

Problems and Countermeasures for the Development of Mainstream Media Clients in the New Era: Postprint

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Abstract

The development of domestic news clients in China has evolved into a tripartite structure comprising portal news, original news, and aggregated news platforms. Portal websites such as Sina and Sohu, along with aggregated news platforms represented by Toutiao, constitute commercial news clients, while news clients transformed from traditional media are categorized as original news clients. These three types of news clients perform distinct functions: portal news platforms emphasize comprehensiveness...

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Preamble

The development of domestic news clients in China has evolved into a tripartite structure comprising portal news, original news, and aggregated news platforms. Portal websites such as Sina and Sohu, along with aggregated news platforms represented by Toutiao, constitute commercial news clients, while news clients transformed from traditional media are categorized as original news clients. These three types of news clients perform distinct functions: portal news platforms emphasize comprehensiveness, segmentation, and diversity; aggregated platforms prioritize interest-based algorithms; and original news platforms stress depth, rationality, and professionalism.

The Pengpai News client distinguishes itself through original news content. Emphasizing the creation of distinctive news products, Pengpai continuously innovates and iterates both in content and technology. Four years ago, the primary challenge was adapting to the mobile internet era, whose most essential characteristic is the transformation of information dissemination forms—from single-text reporting to integrated multimedia combining sound, text, and images. As information consumption patterns shifted, people increasingly relied

on the “two micros and one client” (Weibo, WeChat, and news apps). In this context, we needed to adapt our traditional text-based reporting methods for internet dissemination, restructuring content integration to align with evolving distribution channels.

Amidst changes in the news discourse landscape, the traditional public opinion sphere once aligned with mainstream media’s agenda-setting—wherever mainstream media stood, so did public opinion. However, network development has fragmented the singular discourse arena under the traditional media monopoly, creating multiple public opinion fields comprising websites, self-media, and social platforms. Against this backdrop, traditional media must proactively set agendas to bridge these discourse fields, gradually enhancing their capacity to guide public opinion. At the technical level, we follow cutting-edge technologies, implementing major changes and innovations annually.

Built upon the foundation of the Oriental Morning Post and operating with small teams, Pengpai creates segmented brands, forming an independent ecosystem through micro-teams while aggregating information sources on a large platform. Through process reengineering, it adapts to mobile internet development. After four years of development, Pengpai has achieved bold innovation in its convergence approach, enabling the complete transformation of traditional media teams into new media structures. Supported by advanced technology and rooted in content construction, it adapts to mobile internet trends, continuously strengthening its agenda-setting capacity in online news, bridging different public opinion fields, and achieving notable results in major thematic propaganda.

The convergence and integration of traditional media with networks has become an industry-recognized imperative. Two key aspects require attention: First, traditional media must correctly understand and maintain their core advantages. Despite challenges from new media and self-media, they must recognize their accumulated strengths, including credibility advantages that cannot be replaced by new media in the short term. Second, they must develop new internet thinking.

A key characteristic of new media is that finding the right market window and creating a product that fits market needs can generate explosive growth in a short period, creating a virtuous cycle. Therefore, the initial growth phase is crucial for new media development, as explosive growth during this period plays a critical role in future development. Pengpai’s emergence resulted from the combination of top-down requirements and bottom-up demand. As an important reform pilot for the Shanghai United Media Group’s newspaper-network integration, Pengpai is operated by the Oriental Morning Post’s editorial team. Initially exploring content direction through a WeChat matrix, testing ultimately revealed that current affairs and ideological content were areas where the team excelled and that users preferred. These became Pengpai’s distinctive content categories, with early tested public accounts directly transforming into columns under Pengpai News. After four years of development, downloads have reached 100 million, with over 9 million daily active users.

Central Editorial Office Construction and Function in the Context of Media Convergence

Establishing a Central Editorial Office represents a practical need to coordinate various publishing ports across print and new media to form synergy. Only by enabling the Central Editorial Office to function effectively as a “nerve center” can convergence communication capabilities be continuously improved. The Central Editorial Office is a command, coordination, and organization mechanism that produces various products according to the specific needs of different user ports. While hardware configuration is important, soft power construction is more critical.

