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Exploration of the “Central Kitchen” Model (Postprint)

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Abstract

In recent years, as China’s traditional media has entered a stage of deep convergence, the all-media “central kitchen” model has been increasingly promoted, transforming the unidirectional communication paradigm of traditional media, facilitating the integration of legacy and new media, and endowing Chinese media with greater innovative significance. This paper will provide a concise analysis of the “central kitchen” model within deep media convergence and offer personal perspectives.

Full Text

Abstract

In recent years, traditional Chinese media has entered a stage of deep convergence, with the omnimedia “Central Kitchen” model being increasingly promoted. This has transformed the single dissemination approach of traditional media, facilitated the integration of old and new media, and endowed Chinese media with greater innovative significance. This article provides a brief analysis of the “Central Kitchen” model in the context of media deep convergence and offers personal insights.

Keywords: media deep convergence; “Central Kitchen” model; innovation

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The new media era is characterized by three major features: high speed, massive dissemination volume, and strong interactivity. With the advent of the information age, the speed at which new media disseminates massive amounts of news information has accelerated daily, playing important roles in spreading cultural information, developing social education, and providing cultural entertainment. Furthermore, contemporary new media places special emphasis on audience interaction, typically employing channels such as WeChat, Weibo, QQ,

Tieba, and forums to understand public voices and opinions, thereby comprehensively strengthening communication between media and the masses. Moreover, after new media convergence entered traditional media, the form of media itself changed, constructing an entirely new “Central Kitchen” model. This article will briefly introduce the characteristics of the “Central Kitchen” model, analyze questions regarding its development, and systematically discuss its prospects.

1. Characteristics of the “Central Kitchen” Model

1.1 Full Process Coverage

Traditional media typically focused solely on using integrated platforms to gather information, employing application layers and storage systems to appropriately modify content, and utilizing fixed processes to compile and review news products. This media model suffered from insufficient workflow integration, and news content often exhibited “boundless” characteristics, making it difficult to filter valuable information. The “Central Kitchen” model can compensate for these deficiencies, winning broader development space, optimizing media service system functions, promoting information circulation, and endowing information dissemination with an era mission. It possesses advantages such as openness, personalization, and interactivity. Additionally, the “Central Kitchen” model provides a foundation for deep media convergence, strengthening communication between leading media and cooperative media, and making news gathering, editing, and dissemination more efficient. The “Central Kitchen” model constructed by People’s Daily, for instance, adopts the core concept of a “co-ordinated gathering and editing platform,” establishing a tripod structure comprising a “Reporting Center,” “Technology Center,” and “Omnimedia Editing Center” that provides structural support.

1.2 Transformation of Traditional Journalism through Technology Platforms

Traditional media employed relatively singular narrative patterns in news reporting, with strong subjectivity and one-sidedness, placing audiences in a passive position for information reception. In the new media context, a narrative pattern combining reporting with commentary has emerged. Reporters, hosts, and news editors interact with audiences at any time while reporting news, giving birth to the omnimedia reporting platform. This so-called “omnimedia reporting platform” primarily includes WeChat, Weibo, Tieba, radio, and the internet, which not only enables rapid reporting of news interview activities but also strengthens interaction between audiences and reporters or editors, narrowing the distance between citizens and interviews, ancient topics and real life, and promoting excellent cultural development.

On the other hand, compared with traditional media, narrative modes in the new media context are more colorful and diverse. Currently, the most commonly used news narrative modes are the honeycomb, diamond, and rhombus

patterns. The honeycomb pattern is one of the most frequently used narrative modes in the current new media context, mainly employed for reporting news events. It collects various dispersed elements—for example, when reporting the Malaysia Airlines incident, it first reported the flight route and number of missing persons, then subsequently reported the aircraft model, departure time, missing location, number of Chinese passengers, and passenger list. Reporters, program hosts, and news editors should continuously excavate and report more information when covering such news, collecting valuable fragmented messages to enhance audience understanding of news content. The diamond pattern uses new media technology to add text, images (such as photos, chat screenshots, and comment screenshots), and interview videos, making news content more authentic and complete and enhancing news credibility. The rhombus pattern utilizes networks, Weibo, WeChat, forums, and other platforms to increase interaction and understand audience perspectives while reporting news, expanding the dissemination scope of news. The news narrative pattern for the “U.S. Presidential Election” exemplifies the rhombus form, where netizens can express their views through comments, brief reviews, and postscripts, thereby enhancing public enthusiasm for news participation and promoting effective dissemination of news programs.

