

Empowering Rural Revitalization through Broadcast Media in the Construction of County-level Converged Media Centers: A Study Centered on Shandong

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Abstract:

Media convergence and rural revitalization are crucial national strategies in China. Using converge to address the issue of rural hollowing out in the digital age and promote rural retribalization has become a social reality. To achieve rural revitalization, it is essential to further harness the potential of broadcasting and television within the framework of the media convergence strategy. This research argued that constructing county-level converged media centers can significantly contribute to rural revitalization, effectively conveying policy information, spreading agricultural technology, and promoting rural culture. Additionally, these centers can attract migrant workers back to their hometowns, boosting the rural economy. Building county-level converged media centers helps reshape community relations, promotes rural retribalization, and revitalizes rural areas.

Keywords:

Broadcast Media, Rural Revitalization, County-Level Converged Media Centers, Shandong

1. Introduction

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Promotion of Rural Vitalization, which came into force on June 1, 2021, mandates the extensive use of broadcast media, online networks, and print publications to provide rural residents with accessible public cultural services. The rural vitalization strategy is a significant initiative proposed by the Chinese government that impacts the national economy and people's livelihoods. On this background, broadcast media, with its accessible content, ease of use, and broad audience reach, has become a co-creator of public opinion and information services, which is crucial in advancing the rural revitalization strategy. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, county-level converge media centers effectively used radio, television, and new media for modern, coordinated governance

in rural areas. Loudspeakers and WeChat groups facilitated the state's media mobilization in rural areas [1].

The extensive use of media to promote rural revitalization in numerous counties and townships in Shandong Province exemplifies a typical and representative approach. Researchers using Cao County as a case study have found that the county, based on its deep understanding of local industries, has developed a communication strategy emphasizing its strengths in local manufacturing, handicrafts, and e-commerce industries. [2] This study proposes broadcast media should redefine their role in rural revitalization, actively engage in the development of county-level converge centers, and effectively contribute to rural revitalization with precision and efficiency.

2. Literature Review

As a crucial tool for primary-level governance, broadcast media has played a significant role in constructing the public cultural space in county and township communities. In the digital era, new audiovisual media, such as short videos, have further enriched rural life and facilitated the development of digital rural areas. [3] In this study, we approached media convergence by combining the characteristics and advantages of broadcast media and short video media, summarizing the current research of county-level converge media centers, rural areas, and broadcast media.

2.1. County-level converge media centers

As the primary portal for media convergence promoted from the bottom-up in China, county-level converged media centers have become essential catalysts in modernizing national governance by bridging the “last mile.” Simultaneously, digital transformation has increased the coverage of audiovisual media in grassroots rural communities, promoting the construction of digital rural areas.[4] Currently, county-level converged media centers face challenges on new media platforms like Douyin, including information integration, role positioning, content selection, and profitability. In the era of self-media communication, effective information integration and precise audience targeting are vital to improving communication efficiency. A study of 100 county-level converged media on Douyin found that they commonly suffer from poorly organized sections, unclear content categorization, and lack diversity in their content, limiting their effectiveness as governance bridges. Additionally, these accounts often fail to connect with primary-level communities sufficiently, serve local audiences, and struggle with profitability. [5]

County-level converged media centers play a unique and crucial role in rural governance. Their involvement stems from the shared strategic background, action field, and value orientation with rural governance. As components of the national strategy, they and rural governance serve the goal of modernizing national governance systems and capabilities. Through e-government, business, life, and cultural services, county-level converged media centers enhance people's quality of life. In governance, rural and county-level converged media centers emphasize the collaborative participation of diverse stakeholders. The county-level converged media foster the formation of rural governance communities by building governance networks. In tandem with developing digital rural areas, they significantly bridge the urban-rural digital gap by integrating information resources, enhancing rural residents' digital literacy, preserving and innovating rural culture, and modernizing rural governance systems and capabilities. [6,7]

Different media types have rapidly converged under policy impetus, with policies providing operational guidance for media convergence at the rural level. Meanwhile, emerging media offer a foundation for the convergence of different media types, unleashing the potential for media convergence to reach the community. [8,9] We explored the history and prospects of county-level converged media centers and found that the evolution of media convergence practices generally demonstrates a hierarchical progression under policy drive. Media convergence can actively empower rural social governance during digital transformation. [10] For example, the structure of rural social governance in China enables broadcast and new media to serve as complementary media forms to decentralize state power and the collectivization of rural areas. Broadcast media empower the central government with more robust governance capabilities. In contrast, new media provide equal opportunities for governments at all levels and rural residents to participate in rural governance, achieving a relative balance in power dynamics.

