

The Transformation and Development Path of Traditional Media: An Analysis of Media Convergence (Postprint)

Authors: Sheng Huanfei

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Abstract

With the continuous advancement of science and technology, the rapid iterative updates of new media have posed exceptionally severe challenges to traditional media. How traditional media can fully leverage their advantages, advance with the times, achieve integration and complementarity with new media, and maximize both economic and social benefits will be a critical issue requiring focused exploration in the coming period. Through a comparative analysis of traditional and new media, this paper examines and discusses the integration path between China's traditional media and new media from five dimensions: mindset, technology, branding, user stickiness, and precision services.

Full Text

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Abstract: With continuous scientific and technological progress, the rapid iteration and renewal of new media has posed exceptionally severe challenges to traditional media. How traditional media can fully leverage their advantages, keep pace with the times, achieve complementary integration with new media, and maximize both economic and social benefits will be a critical issue requiring focused exploration in the coming period. Through a comparison of traditional and new media, this paper analyzes and discusses the integration path between China's traditional media and new media from five dimensions: thinking patterns, technology, brand, stickiness, and precision services.

Keywords: new media; traditional media; transformation and development; media convergence

On August 18, 2014, the Central Comprehensively Deepening Reforms Leading Group reviewed and approved the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media” at its fourth meeting. Comrade Xi Jinping called for “strengthening internet thinking, adhering to the complementary advantages and integrated development of traditional and emerging media, insisting on advanced technology as the support and content construction as the foundation, and promoting deep integration between traditional and emerging media in content, channels, platforms, operations, and management.” This marked the elevation of media convergence to a national strategy in China. That same year, the Xinhua News Agency client was launched, integrating numerous Xinhua new media platforms and aggregating the most powerful editorial forces. With over 3,000 journalists in more than 180 countries and regions reporting from news scenes, it broadcasted to the world in the first instance. Subsequently, the People’s Daily client was released, relying on the *People’s Daily’s* powerful global editorial network to deliver global news, inventory public opinion hotspots, livestream breaking events, and focus on creating original columns. With four main presentation blocks—news, commentary, audio, and Q&A—it meets users’ multi-level needs.

Today, the momentum of integration between traditional and new media is strong, yet it largely remains at the stage of simply migrating traditional media content to new internet platforms using new technologies, without truly achieving qualitative transformation. How traditional and new media can complement each other’s advantages, achieve deep integration, and ultimately form a new media morphology that maximizes both economic and social benefits remains a critical issue requiring focused exploration in the coming period.

1. The Concept and Evolution of “Media Convergence”

The concept of “Media Convergence” was first proposed in the 1970s by Nicholas Negroponte, founder of the MIT Media Lab. In 2005, Professor Cai Wen of Renmin University of China introduced it to the domestic context. According to Cai’s perspective, “media convergence” refers not only to cooperative models among various media (organizations) but also to the integration of different types of media through new mediums to form an independently operating, process-complete, and standardized news production model. Today, internet technology has dramatically reduced the cost of media dissemination, and traditional text, images, and audio/video transmission methods have become compatible through digital compression technology. Guided by the internet’s superior loading capacity, convergence between traditional and new media has become a natural progression.

Typically, people consider media convergence as the combination of traditional media such as print, radio, and television with new media transmission channels like PCs, mobile phones, and set-top boxes, enabling resource sharing and centralized processing, then providing corresponding information products to audiences at fixed times and points through different platforms via SMS,

websites, Weibo, WeChat, and clients. However, deeper media convergence is not merely about diversifying transmission channels and information collection sources. More importantly, it involves media professionals comprehensively processing multimedia raw materials using the most advanced information processing methods, rapidly disseminating information according to the communication characteristics of various media, and simultaneously obtaining audience feedback with maximum scope and speed, thereby deepening service quality to achieve maximized social and economic benefits.

2. Comparison Between Traditional Media and New Media

2.1 Distinctions Due to the accelerated iteration of media forms, traditional and new media have become relative concepts. Currently, China's general understanding of traditional media mainly includes newspapers, journals, books, radio, and television. Correspondingly, so-called new media refers to media forms that emerge based on new technological systems after the aforementioned traditional media, primarily using the internet, web television and radio, and mobile devices as carriers. Traditional media mainly manifests as text, images, and sound, delivered through carriers such as print, television, and radio, with temporal and spatial limitations. New media, by contrast, integrates text, sound, images, and animation, breaking through temporal and spatial constraints to some extent.

