Media Convergence and Media Development Strategies in the Internet Context: Postprint

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Abstract

The development of Internet information technology has propelled media convergence to evolve from traditional channel convergence to value and terminal convergence. This paper examines the developmental history of media convergence, analyzes its changing trends and the new competitive landscape of Chinese media post-convergence, and explores strategies for media development within the context of Internet media convergence.

Full Text

Preamble

The development of internet information technology has propelled media convergence from traditional channel integration toward value and terminal integration. This article examines the history of media convergence, analyzes its evolving trends and the new competitive landscape of Chinese media post-convergence, and explores development strategies for media in the context of internet-driven media fusion.

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With the advancement of information technology, the mobilization of the internet has profoundly impacted media convergence. On one hand, it has driven network convergence beyond mere media integration, transforming media development into a networked system within the social environment. On the other hand, it has enhanced the application and terminal value of networks as channels for media convergence. As scholars have noted, networks represent an advanced stage of media development whose fundamental characteristic is “anti-media”—breaking down barriers between media and diluting channel value. Due to continuous technological strengthening, mobile networks are becoming a generalized social reality, forming a “Mega-Web” throughout the social

environment. As 3G and 4G technologies advance and wireless broadband becomes ubiquitous, mobile connectivity and instant online access have become the norm for information acquisition. In this context, the communication network of any single medium manifests as individual nodes within broader network convergence. Mobile internet development has propelled network convergence beyond media convergence, amplifying network terminal value and ultimately making entry-point competition the focal point of media rivalry.

1. Internet-Influenced Media Convergence

Beginning in the late 1970s, developments in digital technology and local area networks triggered internal and external convergence within the media industry. MIT professor Nicholas first proposed the concept of media convergence in 1978, astutely predicting that advances in computer and broadcasting technologies would inevitably lead to integration among the printing, computer, and broadcasting industries. Building on Nicholas's research, MIT professor Ithiel published *Technologies of Freedom* in 1983, arguing that rapid digital technology development would dissolve boundaries between newspapers, broadcasting, telecommunications, and television. By the mid-1990s, the pace of media convergence had confirmed these predictions. In 1996, Stanford professor Kevin published *Big Media*, analyzing convergence trends across the mass media, telecommunications, and information network industries from a broad media perspective, and predicting that this integration would spawn a "Mega-Media" (MM) industry—the dominant trend for 21st-century media development.

After entering the 21st century, China's media industry convergence accelerated dramatically. Starting in 2000, major mainstream media outlets launched "TV-network integration" and "newspaper-network integration" initiatives, advancing China's media convergence process. By 2010, nationwide triple-network convergence (telecommunications, broadcasting, and computer internet) reached its peak, essentially marking the completion of China's media industry convergence.

Historical analysis reveals that internet technology development diversified network development, with computer networks, telecommunications networks, and broadcasting networks serving as convergence channels. In this sense, media convergence represents channel convergence, whose essence is providing homogeneous information services through different network platforms. Scholars note that network convergence constitutes the prerequisite for media convergence, content convergence forms its resource foundation, and terminal integration serves as the fundamental carrier for its realization. However, as the internet evolved into the mobile network era, cross-network and cross-terminal communication became simpler, diluting networks' channel value while strengthening their application and terminal value.

2. Media Competition Patterns in the Internet Context

Generally, traditional media possess content advantages while online media boast user volume advantages, with each side's strengths becoming the other's weaknesses, thereby intensifying platform competition. The rivalry between traditional television and emerging video websites exemplifies this dynamic. For instance, Hunan TV's competition with Tudou, Youku, and iQiyi illustrates this pattern. In 2006, Hunan Broadcasting Group launched Golden Eagle Network, focusing on entertainment news and programs, followed by Mango TV in 2009 for video streaming and user value-added services. Nevertheless, neither platform gained significant advantage in online media, as their user base remained largely drawn from Hunan TV's existing audience, failing to attract other demographics.