1.3 Multi-channel Dissemination

The combination of audio and visual elements is the most prominent characteristic of internet news programs. This news dissemination method can compensate for the deficiencies of traditional news reporting methods, enabling the people to more deeply understand news program content. Compared with original news dissemination methods, it maximally restores the true nature of news, adopting an on-site reproduction approach for information dissemination. Based on web pages and supplemented by online videos with text, it not only enhances audience impression of news content but also guides people to engage in deeper thinking about news content. Thus, news editors must ensure the accuracy and authenticity of news content during the news processing procedure—this is a principle that news editors must adhere to. Additionally, news editors should emphasize highlighting the accuracy, authenticity, and freshness of news programs, focusing on the themes expressed by news events, and may add other relevant materials. However, it is inadvisable to report multiple pieces of news information together, as such reporting blurs the theme of news coverage and affects audience understanding. Therefore, news editors should highlight the time, location, characters, cause, and process of events when writing and publishing news stories. News stories require concise language, obvious themes, rigorous structure, substantial content, and sincere emotion, highlighting relevant information about news events in news releases to ensure content integrity, placing the most important information at the very beginning.

Currently, many audiences question whether the “Central Kitchen” model and media convergence represent simply “old wine in new bottles,” believing that

the “Central Kitchen” model will ultimately belong to traditional media. At present, the “Central Kitchen” model has already integrated “globalization concepts,” advocating increased news sensitivity to satisfy the personalized needs of broad audiences. In this regard, the “Central Kitchen” model attaches great importance to enhancing the sensitivity of news products. Network news is not merely single text exposition but adopts various new methods including video, audio, and text to objectively report events, making outstanding contributions to national political propaganda. In socialist countries, news management belongs to the state, which has absolute control over news discourse, and the Party and state’s policies are conveyed to the public through television news reports. Thus, many Chinese news products possess strong political characteristics, and consequently, it becomes an important task for news media itself to grasp the latest policy dynamics, concerning the accuracy and timeliness of political news reporting. This also requires online news editors to emphasize improving their social responsibility awareness and political literacy when publishing news events, adhering to correct positions, reporting true and accurate news information, emphasizing the excavation of news value, and being able to sensitively discover newsworthy clues.

2. Development Questions about the “Central Kitchen” Model

2.1 Development History

Examining the current state of deep media convergence in China, the integration of old and new media has undergone two major stages. From 2014 to 2016 was the first stage, referred to as the “experimental stage,” characterized by “independent exploration” and “letting a hundred flowers bloom,” requiring clear direction for old and new media integration and formulation of clear strategic frameworks. News authorities should provide adequate supporting funds for media, stimulate media work vitality, and guide media to optimize news products and transform news dissemination and production according to market development and modern competition trends.

Starting from 2017, the “Central Kitchen” model entered its second development stage—the summary and promotion stage. The “Symposium on Promoting Deep Media Convergence” explicitly stated that the main task of the second stage is to summarize practical experience from the first stage, construct more complete and innovative media convergence models, establish news product sharing platforms, promote national concepts, and optimize information resource allocation.

2.2 Three Major Questions

2.2.1 Can the “Central Kitchen” Model Bear Substantial Costs? Currently, the “Central Kitchen” model constructed by People’s Daily, Xinhua News Agency’s network convergence media, and its research and investment in

artificial intelligence, biosensor technology, and drones have attracted considerable attention. The outside world also raises questions about whether the “Central Kitchen” model can bear the substantial costs required by information technology platforms, questioning whether the “Central Kitchen” model will be a “flash in the pan” amid frequent technological development trends. The central media system points out that promoting deep convergence of old and new media is closely related to local information technology development. For example, in the intelligent era, whether robots and VR/AR technology can achieve expansion and compatibility—if not, higher technology development costs must be invested, which will inevitably increase additional high-tech costs. For the “Central Kitchen” model, its technology platform does not primarily aim at developing products but rather optimizes news production processes to satisfy information acquisition requirements of omnimedia users. Moreover, the “Central Kitchen” model does not satisfy itself with building news production platforms for “two micros and one terminal” (Weibo, WeChat, and news client) but adopts modular technology to optimize news production processes, expand news production technology platforms, and achieve compatibility of information data.

2.2.2 Can the “Central Kitchen” Model Solve the Hollowing-Out Problem? Generally, big data platforms constructed by traditional media often have deficiencies, easily causing accumulation of news materials or sealing valuable massive information, leading to hollowing-out of traditional media. The “Central Kitchen” model helps solve the hollowing-out problem of traditional media, integrating valuable information, purifying the media environment, and absorbing the essence of network news, thereby increasing media cultural value and enhancing attractiveness. On the other hand, the “Central Kitchen” model can satisfy public demand for news information, expand media scale by enriching news platform content, achieve news resource sharing and news product storage, create a cross-regional, cross-temporal, and cross-media news resource database, and break the closed state of traditional media.

2.2.3 Does the “Central Kitchen” Model Have Substantive Innovative Significance? In summary, the “Central Kitchen” model can comprehensively integrate media systems, achieve full process coverage, transform the operational model of traditional journalism, combine “internet thinking” to reshape the production center of news works, and realize multi-channel dissemination methods for news programs. With the development of information technology and continuous optimization of the “Central Kitchen” model, five promising development prospects have emerged: gradual transformation from “Central Kitchen” to “Central Cultural Restaurant,” upgrading from “Central Kitchen” to “Central Library,” development from “Central Kitchen” to “Central Business Platform,” upgrading from “Central Kitchen” to “Central Database,” and transformation from “Central Kitchen” to “Central Time Machine.”

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

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