2.2. Countryside and Broadcast

During the construction of county-level converged media centers, “interpersonal communication and social media” encourages active public participation in rural governance, which differs from the one-dimensional social governance of broadcast media. [11] We reviewed the history of rural broadcasting and placed it within the macro framework of rural social governance to explore its core role as a new media form. Rural broadcasting, using people as the medium and relying on horizontal and vertical organizations, plays a multifaceted role in promoting information dissemination, stabilizing public opinion, and fostering the modernization of rural society. [12] In the context of modernization, county-level converged media centers play an essential role in solving the problem of urban-rural information differentiation, which can narrow the social differentiation by extending the media supply chain, widening the county-level financial media public service chain, and strengthening the we-media relationship chain. They are crucial in the balance of information resources within the county. For example, researchers conducting a field study on the rural history of Xingyang, Henan, found that by conveying modern technology and knowledge, broadcasting became a key channel for residents to access information and express their concerns. This significantly enhanced their sense of belonging and identity. [13,14]

Broadcast media have empowered the development of rural society in China, and it has become a reality that different levels and types of broadcast media are driving rural social governance. CMG Shandong is establishing a diversified business pattern to drive high-quality development. They actively plan original activities such as New Era and New Shandong Cuisine, showing Shandong culture and the achievements of rural revitalization. These efforts promote innovation and development in related industries, enhancing CMG’s brand influence. Lianyungang TV integrates new media resources and supports rural revitalization through multimedia approaches. Specifically, they organize special events to promote urban-rural integration and agricultural product sales. Using digital technology and brand influence, they enhance the popularity of farm products, establish new e-commerce models, drive rural industrial revitalization, and increase farmers’ income.

Intelligent broadcast aims to establish a six-level emergency broadcasting system covering the national and rural levels. Despite technological advancements and functional positioning challenges, it plays a crucial role in emergency management.

Additionally, intelligent broadcast improves program transmission coverage by promoting the application of technologies like high-definition and ultra-high-definition television. Moreover, it actively contributes to public services by promoting intelligent services, strengthening rural public opinion platforms, and providing support for building the Party well at the primary level. [15,16,17]

3. Case Study: Research on the Construction of County-level Converged Media Centers in Shandong from the Perspective of Clue Ethnography

This study focuses on county-level converged media centers in Shandong Province. We consider the differences in the development levels between coastal and inland areas and select research cases based on the construction status of county-level converged media centers. Then, we conduct a qualitative study on the impact of media convergence on rural revitalization using clue ethnography. Specifically, we divide Shandong Province into four regions: northwest Shandong, southwest Shandong, central Shandong, and east Shandong. We select a typical case within each area based on the comprehensive evaluation of county-level converged media centers for our research analysis.

Table 1. Case Analysis of the County-Level Converged Media Centers.

Samples	Unit Responsibilities	Institution Setting	Short Video
Shanghe converged media	(i) Strengthen the mainstream public opinion. (ii) Distribute news and serve the daily lives of the public. (iii) Various functions including media advertising and cultural business.	The Shanghe Converged Media Center has no other secondary units.	Established at the end of 2019. Douyin followers: 22,000
Cao County converged media	(i) Grasp the overall situation, ensure the leading role of the Party, and implement the deployments and decisions of the Central Committee. (ii) Undertake the work of broadcasting program transmission. (iii) Audio-visual material collection and management. (iv) Operations and management of new media.	The Cao County Converged Media Center (Cao County TV)	Established on September 21, 2021.
Gaomi converged media	(i) Adhere to the state's guidelines and policies (ii) Build an omnimedia platform (iii) Broadcasting program planning and new media operations.	Seventeen functional departments, including the Office, Financial Department, Personnel Education Department, Omnimedia Reporters Department, and the Gaomi News Editorial Department, etc.	Established on August 6, 2019.
Jiaozhou converged media	(i) Execute upper-level policies and promote the guidelines of the Party. (ii) Produce high-quality programs. (iii) Content planning of newspapers.	Twenty-four departments, including the Office, Human Resources Department, Interview Department I, Interview Department II, Design Department, News Program	Established in January 2021.

		Department, Party Building Program Department, etc.	
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3.1. Regional differentiation: County-level converged media development in Shandong adapts to local conditions

The development of county-level converged media centers in various districts and counties of Shandong started early, but there are differences in the situation of each county-level converged media center in different regions. For example, in northwest Shandong, the Shanghe converged media aims to implement national policies, promote media convergence, build an omnimedia platform, compile current political news, hot topics of people’s livelihoods, government information, public information, and service information, empowering the construction of intelligent cities and intelligent government services.

