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A Preliminary Discussion on the Current Status of Cross-boundary Integration of Traditional Chinese Media (Postprint)

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

Abstract

As internet-centric new technologies make aggressive inroads into the news communication industry, accompanied by the evolution of national media policies, the four major traditional media—serving as the "weathervane" and "final word" for public opinion—though still commanding residual influence, have experienced a sharp decline in status and face numerous difficulties, advancing circuitously through opportunities and challenges. Adversity drives transformation; new societal developments have given rise to a novel media ecology, wherein the cross-boundary integrated development model based on the "Media+X" paradigm provides vitality and a pathway for traditional media to break through adverse circumstances. Investigating the current implementation status of this model in China holds enlightening significance for the successful transformation of traditional media nationwide.

Full Text

Preamble

A Preliminary Discussion on the Current State of Cross-boundary Integration of Traditional Chinese Media

Abstract: With internet-based new technologies aggressively encroaching upon the news and communication industry, accompanied by evolving national media policies, the four major traditional media—serving as both the "weather vane" and decisive voice of public opinion—are facing a sharp decline in status despite their lingering influence. Adrift with difficulties, they forge ahead through opportunities and challenges. This predicament prompts transformation; new social developments have given rise to a new media ecology. The cross-boundary integration development model, with "Media + X" as its basic paradigm, offers vitality and a way out for traditional media's breakthrough

from adversity. Studying the implementation status of this model in China provides enlightening significance for the successful transformation of traditional media nationwide.

Keywords: traditional media; cross-boundary integration; integration methods; integration effects; improvement suggestions

Classification Code: G222
Document Code: A
Article ID: 1671-0134(2018)04-039-02
DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2018.04.011
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1. Overview

Traditional media refers to all media that existed before the emergence of internet media, primarily comprising four categories: the newspaper and magazine industry based on paper, the broadcasting industry using radio technology for audio transmission, and the television industry employing electronic devices for signal transmission.

2. The Necessity of Cross-boundary Integration for Traditional Chinese Media in the New Era

China's traditional media have chosen the path of cross-boundary integration to promote development due to both internal and external factors, mainly manifested in the following aspects:

2.1 Inherent Deficiencies in Traditional Media

Whether in broadcasting, television, or newspaper and magazine industries, most have failed to keep pace with the times and universally suffer from prominent shortcomings.

First, the profit model is singular and outdated, with weak revenue growth and inability to make ends meet. Traditional media primarily rely on advertising for profit. However, with the differentiation of media elements, especially audience fragmentation, a large number of young and middle-aged audiences have migrated to internet media. The groups remaining with traditional media are predominantly elderly, culturally less equipped, and lower-income individuals. The negative effect of this situation is twofold: not only can traditional media no longer gather a massive audience to generate substantial profits, but the young and middle-aged with stronger purchasing power have chosen to distance themselves, leaving behind groups with weaker consumption capacity, which drastically reduces advertising effectiveness.

Second, serious talent drain casts a bleak outlook for sustainable development. The difficulty in generating profit triggers a series of domino effects, among which the most obvious and far-reaching is that employees in traditional media institutions suffer from low income, continuously declining job satisfaction and security, and insufficient professional identity, leading to instability and a constant outflow of talent.

Third, outdated management concepts and insufficient awareness of proactive reform for survival. For a long time, numerous traditional media institutions have been part of the national public institution system, holding "golden rice bowls" and lacking awareness of potential dangers. Even after losing the unique advantage of being primarily funded by state finance, they have struggled to adapt their management and operational philosophies in a timely manner. Bureaucratization, fantasies about fiscal appropriations, and waiting for others' successful experiences have fostered a prevailing passive mindset. These backward management concepts have worsened the already declining situation of some traditional media institutions, making them prone to miss transformation opportunities and ultimately embark on a path of no return toward elimination.

2.2 Immense Pressure from New Technologies and Media Policies

The penetration of new technologies into the media industry and the vigorous implementation of media reform policies constitute two major sources of external pressure on traditional media. Internet technology, particularly the rise of digital media brought by mobile internet technology, makes traditional media pale in comparison: (1) Traditional media's timeliness far lags behind that of online media. With complex production processes and slower review mechanisms, traditional media's dissemination speed struggles to compete with new media. (2) Traditional media's interactivity far lags behind that of online media. Traditional media essentially operates as one-way communication, making it difficult for audiences' feelings, opinions, and suggestions to be fed back to media institutions in a timely manner. Online media, conversely, effectively achieves this function through multiple channels such as likes and comments. Benign two-way interaction between media and audience facilitates healthy media development, where traditional media falls short again. (3) In terms of content richness, diversity, and interesting presentation forms, traditional media also loses to online media. Constrained by broadcast time and layout space, traditional media's content is relatively rigid and singular, with presentation forms lacking support from multimedia and other elements, making it far less engaging than new media and resulting in weaker competitiveness.

Reforms in China's media policies have further highlighted the weakness of traditional media's ability to support themselves. After 2008, when the state-funded media institution model was dismantled, each media organization could no longer enjoy "guaranteed harvests regardless of drought or flood." To thrive, they had to rely on their own sound management. This catfish effect activated the survival competition awareness of some traditional media institutions, forcing them to strengthen themselves—first seeking survival, then pursuing development.

