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Accelerating Deep Integration of Prefecture-Level Traditional Media in the Post-Print Era

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Abstract

China's information technology has experienced rapid advancement within a mere few years, precipitating profound transformations in media representation forms and audience cognitive patterns. Media convergence has entered an accelerated phase, evolving from simple "addition" to genuine "integration", ultimately achieving the state of "complete integration and unity". Prefecture-level traditional media must advance with the times by undertaking deeper and more comprehensive reforms and innovations to adapt to the developmental shifts of modern information-based media, construct a comprehensive modern communication system, and thereby accelerate the realization of deep media convergence.

Full Text

Preamble

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How Prefecture-Level Traditional Media Can Accelerate Deep Convergence

Abstract: In recent years, China's information technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, fundamentally transforming both media forms and audience mindsets. Media convergence has entered an accelerated phase, evolving from simple "addition" to true "integration," ultimately achieving the goal of "becoming one entity." Prefecture-level traditional media must keep pace with the times, undertaking more profound and comprehensive reforms and innovations to adapt to the transformation of modern information-based media and construct a robust modern communication system, thereby accelerating the achievement of deep media convergence.

Keywords: Prefecture-level; Traditional media; Deep convergence; Development strategies

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Introduction

In 2014, the central government first proposed the strategic concept of media convergence. Five years have since passed, and media convergence in China has undergone significant development. From central to provincial and prefecture-level traditional media, organizations have embraced the “Internet Plus” wave, continuously exploring paths for transformation and development in the media industry. Deep integration has been achieved across content, technology, distribution channels, and management models. The convergence of traditional and new media has enabled prefecture-level media to achieve remarkable progress in expanding scope, accelerating development speed, and increasing overall momentum, making the trend of media convergence increasingly evident.

1. Current Status of Prefecture-Level Media Convergence

The “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Convergence Development of Traditional and Emerging Media” was adopted on August 18, 2014, at the fourth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform. The group leader and national leader emphasized at the meeting that the convergence of traditional and emerging media must follow the laws of news communication and emerging media development. It is essential to strengthen internet thinking, transform traditional mindsets, use advanced technology as the supporting foundation for transformation, promote complementary advantages and integrated development, and take content construction as the fundamental basis for integration. This year, innovative reforms in media convergence have extended further to grassroots media, broadening audience reach. Convergence development represents a self-revolution for media organizations, and traditional media from central to local levels are actively exploring pathways, with characteristics 主要体现在以下几个方面.

1.1. Establishing Presence on Major Platforms

Currently, the primary platforms for prefecture-level media presence include Weibo, WeChat, and aggregated news clients. Establishing a presence on these “two micros and one end” has become the standard configuration for prefecture-level media convergence. By opening accounts on social media platforms and continuously publishing information that integrates images, video, and audio, these media outlets enhance user engagement. For example, the Fujian Minnan

Daily Press Group has launched a series of new media platforms, including the Minnan Daily WeChat Official Account, Zhangzhou News WeChat Official Account, and Zhangzhou News Sina Weibo, which have amassed over 300,000 followers and gradually expanded their influence. Additionally, the “Minnan Cloud Newspaper” app, “Minnan TV” online video platform, and “Minnan Voice” online radio station have formed a comprehensive all-media matrix and three-dimensional communication landscape.

1.2. Accelerating “Central Kitchen” Construction

Central leadership has pointed out that the “central kitchen” is the standard configuration and flagship project for promoting deep media convergence and must be built and utilized effectively. The People’s Daily pioneered the use of the “central kitchen” in its 2015 “Two Sessions” coverage. Following the demonstration effect of central and provincial media, prefecture-level traditional media have also joined the construction wave. The Fujian Minnan Daily Press Group invested over 30 million yuan to build the “Minnan Daily Press Group Media Convergence System Project.” In December 2016, the “Minnan Daily Press Group All-Media News Editing and Command Center,” or “Central Kitchen” (Phase I), was completed and launched. In November 2017, the “Minnan Daily Press Group New Media Center” (Phase II) was completed and launched. These developments have further propelled the group’s newspaper-network-micro-end platforms from a simple “addition” all-media communication matrix to a new integrated media ecosystem where media forms, communication patterns, and product formats truly “converge.”

1.3. Seizing Opportunities in County-Level Media Convergence

At the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work held on August 21, national leaders delivered an important speech emphasizing that county-level media convergence center construction should be the priority focus for integrating traditional and emerging media to better guide and serve grassroots communities. Many prefecture-level media have taken county-level media convergence center construction as the breakthrough point for integration, continuously consolidating local resources and expanding service areas in practice, forging a path of branded and intensive media transformation with local characteristics. On September 7, Anhui Daily Press Group signed a “County-County Convergence” platform cooperation agreement with Huangshan and Tongling cities, launching a comprehensive integration process interconnecting provincial, municipal, and county-level media. Subsequently, Zhengzhou Daily Press Group explored a “cross-media unification, multi-dimensional linkage, multi-platform consultation, and all-media release” media industry system with counties, cities, districts, and development zones, promoting sustainable development of county-level media convergence centers.

2. Constraints on Prefecture-Level Media Convergence

National leaders have pointed out the need for profound discourse on media convergence while putting forward clear requirements and standards, emphasizing that traditional and emerging media convergence development must achieve “becoming one entity” and maximize the transition from the “addition” phase to the “integration” phase. However, a considerable number of prefecture-level media still fall far short of these goals. The reasons include several major constraints.

