents a tremendous advantage that must be effectively utilized. By combining online and television media, the source materials for new television programs can be substantially expanded.

3.2 Diversification of New Television Program Formats

With smartphones now ubiquitous, people constantly use various mobile applications during leisure time, providing new avenues for television program development. The phrase "shoot and share instantly" immediately brings Weibo to mind. Despite its relatively short existence, Weibo' s influence has been enormous, enabling information to spread rapidly across vast networks. Its social impact and ability to shape public opinion surpass other media. Weibo' s real-time dissemination relies on mobile terminals, and browsing Weibo has become a habitual behavior. Given its tremendous influence, the integration of Weibo information release with new television programs has emerged as a novel program format.

For example, some Weibo-based programs collect entertaining Weibo content to share with audiences, creating highly creative and amusing entertainment shows. Others focus on "cooperation between online and television media" by monitoring key Weibo events and discussing trending topics, creating cross-media "television-Weibo" news programs. These new television programs source their content from Weibo, discussing social media on television and perfectly integrating television media with new mobile media, offering significant long-term development potential.

WeChat offers convenience and immediacy, with over 600 million users exerting widespread influence. During the 2015 Spring Festival Gala, WeChat collaborated with advertisers and CCTV to launch the "Watch Gala, Shake for Red Envelopes" campaign, allowing viewers to use WeChat' s shake function to interact with the live broadcast and win New Year red envelopes. This innovative format largely resolved the challenge of declining viewership and substantially improved Gala ratings. This model of combining traditional television programs with WeChat represents a new direction for program development and provides an excellent roadmap for the future transformation and upgrading of traditional television programs.

3.3 Broadening Design Concepts for New Television Programs

The unified application of triple networks has made television program distribution more convenient and widespread. Developing mobile APP applications derived from or associated with television programs can enhance program attention, improve audience participation, and facilitate promotion, thereby increasing ratings and expanding audiences. This makes programs more creative and dynamic while generating greater advertising revenue. Some radio and television stations are already moving in this direction. For example, China' s first celebrity cross-border fashion reality show utilized a separated production-broadcast model, produced by EE-Media and broadcast on Dragon TV. The season comprised 10 episodes, each featuring six female celebrities creating design works around a common theme to secure pre-orders from four buyers represent-

ing consumer markets, recognition from top fashion observers, and support from live audiences. The program collaborated with Taobao e-commerce, ultimately promoting participants' fashion concepts and works to online markets. This program involved multiple industries including e-commerce (Taobao), television media, fashion, and creative design, achieving seamless integration between television programs and advertising. It created a disruptive "content-as-commodity" model enabling immediate purchase of featured items, transforming audiences into users and establishing a foundation for mass participation. This disruption will become the cornerstone for future development and innovation in new television programs.

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