Traditional media, constrained by information dissemination methods and carrier (layout) limitations, focuses on content depth. After information is released, it often gradually fades from memory over time. New media can track information in real-time, easily classify and organize content through internet platforms for repeated utilization, and simultaneously form communities based on this content through social networks for instant interaction with users. The primary difference between traditional and new media lies in their information release carriers and timeliness. Constrained by dissemination speed and carrier capacity limitations, traditional media suffers from delayed information release and limited carrier capacity. A piece of information must pass through multiple procedures from collection to publication, with limited quantities for each release. New media content display occurs through web pages, where a single page can carry infinite information—as long as the platform is sufficiently robust, it can display countless items daily. This represents the natural advantage of digital platforms.

Moreover, the two cannot be compared in terms of content form diversity. In traditional media, each medium's information release form is relatively singular, limited to either text and images, sound, or video. New media is more inclusive, encompassing text, images, audio, animation, and video. This rich information presentation enables new media to meet the needs of different demographic groups—something traditional media cannot match. Overall, traditional media such as print, radio, and television segment different content forms, creating fragmentation in content, whereas new media platforms achieve unification of

diverse content and can organically integrate all these elements to produce new, more connotative content. Furthermore, new media can disassemble content—for instance, collaborating with internet radio stations to launch radio recordings while extracting video programs for further cooperation with video websites. All these examples demonstrate that “content,” relying on digital platforms, can be recombined like building blocks to produce more information products, achieving full information exploitation and maximizing information value.

2.2 The Predicament of Traditional Media Under the New Media Landscape China’s current “traditional media” has shouldered national missions from its inception, intimately connected with the administrative system and enjoying institutional superiority, having grown up in insufficiently competitive spaces. This “sponsored” growth model has caused some media to become complacent about content quality improvement and weak in profit motivation, leading to monotonous business models. Simultaneously, under the influence of bureaucratic conservatism, media’s core values are not fully realized. Compared with new media, their influence continues to weaken, and their positions as sources of information, truth, viewpoints, and trust are gradually eroding, with core content talent gradually draining and profitability collapsing.

Facing the onslaught of new media, traditional media can barely defend themselves. Moreover, the rapid iteration of new media forms has brought unprecedented urgency to traditional media. The convenience, novelty, entertainment value, and rapid dissemination of massive information inherent in new media constantly 冲击 traditional media’s established business models. Under this media development landscape, to effectively fulfill their inherent missions, traditional media must adapt to technological development trends, keep pace with the times, transform their thinking patterns, leverage new technologies, and accelerate deep integration with new media to develop complementary strengths, learn from each other, regain market share and audiences, firmly 守住 the public opinion 阵地, and maintain traditional media’s discourse power and authority.

3. The Path to Convergence

3.1 Transforming Thinking Patterns Beyond technology, the most important difference between traditional media and internet-based new media lies in thinking patterns. For a long time, traditional media has formed a one-way communication model of “I write, you read; I broadcast, you listen,” unconsciously treating audiences as passive recipients of media information, never considering allowing audiences to participate as information enrichers, publishers, or even producers. This “communicator-centric” thinking severely constrains traditional media’s development pace in the new media era. Taking television as an example, in 2017, second- and third-tier satellite TV stations being unable to pay salaries was an open secret in the industry, while first-tier satellite TV stations experiencing zero profit margins was also within expectations. Internet thinking is a “user-first” marketing mindset, yet television professionals remain

stuck in the traditional “audience thinking” stage. Under the impact of today’s internet information 海量, instant publishing, and personalized services, television inevitably loses its “audience” and “spectators,” and its information reprinting and content homogenization non-professionalism further accelerates audience abandonment of traditional media like television. Traditional media must transform their rigid thinking patterns, abandon old concepts and methods of 固守 content production and one-way communication, inject internet thinking centered on freedom, equality, and openness, and produce useful, fresh, and original high-quality content using modern advanced technology. Only by presenting content through new technological forms and serving users through channels can they open up new horizons.

3.2 Addressing Technological Shortcomings The birth and development of emerging media is based on the continuous maturation of network technology. If media convergence is multi-legged, technology is one of its important legs. Whether transforming from “mutual use” to integration between traditional and new media, changing user reading habits, or media transformation, technology’s driving role is a crucial force. Obviously, traditional media has outstanding advantages in content construction but lags in technology research, application, and maintenance, becoming a “bottleneck” constraining their development. New technology develops rapidly and changes daily. Traditional media must keep a close eye on cutting-edge technology, aim at development trends, introduce outstanding media technology talents, and embed frontier media technology to keep pace with the times. In recent years, *Southern Weekly* has emancipated its thinking, promoted innovative editorial operations, and achieved deep integration between content and users on mobile terminals through technological means. To strengthen technological support, they have built a modern technical team with both business logic and internet thinking; emphasized human resource reserves by establishing graduate internship bases in cooperation with universities, using high-end talent to 锁定 subsequent talent introduction targets; actively applied for technology projects, establishing win-win relationships through industry-university-research cooperation, adding technological attributes to their original media attributes, enhancing technological strength, and exploring a breakthrough path for traditional media on the road to media convergence.