In 2014, Hunan Broadcasting Group merged Golden Eagle Network and Mango TV, launching a new integrated Mango TV video platform. The merged entity vigorously pursued exclusive broadcast strategies and increased investment in self-produced programs to compete against Tudou, iQiyi, and Youku, achieving favorable results. Conversely, online video platforms like Tudou, Youku, and iQiyi initially leveraged computer internet advantages with technical and financial support, purchasing foreign program copyrights at premium prices to meet users' massive, personalized demands. However, after traditional media like Hunan Broadcasting Group entered the video website arena, these early strategies faced challenges and risked capital chain rupture. Consequently, later strategies focused on extending upstream in the industrial chain, increasing self-produced content and expanding user-generated content (allowing users to upload personalized videos), thereby transforming into comprehensive, entertainment-oriented video platforms to compete with traditional media for user entry traffic.

Mobile internet not only provides new development directions for mass media but also facilitates information dissemination for ordinary users. Through social platforms like WeChat and Weibo, massive numbers of users generate and share personalized content from daily life. This micro-content represents a form of media existence. According to a survey by Tencent Technology and Renmin University New Media Research Institute, 40% of users currently rely on social platforms as their primary channel for acquiring new knowledge and information, 25% use them as the optimal platform for following social hotspots, and 35% prefer social platforms for publishing personal information, sharing preferences, and forwarding others' viewpoints. The information disseminated by ordinary people on social platforms is massive; if properly analyzed and mined, it could constitute a tremendous media content production platform.

3. Media Development Strategies in the Internet Era

In the era of rapid mobile internet popularization, traditional media, online media, self-media, and individual media surround users, forming a massive communication network. In this environment, user selectivity becomes paramount,

with choices often random and utilitarian. Users prioritize information content quality over distribution channels, weakening channel value while strengthening content value. In the computer network era, users relied on distribution channels to verify content accuracy and authority. In the mobile internet context, however, social networks filter useless information, quickly drowning out valueless content while enabling truly valuable information to spread continuously. Therefore, for media organizations, the quality, creativity, standards, and level of produced content are crucial—only high-quality content can attract users.

No media can remain isolated from the internet in the mobile era. Beyond placing self-produced content on proprietary platforms, both traditional and online media should accelerate cross-platform layout to achieve diffusive communication effects through cross-platform, cross-terminal collaboration. Traditional TV and print media can establish online presence and also 入驻 social platforms like WeChat and Weibo to create "cross-regional" three-dimensional communication. For instance, CCTV opened multiple accounts including "CCTV News" and "CCTV Sports" on Sina Weibo, NetEase Weibo, and Sohu Weibo, achieving diffusive effects. "CCTV Finance" on Sohu surpassed 20 million clicks and gained over 10 million fans within a month. Thus, cross-platform cooperation maximizes extension of brand advantages and product resources, optimizing benefits while promoting mutual wins.

The computer network era facilitated the shift from offline to online, enhancing online communication effects. The mobile internet era emphasizes real-time connectivity, blurring online-offline boundaries. O2O (Online To Offline), as a service concept, is not exclusive to e-commerce—all media, including traditional outlets, can leverage it for competitive advantage. Media's fundamental value lies in providing information services, which can be extended to life services through O2O models aligned with their positioning. With mobile internet, smartphones, and payment technology development, traditional media can more conveniently integrate with e-commerce, transforming from ad-reliant profit models to brand-based profitability. For example, Dragon TV's recent "Goddess's New Clothes" exemplifies the O2O model combining "TV program + e-commerce + mobile APP," enabling viewers to shop while watching. This new format integrates entertainment with consumer stimulation, creating profound online-offline interaction and generating topic and word-of-mouth effects.

As internet rapidly develops and popularizes, communication competition among media intensifies. Generalized social communication networks significantly impact media marketing. Advertisers must consider media communication effects and user groups, with increasing emphasis on combined placement effects. Media must strengthen creative and content marketing strategies. Many media now believe that combining content marketing with creative marketing is optimal. In the mobile internet era, user groups' sharing value far exceeds individual users' attention value, as sharing itself disseminates media content and creativity. Native advertising has become the most important marketing method for mobile media. Though not complex, native advertising

offers three advantages: content-ization of advertisements, user experience in communication channels, and spontaneity of user sharing. Content-ization requires information to provide value to users, embedding brand content to meet content demands. User experience requires effective design of creative and expressive forms to create pleasant experiences. Spontaneous user sharing—key to native advertising's highest value—occurs when users, recognizing the first two features, voluntarily share and promote diffusion. Phoenix TV began introducing various foreign native advertisements in 2012 across news, video, and columns, achieving good communication reputation and advertiser recognition.

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