

Southern Media Group Forges a New Path in Media Convergence: Postprint

Authors: Hao Tianyun

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

Abstract

The 68th anniversary of Southern Media Group in 2017 coincided with the historic 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, imbuing the occasion with extraordinary significance. In his report at the congress, President Xi Jinping comprehensively elaborated on the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, clarifying major theoretical and practical issues concerning the Party and nation's future development, thus establishing the supreme guiding principle for al...

Full Text

Southern Media Group's Distinctive Path of Integrated Development

By Hao Tianyun

The 68th anniversary of Southern Media Group in 2017 coincided with the historic 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, imbuing the occasion with extraordinary significance. In his report at the congress, President Xi Jinping comprehensively elaborated on the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, clarifying major theoretical and practical issues concerning the Party and nation's future development, thus establishing the supreme guiding principle for all endeavors in the new era. As an influential Party media group, how could Southern Media Group earnestly study and implement the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress through concrete actions, embrace the new era, and bravely undertake its new mission to strengthen the Party's publicity and public opinion front? How could it cultivate new capabilities, create new value, and build new advantages amidst the constantly evolving media landscape and public opinion ecology? Through in-depth investigation, this author discovered that Southern Media Group is

greeting the new era with achievements in building new-type mainstream media, forging a highly distinctive path of integrated development.

1. Group Background and New Media Strategy

Southern Media Group evolved from *Southern Daily* and its series of publications. Founded on October 23, 1949, in Guangzhou, *Southern Daily* has established itself as the dominant political and economic media in South China through its irreplaceable authority, credibility, and high-quality mainstream news and in-depth reporting, becoming Guangdong's only authoritative political and economic newspaper targeting high-end readership. The predecessor of Southern Media Group, Southern Daily Group, was officially launched on May 18, 1998, and renamed Southern Media Group on July 18, 2005. The renaming strengthened the "Southern" tradition of cultural lineage and continuous innovation through multimedia development, forming brand and talent clusters, while establishing "Southern" as an asset-based media group with modern corporate governance structures.

While deepening its traditional print media, Southern Media Group has vigorously implemented a new media advancement strategy, accelerating the development of internet and mobile media and expanding into related industries where media advantages could be leveraged. In recent years, the group has successfully constructed a three-dimensional platform combining newspapers, periodicals and publishing houses, and online media, gradually extending toward a branded media conglomerate. Along the strategic goal of building an international cultural communication brand, the group has formed "seven fleets"—print media, online media, mobile media, book publishing, cultural exhibitions, cultural industries, and social welfare activities—presenting a richer brand architecture. Currently, Southern Media Group owns 8 newspapers, 9 periodicals, multiple websites, "two microblogs and one app," and 1 publishing house, forming six major product lines covering print media, online media, mobile media, radio and television media, outdoor LED displays, and electronic newspaper reading boards, with its all-media matrix reaching 200 million users.

Guided by the 16-character strategy of "deepening the main business, diversifying development, accelerating transformation, and integrated development," Southern Media Group has vigorously promoted integrated development along the path of "deep integration and comprehensive transformation," aiming to build an intelligent cultural media group with leading news and information, advanced communication methods, outstanding service capabilities, rich industrial forms, and strong capacity for public opinion guidance and market competitiveness, maintaining its public opinion guidance and social influence at the industry's top tier.

2. Full Coverage Across Newspaper, Website, App, and Microblog: Vanguard of Thematic Propaganda

For years, Southern Media Group has consistently maintained correct guidance of public opinion, delivering powerful thematic propaganda that has comprehensively enhanced its media influence and credibility, establishing itself as a vanguard in thematic reporting.

2.1 Amplifying the Southern Voice of Mainstream Public Opinion

Since 2015, *Southern Daily* and *Southern Weekly* have combined Guangdong's practical work to deeply explain the new thoughts and practices of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core in governing the country, with over 100 commentaries reprinted and recommended by central media outlets such as *People's Daily* and Xinhua News Agency. *Southern Daily* has focused on operating the column "New Thoughts and Practices on Governance," continuously publishing 162 commentator articles in the first half of 2017 alone, leading the nation in both quantity and quality. These efforts earned three commendations from the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and two reprints in *People's Daily*, with over 150 articles reprinted by mainstream news websites and clients including Xinhua News Agency, *People's Daily Online*, and the *People's Daily* client, establishing a theoretical highland for interpreting General Secretary Xi Jinping's important speeches among local media nationwide and powerfully amplifying the Southern voice of mainstream public opinion.

