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Direction Setting and Digital Intelligence Empowerment: New Mission and New Vision for China's Media Industry (Post-print)

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Abstract

Direction guidance and technological empowerment constitute the core driving forces for the high-quality development of China's media industry. Against the backdrop of the robust rise of digital platform media and the profound restructuring of the media ecosystem by generative AI, China's media sector faces both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges. While digital intelligence technologies continuously optimize the entire news production workflow and platform empowerment enhances...

Full Text

Preamble

Direction guidance and technological empowerment constitute the core driving forces for the high-quality development of China's media industry. Against the backdrop of the robust rise of digital platform media and the profound restructuring of the media ecosystem by generative AI, China's media sector faces both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges. While digital intelligence technologies continuously optimize the entire news production workflow and platform empowerment enhances the quality and efficiency of media operations, challenges such as insufficient endogenous reform momentum within mainstream media, weak institutional innovation, and imperfect evaluation systems continue to constrain systemic transformation. The *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization* (hereinafter referred to as the "Decision"), adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, has laid out multiple deployments for a new round of deepening reform in China's media industry. It is therefore essential to seize

this important opportunity presented by directional guidance and technological transformation to advance the systemic reform of China’s mainstream media.

1. Direction Guidance: Leading the All-Media Communication System Through Systemic Reform

The Decision explicitly calls for “building an adaptive all-media production and communication mechanism and evaluation system, and promoting systemic reform of mainstream media,” providing strategic guidance for deepening reform and integrated development. Since media convergence became a national strategy in 2014, the evolution of policy discourse—from “media convergence” to “deep media convergence,” and from “new mainstream media” to “systemic reform of mainstream media”—reflects not only the practical logic of China’s media convergence advancing toward the goal of an all-media communication system under the dual drivers of top-level design and technological empowerment, but also reveals that media convergence has entered a critical 攻坚期. Mainstream media at all levels urgently need to make simultaneous breakthroughs and establish new paradigms in core areas such as institutional mechanisms, business models, technological architecture, and evaluation systems to adapt to the complex changes in the new-era media environment and maintain lasting competitiveness in the fierce market.

As an important subsystem of social structure, China’s media convergence still faces practical dilemmas at the macro level, including unbalanced regional development, inconsistent integration paces, severe homogenization of government new media, and the erosion of mainstream media’s capacity for social consensus building and ideological guidance by commercial platforms. Mainstream media must integrate into the complex sequence of the contemporary communication system and continuously embed themselves into the national economic and social development macro-system by continuously expanding service boundaries, intensively building platform ports, and advancing in-depth digital-intelligent transformation, thereby serving the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities.

From an internal media perspective, the Decision’s deployment for systemic reform of mainstream media has formed a “production-communication-evaluation” closed loop. The evaluation system serves as both the measuring scale for assessing media convergence practice and the baton guiding systemic reform of mainstream media. A comprehensive three-dimensional evaluation can be conducted across multiple indicators, including mainstream media positioning, internal governance, content quality, platform construction, technology input-output ratio, service function extension, and international communication capacity, through modules such as top-level design, underlying architecture, content construction, communication effects, service capacity, and linkage capability. Building an evaluation system is a systematic project involving the communication environment, market demand, media development stage, and media positioning and carrying capacity. Therefore, the construction

of communication evaluation systems must continuously undergo dynamic adjustments to enhance their adaptability and implement scientific evaluations in a classified and graded manner.

2. Digital Intelligence Transformation: Building Intelligent Development with New Quality Productive Forces

The Decision explicitly identifies artificial intelligence as a strategic industry and proposes “promoting the integrated development of technological innovation and industrial innovation.” The 2025 Government Work Report once again emphasizes “continuously advancing the ‘AI Plus’ initiative.” From ChatGPT to Sora and then to DeepSeek, the rapid iteration and application of generative artificial intelligence are driving a new round of media revolution, making digital-intelligent transformation the core kinetic energy for media to cultivate new quality productive forces and achieve high-quality development.

The integrated application of technologies such as AI-generated content, digital humans, and intelligent middle platforms empowers the entire media content production process to improve quality and efficiency, enables full-process tracking of public opinion dynamics, and facilitates intelligent upgrades of client-side services across all scenarios. However, technological empowerment also brings attendant technological and ethical risks such as deepfakes, algorithmic black boxes, and public opinion manipulation, posing potential threats to the existing media order. How to find a suitable development path in a human-machine collaborative media environment, leverage advanced technologies to achieve effective communication on noisy online platforms, and become a credible content provider and authoritative public opinion guide has become the core issue of media digital-intelligent transformation.

The key to media digital-intelligent transformation lies in using systematic thinking to coordinate technological empowerment and value guidance. On the one hand, media must actively adapt to the intelligent communication ecology, promote intensive transformation of internal organizational structures through digital-intelligent thinking and platform thinking, build a talent system adapted to intelligent needs, optimize resource allocation, release high-quality production factors from inefficient fields, establish institutional mechanisms that support technological innovation and application implementation, and achieve a qualitative leap from “+AI” to “AI+.” On the other hand, media must clearly define the boundaries of technology use, adhere to a people-oriented value orientation, and guard against the alienation and disciplining of media essence by technology.

