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## Who Holds the Colorful Ribbon Dancing in the Sky? –How County-Level Newspapers Report News Post-Print in the New Media Environment

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**Date:** 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

### Abstract

In the new media environment, where information disseminates at an astonishing pace, the geographical advantages that county-level news media once held over prefecture-level, provincial, and central news media have essentially vanished. When newsworthy events occur, they cannot be suppressed, yet the distribution channel value of county-level outlets cannot compete with that of major platforms. How should county-level news media respond? This article conducts a detailed analysis of a widely reported case to provide reference suggestions for news practitioners.

### Full Text

## Who Holds the Colored Ribbon Dancing in the Sky? How County and City Newspapers Should Report News in the New Media Environment

**Abstract:** In the new media environment, information spreads at an unprecedented pace, essentially eliminating the geographical advantages that county-level news media once held over prefecture-level, provincial, and central media. When a newsworthy event occurs, it cannot be concealed, yet the channel value of local outlets cannot compete with major platforms. How should county-level news organizations respond? This paper provides a detailed analysis of a widely reported case to offer reference points for journalism practitioners.

**Keywords:** New Media; County and City Newspapers; Same-Topic News

**Chinese Library Classification:** G216

**Document Code:** A

**Article ID:** 1671-0134(2018)09-041-02

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2018.09.015

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As is well known, the internet is not constrained by time or space. In the new media era, the speed and breadth of information dissemination are unprecedented, which has essentially nullified the traditional advantages of “geographical convenience” and “local connections” that county and city newspapers once enjoyed as frontline witnesses to news events. These outlets now face simultaneous competition from both higher-level media and self-media, with their communication effects frequently undermined. How should county and city newspaper new media respond and report when encountering news, especially breaking news or compelling stories? This article analyzes a recent news case to identify some common patterns and provide reference points.

## 1. News Instance

On April 6, 2017, a story about a fruit farmer from Henan who was hospitalized in Danyang and unable to sell his mangoes quickly spread online. Doctors and nurses at Danyang People’s Hospital purchased all 2,000 jin (1,000 kg) of mangoes to prevent them from spoiling, creating a heartwarming story that gained widespread attention.

## 2. Dissemination Pathways

### *Print Media Coverage:*

On April 6, the *Danyang Daily* (a county-level newspaper) published the story under the title “Henan Fruit Vendor Suddenly Falls Ill in Danyang, ‘Unexpectedly’ Sells 2,000 Jin of Mangoes During Hospitalization.” The same day, the *Zhenjiang Daily* (a prefecture-level newspaper) ran it as “Anxious: Henan Fruit Vendor Suddenly Falls Ill; Heartwarming: Hospital Opens Green Channel.” The *Yangtze Evening Post* (a provincial newspaper) published it as “Henan Fruit Vendor Suddenly Falls Ill in Zhenjiang, Heartwarming Story—Focus on Treatment: A Cartload of Mangoes ‘Sold Out’ by Everyone.”

### *New Media Coverage:*

At 7:00 AM on April 6, Yangtze Evening News Network released the story online. Danyang News Network and the *Danyang Daily*’s Fresh APP published it around 9:00 AM, subsequently revising their headlines at 9:50 and 11:20. At 10:42 AM, after @CCTVNews reposted the story from @YangtzeEveningPost, it began to gain traction on Weibo, with central-level accounts like @CCTVNews and @People’s Daily sharing it. The focus remained on the heartwarming nature of the story. Although the *Danyang Daily* Weibo account had posted around 9:30 AM, its limited influence caused the post to quickly disappear in the sea of information.

WeChat platforms were also active. At 11:02 AM on the 6th, the local People’s Hospital WeChat account published the first post titled “You Read That Right! Danyang People’s Hospital Doctors and Nurses Actually Started Selling

Mangoes, the Truth Is...” which exceeded 1,000 clicks within 15 minutes and reached over 7,000 clicks in 24 hours—an extraordinary figure for an account with only 10,000 followers. At 17:00, Danyang Release (the municipal Party Committee’s WeChat) adapted the story as “Watch: Our City’s People’s Hospital Staff Buy Mangoes at Work but Get Praised by CCTV!” garnering 3,992 clicks. At 17:30, the *Danyang Daily* WeChat published it as “Surprise! Danyang People’s Hospital Doctors and Nurses Actually Started Selling Mangoes, the Truth Is...” with 6,812 clicks. The next day, various local self-media accounts began forwarding the story.

### 3. Analysis of the Dissemination Pattern

Based on the above multi-platform publication timeline, two conclusions emerge: First, county and city newspaper new media have no competitive advantage when facing major media platforms under the same conditions. Whether in terms of news source capture or online topic manipulation, they are at an absolute disadvantage. Second, compared with major platforms, simultaneous publication doesn’t work for county and city newspaper new media, and falling behind works even less. Only one path remains: being first, making the first move. If print publication cannot be first, the newspaper’s new media platforms must publish first to offset the impact of outside major media and civilian self-media, thereby strengthening our influence and voice.

### 4. Strategies for When News Is Scooped

What should be done when we fail to secure the first news landing point, a common occurrence when civilian self-media publish simple “picture + caption” posts first? Should we pass on the story or repeat the self-media coverage? Passing too often may cause the public to dismiss us: “Why didn’t the local county newspaper cover this?” Yet simple repetition is also unsatisfactory—without newer, more authoritative on-site reporting or behind-the-scenes news, how can we demonstrate the unique impact of local county newspapers? Xinhua News Agency’s response to the “Mango Incident” provides one solution.

After the mango incident, all three central media outlets—@CCTVNews, @People’s Daily—covered the story on Weibo and WeChat, except for Xinhua. Just as people were wondering why, on April 9, Xinhua issued a new media dispatch on its client titled “Curing the ‘Physical Illness’ Then Treating the ‘Heart Disease’ —A Mango Vendor’s ‘Danyang Adventure’ .” Through detailed, in-depth interviews, the reporter answered all the questions that had arisen in readers’ minds after seeing the initial news, providing a methodological answer to the question of “what to do” when self-media seizes the first news landing point. Although we cannot know the exact click numbers after publication, many people in my social circle spontaneously forwarded it. Subsequently, numerous provincial television hosts repackaged and amplified the story through newspaper reading or commentary formats, essentially extracting all remaining value from the news.

Examining the performance of media at all levels during this incident, we find that county and city newspaper new media are in a very awkward position. When good news breaks, it cannot be concealed, yet its channel value cannot compete with major platforms. Moreover, other self-media and major media will rush to report it. If you don't report it, others will "steal" it. The new media environment presents both opportunities and challenges. The China Journalists Association recently issued the "Initiative to Practice the 'Four Directions and Four Practices' and Become News Workers Trusted by the Party and the People," calling on journalists to remember General Secretary Xi Jinping's entrustment, take the "Four Directions and Four Practices" as their professional benchmark, be loyal and responsible, fulfill their duties, and strive to become trusted news workers, creating a favorable public opinion atmosphere for the successful convening of the 19th Party Congress. How to quickly transmit the voice of county and city newspapers and deeply excavate the stories behind the news—this incident provides an excellent lesson, from which we can learn much in terms of news handling.

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

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