Because its thematic propaganda achieves "full coverage across newspaper, website, app, and microblog," Southern Media Group has received repeated commendations from central Party leaders and the Publicity Department's news review. Since 2017, to highlight coverage of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions on Guangdong's work, the 12th Guangdong Provincial Party Congress, the National "Two Sessions," the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's return, and the 90th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army, the group has meticulously organized reporting on major international events such as the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and the G20 Hamburg Summit, while actively undertaking coverage of exemplary figures like Liao Junbo and Huang Danian. Following four prominent commendations from central leaders including Liu Yunshan, Liu Yandong, and Liu Qibao in 2016, and eight issues of news review praise from the Publicity Department, the group received nine commendations from the Publicity Department in the first half of 2017. Its coverage of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions on Guangdong's work, the Guangdong Provincial Party Congress, and the National "Two Sessions" received high praise from leaders including Hu Chunhua.

2.2 Effective Guidance of Hot Topics

Beyond comprehensive thematic propaganda, Southern Media Group has become increasingly effective in guiding public discourse on hot topics, striving to produce outstanding works

with intellectual depth, warmth, and quality. Exemplary pieces demonstrating Southern's editorial standards include *Southern Daily's* series on "Guangdong's Economic Good Start," *Southern Metropolis Daily's* investigative reports on "Elderly-Targeting Health Products," exposing the underground "pornographic live streaming" industry, and Shenzhen medical insurance fraud, as well as *21st Century Business Report's* investigation into the Beidou navigation industry. These reports are powerful, well-guided, and highly praised by society. By carefully selecting propaganda themes, innovating presentation methods, and focusing on communication impact, a batch of technically advanced, well-produced converged media products and in-depth, skillful positive-energy articles have spread widely across cyberspace. Many mainstream news masterpieces have achieved hundreds of thousands, millions, or even tens of millions of reads. For instance, the two programs "Wu Song is Coming" and "Two Sessions Talk Show" garnered over 100 million and 50 million reads respectively, while the viral song "Four Three Two Let's Go!" and the H5 production "Southern Internet Celebrities Take You on a Deep Tour of Guangdong" attracted widespread attention for their novel and lively presentation.

3. "Central Kitchen 2.0" Further Improving Editorial Coordination Mechanisms

Shan Haixiong, then Member of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee Standing Committee and Minister of the Publicity Department, emphasized the need to implement a "mobile-first" strategy, continuously strengthen and optimize converged media flagship products, and further enhance the discourse power of traditional mainstream media in the new media field. He called for institutional innovation to support the accelerated development of key projects such as the Free Trade Zone Information Port and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Research Institute by the Southern Finance and Economics All-Media Group.

In accordance with the central and provincial Party committee's deployment requirements for advancing deep media integration, Southern Media Group has made the construction of "Central Kitchen 2.0" (Phase II of the "Integrated Editorial Platform") the flagship and foundational project for promoting deep media integration, building upon the "Central Kitchen 1.0" completed in 2016.

3.1 Integrated All-Media Coordination to Create Viral Products

Since establishing its all-media production concept, Southern Media Group has comprehensively reformed its editorial process to create a new production workflow characterized by rapid response, unified technology, diverse methods, and coordinated media operations. Focusing on creating flagship products and building "Central Kitchen 2.0" as the key priority, the group has further improved the "1+X" editorial coordination mechanism. The all-media platform features advanced, practical functions with interconnected and shared business applications, elevating the group's informatization to a new level. The "Central

Kitchen 2.0” construction targets “four ones”: one newspaper-website-app decision-making coordination mechanism, one editorial command and dispatch platform, one all-media content management system, and one communication effect monitoring and feedback system.

