

A Preliminary Study on the Fundamental Capabilities of Local Newspapers in Practical Media Convergence: A Case Study of Chifeng Newspaper Media Group (Postprint)

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Abstract

In recent years, new media based on mobile Internet technology—including Weibo, WeChat, and news applications—have increasingly impacted traditional newspapers, with even local (prefecture-level) newspapers at the far end of the shockwave facing considerable pressures. Advancing the deep integration and development of media constitutes the essential path to resolving the newspaper industry’s predicament, a consensus that has emerged within the sector. The Chifeng Daily Media Group, through its practical implementation of media convergence initiatives, maintains that local traditional newspapers should pursue development along two principal dimensions: internally, they must preserve the core value characteristic of “content is king,” adopt an integrated mindset to vigorously construct all-media platforms, and pioneer the comprehensive establishment of a “central kitchen.” While serving local party committees and governments, they should simultaneously attract new readers and serve new audiences; externally, they should adhere to Internet thinking, proactively seek collaboration with self-media, national media giants, and Internet technology companies, and promote the deep integration of traditional and emerging media across content, channels, platforms, operations, and management.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: A Brief Discussion on the Fundamentals of Local Newspapers in Media Convergence Practice—A Case Study of Chifeng Daily Media Group

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Abstract: In recent years, new media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and news apps—built upon mobile internet technology—have increasingly impacted traditional newspapers. Even local (prefecture-level) newspapers at the far end of this shockwave now face significant pressures. Advancing deep media convergence has become an industry consensus and the only path to resolve the newspaper industry’s predicament. In its practical implementation of media convergence, Chifeng Daily Media Group believes that local traditional newspapers must pursue development along two dimensions: internally, they must maintain the core value of “content is king,” build an all-media platform with integrated thinking, and pave the way for a comprehensive “central kitchen” system to attract new readers and serve new audiences while supporting local party committees and governments; externally, they must uphold internet thinking, actively seek cooperation with self-media, national media giants, and internet technology companies to promote deep integration of traditional and emerging media across content, channels, platforms, operations, and management.

Keywords: media convergence; traditional media; content is king

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1.1 Content is King, Service First: Building All-Media Reporting with Integrated Thinking

While mobile internet offers unparalleled advantages in information dissemination speed and breadth, it has also created massive information overload. In such an environment, high-quality content becomes increasingly precious. Regardless of technological developments or updates in communication methods, the essence of “content is king” remains unchanged [1]. As local official media, newspapers should employ the latest editorial techniques and fully utilize both print and new media platforms to meet diverse local audience demands and serve local party committees and governments, making service the primary entry point for “content is king.”

In 2015, based on this understanding, the newspaper group launched a major all-media service column called “Network Detective.” This column follows up on various online “rumors” and “claims” to provide clear, authoritative explanations. All local news and information sections (primarily the first three pages) from the evening paper, as well as the daily paper, are published at the fastest speed on various new media platforms including Weibo, WeChat, forums, and news clients, using a unified icon to establish a consistent brand. Additionally, the group created an interactive service zone called “Bang Ba” on its official

WeChat account and website forum. Citizens can access the “Bang Ba” zone to consult various panels such as “Online Medical Consultation,” “Online Legal Consultation,” “Online Psychological Counseling,” and “Evening Paper Help Desk” without leaving their homes. Leveraging its human resource advantages, the newspaper group organizes professional volunteers in “Bang Ba” to answer netizens’ questions, with selected Q&As edited and published in both print and new media platforms.

1.2 Innovating the All-Media Lineup to Serve the Central Work of Local Party Committees and Governments

Serving the central work of local party committees and governments is a crucial pathway for local media to enhance their viability. At present, Chifeng’s national civilized city creation campaign is being advanced throughout the city. In response, Chifeng Daily Media Group designed a series of videos called “Civilization Quiz,” which authentically records small scenarios and stories between strangers. While the text and image versions of “Civilization City Creation • Civilization Quiz” are published as special columns in the newspaper, the excellent videos are simultaneously released on new media platforms including WeChat, Weibo, and the “Palm Chifeng” news client.

