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Reflections on Key Points for Constructing County-Level Converged Media Centers (Post- print)

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Abstract

County-level media convergence centers represent an upgrade of communication models in the context of institutional reform and media transformation. Given that there is currently no fixed and unified construction model, all localities are actively exploring. At present, this initiative faces common issues such as a shortage of professional talent and scarce content. This paper discusses how to grasp the construction of county-level media convergence centers, aiming to provide references for more colleagues involved in this work.

Full Text

Key Considerations in the Construction of County-Level Media Convergence Centers

Abstract: The county-level media convergence center represents an upgrade of communication models amid institutional reform and media transformation. Given the absence of a standardized construction model, localities are actively exploring approaches. Currently, common challenges include a shortage of professional talent and scarce content. This paper discusses how to effectively approach the construction of county-level media convergence centers, aiming to provide reference for peers engaged in this work.

Keywords: county-level media convergence center; integrated development; media reconstruction; reform

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Following the recent adoption of the “Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of County-Level Media Convergence Centers” at the fifth meeting of the Central Committee for Comprehensively Deepening Reform, localities have accelerated construction pace, ushering in an unprecedented period of rapid development for county-level media convergence centers. Undoubtedly, for traditional media entering a “severe winter period” or new media in a phase of rapid evolution, the development of county-level media convergence centers presents a valuable opportunity. Yet facing this unprecedented advantage, how should we seize it? How should county-level media convergence centers position themselves? How can existing resources be activated? These are questions worthy of deep consideration.

1. Reconstructing Media Forms at County-Level Media Convergence Centers

From a media perspective, county-level media convergence centers represent an upgrade of communication models proposed against the macro backdrop of institutional reform and media transformation. Their essence lies in mechanism innovation, bringing fundamental changes to form and even substance for China’s grassroots media.

First is the organic integration of media resources. At county-level media convergence centers, various media means are fully integrated—television stations, digital radio, websites, WeChat, Weibo, and news apps—all converging into a mobile portal. This enables one-time collection of news materials, multi-dimensional editing, and all-channel distribution, thereby achieving comprehensive media coverage while avoiding waste of media resources.

Second, the reconstruction of media forms. Multi-channel collaboration not only integrates content products but also inevitably drives the reconstruction of media operation processes including planning, collection, editing, and distribution. The construction of county-level media convergence centers necessarily requires close integration with grassroots entities, particularly the participation of large numbers of talents from diverse backgrounds, bringing new models to news and information production. The involvement of more social forces and technology sharing can also feed back into media operations, solidifying roots and consolidating the public opinion front.

Third, the innovative deepening of media services. At the county-level media convergence center construction promotion meeting held in Changxing, Zhejiang this September, emphasis was placed on striving to build county-level media convergence centers into mainstream public opinion positions, comprehensive service platforms, and community information hubs. From this, we can see that beyond information attributes, county-level media convergence centers are also endowed with service functions, empowering local government services.

Fourth, if websites, WeChat public accounts, and personal Weibo accounts within a regional scope are all incorporated into a management system led by

county-level media convergence centers, content supervision can be achieved. Furthermore, after introducing big data analysis applications, key public opinion monitoring and handling can also be realized.

2. No Fixed Model for County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

According to media data, China has over 2,800 county-level administrative districts, encompassing more than 4,000 county television stations, newspapers, websites, and over 600 news clients. Following central government deployment, 600 county-level media convergence centers were launched nationwide in 2018, with basic national coverage to be achieved by the end of 2020.

2.1 Construction Status of County-Level Media Convergence Centers Across Regions

According to incomplete statistics, as of mid-December 2018, construction status across regions was as follows: The Yunnan Broadcasting and Television Station's "Colorful Cloud" converged media cloud platform has already connected provincial, prefecture-level, and county-level broadcasting and television media. All districts in Beijing have completed district-level media convergence center construction. District-level media convergence construction in Tianjin has been fully launched, entering a phase of unified integration and enhancement. All county-level media convergence centers in Fujian Province were uniformly unveiled and began centralized office operations before the end of 2018. Jilin, relying on the "Tianchi Cloud" converged production platform and media convergence command center, will complete the establishment of all county-level media convergence centers across the province before the end of 2019. Jiangxi has issued the "Jiangxi Province County-Level Media Convergence Center Evaluation Measures (Draft for Comment)" and the "County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction Guidance Manual (Trial Version)," aiming to achieve province-wide coverage of "one network, one cloud" by June next year. Guangdong has merged all county newspapers, internal publications, radio and television stations, and their new media within the province to form a single "large institution," constructing a province-wide "single network." Guangxi required that by the end of December 2018, 26 pilot counties (cities, districts) complete media convergence center construction tasks, and by December 2019 achieve full coverage of county-level media convergence centers in the remaining 71 counties (cities) across the region. Other regions are also comprehensively implementing the spirit of the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work, relying on local resources to solidly advance county-level media convergence center construction.

2.2 Top-Level Design Adapting to Local Conditions

Surveying the national situation, there is currently no fixed, unified construction model for building county-level media convergence centers; localities are actively exploring approaches. The current common practice is to integrate all county media resources—including county radio and television stations, websites, internal publications, news clients, WeChat public accounts, and Weibo—and operate them integrally according to the “central kitchen” model. Construction forms include: first, relying on integration of local media resources, with the typical representative being the Zhejiang Changxing Media Group; second, leveraging higher-level traditional media and media technology companies to achieve convergence. For example, the “Colorful Cloud” platform of Yunnan Broadcasting and Television Station is the province’s only operational core media convergence platform, while Beijing’s districts cooperate with People’s Daily Online, Xinhua Net, and the People’s Daily Media Technology Company.

