

Research on the Path and Achievements of Deep Media Convergence Development Through Product Innovation: A Case Study of the Convergence Development of West China Metropolis Daily and Cover News (Postprint)

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Abstract

According to the 38th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 2016, China’s internet user base had surpassed 700 million, with mobile internet users exceeding 600 million, accounting for over 90% of total internet users. This mobile-first landscape catalyzed the rapid emergence of news platforms like Toutiao, which quickly amassed over 100 million users. Conversely, traditional print and broadcast media experience...

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Preamble

According to the 38th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 2016, China’s internet user base had surpassed 700 million, with mobile internet users exceeding 600 million, accounting for over 90% of total internet users. This mobile-first landscape catalyzed the rapid emergence of news platforms like Toutiao, which quickly amassed over 100 million users. Conversely, traditional print and broadcast media experienced continuous decline, prompting a wave of media convergence initiatives. This transformation gave rise to notable examples such as The Paper, Cover News, Jiupai News, and Shangyou News, marking a flourishing period of media integration across China.

1.1 Mobile Platforms as the Battleground for Traffic Entry

In the mobile internet era, the maturation of mobile technology, the proliferation of 4G and 5G networks, and the continuous optimization of smartphone pricing and functionality have resulted in over 90% of Chinese netizens accessing the internet via mobile devices. Consequently, the majority of traffic now originates from mobile entry points, shifting the competition for news traffic to the mobile arena. As traditional newspaper and broadcast audiences migrated to mobile platforms, conventional media outlets—slow to adapt during the early stages of new media development—have been compelled to prioritize the capture of mobile news portals as their first step toward transformation.

From central media organizations like People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency, which pioneered independent news apps, to regional groups such as Zhejiang Daily Press Group, Changjiang Daily Press Group, Chongqing Daily Press Group, and Sichuan Daily Press Group, numerous players have launched proprietary news applications. This trend spawned platforms like People's Daily, Xinhua, The Paper, Jiupai News, Shangyou News, and Cover News. Simultaneously, media organizations lacking independent capital or brand influence have opted to establish presence on third-party mobile channels such as Weibo, WeChat, and Toutiao to capture traffic. Whether through proprietary platforms, third-party presence, or collaborative development, the scramble for mobile traffic entry points has become a critical “land-grab” phase in media convergence.

1.2 Live Streaming and Short Videos as the Communication High Ground

Research from Zhiyan Consulting indicates that China's live streaming market reached 15 billion RMB in 2016, with user penetration hitting 325 million. Concurrently, the short video sector experienced explosive growth, with startups like Yixia Technology securing hundred-million-level investments. Short videos—defined as second-long videos relying on mobile smart terminals for rapid shooting and editing, enabling real-time sharing and seamless integration on social media platforms—combine text, voice, and video to more intuitively and comprehensively meet users' expression and communication needs.

The exponential growth of live streaming and short videos has fundamentally transformed information dissemination. Traditional text-and-image-based communication no longer satisfies user demands, as audiences increasingly devote substantial time to these more accessible, vivid, and shareable formats. In this context, live streaming and short videos have become essential components of media convergence strategies. Official Weibo accounts of People's Daily and CCTV News publish over ten short videos daily, while platforms like Beijing Time, Cover News, and The Paper have established dedicated short video production teams and independent brands. Short video journalism has repeatedly created viral news events, such as Beijing News' coverage of “Cliff Village in

Liangshan, Sichuan,” among countless others.

1.3 Big Data and AI as Strategic Upgrade Points

Beyond platform and communication transformation, the application of big data and AI represents another critical strategic focus for media convergence, demanding substantial future investment. Today, not only the media industry but also traditional and emerging sectors are leveraging big data and AI for empowerment—from government applications like legal big data assisting court proceedings and traffic big data supporting urban management, to corporate applications like logistics companies using big data and sorting robots for package handling. This pervasive integration has received strong national policy support.

In media convergence, big data and AI hold paramount strategic importance. People’s Daily’s “Central Kitchen” big data platform creates unified content editing and command centers, integrating content output with intelligent information services. Jiupai News employs big data collection and mining technologies, utilizing data warehouses and marts for statistical analysis to enable original and repurposed journalism with visualization technologies. Cover News has vigorously developed its chatbot “Xiaofeng,” partnering with Microsoft Xiaoice to enable not only simple news writing but also user interaction, news 推送, and even poetry exchanges. Big data and AI will undoubtedly become crucial competitive battlegrounds, with converged media centers and robot journalism serving as vital strategic assets.