Compared with various local online and self-media platforms in Chifeng, newspapers’ strength lies in their authority, while their weaknesses are timeliness and interactivity. The all-media service columns “Network Detective” and the “Bang Ba” interactive zone effectively compensate for these weaknesses by leveraging the newspaper’s authoritative strengths. Since their launch, these columns have won high praise from local audiences.

1.4 Building an All-Media Platform with Integrated Thinking

In recent years, *Chifeng Daily* has carefully planned all-media coverage of major municipal events such as the Party Congress and the People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) sessions. The newspaper group’s all-media reporting team uses two major new media matrices (*Chifeng Daily* and *Hongshan Evening News*), two languages (Mongolian and Chinese), and twelve distribution terminals to provide full-process coverage of these events. In addition to the three main newspapers—*Chifeng Daily* (Chinese edition), *Chifeng Daily* (Mongolian edition), and *Hongshan Evening News*—the group’s new media platforms including Daily Weibo, WeChat, client (Palm Chifeng), Hongshan Evening News Weibo, WeChat, forums and client, as well as Chifeng Mobile News and Saiwai Chifeng Network, all participate in reporting. Content-wise, the group meticulously produces a series of audio, video, and animation columns to present hot topics both inside and outside the conferences in a panoramic manner, with in-depth focus on livelihood issues, achieving excellent social dissemination effects.

Developing internal strength for media convergence requires “integrated think-

ing” as a crucial element. “Integration” means “I am in you, and you are in me,” even “I am you, and you are me.” From the perspective of operational elements, “integration” is a process of resource sharing, interconnected back-end systems, and data integration—a process of extending the all-media production chain and implementing integrated marketing. From the perspective of interests, “integration” is a community of shared goals and responsibilities achieved through performance evaluation mechanisms, survival-of-the-fittest systems, and interest-linking designs [2]. At present, when planning and producing content products, Chifeng Daily Media Group still faces many practical problems, and the degree of “integration” is far from sufficient. In line with the goal of “integration,” Chifeng Daily Media Group is striving to improve and establish new work platforms, processes, and mechanisms, strengthen all-media planning models, editor-led customized models, and professional integrated models, paving the way for the comprehensive construction of a “central kitchen.”

2.1 Trying Local Self-Media Joint Push Agreements

Self-media differs from information dissemination dominated by professional media institutions. It is an information dissemination activity led by the general public, transforming the traditional “point-to-face” communication into a “point-to-point” peer-to-peer communication concept. Forums, blogs, Weibo, WeChat, and emerging video websites constitute the main existing channels for self-media expression, enabling rapid information dissemination with greatly enhanced timeliness. From production to publication, the speed and efficiency of self-media works are unmatched by traditional television and newspaper media. Self-media can quickly disseminate information to audiences, who can also rapidly provide feedback on the communication effect. The distance between self-media and audiences is zero, and its powerful interactivity is beyond the reach of any traditional media.

However, self-media has inherent weaknesses: news scarcity, legal violations, and lack of authority. These self-media platforms often adapt or steal original content from traditional legitimate media. Traditional media lack effective protective measures to safeguard their rights, and measures such as reporting to operating platforms and relevant departments yield minimal results in practice.

In its media convergence practice, Chifeng Daily Media Group has tried the following approach: signing an “Original Content Cooperation Agreement” with influential local self-media in Chifeng. The self-media party can use the original content from the media group’s platform during the cooperation period, but must indicate that it comes from the Party A’s platform account and is obligated to push news content and activity promotion content provided by Party A, with a certain number of items per week or month. Through such loose cooperation, the group can not only prevent its original content from being infringed upon, but also leverage the advantages of self-media to achieve two goals at once, thereby expanding the influence of the newspaper group’s new media in Chifeng.