2.3 Significant Advantages of Cross-boundary Integration

The reason traditional media have chosen cross-boundary integration to break through their predicament is closely related to the advantages of this model. The digital life following internet popularization has broken down the medium barriers of traditional media and dismantled their long-standing monopoly on communication channels. A new industry model featuring grand integration between media and other sectors is emerging. Leveraging the internet as a powerful connectivity tool, traditional media—advantaged in producing professional content—can integrate their high-quality content products into the internet's dissemination system, thereby reshaping an entirely new business model and achieving an excellent "1+1>2" effect. This is the essence and advantage of media cross-boundary integration. This model enables "win-win" or even "multi-win" scenarios between media and other industries, with all cooperating parties harboring high enthusiasm, thus making it more conducive to the glorious transformation of traditional media.

3. Main Forms and Effects of Cross-boundary Integration in China's Traditional Media

Through continuous exploration and unremitting efforts at various levels, multiple cross-boundary integration methods have been boldly attempted under the overarching framework of "Media + X." The more notable integration methods are illustrated below:

[Note: The original text mentions a figure here but no figure marker is provided]

3.1 "Media + Technology" Model

"Media + Technology" represents the most extensive and profound cross-boundary integration method undertaken by China's traditional media to date. Over 95% of traditional media have integrated with new technologies. The integration of media and technology primarily manifests in: building websites, developing apps, opening Weibo/Blog accounts, establishing public WeChat accounts, using QR codes to carry audio/video resources, employing VR/AR to enhance user experience, and utilizing big data analytics to precisely grasp user needs.

The marriage of media and technology not only enables traditional media to overcome numerous shortcomings in their original operational and business models but also successfully borrows strengths from internet-based new media. This allows their quality content to achieve "excellent complementarity" with interesting presentation forms and convenient interactive dissemination models, significantly enhancing traditional media's resilience and ability to revive.

3.2 "Media + Education" Model

Integration with education represents a direction that the media industry has consistently pursued. Education is a "never-setting industry" with enduring vitality and massive audience potential. Currently, "Media + Education" integration manifests in two prominent forms: First, major local newspapers, television, and radio stations widely organize "little reporter" activities, where media serves as a connector between numerous businesses and educational audiences (students and parents). This provides unlimited business opportunities for the former while enriching knowledge, expanding horizons, and providing valuable training opportunities and educational resources for the latter that would be difficult to obtain independently. Participating media also expand their influence and receive certain economic returns while benefiting businesses. The second prominent form is organizing large-scale education competitions. Professional publishing houses or magazines have achieved considerable success in this regard. For example, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press has repeatedly held national English competitions, which not only expanded its influence but also effectively promoted related products (such as books and audio-visual materials), achieving revenue growth to some extent.

3.3 "Media + Finance" Integration

One of the most dynamic manifestations of media-finance integration is the development of investment funds or industrial funds. For instance, in March 2016, Guangdong Haitong Creative Capital Management Co., Ltd. jointly developed an investment fund with four provincial media publishing groups including Southern Media Group, with a target scale exceeding 10 billion RMB. This integration follows market principles and equity investment methods, focusing on supporting transformation and upgrading of Guangdong's media publishing enterprises and key projects in media convergence development, greatly facilitating long-term development.

3.4 "Media + Tourism" Integration

One form of media-tourism integration involves numerous newspaper offices widely establishing travel agencies. For example, over 80% of prefecture-level newspaper offices in Hebei Province have opened travel agencies in recent years. However, facts indicate that the revenue from newspaper offices running travel agencies is not optimistic, and this integration path is not easy. A more successful integration model between media and tourism combines media promotion with offline tourism operations. For instance, the public channel of Hebei Radio and Television, with the theme "Good News, Good Scenery," stimulates users' desire to visit scenic spots through exquisite visuals, vivid explanations, and immersive activities. This helps build Hebei's tourism publicity main position facing the nation and even the world, becoming a typical example of media-tourism integration.

3.5 "Media + Healthcare" Integration

Media-healthcare integration is most prominent in television and radio broadcasting, primarily using free medical lectures as an attraction to subtly induce audiences into purchasing medical auxiliary devices, healthcare products, and other medical products. Currently, this integration method is quite controversial and fraught with problems.

3.6 "Media + E-commerce" Integration

Integration with e-commerce represents a relatively successful and promising cross-boundary integration method for traditional media. Hebei Radio and Television's "Hebei Sanjia Shopping Channel" is a typical successful case of "Television + E-commerce" cross-boundary integration. Approved by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television in 2010, it conducts home shopping business through a combination of television, internet, and catalog channels. This enables users to obtain detailed product information at home, place timely orders, and enjoy free door-to-door delivery, cash on delivery, and free return/exchange services, achieving favorable business results.

4. Reflections and Suggestions on the Effects of Cross-boundary Integration in China's Traditional Media

From the above analysis, we can see that China's traditional media have explored certain experiences in the field of cross-boundary integration. Under the main framework of "Media + X," they have attempted integration with numerous industries, which helps broaden traditional media's revenue channels and thereby enhance their vitality and competitiveness.

Naturally, currently, the cross-boundary integration of traditional media inevitably still has some problems, a long way to go, and awaits further in-depth exploration and cooperation with more industries. However, overall, cross-boundary integration represents a relatively optimistic reform path for traditional media.

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

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