2. Huaxi Metropolis Daily–Cover News Convergence Development Analysis

In exploring media convergence, Sichuan Daily Press Group (hereinafter “the Group”) has deepened its integration efforts, launching the “Cover Media” project on October 28, 2015, leveraging China’s first metropolis newspaper—Huaxi Metropolis Daily—to build a new mainstream media platform. On May 4, 2016, Cover Media officially launched the Cover News client and website (collectively “Cover News”). This case study examines Cover News’s development to illuminate future media convergence trajectories. The Huaxi-Cover integration journey epitomizes product innovation, with Cover Media itself serving as a product that has carved a unique path through content, technology, platform, and mechanism innovation.

2.1 Content Innovation for High-Quality Output

2.1.1 Technology-Driven Personalized Content Delivery Cover News employs data mining, robot learning for writing, and interest-based recommendation algorithms to transcend traditional editorial 推送. Through user-initiated news tracking, interest tagging, machine recognition, and continuous learning, it

creates personalized news streams tailored to individual users—“different faces for different people.”

2.1.2 Enhanced Original Content and Public Opinion Guidance As one of only two clients nationwide with Class I internet news information service 资质, Cover News continuously enhances its content dissemination credibility and influence, achieving remarkable success in original reporting. Multiple original pieces have achieved hundreds of millions in cross-platform dissemination, including viral coverage of the “Two Sessions,” “Liangshan Landslide Rescue,” and “Liangshan Anti-Drug Police Sacrifice.”

2.1.3 Strengthened Live Streaming and Video Impact Cover News has aggressively expanded into live streaming and short videos, emphasizing professionalism in live broadcasting and quality in video production. Cover Live consistently ranks among the top three on Toutiao’s video livestream chart, frequently claiming the top spot. Live events like “Liangshan’s Highest Zip Line,” “Tibet-Sichuan’s First Major Bridge,” and “Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Completion” have each garnered over ten million views.

2.1.4 Intelligent Interaction via Chatbot Engagement Riding the AI wave, Cover News has continuously advanced its artificial intelligence capabilities. In April 2015, Cover News APP version 3.0 launched with mature algorithmic recommendations and proprietary robot writing technology. The in-house developed “Xiaofeng Robot” 1.0 enabled chatbot functionality, which was significantly enhanced through integration with Microsoft Xiaoice on July 13.

2.2 AI-Led News Production Transformation

2.2.1 “Intelligence First”: Building “Intelligent Media” Positioned as “the lifestyle for hundreds of millions of young people,” Cover News differentiates itself by strengthening value connections. This value-driven technological approach provides direction for new mainstream media. In convergence development, internet-based mainstream media must balance technology with value guidance—neglecting the latter constitutes public irresponsibility. Cover News addresses machine learning’s “information overload” and “information narrowness” problems by emphasizing value matching, creating “intelligent media” that combines “wisdom + intelligence.” Through human editorial intervention to correct algorithmic biases, it instills values into the technological engine, enabling both personalization and value connection.

2.2.2 AI-Driven News Production Process Reform In building Cover News, Huaxi Metropolis Daily has kept pace with the AI era, advancing into big data and AI technologies. The organization fully leverages AI media technology to empower journalism, refining and deepening AI-news integration while expanding AI applications across the entire production chain—from material

collection, screening, and analysis to writing and distribution. Every 环节, from news 线索 gathering to fact-checking, involves deep AI participation, driving intelligent transformation of news production workflows.

2.2.3 Talent Support Through Independent Team Building Huaxi Metropolis Daily–Cover News prioritizes building an internet-savvy workforce. First, it has established an independent, highly skilled technical team of over 80 members—nearly half the total workforce—with 30 recruits from leading tech companies like BAT, Huawei, and Microsoft. Key technical positions including CTO, Data Director, and Product Director were recruited through headhunting services. Second, it cultivates versatile, all-media reporting and editing teams. Personnel transformation is central to building new mainstream media. Cover News–Huaxi Metropolis Daily actively drives traditional talent transformation through enhanced training, new media product operations, and entrepreneurial projects, equipping staff with new knowledge and capabilities to develop all-media and expert-level professionals.

2.3 Platform Innovation for Pan-Content Ecosystem

2.3.1 Building an AI-Era Business Ecosystem Cover News aims beyond a standalone client, targeting the ubiquitous long-tail distribution in content domains to build a pan-content ecosystem platform for the AI era. This creates diversified, sustainable business models and profit chains across media, e-commerce, and entertainment sectors. Media focuses on content optimization, e-commerce addresses APP consumption fatigue, and entertainment leverages social and cultural elements to redefine connections between people and information, goods, services, and each other.