In southwest Shandong, the Cao County converged media is responsible for the broadcasting, rebroadcasting, and transmission of radio and television programs, as well as providing technical support for their broadcast. And their advertising business covers all townships in the county. They not only handle the design, production, and publication of radio, television, and new media advertisements but also undertake the collection, archiving, and management of all radio and television audiovisual materials in the county. However, some regions choose to directly rebroadcast programs from provincial and central media platforms. For example, in the central region of Shandong, the Gaomi converged media center rebroadcasts programs from central, provincial, and Weifang television. It is also responsible for the signal transmission of Gaomi radio station, advertising, cultural industry operations, and “converged media +”.

Located in the economically developed eastern and central regions of Shandong Province, the Gaomi and Jiaozhou converged media centers have adopted focused communication strategies in one or two key areas. For example, Jiaozhou Converged Media Center is responsible for interviewing, producing, and broadcasting high-quality programs, recording or live-streaming events, providing public cultural services, and actively promoting innovation in program formats and content to build an omnimedia platform. Jiaozhou Converged Media Center is also involved in planning, editing, layout, and printing a newspaper distributed to local government departments, enterprises, and community representatives. It also manages advertising and related revenue-generating projects for various media platforms, including radio, television, newspapers, apps, and official WeChat accounts.

3.2. Shared Technology Platform: The Lightning Cloud of Shandong TV Support County-level Converged Media

In China, provincial TV stations often provide the technical infrastructure for county-level converged media centers. For instance, Sichuan TV established the Panda Cloud, and Jiangsu TV introduced the Litchi Cloud. The Lightning Cloud, constructed by Shandong TV and supported by Shandong Broadcast and Telecom Information Co., Ltd., plays a connecting role in government services, providing a platform for collaborative engagement among media at the provincial, municipal, and county levels. [18] The construction model of the cloud platform is characterized by integration. Lightning Cloud, as Shandong TV’s converged media news production platform, enables the seamless integration of topic selection, interviewing, writing, editing, reviewing, publishing, and evaluation. Besides, the platform supports various

media formats, including text, images, audio, and video, meeting the diverse demands of news content in the era of media convergence.

Secondly, the cloud platform exhibits efficiency and flexibility. Its efficiency lies in the optimal utilization of computing, storage, and networking resources. The platform dynamically allocates and schedules resources using cloud computing technology to ensure smooth progress throughout the news production process. Its flexibility is demonstrated through the optimization of news production workflows. The platform can adjust production processes according to specific needs, accommodating various news reporting requirements. Thirdly, the cloud platform prioritizes security and stability. In the era of media convergence, the platform must ensure the security and stability of news content. So, it employs multiple security measures, including data encryption, user authentication, and access control, to guarantee the security of news content during transmission, storage, and usage.

From the current situation of county-level converged media centers in Shandong Province, the Lightning Cloud can make adjustments based on real-time feedback from county-level converged media, using a comprehensive coordination approach to strengthen and effectively utilize county-level converged media centers. [19] County-level converged media centers in Shandong, such as Shanghai Converged Media Centers and Cao County Converged Media Centers, complement each other's strengths, breaking conventional live broadcasting models. These converged media centers focus on local characteristics and brands, constructing a platform for civilized practices. According to the results of clue ethnography, different types of county-level converged media centers have transitioned from products to industries under the guideline of "taking root in the local area, serving the local area." This has vigorously driven industrial progress and regional development.

4. Discussion: A Comparative Analysis of County-Level Converged Media Centers in Shandong

Different types of county-level converged media centers exhibit unique characteristics: the affordance of information technology has changed social patterns in rural areas, shaping social relationships in the digital era. Based on a comparative analysis of county-level converged media centers in Shandong Province, this study finds that these centers have somewhat bridged the digital divide between rural and urban areas. They play a positive role in reshaping rural culture and tribal identity, preserving rural memory.

4.1. Rebuilding Local Tribes: County-level converged media centers promote rural retribalization

Directly impacted by the transition to modernization, the hollowing-out issue in rural China has garnered widespread attention in recent years. Urbanization has led to a significant number of rural residents moving into cities, resulting in a series of problems, such as weak relationships. County-level converged media has reconstructed crucial social media platforms. Platforms like Weibo, WeChat official accounts, and Douyin have become focal points of county-level converged media, attracting both those who stay in their hometowns and those who leave. For example, county-level converged media coverage of local celebrities can quickly capture the attention of residents. In May 2022, a video news titled "Passing of an Opera Giant! Honoring Ma Jinfeng, the master of Yu Opera from Cao County" was posted on

Douyin by Cao County Converged Media, attracting a significant amount of attention from people from Cao County. Comments such as “Rest in peace” and “Two of the top five Yu Opera actresses come from Cao County. Cao County is remarkable” demonstrate strong retribalization characteristics.