In December 2014, Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Group launched its “Central Editorial Office,” proposing the fundamental principles of “unified command, unified gatekeeping, rolling collection, rolling release, multi-dimensional presentation, and multi-media dissemination,” insisting on full-staff participation and round-the-clock operation. Before the Central Editorial Office’s establishment, the print newspaper’s current affairs and local news editing rights resided with the night editing center, while Weibo, WeChat, and APP publishing rights belonged to the all-media news center, and the website was managed by Dayoo.com. After the Central Editorial Office’s establishment, a new command, coordination, and operation mechanism was created.

First, the core teams of new media editors and print media editors were relatively centralized in shared office space, using new integration mechanisms and spatial consolidation to break down previous organizational and physical barriers. Second, a Central Editorial Office pre-editing meeting system was established, with heads of print media teams, various new media teams, and interview, photography, video, design, technology, and operations teams meeting together to enable direct coordination. This facilitates joint planning, shared human resources, product sharing, and co-hosted activities, gradually moving from simple addition to genuine integration.

The Central Editorial Office is regarded as a major transformation in traditional media’s content production process and organizational structure. System reform represents the top-level design for convergence, while the injection of technology, product, and operation factors acts as a catalyst for integration. Guangzhou Daily’s Central Editorial Office front-end comprises print media teams, official Weibo teams, client and website teams, while the back-end consists of the Pearl River Delta Center, Photography Department, Mobile Department, Sports Center, and Special Edition Center. The core is formed by the New Media Operations Department, Visual Design Department, New Media Technology Department, and Audio-Video Department. Each platform and port provides distinctive content products based on their different user positioning.

Most mainstream media convergence development begins with establishing a Central Editorial Office, but does not stop there. Guangzhou Daily’s Central Editorial Office construction focuses more on soft power exploration, including

organizational structure, assessment mechanisms, education and training, team transformation, and mechanism reform. The most important aspect is conceptual transformation. First, manuscripts must premiere on new media platforms. Second, content requires tracking to the dissemination level, delivering content to users through various methods and exploring content propagation. At the mechanism level, the most important measure to promote full-staff transformation is establishing and continuously adjusting new media incentive mechanisms. New media assessment must fully consider the characteristics of each platform, formulate corresponding assessment systems, refine them to different positions, and design compensation according to professional characteristics.

New Hunan Client: Practical Operations and Considerations for New Media Monetization

The New Hunan client launched in 2015, positioned as a mobile news information platform, mobile government affairs platform, and mobile life platform. Its target users encompass both key minorities and the general majority, primarily focusing on Hunan users.

First, amidst voices emphasizing “channel is king” and “technology is king,” we must recognize that high-quality content remains paramount, and content with inherent traffic can achieve monetization. In-depth original content constitutes New Hunan’s core characteristic. Second, visual presentation represents the current trend, encompassing forms such as VR, H5, and short videos. The vertical-screen era has arrived, with short video user scale continuously expanding. The narrative mode traditionally used in television—beginning with panoramic shots—is no longer effective on social platforms, replaced instead by more impactful shots supplemented with text explanations when necessary. Simultaneously, interactive content also carries inherent traffic, involving not only technical interaction but also interaction with users. Interactivity is a key feature of new media that transforms consumers into content producers, requiring content to resonate with users at the same frequency. Comments and sharing represent the two most important forms of interaction.

Regarding content monetization pathways, Hunan Daily has reached copyright cooperation agreements with most mainstream information platforms, integrating newspaper-network-client content resources and uniformly licensing them externally. Second, the user base and activity of the newly launched New Hunan client directly generate advertising revenue. Finally, in terms of government service monetization, “New Hunan Cloud” uses the New Hunan client as the mother platform, integrating various provincial departments, districts/counties, universities, and enterprises to open exclusive channels for them on the New Hunan APP, simultaneously generating their own “New Series” independent apps. This builds a shared news database, providing resident units with platform services, content services, technical services, public opinion monitoring, and new media training.

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

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