Through technology empowerment, “Central Kitchen 2.0” enables all-media integrated coordination in decision-making, real-time online dispatching in interviewing, efficient all-media connection in editing, three-dimensional all-media presentation in publishing, and big data monitoring in communication. On Southern Daily’s 68th anniversary, coinciding with the 19th CPC National Congress, the new editorial system played an extremely important role in coverage. Before the congress opened, the group launched “A New Lychee Song in RAP Shows You the New Guangdong” and “Foreigners in Guangdong Sing a Song for the ‘New Four Great Inventions’” in RAP format to tell the story of Guangdong’s new achievements, becoming viral products with over one million “likes.”

After the launch of “Central Kitchen 2.0,” most topics can be discussed and communicated online in real time, enabling multi-port editors to communicate directly with frontline journalists and facilitating team operations within departments or even joint operations across departments, reducing numerous intermediate links and communication barriers and providing strong support for transforming traditional editorial processes. “Central Kitchen 2.0” will greatly promote the construction of Southern Media Group’s all-media “integrated platform,” connecting all group media to a unified manuscript database covering text, images, video, and other forms of collection, processing, and distribution, forming a unified command, user-friendly news information collection and release platform that truly achieves content resource sharing, efficient support, diversified production, multi-product production, and orderly personalized production. The system has established a unified technical platform, focusing on building technical support capabilities adapted to new media production and dissemination and a quantitative evaluation system for network communication effects.

3.2 “Southern Famous Journalists Training Program” Cultivating All-Media Talent Southern Media Group has used the “Southern Famous Journalists Training Program” to guide its talent cultivation strategy, comprehensively deepening management system and personnel mechanism reforms. By attaching great importance to team building, actively carrying out “Study the Party Constitution and Party Rules, Be a Good Party Member” education and Marxist journalism education, adjusting and promoting key position personnel, and implementing all-media technology training for all staff, the group has comprehensively enhanced the cohesion and combat effectiveness of its editorial team. For years, this editorial team has steadfastly prioritized correct political direction, adhered to Party spirit principles and Marxist journalism, grasped the correct political orientation, and strived to become a first-class editorial team

focused on positive propaganda with high professional standards and excellent work styles, producing a series of high-quality works that uphold social responsibility, inherit Southern values, understand public sentiment, express public opinion, and possess intellectual depth, warmth, and quality.

Simultaneously, Southern Media Group focuses on cultivating outstanding talents proficient in modern media methods and techniques. By vigorously promoting the transformation of editorial staff into all-media reporters, editors, and management personnel, the group trains all-media composite talents brave enough to try new content production methods such as live streaming, short videos, drone collection, and VR. In October 2016 and April 2017, the group selected two batches totaling 40 “Southern Famous Journalists,” establishing corresponding cultivation measures and evaluation incentive systems using a “one person, one policy; tailored policies for individuals” approach. The group explores implementing new media project systems and studio systems to build talent innovation and entrepreneurship platforms. Through this cultivation, Southern Media Group’s journalists have quickly mastered all-media skills, shouldering the heavy responsibility of integration and innovation in major reporting activities in recent years and launching a series of distinctive, popular articles, columns, and projects. The “Southern Internet Celebrities” have become capable of creating viral “blockbuster” products, ranking among the top domestic media peers.

For years, Southern Media Group has insisted on treating talent as its primary productive force, optimizing talent structure as an important driver for integrated development and transformation. The group has reformed personnel selection and appointment systems, improved evaluation, training, and incentive mechanisms, intensified the introduction and cultivation of new media professionals, and strengthened all-media skills training for editorial and management staff. It actively guides and assists various business sectors in introducing professionals in data technology, computer technology, and new media product operations; improves incentive mechanisms, implements position appointment management, builds platforms for outstanding talent development, and solves the problem of cadres being able to “move up or down, enter or exit.” These efforts aim to build a dynamic, all-media, expert, and composite talent team with strong user awareness, innovation awareness, product awareness, and market awareness, adapted to transformation and development, forming a diversified and multi-level talent structure that equally emphasizes editorial and product development, operation and management, and technology and capital.

4. “Southern Plus” Makes a Strong Entrance with Deep New Media Integration

4.1 “Southern Plus” Launch Achieves “Double Two Thousand” Breakthrough As the mobile mainstream media platform built by Southern Media Group, “Southern Plus” achieved a “double two thousand” breakthrough within two years of its launch at the end of October 2015: by mid-October

2017, the app's cumulative downloads exceeded 24 million, and the Guangdong authoritative new media platform "Southern Account," operated by the app, hosted over 2,000 institutional accounts. Currently, "Southern Plus" produces an average of 3 H5 works, 1.5 animation works, and 3 video news products weekly, launching over 20 live video streams and a series of acclaimed viral products.