2.3.2 Constructing a Diversified Mobile Communication Matrix Cover Media has built a multi-carrier, multi-channel, wide-coverage mobile communication matrix. Centered on Cover News, it has developed products including Cover Live, Cover Think Tank, Cover Public Opinion, Cover Data, Cover Account, and Cover Cloud Commerce, forming a diverse and rich product portfolio.

2.3.3 Mechanism Innovation for Integrated Development The Huaxi-Cover convergence established a “dual-brand” support, “dual-engine” drive, integrated development, and unified coordination approach, advancing the dual brands from “coexistence” to “integration” through deep fusion, synchronized resonance, and joint development.

2.3.4 Organizational Integration Organizationally, Huaxi Metropolis Daily–Cover News continuously promotes integration. The Huaxi Metropolis Daily editorial committee and Cover News editorial committee merged into the Huaxi-Cover Editorial Committee, while the Huaxi Metropolis Daily

management committee and Cover Media general manager's office combined into the Huaxi-Cover Management Committee. These unified bodies oversee integrated planning, operations, management, and assessment for both entities. Department structures were optimized so that all departments simultaneously serve both Huaxi and Cover, operating as a unified whole.

2.3.5 Integrated Communication System Structurally, the integration打通 Huaxi and Cover resources, implementing “one-time collection, multi-format generation, multi-level dissemination.” This creates a convergent yet differentiated pattern where “mobile prioritizes speed, print prioritizes depth.” The organization continuously strengthens its mobile matrix, innovates mobile news products, and promotes integrated 联动 dissemination across multiple products.

2.3.6 Integrated Operational Mechanism Production mechanisms dismantle barriers between traditional and new media editorial processes, constructing a hierarchical, integrated workflow covering strategy, collection, editing, review, and distribution. Assessment mechanisms unify evaluation standards, incorporating user metrics like clicks, shares, and comments as key performance indicators.

3. Assessment of Social and Economic Benefits

Driven by product innovation and guided by the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media,” Huaxi-Cover has achieved deep integration across content, channels, platforms, operations, and management—creating the Cover News we see today. At the November 17, 2017 C+ Mobile Media Conference hosted by Cover News, a strategic partnership with Toutiao was announced, combining content strengths with technological advantages and establishing a western content entrepreneurship base. This successful attraction of a major platform's attention signals an important future business direction for media convergence.

After two years of development, mainstream media players have demonstrated diverse approaches. While future outcomes remain uncertain, current leaders like People's Daily and The Paper show strong momentum. For Cover News, further differentiation is essential. This assessment examines its social and economic performance.

3.1 Social Benefits

3.1.1 Correct Orientation: Upholding Positive Propaganda and Strengthening Public Opinion Guidance Through major reporting opportunities, Huaxi Metropolis Daily–Cover News continuously strengthens content innovation and positive propaganda to enhance public opinion guidance. During major thematic reporting, it elevated guidance capabilities by deeply publicizing the spirit of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC

Central Committee and leveraging VR, H5, comics, emojis, and video for Two Sessions coverage. Products like “Cover Dialogue with Government Work Report Drafting Team Member Liu Yingjie” and “Cover Exclusive Dialogue with CPPCC Spokesperson Wang Guoqing” delivered highly readable content that amplified representatives’ governance voices. In major emergencies like the Maoxian landslide, Cover News maintained correct orientation, followed journalistic principles, and used video and livestreaming to showcase rescue efforts, rallying positive energy.

3.1.2 Social Influence: Targeting Young Users, Spreading Positive Energy Targeting primarily post-80s and post-90s digital natives, Cover News emphasizes “young users’ differentiated choice rights and personalized expression interests,” building a new-generation client around youth to enhance guidance among young demographics. Since launch, it has achieved national impact, particularly in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Beijing, and Chongqing, with 10% user activity, a 4:1 iOS-to-Android user ratio, and 63.3% of users under 30. Experts from Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University, the National Academy of Governance, Sun Yat-sen University, and People’s Daily Public Opinion Monitoring have praised Cover News as both timely and proactive in capturing youth demand, thereby strengthening mainstream discourse influence among young people.

