

Post-print of China National Geography Platform Integration and Innovation Practice

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Abstract

, China National Geography's new media platform integration and innovation began with its 2008 website revamp and expanded through subsequent launches of Weibo, WeChat, and official mobile clients, further strengthening its new media advantages. However, as a magazine renamed only a decade ago, its development journey remains long. Media transformation, especially for traditional print media, is a challenging process that the industry has continuously explored. Some media outlets have been eliminated without transformation or during transformation, while others have merely begun their transformation journey. China National Geography falls into the latter category—it remains on the path of exploration.

Full Text

Preamble

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The Integration and Innovation Practice of China National Geography Platform

By Yang Qingshan

1. Overview of China National Geography

The predecessor of *China National Geography* was *Geographic Knowledge*, founded in 1950 in Nanjing and sponsored by the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences. It stands as one of China's most authoritative geography publications and among the earliest Chinese periodicals to expand internationally, with editions in traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese, Japanese, and English. From its inception, the magazine positioned itself as a popular science publication and achieved remarkable success over subsequent decades. As a traditional media

outlet, *Geographic Knowledge* experienced notable prosperity during the 20th century, with circulation exceeding 400,000 copies in the late 1970s. However, influenced by evolving times, its circulation began declining in the 1980s, dropping to just over 10,000 copies at its lowest point in the 1990s. After experiencing several peaks and valleys, the magazine was officially renamed *China National Geography* in October 2000. The editorial office adopted new communication concepts and operational approaches, steering the publication toward new media development. Through innovative philosophy, content, and format, the magazine created a new media dissemination platform aligned with contemporary requirements, actively promoting integration with new media. Over the subsequent decade, *China National Geography* has developed into a leading high-end popular science magazine in China.

2. The Integration and Innovation Practice of China National Geography

Driven by information, communication, and network technologies, informatization continuously propels development across all sectors. Accelerating the integration of traditional and new media has become a crucial pathway and necessary choice for traditional media to achieve transformation and upgrading. *China National Geography* has embraced new media as a “relay baton” for future development, promoting media convergence and achieving notable success in the industry.

To drive traditional-new media integration, media organizations must adopt entirely new internet development thinking, fully utilizing network technologies to transform traditional media, formulating practical reform plans, and gradually adapting to the equal exchange and interactive communication characteristics of emerging media. They must establish a user-first concept, moving beyond the old one-way communication model where audiences passively received information, and instead focus on user experience and feedback to satisfy diverse and personalized information demands. This requires comprehensively expanding new media development platforms, organizing information production, utilizing big data for precise customer needs research, and better leveraging traditional media advantages through new media platforms to achieve genuine integration.

As a leader among China’s popular science journals, *China National Geography* has kept pace with development trends, establishing major new media platforms including its official website, Sina Weibo, WeChat public platform (dili360), Renren, and mobile app clients, comprehensively promoting brand building and recognition expansion.

2.1 China National Geography Website

The website was first established in 2002, initially offering only magazine content introductions, geography forum exchanges, and a simple message board function. In January 2003, the China National Geography Chinese website

completed its revision; the youth page launched; and the online store opened, establishing its own e-commerce system, which added online payment functionality in December 2005. In October 2007, preparations began for a new website; in March 2008, Beijing Panorama National Geography Network Technology Co., Ltd. was formally established and successfully registered an international domain name; and in October 2008, the China National Geography Chinese website officially launched.

Websites serve not only as an excellent form of brand promotion but also as a platform for audience interaction, enabling timely feedback and understanding of reader needs. The “Geography Forum” section provides a good communication platform between readers and staff, allowing the magazine to quickly understand reader preferences and feedback on design and content selection for timely adjustments. As the primary platform for *China National Geography*'s new media development, the website has undergone significant organizational structural changes through continuous development and innovation. Upon opening the website, visitors no longer see simple digital magazine editions and comment sections but rather numerous exquisite images with strong visual impact—a consistent feature of *China National Geography*. The vertical structure comprises several major sections: Focus, Community, Landscape, Promotion, CNG Focus, and Contributions. Horizontal information categories include Gallery, Landscape, Talk, Authors, Forum, Events, and Mall—seven major blocks. Both the vertical and horizontal content composition and image display are highly attractive, indicating extensive tagging management of images and articles by topic, column, author, and forum, structuring all information to enable readers to quickly find needed content through deep searches, effectively creating a professional geographic knowledge database.

