

Postprint: On the Construction and Value of Public Opinion Think Tanks

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Abstract

In the era of big data, newspaper media undergoing transformation and development, as collectors, producers, processors, and disseminators of data, should leverage their advantages and identify strategic focal points. The public opinion think tank constructed by Southern Media through aggregating political and economic resources, data sources, elite teams, and all-media communication platforms offers a viable pathway. Drawing upon the experience of the Southern Public Opinion Data Project's think tank construction, this paper concentrates on discussing the establishment of public opinion service systems and the value of public opinion think tank development, for industry exchange.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: Construction and Value Exploration of Public Opinion Think Tanks

Abstract: In the era of big data, newspaper media undergoing transformation and development—acting as collectors, producers, processors, and disseminators of data—should leverage their strengths and identify focal points. The public opinion think tank built by Southern Media Group, which aggregates political and economic resources, data sources, elite teams, and all-media communication channels, offers a viable pathway. Based on the experience of constructing the Southern Public Opinion Data Project think tank, this paper focuses on discussing the construction of public opinion service systems and the value of building public opinion think tanks for industry exchange.

Keywords: media think tank; public opinion service; precise governance

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1. Characteristic Public Opinion Services of New Media Think Tanks

The system addresses key questions such as “What are the monitoring sources and where does data come from?”, “How can complex data be analyzed and utilized?”, and “How can we rapidly respond to and meet users’ diverse service needs?” This effectively supports a complete production and service chain from source monitoring and data collection to analysis and judgment, and ultimately to public opinion user services. In 2014, Southern Media Group launched the Southern Public Opinion Data Research Institute, creating a composite think tank from a professional media perspective that focuses on the research field of “governance modernization” and establishing it as the premier public opinion service platform for exploring pathways to modernization in Guangdong’s governance.

The positioning of the Southern Public Opinion Data Research Institute as a media think tank is very clear, and its public opinion services are distinctly characterized. It represents an objective requirement for party newspaper media in the new era to focus on central tasks and serve the overall goal of Guangdong’s reform and development. It is also an intrinsic requirement to apply advanced technology, leverage think tank functions, complement news production and reporting operations, and jointly build a new pattern of public opinion guidance. Furthermore, it is a practical need for Southern Media Group to coordinate at the group level, integrate internal and external resources, innovate products and services, and thereby promote industrial transformation, upgrading, and integrated development.

2. Information Service System for Public Opinion Think Tank Operations

Southern Public Opinion’s think tank operations fully utilize and leverage the media’s advantages in information channels, communication, investigation and research, and resource integration. After three years of exploration and practice, its technical operations have stabilized, its product matrix has been further enriched and improved, and it has gradually developed a relatively mature information service system.

2.1 Source Data as the Foundation of Public Opinion Services

The public opinion services provided by think tanks are professional services whose foundation lies in data collection and analysis [2]. Public opinion monitoring is commonly understood as being limited to online network sources such as electronic newspapers, news websites, video websites, forums, blogs, Weibo,

WeChat official accounts, and overseas information. Compared with online network sources, offline exclusive sources owned by media—such as reader tip-off data, online government affairs data, journalist investigation data, and newspaper topic selection data—have smaller data volumes and slower growth rates but higher information value density.

Southern Public Opinion's information service system achieves comprehensive coverage of both online network sources and offline exclusive sources, currently monitoring over 3 million sources. These data sources complement and corroborate each other, effectively expanding the scope and density of data acquisition.

2.2 Analysis and Prediction Building Interpretive Capacity

Analyzing and interpreting complex data from various sources, predicting event development trends, extracting high-quality viewpoint reports, and finding value information that better meets user needs behind the chaotic data—these represent the greatest variables in public opinion work. Southern Public Opinion's information service system uses data mining technology as its core, applies data modeling, and combines data visualization methods to provide multi-dimensional analysis and prediction including early warning recommendation and discovery, event traceability analysis, public opinion heat monitoring, communication trend deduction, key netizen analysis, and sensitive speech analysis. Through systematic public opinion 预判, it assists decision-making and judgment.

Moreover, approximately 180 journalists and editors from Southern Media Group who have long been engaged in beat reporting and extensive contact with grassroots society have transformed into full-time and part-time analysts for the public opinion think tank by leveraging their unique observational and analytical capabilities combined with professional expertise, serving as the “internal brain” of the think tank. Simultaneously, the think tank fully utilizes “external brain” resources from academic institutions such as Peking University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Jinan University to provide academic research support. Only through the combination of machine prediction and manual judgment, online collaboration and transparent management of public opinion production, and the collision of internal and external brain experience and case base knowledge management can the public opinion think tank provide more systematic, scientific, and precise public opinion services and deliver intellectual support to government and enterprise units at all levels.