Furthermore, this study found that county-level converged media provides a new platform for the inheritance and innovation of rural culture. Through live streaming and short videos, county-level converged media shows promote rural culture, attracting more tourists and investors to visit and consume in the county. Promoting local specialties also serves as a crucial channel for monetizing traffic for county-level converged media. For instance, the collaboration between Shanghe Converagd Media and the Agricultural and Rural Bureau of Shanghe County confirmed this phenomenon. The short video titled “Using Round Pipes to Support Plum Trees: Ensuring Adequate Sunlight and Facilitating Fruit Thinning and Harvest Management,” released in June 2021, shows the development of modern agriculture in Shanghe County Comments such as “High-quality fruits” and “Plums taste better when they receive sufficient sunlight” reflect the intention to prioritize the development of local agriculture.

The proliferation of new media has driven retribalization, where the characteristics of direct and timely communication from the tribal era are revived and under the promotion of county-level converged media, individuals originally scattered across cyberspace reaggregate into new communities based on common geographical relationships, culture, and values. This phenomenon resembles the tribalization of primitive societies. For county governance, the key to rallying people and promoting local cultural identity lies in uniting people to promote development. In October 2023, Jiaozhou Converged Media released a video titled “Getting Rich from Rearing Silkworms,” which narrated the story of Jiang Xumeng and his wife’s journey to prosperity through farming and live-streaming sales. The following month, they released “A Bite of Jiaozhou,” which delved into the history and stories behind the cultivation of Jiaozhou Chinese cabbage. These stories of local industry development are inspiring and help residents better understand the actual state of regional economic development.

4.2. Prominent Homogenization Trend: The Transmission Dilemma of Short Videos in County-Level Converged Media Centers

Present communication requires county-level converged media centers to integrate into local communities. However, in practice, the performance evaluation of these centers often prioritizes traffic metrics, leading to a homogenization of content and a shortage of original material. This issue is evident in the case of Gaomi Converaged Media. Despite Gaomi being the hometown of Nobel Prize-winning author Mo Yan, various factors (such as copyright issues and communication restrictions) result in a need for more original content in the media center's short videos, mostly sourced from other media. This situation is common among local media in China and mirrors the homogenization problem during the era of metropolitan newspapers.

This study used the clue ethnography method to analyze the challenges faced in constructing county-level converged media centers. We found that under the existing evaluation system, there is a lack of originality in content, and a contradiction exists between the pursuit of traffic and the demand for public welfare. Besides, incubating content production projects that require long-term investment is difficult. Shanghe

Converged Media's focus on local weather news exhibits a scattered pattern. For example, the comments section of the video Colorful Clouds Appear in the Sky Over Shanghe has turned into a wishing pool, where people commented, "Wishing all our dreams come true," "Shanghe is getting better and better," "Hope we all get in." While these comments align with current internet communication habits, some noticeable issues remain, such as unoriginal content gaining significant communication effects.

We observed that the demand for social interaction and the shared characteristics of county-level communities constrain the communication topics of county-level converged media centers. For instance, the news released by Shanghai Converged Media about a local woman accidentally falling into the water and the subsequent rescue operation conducted by the police was targeted at an audience related to the locality. As a result, comments such as "Salute to the police" and "Well done, officer. We are proud of you" highlighted the sense of local pride. While such communication strategies contribute to shaping the image of local media, they also restrict the further communication of local content.

5. Conclusion

County-level converged media centers in Shandong Province have effectively empowered rural revitalization, facilitating the effective dissemination of information and the widespread promotion of rural culture stimulating rural economic vitality and strengthening social governance capabilities. According to research findings, these centers have promoted the digital transformation of rural society, enhanced cultural identity, achieved rural revitalization, and bridged the urban-rural digital divide by adopting tailored content innovation strategies. For example, Cao County Converged Media focuses on local events and residents to resonate with the audience, while Shanghe Converged Media highlights modern agriculture and shows development achievements. Similarly, Jiaozhou Converged Media emphasizes rural revitalization and highlights local characteristics. However, the issue of homogenization suggests that county-level converged media centers need to innovate content production mechanisms further, encourage in-depth exploration and creative expression of regional cultural characteristics, and enhance audience appeal through differentiated content. Additionally, these centers can explore diversified strategies to enhance sustainable development capabilities. These are all considerations for the future development of county-level converged media centers.

In the future, county-level converged media centers should deepen media convergence strategies and use advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data to better serve the diversified needs of rural revitalization. Additionally, they should strengthen the convergence with rural industries, such as intelligent agriculture and rural tourism, not only communicating information but also promoting rural industrial advancement and increasing farmers' income. Furthermore, county-level media centers should enhance cross-regional cooperation and share experiences, establishing a new pattern of converged media development characterized by resource sharing and complementary advantages, thus empowering the national rural revitalization strategy. In summary, as critical participants in the rural revitalization strategy, county-level converged media centers should adopt a more open approach to lead rural society into an era of well-rounded revitalization.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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