By mid-October 2017, more than 2,000 government and institutional new media accounts from Party and government organs and enterprises across Guangdong had joined "Southern Account," generating 30,000 monthly posts and over 40 million monthly reads. Driven by numerous new media products, "Southern Plus" has firmly established its position as the mainstream media leader on Guangdong's mobile terminals, becoming the backbone new media platform in South China and winning widespread acclaim from the industry and netizens.

In August 2017, "Southern Plus" launched the second season of its anti-corruption talk show video "Wu Song is Coming," which garnered 30 million views across the network, following the first season's four episodes that exceeded 100 million views. During the 2017 National "Two Sessions," "Two Sessions TALKS" launched by "Southern Plus" exceeded 50 million views. Meanwhile, "Southern Account," launched in 2016, has become another major government new media aggregation platform and traffic entrance alongside Weibo and WeChat, comprehensively covering Party and government organs in Guangdong's 21 prefecture-level cities, with provincial and municipal-level government new media from human resources, public security, judicial administration, taxation, state-owned assets, and industry and commerce systems collectively joining the platform.

4.2 "Mobile-First" Strategy Driving Comprehensive Transformation

According to the "2017 National Party Newspaper Convergence Communication Index Report," "Southern Plus" ranks first among 367 party newspaper-owned apps. Among the 272 internet news information service units licensed and designated by the Cyberspace Administration of China, "Southern Plus" topped the May 2017 ranking. Additionally, other new media flagship products of Southern Media Group include the Southern Metropolis Daily's "Bingdu" app with nearly 80 million downloads, *Southern Weekly* app with 10.72 million downloads, and the "Gebi" community project, which launched on WeChat in May and has exceeded 100,000 total users. The "mobile-first" strategy and vigorous new media development have significantly driven the group's industrial transformation.

In the first half of 2017, the group's new media revenue increased by 28% year-on-year, with mobile media revenue surging by 75%. "Southern Plus" achieved the "double two thousand" milestone within two years, primarily due to the "mobile-first" strategy implemented two years ago. This strategy responds to mobile internet era demands by actively occupying the commanding heights of mobile communication and building a backbone new media mainstream media platform. The mobile internet era requires transforming the previous limited,

fixed information “entrance” into a “multi-point touch” model aligned with various scenarios, providing “accompanying services” based on scenario awareness and personalized needs for users in different contexts.

In recent years, Southern Media Group has focused on building mobile client products such as “Southern Plus” to construct a new media matrix featuring shared technology, integrated platforms, mutual traffic guidance, complementary advantages, distinctive features, and effective services. Currently, the group has formed a multi-medium, multi-form, three-dimensional media ecosystem covering newspapers, periodicals, websites, apps, microblogs, and screens, reaching over 200 million total users.

5. Comprehensive Transformation Building “Media Plus” and Ranking Among Asia’s Top 500 Brands

World Brand Lab’s June 2017 report “China’s 500 Most Valuable Brands” listed Southern Media Group’s *Southern Daily*, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, and *Southern Weekly* with a total brand value of 76.409 billion yuan, ranking third among national media institutions after CCTV and *People’s Daily*. In the September 2017 “Asia’s Top 500 Brands” list, the three publications ranked 132nd, 170th, and 181st respectively, with *Southern Daily* and *Southern Metropolis Daily* joining *People’s Daily* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* among Asia’s top ten newspaper brands.

Southern Media Group’s integrated development in recent years has proven that facing profound changes in the media landscape, “deep integration and comprehensive transformation” enables the group to continue playing a prominent role as a national first-class provincial party newspaper group in serving the overall situation and guiding public opinion, while also leading innovation trends and serving as a pacesetter in media reform and development during the convergence era. To date, Southern Media Group’s all-media matrix covers 200 million users, with brand value ranking third among national media institutions. The group has built an all-media matrix covering newspapers, periodicals, websites, apps, microblogs, and screens, continuously expanding the influence of its WeChat official accounts. As of September 2017, the group had 24 accounts with over 100,000 subscribers and 6 with over 500,000; six media Sina Weibo accounts had over 6 million followers; and the group’s all-media matrix covered 200 million users.