The website's revision and innovation have provided important opportunities for the magazine's development. First, it serves as an excellent platform for diverse content display. At the bottom of the website, the “Contributions” section clearly shows multiple submissions for each topic. For instance, the columns *Reflections of New Year Flavor* and *Bond with China National Geography* contain 10 and 26 articles respectively, each showcasing relevant themes from different perspectives. Although this content does not dominate the magazine's mainstream offerings, it provides an important platform for exchange with geography enthusiasts, enhancing the magazine's brand influence. A platform that publishes quality photographic works is more likely to attract audiences and expand content richness, making it more reflective of people's lives.

Second, the website serves as a platform for content publication and distribution. While emphasizing technology-driven media convergence, *China National Geography* consistently upholds “content is king,” placing brand content construction in a prominent position to win development advantages through content superiority. The editorial team understands that generalized information is no longer a scarce resource. Only through big data analysis of user traces left on the website, followed by targeted production of specialized and segmented

content to meet personalized information needs in social development, can the magazine remain competitive. The website's operation of submission windows and author lists not only sources excellent materials but also gathers numerous writers to contribute.

2.2 Official Weibo and WeChat Platforms

Internet technology development provides crucial technical support for traditional media transformation. As one of today's most popular social media platforms, Sina Weibo serves as an important window for information producers. *China National Geography* joined Sina Weibo in September 2009, and by June 2016, its official account had accumulated over 3.87 million followers with nearly 11,000 posts. While these numbers are only one indicator of digital development, they reflect the journal's dissemination capacity and reach on social media. In March 2014, the *China National Geography* WeChat subscription account "dili360" launched, marking expansion into another "micro-communication" domain.

As widely used network social platforms, Weibo and WeChat play significant roles in *China National Geography*'s brand influence dissemination through their interactivity and information re-transmission. The Weibo homepage features the red *China National Geography* logo, followed by promotion pages for the website client, the newly launched travel app Palm Path, and various event announcements. Weibo, as a socialized and personalized self-media platform, is used by people primarily to satisfy personalized information needs. Through the "comment" function below posts, continuous interaction with fans enhances stickiness and invisibly expands brand influence. Meanwhile, content forwarding on Weibo and WeChat triggers secondary or even multi-dimensional dissemination, further elevating brand influence. When published content aligns with readers' habits or preferences, click-through and read rates surge. Both the official Weibo and WeChat platforms achieve over 10,000 reads per post and hundreds of likes.

2.3 Official Mobile Client

The mobile client primarily refers to iPad, iPhone, and Android versions. As of June 2016, the official client had been downloaded 1.1 million times on 360 Mobile Software, and version 5.2 (updated December 31, 2015) had over 400,000 downloads on Tencent App Store. The travel app Palm Path, launched on September 23, 2015, has over 7,000 downloads.

Mobile client downloads represent an important brand promotion method and another key channel for providing attentive reader services. Without client downloads, users would face significant inconvenience when searching for information or purchasing digital magazines, putting *China National Geography* at a competitive disadvantage in its new media transformation. The client provides convenient magazine purchase and reading services, not only marketing content

but also establishing a solid user base for brand promotion.

China National Geography is a market-oriented print media, and paid purchases align with market principles. Although many free digital magazines exist online, each issue of *China National Geography* offers unique content unavailable through simple online searches. The magazine provides valuable content worth paying for. Amid fierce market competition, it maintains its stance as a quality publication, providing valuable content services and adhering to paid reading without forgetting its original purpose.

3. Characteristics and Problems of New Media Platforms

For *China National Geography*, new media represents the “relay baton” for future development and an important pathway to media convergence, expanding new space for magazine development. In 2008, the magazine established Beijing Panorama National Geography New Media Technology Co., Ltd. to operate its website, client apps, Weibo, WeChat, and other new media platforms, setting it on the new media development track. After nearly nine years of development, the website, official Weibo, WeChat platform, and mobile client have demonstrated many common characteristics while also revealing certain problems.

3.1 Characteristics of New Media Platforms

First, all platforms serve as vehicles for brand operation and influence enhancement. These multi-dimensional new media platforms function not only for information release but also as powerful marketing stages to expand brand influence. Brand integration is essential, with all content components—from topic planning and original content to exquisite image selection and e-commerce support—serving brand image. Much content originates from signed authors, making products unique and requiring permission and LOGO placement for reprinting, thereby disseminating the *China National Geography* brand. The website’s rich information content, numerous forum fans, Weibo’s 3.87+ million followers, millions of client downloads, and tens of thousands of WeChat article reads have contributed significantly to the magazine’s current monthly circulation of over 1 million copies. Since its renaming, *China National Geography* has adopted the motto “Open the door to nature, reveal the essence of humanity,” building on 60+ years of history and profound accumulation. Having experienced several ups and downs, the brand now emphasizes qualitative improvement and leapfrogging development, expanding market influence and share through robust new media platforms.