3.3 Leveraging Comprehensive Brand or Late-Mover Advantages Ultimately, the integration of old and new media is not about abandoning traditional media’s existing resource advantages, such as authoritative content sources, strong editorial capabilities, long-cultivated readerships and users, and brand influence accumulated over time. These are precisely advantages that new media lacks. Traditional media should fully leverage their original resource advantages and brand value, accurately position themselves according to audience groups beyond their original service models, take audience needs as the foundation, develop brand markets for core products, enable more audiences

to acquire knowledge and obtain services, thereby better expanding audience groups and strengthening their brand. In response to rapid changes in the media market, they should connect with new media by launching websites and linking to social networks, covering both online and offline channels to quickly deliver more news information to users, winning more development space. In recent years, the Guangzhou Daily Group has established a “mobile-first” development strategy, initially building the “Guangzhou Daily Media Convergence and Communication Platform,” and was among the first in the nation to establish a hub-style central editorial office, achieving “unified management, unified gatekeeping; rolling collection, rolling release; multi-format presentation, multi-media dissemination” of news information. This has accelerated deep integration between newspaper and network, enabling 24-hour full-media format broadcasting and interaction across print, web, and mobile, with multiple data rankings such as online reprint volume ranking among the top for party newspapers nationwide, greatly enhancing brand effect and maintaining brand influence.

3.4 Enhancing Media Stickiness Traditional media has long upheld the mission of being the “mouthpiece of the Party” and “public instrument of society,” accustomed to and adept at one-way indoctrination, unable to truly meet readers’ and market’s needs comprehensively, often focusing solely on content collection and editing while neglecting user experience, resulting in insufficient reader stickiness. Therefore, using new technology to target user needs, strengthen service awareness, improve readers’ user experience to accumulate and cultivate reader loyalty, and thereby enhance media stickiness is an extremely important aspect in the integration process between traditional and new media. Traditional media can improve portability, usability, and interactivity by changing paper size, color, and font size in print media, optimizing the medium itself from the perspectives of users’ environments, social factors, and basic costs to enhance user experience and redesign media products. H5 technology supports sliding reading and can greatly attract user attention through animation, music, and plot settings, widely used by many media. It provides users with immersive participation and easily generates emotional resonance. Additionally, traditional print media has borrowed the unique follow-up post advertising format from the internet, breaking the mindset that posting and “building floors” of comments can only happen online, achieving unexpected results. There are also cases where traditional “layouts” are displayed on new media, making “static” traditional layouts “dynamic” on new media. *Liuzhou Evening News* utilized the 裂变式 (viral/fission-style) dissemination environment of WeChat Moments to integrate resources, launching electronic extra editions in a new media format combining “print texture + web coolness + H5 animation + mobile media,” which is very convenient for mobile dissemination, conforms to user experience, enhances media stickiness, and improves dissemination effect and influence. These are all new attempts at integration and innovation.

3.5 Focusing on Precision Services Readers' attention is limited—the more content there is, the less time readers can focus. As mobile internet becomes an important voice in China's public opinion field, the traditional pyramid-style communication pattern dominated by traditional media continues to evolve and transform into a fragmented and flattened new trend. How to attract readers' attention becomes increasingly valuable for media. Therefore, traditional media can select and precisely process massive amounts of information based on their characteristics and modern technology, while also sensing the needs of mobile media and people's requirements for community relationships, re-observing and studying human behavior patterns and permeating them into the media communication process. Simultaneously, they must study both consumer group types and differences in consumption patterns among different consumer groups to achieve greater specialization and segmentation. This professionalized and specialized content based on segmentation is precisely what readers need. In recent years, a batch of self-media public accounts have become popular, many relying on refined content and precise push notifications. For example, the famous public account "Six-God Leilei Reads Jin Yong" primarily studies Jin Yong's works, targets Jin Yong's readers as its main audience, and achieves seamless integration between Jin Yong's work content and advertising content. It attracts traffic through high-quality original content and then relies on massive user numbers to obtain advertising revenue.

Technological transformation calls on all media to change themselves in the era of existing and future new media forms. Before new technology, traditional and new media face the same opportunities. Traditional media must both focus on trends and be based in reality, both create core product value for the market and fully leverage existing resource advantages, accelerate the pace of integration with new media, and forge a distinctive all-media development path. It is believed that with deep media integration, the future media will usher in a new era of information sharing and interactive communication.

Technological development never ends, and media convergence is always on the road.

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(Author's Affiliation: *China Media Technology Magazine*)

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

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