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Exploring Media Convergence Development in Market-oriented Newspaper Clusters: A Case Study of Inner Mongolia Xinhua Newspaper Center and Its Affiliated Publications (Post-print)

Authors: Lin Guodong

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Abstract

The Inner Mongolia Xinhua Newspaper Center supervises and sponsors 11 newspapers and periodicals. To centralize operations and management within media convergence development and achieve a matrix effect, it developed a “converged media publishing service platform” that reduced costs, improved efficiency, and effectively addressed issues concerning news and public opinion guidance and publication quality management.

Full Text

Introduction

Since 2014, marked by the promulgation of the *Guidelines on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media* and a series of speeches by President Xi Jinping, media convergence has officially risen to the level of national strategy. President Xi has emphasized the need to cultivate a batch of new mainstream media with diverse forms, advanced methods, and strong competitiveness, and to establish several new-type media groups with formidable strength, reach, credibility, and influence. He has also pointed out that the key to convergence development lies in achieving genuine integration—becoming one and the same. The transition must be accelerated from the “addition” phase to the “fusion” phase, evolving from a state of “you are you, I am me” to “you within me, me within you,” and ultimately to “you are me, I am you.” Over the past two years, the Inner Mongolia Xinhua Newspaper Center has actively responded to this call, organizing its affiliated publications to explore media convergence development, achieving certain results.

1. Basic Situation

The Inner Mongolia Xinhua Newspaper Center (hereinafter referred to as “the Center”) was established in 2000 as a business-managed public institution under the supervision of the Inner Mongolia Press and Publication Bureau, overseeing and sponsoring 11 market-oriented publications including *Inner Mongolia Morning News*, *Inner Mongolia Business News*, and *Inner Mongolia Legal News*. In 2009, it was transferred to the supervision of the Inner Mongolia Publishing Group. For more than a decade, the Center has served as a centralized management unit for socialized newspapers and periodicals in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, making effective contributions to the development of the region’s press and conducting beneficial explorations and practices in the reform of non-current-affairs publications. Overall, the Center’s media outlets remain primarily focused on traditional publishing, still at the stage of “you are you, I am me” in terms of media convergence. Only *Inner Mongolia Morning News* has begun exploring resource integration and product interaction.

The reasons for this lag are mainly as follows: (1) Inadequate management and severe institutional constraints have led to insufficient motivation for reform and innovation. Since the reform of non-current-affairs publications, uncertainties in property rights and institutional mechanisms have negatively impacted the publications. Market-oriented publications worry about management constraints under the state-owned system, while less market-oriented ones fear marketization itself. This shared apprehension toward market-oriented development under state-owned management has resulted in weak reform momentum, manifesting in media convergence as a lack of strategic planning and thinking, a perfunctory approach to new media operations, absence of medium- and long-term planning, and a wait-and-see attitude while focusing only on immediate tasks. (2) Superficial understanding and lack of in-depth research are evident in three aspects. First, some prematurely dismiss traditional media, seeing only its challenges while overlooking its strengths, particularly in brand influence and the authority, professionalism, and credibility of content production. Second, some equate convergence development merely with establishing new media platforms, creating numerous new media outlets without addressing institutional mechanisms, resulting in traditional and new media operating as “two separate skins” that go their own ways without genuine integration. Third, some believe media convergence means new media will “devour” traditional media. In fact, media convergence is not a zero-sum process but a mutually reinforcing one, with the key being for media to leverage their own advantages and identify suitable development directions and models. (3) The structure remains simple and primitive without true integration. The focus has been placed on new media construction—launching electronic editions, websites, official Weibo and WeChat accounts, and mobile apps. While this appears to add new distribution channels for traditional news reporting, it essentially amounts to repetitive publishing of existing content without achieving effective integration of media resources and production factors. This is merely a physical aggregation of vari-

ous media that cannot produce a chemical reaction, failing to form an integrated organizational structure, communication system, or workflow, and not generating more news products adapted to different audiences. (4) Insufficient technology research and development and inadequate talent reserves have hindered progress. The Center lags in technology R&D, application, and maintenance, relying on outsourcing for editorial systems, security maintenance, and upgrades. None of the affiliated publications have any R&D capabilities, with only *Inner Mongolia Morning News* employing a small number of technical personnel. Mature technologies are often controlled by commercial websites, forcing traditional media to follow their lead and 无偿地 provide content, essentially becoming “employees” of these platforms. Meanwhile, convergence development requires compound talents who understand both journalism and new media development patterns, as well as media policies and market operations. The Center’s media outlets face widespread talent shortages in terms of structure, recruitment, and training, with minimal participation in or organization of relevant training programs. (5) Dispersed publishing resources and weak economic strength pose significant challenges. For a long time, the Center’s publications have been independent legal entities operating separately, resulting in small scale, dispersed layout, and weak market competitiveness. Without capital accumulation or industrial foundation, they have adopted a wait-and-see mentality amid current market downturns and new media impacts, lacking research on market and new media responses, future development planning, and preparation, leading to redundant construction, excessive quantity with low quality, and passive observation.