Second, the platforms demonstrate a serious attitude toward magazine production. Unlike many traditional media outlets, *China National Geography* attaches great importance to platform construction, as evident in its website structure and basic content production. The website does not simply post digital magazine editions perfunctorily but lists the magazine as paid content while providing non-magazine content for free reading. According to its new media platform, the

magazine offers segmented columns, free content displays, and online store links, providing free searchable information while continuing digital magazine sales. Offering massive amounts of free information allows consumers to fully understand the magazine's purpose, spirit, and basic content structure, enabling more rational purchasing decisions and fostering relatively stable customer sources.

Third, the platforms feature clean promotion pages without embedded advertising. Except for magazine activity announcements or product launches, the website, mobile client, and WeChat promotions rarely feature implanted advertisements. This absence of advertising annoyance leaves a positive first impression, allowing readers to quickly grasp page layouts and find needed information.

3.2 Prominent Problems

The primary problems concern user attraction: insufficiently rich content on Weibo and WeChat platforms, inadequate original Weibo content, and relatively few WeChat push articles. Regarding the official Weibo account, despite being a media outlet with abundant original content, most posts are reposted from an account called “Pipitime” (皮皮时光机). Although this content is timely and relevant, it lacks originality—followers expect more original content. Website content is not adequately reflected on Weibo. While Weibo's 140-character limit poses some obstacles, posting more original content remains necessary. People may not visit the official website daily, but they frequently check Weibo. As social media platforms emphasizing interpersonal communication, Weibo and WeChat should highlight valuable information micro-dissemination to enhance brand influence.

Similarly, WeChat's limited push content reduces reader choice. If content fails to cater to reader tastes, immediate exit becomes common—hardly an effective method for retaining followers. As important platforms for micro-communication with high socialization and usage frequency, Weibo and WeChat offer nearly free self-promotion. Rich content helps uncover user potential and habits, especially with big data support for analyzing user behaviors.

4. Paths and Methods for Deepening Media Platform Integration

4.1 Transform Concepts and Continue Strengthening Internet Thinking

For *China National Geography*, launching mainstream new media platforms does not signify completed transformation but merely represents a beginning. With highly developed internet technology, the magazine must fully utilize existing internet technologies for self-transformation, actively adapting to emerging media's instant and massive communication characteristics. It must establish market preemption awareness, fully integrate information resources, and make information for readers more comprehensive and systematic. Adapting to emerg-

ing media's fully open and competitive nature requires a global perspective, broader market competition awareness, strengthened market concepts, and enhanced marketing and product promotion capabilities to build a stronger brand.

4.2 Fully Utilize Social Platforms like Weibo and WeChat to Expand Social Dissemination

Weibo and WeChat are primary representatives of interpersonal communication platforms. With increasingly awakened audience consciousness, today's audiences are no longer passive information recipients like decades ago. Instead, they actively select information, and with the growing popularity of social applications, social networks have become service entry points and user sources for new internet businesses. To promote media convergence, it is essential to closely monitor and selectively develop social application platforms and technologies, promote effective integration between social platforms and information dissemination platforms, enhance platform stickiness, and gather more loyal users. By fully utilizing self-operated new media social platforms like Weibo and WeChat to actively develop followers and expand user scale, *China National Geography* can improve dissemination effects. Developing these platforms brings not negative but rather more positive impacts on magazine circulation.

4.3 Further Enhance Core Competitiveness of Magazine Content

Regardless of external technological development, content remains the greatest competitive advantage for periodicals and the foundation for maintaining long-term competitiveness. While emphasizing technology leadership and driving forces, *China National Geography* must consistently adhere to "content is king" and "content matching is king," placing content construction in a prominent position and accurately grasping personalized audience needs to provide more content matching website search terms, winning development advantages through content innovation. Content innovation must pursue professionalism and authority in quality, integrating traditional media advantages in information collection and verification, analysis and interpretation, and professional personnel into new media. By relying on a strong editorial team to collect and produce higher-quality information worth paying for, the magazine can satisfy readers. Additionally, it must leverage micro-communication on Weibo and WeChat, publishing more short, highly readable, and attractive content to preheat upcoming issues and boost sales.

In summary, *China National Geography's* new media platform integration and innovation began with its 2008 website revamp and expanded through subsequent launches of Weibo, WeChat, and official mobile clients, further strengthening its new media advantages. However, as a magazine renamed only a decade ago, its development journey remains long. Media transformation, especially for traditional print media, is a challenging process that the industry has continuously explored. Some media outlets have been eliminated without transformation or during transformation, while others have merely begun their trans-

formation journey. *China National Geography* falls into the latter category—it remains on the path of exploration.

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

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