2.1. Management Awareness Issues

Prefecture-level media leaders have yet to demonstrate the “desperate determination” required for deep convergence. Currently, the circulation of many prefecture-level party newspaper traditional media has plummeted, with advertising revenue experiencing a “cliff-like” decline and severe reader loss becoming increasingly prominent. While everyone recognizes the severity of these problems and media leaders profess to value new media development, the reality is that both leadership and editorial resources remain entrenched in traditional media structures. Furthermore, there is insufficient urgency and consciousness for convergence development. Some believe that although traditional media faces difficulties, party newspapers can rely on government subsidies for stable support. This survival and development philosophy among prefecture-level traditional media hinders convergence with emerging media.

2.2. Management System Problems

Most prefecture-level traditional media still follow administrative management models. Professional talent recruitment follows the unified public institution examination system, lacking effective and rational human resource allocation mechanisms. In terms of salary distribution and performance evaluation, new media department management systems remain immature, with some performance evaluations long referencing traditional media positions, leading to widespread unequal pay for equal work. Due to systemic constraints and rigid mechanisms, new media departments suffer severe talent loss on one hand, while on the other hand, traditional media personnel lack new media literacy, making it difficult to effectively supply excellent talent for new media development and resulting in slow convergence progress.

2.3. Low Overall Quality of New Media Personnel

In prefecture-level traditional media, the rapid development of new media has created a workforce composed partly of traditional media personnel transferred to new positions. These individuals have fixed mindsets and poor acceptance and understanding of new media technologies. Another portion consists of personnel managed through corporate systems by operation and maintenance companies. Due to low salaries and relaxed recruitment conditions, staff turnover

is frequent, and some new media personnel lack training in traditional media business knowledge and skills, constituting a primary reason for the stagnation of traditional and new media convergence.

3. Strategies for Accelerating Prefecture-Level Media Convergence

3.1. Enhancing Leadership Understanding of Media Convergence

It is essential to clearly recognize that media convergence is a crucial component of comprehensive reform. We must strengthen top-level design and maintain high-level coordination. Prefecture-level traditional media should formulate implementation plans to accelerate media convergence, clarifying guiding principles, objectives, tasks, and implementation pathways. Establish unified and efficient mechanisms for deliberation, decision-making, and coordination, focusing on institutional development and strengthening systemic guarantees.

3.2. Innovating Media Convergence Management Mechanisms

In accelerating media convergence reform, some prefecture-level media have boldly innovated by separating editorial from business operations and separating public institution from enterprise management, breaking rigid personnel and distribution systems to stimulate employee enthusiasm and significantly enhance internal vitality. The Zhejiang Yuhang Morning News Agency standardized its new media management system and established performance evaluation mechanisms, innovating on existing systems and institutions to propose new ideas while providing institutional guarantees.

3.3. Strengthening Talent Team Building

Talent development is central to all development efforts and serves as both the subject and object of convergence development. Media convergence talent requires not only correct political ideology and high-level professional competence but also deep understanding of how to use internet thinking to engage audiences and serve the community. Prefecture-level media organizations must continuously innovate training models to accelerate the transformation of existing media workers into all-media managers, all-media journalists, and all-media editors—versatile talent capable of working across platforms. Simultaneously, they must innovate institutional mechanisms to widely recruit high-level internet talent.

The Fujian Minnan Daily Press Group provides an exemplary model through its unified recruitment, training, and certification of newspaper and website journalists, along with regular job rotations. This innovative personnel system has promoted conceptual integration among editorial staff, improved their professional capabilities, and effectively advanced the cultivation of “all-media talent.”

3.4. Prioritizing Mobile Media Development

By June 2018, China’s mobile internet users reached 788 million, indicating that the mobile terminal will become a new commanding height for future convergence development. Innovation should focus on mobile terminals with concentrated investment of human and financial resources. Develop innovative technologies, conduct in-depth analysis of mobile big data, and build a technical support system aligned with modern lifestyles underpinned by cloud computing. This creates a new media model enabling mobile editing and mobile management, leveraging the role of prefecture-level media “central kitchens” to continuously improve service quality, enhance absorptive capacity, and launch more phenomenal products that adapt to users, attract audiences, and align with mobile development trends.

3.5. Actively Seizing County-Level Media Convergence Center Opportunities

Promoting county-level media convergence center construction represents a major opportunity that prefecture-level media must seize; standing idly by would lead to inevitable passivity. The Fujian Minnan Daily Press Group possesses Zhangzhou’s most authoritative news website and most complete media convergence ecosystem. Riding the wave of county-level media convergence center construction, the group leverages its rich experience in media convergence development and advantages in talent, technology, and its three major platforms (all-media news command center, new media center, and big data center). In advancing and serving county-level media convergence center construction, the group has taken proactive initiatives, participating throughout the entire process of building Nanjing County, Longwen District, and Zhangpu County media convergence centers—from technology selection to business training. Additionally, by utilizing the Minnan Daily party media brand advantage, the group has conducted deep cooperation with county-level media convergence centers to produce a series of thoughtful, warm, and high-quality news content. Through “news + services,” it has built a high-quality “government + livelihood” service platform, truly bringing integrated media closer to the masses and into their hearts.

In recent years, prefecture-level media have continuously reformed and innovated in response to the times, focusing on exploring development paths and innovating institutional mechanisms. This has enabled deep integration between traditional and emerging media across channels, platforms, operations, and management, achieving phased results. Currently, media convergence has entered a critical stage of in-depth advancement. Media convergence is not a choice but a trend and a mission. Prefecture-level media should seize opportunities, ride the momentum, and build a new all-media communication landscape.

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

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