3.1.3 Industry Demonstration Effect: Positive Development Trajectory with Widespread Recognition Since launch, Cover News has received numerous industry accolades. It ranked third nationally in the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television’s “Top 20 Media Convergence Innovation Cases.” *China Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television Journal* noted: “Cover News has begun to take shape as a ‘phenomenal platform,’ with its convergence practices serving as a benchmark amid declining traditional newspaper fortunes.” It also won the “UC Golden Pinecone Annual Media Pioneer Award,” the “Most Original Media Award” from the China Newspaper Association, and the “Annual Cutting-Edge Media Award” from the China E-Commerce Association.

3.2 Economic Benefits

As a western China model for media convergence, Cover News’s ability to survive and thrive through sound business models represents a critical test. Its transformation has established a sustainable foundation.

3.2.1 Market Demand: Gap in New-Generation Clients for Young Users While mainstream media groups nationwide aggressively pursue mobile internet strategies, traditional print media clients have struggled due to technological constraints, creating demand for robust, tech-driven alternatives. Most existing clients target general audiences without precise positioning, leaving a

gap for youth-oriented platforms. Cover News's positioning as "the lifestyle for hundreds of millions of young people" opens new markets and creates a fresh opinion 阵地 for youth.

3.2.2 Competitive Advantages: Dual Strength in Technology and Content Cover News possesses both technological and content advantages. Technologically, it advances in AI+media with cutting-edge algorithmic recommendation, sophisticated big data utilization, and proprietary "Xiaofeng Robot" plus Microsoft Xiaoice integration for robot writing and chatting. In content, it holds Class I internet news service 资质—one of only two such clients nationwide—providing comparative advantages in original content over commercial competitors.

3.2.3 Investment Justification: Consolidating the Main Ideological Battlefield The Huaxi-Cover deep integration project responds to national calls for accelerated media convergence and Xi Jinping's directive to "build new mainstream media with diverse forms, advanced methods, and competitiveness." It defends ideological security by amplifying mainstream voices online, supports national strategies like the Belt and Road Initiative and Yangtze River Economic Belt, and pioneers cultural system reform through deep cooperation with leading internet enterprises.

3.2.4 Replicability: Exploring Solutions for Metropolis Newspaper Transformation Leveraging the pioneering spirit that created China's first metropolis newspaper, Cover News transforms 23 years of accumulated market, brand, professional, and resource advantages into a new development platform. This exploration of innovative convergence models creates a benchmark for metropolis newspaper transformation, offering valuable solutions to industry-wide challenges.

3.2.5 Sustainability Potential: Comprehensive Strength with Strong Momentum With robust support from central publicity departments, the State Administration, the Cyberspace Administration, Sichuan Provincial Publicity Department, and Sichuan Daily Press Group, plus 23 years of Huaxi's market resources and strong internal teams, Cover News demonstrates powerful sustainability. External partnerships with Alibaba, Microsoft, Baidu, and major app stores and carriers provide comprehensive advantages for continued healthy development.

4. Future Trends in Media Convergence

After three years of market exploration, media convergence faces both challenges and opportunities. Correctly positioned products will thrive, while failures will be eliminated. Three key trends will shape future transformation:

4.1 Content + Technology as Core Competitiveness

In the internet era, superior technology and platforms persist through upgrades, but many transforming media get lost in the tech wave. As technical gaps narrow across information platforms, content becomes the key differentiator. Only quality content combined with good technology creates market impact. However, truly superior content remains scarce, and the “originality laziness” caused by low ROI on quality creation means those who possess premium content can easily integrate technology to become market favorites.

4.2 Reconstructing User Relationships as the Transformation Key

In traditional media’s era of information scarcity, audiences were in a passive, unequal relationship with media. The internet and self-media have eroded this dominance, causing audience 流失. Future convergence requires transforming “audiences” into “users” through mindset shifts. Modern users demand internet thinking—user-centered product development, content production based on user needs, and behavioral understanding—to survive market competition.

4.3 Industrialization Development as Sustainable Profit Guarantee

Traditional media profits from simple advertising and 版面 sales have vanished. In today’s competitive market, single revenue streams cannot sustain development. Vertical domains require three-dimensional, market-oriented product systems for sustainable profitability. Deeper, more durable approaches involve industrial layout, leveraging media’s online-offline integration advantages to build open commercial platforms beyond traditional media scope, reinventing profit models.

The internet’s relentless waves continuously generate new markets, platforms, and models. In this fierce competition, every step in media convergence requires innovative spirit to emerge as enduring gold from the 大浪淘沙. This paper, using Huaxi Metropolis Daily–Cover News as a case study, explores convergence pathways and product innovation cores, hoping to illuminate a historically significant milestone for media industry development.

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