2. Specific Measures for Promoting Media Convergence

In response to the current situation of the Center and its publications, and with the support of the Inner Mongolia Publishing Group since 2015, the Center has conducted in-depth research on the domestic and international media convergence landscape, thoroughly examined its own media convergence challenges, and proposed ideas for transformation and development. In the second half of 2016, the Group funded the Center’s “Media Convergence Publishing Service Platform” project. The goal was to establish a “central kitchen”-style all-media editorial center, build a digital resource processing system, create a cloud-based data storage system, and develop various terminal distribution systems, ultimately integrating these four systems into a publishing convergence platform that incorporates all editorial and publishing work of the affiliated publications. In a digital environment, this would further promote media convergence and drive integrated development of old and new media. Upon completion, the platform would effectively solve problems related to news and public opinion guidance and publishing quality management, achieving safe publishing and effective supervision; effectively address content resource and information protection issues to ensure content security; and effectively realize digital publishing workflows, with published content directly forming databases to facilitate future development and convenient resource reuse. The platform’s main structure is

shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

The media convergence platform will serve as crucial support for the future media convergence development of the affiliated publications. Through role-based permission control, it can enable different personnel to have different operational and data access rights. The Center can establish a unified management and control mechanism, allowing Center users to view all process data information of member units, control and review publishing workflows, inspect publishing quality, and conduct sample reviews of finished products, with Center users holding final review authority. The platform can also build a unified contribution center for shared use by all member units, realizing sharing of manuscript resources and materials and establishing internal coordination and approval mechanisms for manuscript usage. It can construct an all-media manuscript editing and processing center that enables “one-time editing, multi-channel publishing,” allowing the same manuscript to be used for both traditional publishing layout and direct release to new media such as websites and mobile portals. Furthermore, it can build a unified content resource storage center encompassing all manuscripts, materials, published articles, and website releases, providing convenient query and retrieval functions and import/export capabilities while enabling different personnel to access different data according to their permissions. On the application release end, it can support paper publication and, for new media, implement news website clusters, electronic newspapers, electronic journals, WeChat enterprise accounts, Weibo accounts, and other applications.

Currently, the media convergence publishing service platform is under construction and is expected to go online before the end of the year.

3. Problems and Reflections

The Center’s media convergence development represents only a single case among numerous media organizations, yet the following issues in its implementation warrant further consideration.

3.1 Media Convergence Must Advance Management System Reform and Streamline Publishing Operation Mechanisms

The transformation of press and publication enterprises into corporate entities has laid a solid foundation for media convergence. However, among the Center’s affiliated publications, the “enterprise conversion” has been basically completed, while the “system reform” still requires effort. The Center has formulated a reform plan with the goals of innovating institutional mechanisms and strengthening overall capacity, the pathway of promoting media convergence and group development of affiliated publications, and the basic principles of “classified cleanup, batch advancement, focused development, and sequential reform.” Based on each publication’s historical issues and current development status, the plan clarifies their positioning and operational development models and advances reforms by category and batch. The reform aims to achieve separa-

tion of editorial and business operations (with the newspaper office and business company respectively undertaking editorial and business operations), clarify and delineate state-owned and social capital, separate permanent staff from other personnel, strengthen media control over affiliated publications, and ultimately achieve group development. Currently, following the requirements for reforming non-current-affairs publication units, the Center is further advancing enterprise conversion, planning market-oriented development, gradually streamlining relationships through reform, and incorporating the reform and development of each publication into the broader group development framework.

3.2 Media Convergence Must Strengthen Content Resource Construction and Always Uphold Content as King

Media are merely tools; focusing solely on tools while ignoring or neglecting news and information—the core mission of media—would be putting the cart before the horse. For new media, content not only meets user needs but also provides a good user experience. In the mobile internet era, the determination of quality content no longer relies on industry evaluation but increasingly on user choice. Regardless of how media forms change, enabling users to obtain good content and experience should be the eternal pursuit of media.

3.3 Breaking Traditional Employment Patterns and Fostering Innovation Teams

The integration of traditional and new media requires not only consolidating talent teams with both journalistic literacy and internet technology understanding but also transforming rigid news operation and editorial processes. Although the Center’s affiliated publications have dedicated personnel for new media, they are far from constituting professional teams. This requires us, while innovating institutional mechanisms, to break traditional employment patterns, remove channel barriers between traditional and new media, and focus on cultivating innovation teams that enable mutual influence and support between traditional and new media in terms of business, talent, platforms, resources, and operations.

3.4 Increasing Capital and Asset Investment and Exploring Cross-Border Diversified Development

Media convergence without capital investment is like a mirage. Investment should be increased, and support funds for media convergence should be fully utilized. Within the scope permitted by law and policy, social capital and venture investment can also be absorbed to operate converged media effectively. Mastering new business models can not only better expand readership and enhance user appeal but also provide a solid material guarantee for media to expand their “territory.” By fully utilizing offline resources, credibility, and influence, traditional media can use new media to explore commercial opportunities beyond traditional media peripheral or cultural products and engage in

diversified operations. Media convergence should not be simply understood as the 搬运 of information products. As industrial competition enters a stage of organic competition centered on user ecosystems, traditional media transformation can no longer cling to traditional business but should actively accelerate the pace of media convergence and comprehensively expand new media business through continuous innovation and cross-border thinking.

[1] Yang Wangui. Research Report on the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media [J]. *Media*, 2014, 23: 8-12.

(Author's affiliation: Inner Mongolia Xinhua Newspaper Center)

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

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