Adhering to scientific development, diversified expansion, and technology-driven innovation, Southern Media Group has achieved remarkable results in media convergence. As a newspaper media group that has comprehensively transformed and upgraded from traditional print media, its convergence extends beyond the “Central Kitchen” editorial mechanism and the “Southern Plus” mobile client to cutting-edge industries such as bike-sharing and intelligent remote operation and maintenance services.

On December 6, 2017, Southern Media Group signed a strategic cooperation

agreement with Beijing Mobike Technology Co., Ltd. in Guangzhou to collaborate on new media planning, client resources, big data mining, think tank construction, and public opinion services. On December 5, a demonstration site for H3C Group's intelligent remote operation and maintenance service was inaugurated at the Southern Media Group building in Guangzhou, marking a new level in the group's service concepts, models, and capabilities.

On December 15, 2017, Southern Media Group held its technology conference, where five joint laboratories and research institutes were unveiled, including two national-level laboratories authorized by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, two applied research institutes, and one central database (big data service center). The group's "Top Ten Technology Innovation Projects of 2017" were also announced. The unveiled Publishing Convergence Development Key Laboratory and Media Big Data Application Laboratory were established by the State Administration in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology, Wuhan University's Shenzhen Research Institute, and Beijing Baifendian Information Technology Co., Ltd. The two applied research institutes—the Southern Digital Economy Research Institute and Intelligent Media Laboratory—were jointly built with internet companies such as Baidu and Alibaba. After establishing its central database (big data service center), Southern Media Group will focus on data priority strategies for talent cultivation and service capability extension.

The ten major projects receiving the "Southern Media Group 2017 Top Ten Technology Innovation Projects" award included the "Central Kitchen 2.0" system platform, the "Southern Plus" converged media mobile live streaming platform, the Southern Public Opinion Yutang app, the outdoor media big data analysis system, and the writing robot.

The group has also established a technology committee to formulate technology development strategies and implementation paths. The committee will accelerate the construction of four major projects: the group central database, intelligent management system, infrastructure cloud platform, and overall network security protection system, while optimizing technology resource allocation and management methods and introducing diversified incentive models to continuously cultivate new capabilities, create new value, and build new advantages. This technology conference sounded the clarion call for accelerating deep integration, comprehensive transformation, and building an intelligent cultural media group.

Southern Media Group is advancing its comprehensive transformation and has initially formed a development pattern with the group's overall transformation as the main body, four flagship products ("Southern Plus APP," "Southern Weekly APP," "Bingdu APP," and "Gebi Community Matrix") and six major industrial transformation benchmark projects (Southern Finance and Economics All-Media Group, Southern Network restructuring and listing, Southern Public Opinion data services, 289 Cultural and Art Industry, distribution and logistics

company restructuring, and Southern Cultural Entertainment Industry) as the two wings, with each unit innovating and developing rapidly.

Following the “Media Plus” industrial development approach, Southern Media Group is forming a “1+6” industrial structure with news media at its core, integrated with government services, cultural creative services, data services, transaction services, cultural entertainment, and smart living, creating a new industrial pattern of “big media, big culture.” Through channel and resource integration, the group achieves organic integration of its high-quality resources with external resources. Currently, the group is carrying out a series of exploratory practices such as “Media Plus Park,” “Media Plus Industry,” and “Media Plus Capital” with remarkable results.

Liu Hongbing, a group representative, stated that media must pay full attention to, research, analyze, and consider new economic forms, promoting healthy industry development through high-quality content’s all-media dissemination. “In the future, Southern Media Group will continue to focus on new economic forms such as bike-sharing and build dialogue platforms between industry-leading enterprises and local governments,” Liu said.

This article is part of the research results of the project “Research on Social Responsibility of Chinese Media” (Project No.: 2017-Y-Y-CM-041), funded by the Special Fund for Basic Scientific Research Business Expenses of Central Public Welfare Scientific Research Institutes of the China Institute of Press and Publication Research.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.