However, regardless of the model adopted, county-level media convergence center construction must first involve top-level design, followed by adaptation to local conditions combined with grassroots innovation, in order to formulate implementation plans that conform to the laws of media integrated development.

3. Four Key Points in County-Level Media Convergence Center Construction

Despite common challenges such as shortage of professional talent, insufficient funding, and scarce content, and despite varying development conditions across regions, the exploratory practices of early pioneers provide valuable insights and references. The author believes that to grasp the essence of county-level media convergence center construction, focusing on the following four “points” may provide a way forward.

3.1 Seizing the “Strategic High Ground”

Grasping the core responsibilities of county-level media convergence centers means seizing the strategic high ground. The construction of county-level media convergence centers is an inevitable measure to enhance internal vitality, consolidate grassroots media, expand grassroots public opinion positions, improve grassroots services, and most efficiently build the “last mile” of information communication between the Party and the people. Behind this, propaganda and ideological work constitutes the central focus. The National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work held in August 2018 pointed out that building a socialist ideology with strong cohesion and leadership is a strategic task that the entire Party, particularly the propaganda and ideological front, must undertake. We must maintain correct guidance of public opinion, enhance the dissemination, guidance, influence, and credibility of news and public opinion, and consolidate and strengthen mainstream ideology and public opinion. We must strengthen innovation in communication methods and discourse styles, al-

lowing the Party’s innovative theories to “fly into ordinary households.” County media are grassroots media under Party leadership, whose primary task is to consolidate and expand grassroots propaganda, ideological, and cultural positions. Working around this core task means grasping the core responsibilities of county-level media convergence center construction.

3.2 Finding the “Focal Point of Effort”

“From the masses, to the masses.” In today’s era of highly developed media, how can county media attract local users’ attention and enhance their usage stickiness? This requires an appropriate focal point of effort. The National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work proposed that we must solidly grasp the construction of county-level media convergence centers to better guide and serve the masses. Attaching users’ information needs to their government affairs needs and even their life and consumption needs hits precisely upon this focal point. The positioning of county-level media convergence centers should not be merely news release platforms; they can also be county-level comprehensive information service platforms or public service platforms. By providing local “information + government affairs + services” to the masses, offering various convenient and efficient services, they can thus become assistants in people’s daily lives. There is no shortage of such examples. For instance, the mobile version of Chongqing Jiangjin News Network, “In Jiangjin,” has built an integrated platform for local lifestyle services and news information, attracting 898 merchants to settle in, covering all sectors of lifestyle services, with a peak daily visit volume of 56,000 person-times. The Yunyang News Smart Yunyang APP has become the only local APP through which water, electricity, and gas fees can be paid. The Sichuan Renshou County Media Convergence Center has established a “Reward-based Tip-off Platform,” distributing red envelopes as rewards to netizens who report problems, and promptly transferring these issues to relevant departments for handling. By integrating government services, county-level media convergence centers can not only retain grassroots users and defend grassroots public opinion positions but also promote the modernization of governance methods. In this way, the construction of county-level media convergence centers not only opens up the “last mile” of media convergence but also opens up the “last mile” of close ties between the Party and the masses.

3.3 Breaking Through the “Content Pain Point”

Constrained by geographical limitations and external media competition, content scarcity will become one of the biggest bottlenecks restricting the development of county-level media convergence centers—this is an urgent pain point that must be broken through. Facing the rapid development of content aggregation platforms and content distribution platforms, and the continuous updating of interactive and communication technologies, original content production remains the most important link—content production will forever occupy the upstream position in the entire media value chain. Only by producing quality content can

one remain invincible when facing various challenges. Providing quality content includes two aspects: first, based on local characteristics and combined with local resources, fully exploring the connection points with regional features, and on this basis, strengthening innovation in communication methods and discourse styles, innovating expression in both concept and form; second, fully introducing intellectual resources and channels, connecting massive amounts of high-quality content from outside the region to local platforms. This can not only enrich platform content, but content producers are also willing to see their products reach every corner of the nation through the “capillary network,” taking root and growing.

3.4 Overcoming the “Mechanism Difficulty”

The construction of county-level media convergence centers is not a simple combination of various media ports but a reconstruction of county-level media communication processes and an innovation in systems and mechanisms. Inheriting the original architecture cannot mean inheriting legacy problems. The construction of county-level media convergence centers must follow the central government’s deployment requirements, starting from organizational structure, compensation incentives, talent transformation, and separation of government and enterprise affairs, among other aspects, to identify their own positioning and rebuild the operational mechanisms of media convergence centers. Through new systems, mechanisms, and operational models, the vitality of media convergence centers can be activated. Media convergence is an inevitable result of media development under new circumstances. Through comprehensive reform and innovation in systems and mechanisms, the unification of public opinion guidance and the enhancement of communication competitiveness can be achieved.

The construction of county-level media convergence centers will transform China’s grassroots media forms. It will not only bring about content integration but also inevitably drive the reconstruction of media operation processes. This initiative also means that the focus of media convergence work will extend from provincial-level and above media to grassroots media, from trunk media to branch media. The reform of branch media will promote the full activation of the national media system. In the transformation process, by implementing around the core task of propaganda and ideological work, grasping the focal point of integrated services, strengthening content construction, and activating mechanisms, we can open a new stage in county-level media convergence center construction.

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