3. Industrial Expansion: Using New Audio-Visual Formats to Promote Cross-Border Integration of Cultural Industries

The cultural industry bears the important function of optimizing economic structure and meeting people’s diverse spiritual and cultural needs. The 2025 Gov-

ernment Work Report proposes “improving the public cultural service system to deliver high-quality cultural resources directly to the grassroots level, perfecting the cultural industry system and market system, and accelerating the development of new cultural business forms.” As the core carrier of the cultural industry, media serves as both the producer and disseminator of cultural content and a key driving force for social value shaping and economic development.

At the level of cultural product supply, the transformation of audio-visual consumption and massive market supply have driven the continuous popularity of micro-short dramas as a new audio-visual format. After experiencing initial explosive market growth, the drawbacks of the micro-short drama industry’s wild growth have begun to emerge, with issues such as induced consumption, vague charging standards, and lax supervision in investment, production, and distribution hindering healthy industry development. A shift toward quality, integration, and standardization has become necessary for micro-short dramas to transform from traffic carnival to cultural depth.

At the level of cultural industry optimization, the deep development and cross-border linkage of cultural IPs from literature, games, and film and television works not only promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture but also make the “film-game linkage” a new driving force for upgrading the culture-tourism integration model, injecting new vitality into cultural communication and local economy. For example, the domestic game *Black Myth: Wukong*, through its deep excavation and market-oriented re-creation of excellent literary works and ancient architectural scenes in Shanxi, has boosted tourism development in Shanxi. Furthermore, media promotes the integrated development of “agriculture-sports-culture-tourism,” continuously empowering rural revitalization. Through mass cultural and sports activities such as “Village BA” and village galas, media not only delivers high-quality culture directly to the grassroots but also creates phenomenal online communication spectacles. Rural live-streaming e-commerce and digital nomad bases not only create economic benefits but also drive local cultural promotion, tourism promotion, and tourism construction, becoming new engines for igniting rural economy.

4. Voice Enhancement: Improving International Communication Effectiveness Through Diversified Approaches

As China unprecedentedly moves to the center of the world stage, telling China’s stories well and transmitting China’s voice to the international community has become the goal of China’s international communication. However, the current unreasonable order in international communication still exists, with Western countries leveraging their communication channel advantages to launch various “public opinion wars” against China, demonizing China’s national image and attempting to contain China’s legitimate development. Communication capacity determines influence, and discourse power determines initiative. Accelerating the construction of a multi-channel, three-dimensional external communication

pattern, enhancing international communication effectiveness, establishing international discourse power that matches China's comprehensive national strength and international status, and creating a favorable international public opinion environment for Chinese modernization construction constitute the era's mission for China's media.

Comprehensively enhancing international communication effectiveness requires balancing breadth and effectiveness. In terms of broadening international communication, it is necessary to build a multi-channel, three-dimensional external communication pattern, coordinate multi-dimensional communication matrices including mainstream media, social media, overseas media, and overseas social media, and unite diverse communication actors including government, media, social organizations, enterprises, universities, groups in China, and local groups to continuously expand channels for spreading China's stories.

In terms of enhancing effectiveness, first, precise communication must be advanced. Big data and other digital information technologies can be used to accurately locate information needs and acceptance habits of target country audiences and deliver information precisely. Additionally, disciplinary barriers must be broken by introducing interdisciplinary knowledge from regional studies, political science, economics, history, etc., to broaden the vision of precise communication and provide scientific basis for targeted international communication work. Second, international communication discourse power and public opinion combat capability must be enhanced. In addition to excavating and exploring discourse expressions that conform to international communication from Chinese culture, Chinese solutions, and Chinese wisdom, it is necessary to jointly tell cooperation stories with Belt and Road partner countries and Global South countries, boost international discourse volume, and strive for a more just and equitable international order. Third, cultural power must be emphasized, and new models of cultural going-global must be explored. Beyond the "three carriages" of cultural going-global—online games, online literature, and domestic film and television dramas—new cultural business forms such as online micro-short dramas and "China Travel" can also expand new dimensions of international communication.

5. Network Governance: Empowering Integrated Cyberspace Governance Through Value Guidance

As the digital intelligence technology revolution advances in depth, cyberspace governance is undergoing profound transformation: the rise of commercial platforms has weakened the central position of mainstream media, the internet public opinion field is flooded with mixed information, ideological games embedded in transnational information flows have become normalized and concealed, competition for international discourse power in cyberspace has entered a strategic stalemate stage, and algorithmic governance and data sovereignty issues have become core propositions in the reconstruction of the global digital governance system. The Decision points out the need to "improve the comprehensive net-

work governance system, deepen the reform of the network management system, integrate network content construction and management functions, and promote integrated management of news propaganda and online public opinion.”

The key to comprehensive network governance lies in integration. Focusing on the media field, integrated management of news propaganda and online public opinion is mainly promoted through systematic management systems, integrated content construction, and coordinated multiple actors. Specifically, it is necessary to improve online public opinion guidance mechanisms, perfect long-term mechanisms for network ecology governance, uphold the core position of the Party’s publicity department in integrated management, and give full play to the coordinating role of cyberspace administration departments. Simultaneously, it is essential to strengthen internet consciousness and mass thinking, focus on leveraging the synergistic effects of multiple governance actors including mainstream media platforms, commercial platforms, and netizens, and promote deep integration and positive interaction between news propaganda and online public opinion through technology empowerment, discourse adjustment, and high-quality content leadership. Additionally, it is necessary to be rooted in specific problems of China’s communication ecology, focus on key areas such as artificial intelligence, data security, online rumors, and cyber violence, and formulate and improve network management laws and regulations at the national level to provide solid institutional guarantees for integrated management of news propaganda and online public opinion.

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

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