In fact, in the internet era, every netizen is a self-media platform. Due to their profession, journalists and editors in newspaper groups have relatively extensive social connections and deep personal networks. Some journalists and editors have thousands of WeChat followers and tens of thousands of Weibo fans. Compared with ordinary people, editors and journalists have relatively high online attention. Based on this, Chifeng Daily Media Group has tried an internal collective news push system. When news is published on new media platforms daily, the network administrator releases the key news to be pushed to a fixed group, instructing group members of the newspaper group to release it through their own WeChat and Weibo accounts in the first instance. At the same time, the network administrator keeps screenshots of each person's release, and the newspaper group regularly provides rewards based on readership. Practice has proven that these methods of joint push agreements with local self-media are effective for Chifeng Daily Media Group.

2.2 Advancing Cooperation with National Media Giants

In recent years, national media such as *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, and CCTV have also accelerated their media convergence pace. These media possess national-level news resource advantages and national-level platform advantages, while local media have specific content advantages. Cooperation between the two can be described as complementary and win-win development.

Xinhua's "Live Cloud" national service platform was officially launched on February 19, enabling media users to edit video materials and broadcast in real-time online through the "Live Cloud" system, allowing various news scenes to be live-streamed without barriers. "Palm Chifeng" under Chifeng Daily Media Group is the only mainstream mobile media client in the Chifeng area officially invited to join "Live Cloud." "Live Cloud" can be displayed on both media users' own terminals and Xinhua's client, enabling two-way integration. Media users can initiate "on-site news" that can be displayed on their own terminals and also enter Xinhua's client "on-site news."

2.3 Exploring Win-Win Paths with Internet Technology Companies

What traditional media has always done relatively well is content supply. In the past, the channels for disseminating information were controlled by the media itself, but in the mobile internet era, the new generation of audiences first obtains information through channels such as WeChat and Weibo, which traditional media cannot control or mobilize. In the mobile internet market, traditional media has innate advantages. If traditional media can cooperate with some excellent internet companies, leveraging professional technical advantages combined with traditional media's resource advantages and editorial advantages, it can make traditional media the most vital component of the mobile internet.

Chifeng Daily Media Group has made beneficial explorations and attempts in this regard. Chifeng Mobile News is a mobile reading media jointly operated by

Chifeng Daily Media Group, Chifeng Branch of China Mobile Communications, and an internet technology company in Hohhot. On August 14, 2012, Chifeng Mobile News was officially launched. The information focuses on local Chifeng news, mainly sourced from *Hongshan Evening News* and *Chifeng Daily*, supplemented by information from other media that the two newspapers do not have. In addition, Chifeng Mobile News features columns such as weather forecasts, interesting stories, sports and entertainment, life services, lottery results, and short humor. China Mobile is responsible for user promotion, the Hohhot internet technology company is responsible for platform construction and maintenance, and the newspaper group is responsible for providing content. Although this project currently appears relatively basic or even outdated, all three cooperating parties have obtained tangible social and economic benefits, which has opened broad thinking and space for Chifeng Daily Media Group's future media convergence path.

In early August 2017, Chifeng Daily Media Group was also invited to join the "Inner Mongolia Party Newspaper Alliance Group," which includes autonomous region-level and league-city party newspapers. For member media, they can apply to jointly publish and push one or a group of local reports they want to promote, with all members publishing in their respective newspapers and pushing on new media platforms. This is one of the main functions of this alliance, which we might call the magnifying glass function. As long as the operation rules are appropriate, it is undoubtedly very beneficial for further amplifying the influence of local media news reports.

In summary, promoting the integrated development of traditional and emerging media is a new era topic facing the news front and the mission and responsibility of mainstream media. At present, integrated development has entered an acceleration period and deep water zone, with arduous tasks. Practice has proven that by leveraging new media platforms and terminals, traditional media can open up huge space for further development. As long as local traditional media practice internal and external skills well, we have reason to believe that the bright prospects of media convergence development can be expected.

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

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