2.3 Customized Public Opinion Services Balancing Commonality and Individuality

In the process of providing think tank services, Southern Public Opinion has found that user needs regarding public opinion dimensions, service timeliness, communication channels, presentation methods, and usage scenarios often exhibit differences and variability. The think tank service framework extracts

users' common and individual characteristics—originating from needs, refining needs, and surpassing needs—to reasonably construct a user coordinate system. It rapidly responds to user requirements from different dimensions including information screening, function configuration, product form, and security measures, providing secure and efficient exclusive services.

For each service user, Southern Public Opinion allocates an independent site, enabling column combination management, personalized encrypted information push, and drag-and-drop page template configuration. It integrates private message, WeChat, SMS, and email communication management methods, allowing one-click forwarding, disposition, and distribution of public opinion information and office document processing. It simultaneously supports user experiences across different terminals including PC 端, APP 端 (Yutang product), and command large screens. Through cross-platform, multi-terminal, real-time dynamic visualization, Southern Public Opinion's think tank services attract users through technical reliability and advancement, product planning innovation, and service proactivity and professionalism, thereby achieving sustainable development of the media think tank.

3. Multiple Values of Public Opinion Think Tank Construction

In recent years, the call to build new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics has sounded, and policy support for think tank construction has become increasingly robust. Against the backdrop of traditional media exploring transformation and seeking innovative development, building media think tanks has become one of the viable paths [3]. Through three years of intensive work in the public opinion service field, Southern Public Opinion has continuously sought feasible directions, methods, and approaches for media construction of public opinion think tanks, with technological, economic, and social values gradually becoming prominent.

3.1 Technical Strategic Cooperation Mechanism as an Important Leverage Method

Technology is a 短板 for media building public opinion think tanks. Southern Public Opinion's think tank construction adopts a parallel strategy of self-building and co-building, independently planning the top-level design of the technical system, selecting and controlling core technologies, and assembling various platforms independently. Simultaneously, it employs a technical strategic cooperation mechanism for joint development by platform, cleverly leveraging external forces to bypass the basic R&D period from a higher technical starting point and overcome technical implementation integration difficulties, forming a public opinion information service system with its own characteristics. Compared with technology-oriented public opinion monitoring companies in the market, Southern Public Opinion can maintain certain advantages in

technical capabilities and business forms.

3.2 Enhancing Media Capacity to Serve Markets and Users for Industrial Transformation and Upgrading

Southern Public Opinion's think tank construction serves as an important 抓手 for Southern Media Group to innovate products and enhance service capabilities, defined in strategy as one of the benchmark projects for Southern Media Group's industrial transformation and upgrading. It improves the ability of traditional media to serve markets and users under new circumstances, transforming party and government institutions and enterprises from traditional readers, audiences, and advertising clients into public opinion users. Revenue from public opinion think tank services has also become an important component of Southern Media Group's new media revenue, achieving integration between traditional and new media development.

3.3 Facilitating Media Workers' Transformation from Observers to Research Experts

In the operation of public opinion think tanks, journalists and editors working on the front lines have become important collaborative individuals in producing special reports, response suggestions, and public opinion consultations. The production of think tank reports has also been incorporated into the daily performance assessment of journalists and editors. This collaborative operation mechanism further taps into and releases editorial potential, while the establishment of public opinion thinking better facilitates media workers' transformation from observers to research experts, strengthening the quality of media reporting and achieving their own capacity transformation.

3.4 Seizing Initiative in Public Opinion Management to Promote Precise Social Governance

Over the past three years, Southern Public Opinion's think tank services have deeply cultivated the Guangdong region, representing an important measure for Southern Media Group as a party newspaper group to advance its work of focusing on central tasks and serving overall interests. The timely and comprehensive early warnings for major emergencies in Guangdong and effective suggestions for public opinion response have powerfully conveyed social conditions and public sentiment, seized the initiative in public opinion management, resolved social contradictions at the grassroots level and in their infancy, and effectively promoted scientific and democratic decision-making and governance capabilities among Guangdong's governments and enterprises. Serving as a public decision-making advisor and promoting precise social governance is precisely the proper meaning of media construction of public opinion think tanks.

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

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