



The Omnimedia Communication System Oriented Management Strategies of the Mainstream Media Group in China: A Perspective of Niche Strategy

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study and analyze the management strategies of the mainstream media group at different stages of media convergence in China. The sample used in this study was Chongqing Daily Newspaper Group in 22 years interval between 2001 – 2023. From the perspective of media ecology, this study was under the theory framework of niche strategy theory. This study adopted coding method of proceduralized grounded theory to analyze the data and to build the theory. The results showed that (1) the mainstream media group adopted multiple niche strategies to adapt to the media convergence ecology, (2) integration and creation strategies were used widely, (3) production management and operation management, in which niche strategies were used most widely, were the most active and important functional areas of the mainstream media group under media convergence. There are some limitations of the study. Although the single case is representative, generalizability is a common criticism of the approach. Future research should adopt the multi-case study to improve the generality of the results. The date source derived from all kinds of literature as the public literature due to the failure of finding enough proper informants involving the whole process of media convergence development of CDNG, which may weaken the reality and accurate of the data. Future research should interview related informants as far as possible to ensure that all the information used are well triangulated. Data in this study are coded with the three types of coding in the ground theory. The coding is subjective in some degree. Subjectivity results in different data interpretation, which may affect the validity of the results. Future research should adopt a mixed method to verify the qualitative results.

Keywords: Omnimedia communication system, media ecology, niche strategy, mainstream media group, media management

Introduction

With the media convergence development, for the mainstream media group in China are facing two challenges commercially and politically. The emerging media constantly breaks through the existing media forms and media patterns. Plenty of private emerging media have been growing rapidly under the impetus of market competition. In contrast, the traditional mainstream media owned by the state lack competitive vitality with retarded system and



mechanism reform. Chinese government and the Communist Party of China is determined to construct an Omnimedia communication system with content construction as the fundamental, advanced technology as the backbone and innovative management as the guarantee, to promote in-depth media convergence, to implement omnimedia communication projects and to strengthen new mainstream media (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2020; The 13th National People's Congress, 2021).

In order to meet the commercial challenge and the national cultural strategies, it is vital for the mainstream media group to innovate the management strategies to adapt to the environmental changes.

The media convergence development of the mainstream media group in China has experienced several stages with different features. At different stages, the management strategies of the mainstream media group change as well in some aspects such as organization structure, human resource management, production management and operation management.

Because media convergence is the process of Omnimedia, based on the research on the management strategies of the mainstream media group under media convergence, this research is to help industrial practitioners and the policy makers draw out some lessons of media management from the past and present of media convergence, which can enlighten the Omnimedia communication system construction in the future.

The media niche strategy theory of Media Ecology can well explain the management strategy of the mainstream media group. The media niche strategy theory proposes 4 types of niche strategies (Shao, R.P. 2008). The management strategy of the mainstream media group can be described in certain niche strategy.

Using a case study of Chongqing Daily Newspaper Group (CDNG), one of the top 10 newspaper and publishing groups in China in terms of total economic size (National Press and Publication Administration, 2021) and 30 operating companies, 15 newspapers, 4 periodicals, 16 websites and 4 mobile apps (Upstream news, 2022), this study aims to study the management strategy of the mainstream media group. By examining the management strategies in organizational structure, human resource management, production management and operation management of the mainstream media group at different media convergence development stages of the mainstream media, this paper will contribute to existing related media management research and provide suggestions for policy makers, industrial practitioners that are grounded in the empirical reality of the mainstream media. Moreover, by examining the phenomenon from the media ecology perspective, the findings can shed light on media management of the mainstream media group. Specifically,

Research Objective

- 1) To study the management strategies of the mainstream media group adopts at different stage of media convergence?
- 2) To study media convergence development, how do the management strategies change?

Literature Review



1. Omnimedia and Omnimedia Communication System Construction

The term “omnimedia” in the sense of communication can be traced back to July 1995, when *Interactive Daily* published an article introducing a multimedia publisher called Omnimedia (Omnimedia to Showcase Interactive Products. (1995).

“Omnimedia” was a concept with ambiguity in China, until Xi Jinping, the Chinese President, interpreted omnimedia as “Four-all Media” (Xinhua News Agency Commentator, 2019). Xi indicated that with continuous development of omnimedia, media would be anywhere and anytime by all information technology means with all people participation and fully play its role. Because in Chinese “any” and “fully” can be expressed as the same word “all”, Xi used “Four-all Media” to describe the characteristics of omnimedia for expression convenience.

In October 2019, the fourth plenary session of the 19th the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee (2019) planned to build an omnimedia communication system with content construction as the foundation, advanced technology as the backbone and innovative management as the guarantee. In September 2020, omnimedia communication system construction formally became an object in the government official document (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2020). The *People's Republic of China's 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Goals for 2035* (The 13th National People's Congress, 2021) further put forward to implement omnimedia communication project. All these manifest that as the development strategy of Chinese cultural undertakings, Omnimedia communication system construction is the development goal of media in China.

2. Mainstream Media and Mainstream Media Group

The mainstream media in China is defined as the mouthpiece of the Party and the government with diversified communication means, strong communication capability home and abroad, powerful influence on the audience representatives at all levels of society and good economic profit (Xinhua News Agency Research Group, 2004; , W.H, & Wang, J., 2021). In China, in order to make full use of internal resource advantages, talent advantages and market advantages, coordinate internal division of labor, and improve organizational efficiency, several mainstream media are integrated to establish the mainstream media groups by the government administrative intervention.

3. Media Management Under the Background of Media Convergence

In China, scholars' research on media management under the background of media convergence usually came from the observation of industrial practice.

In organizational structure, organizational structure reform should build flat, flexible, virtual and team-oriented omnimedia organizational structure on the deconstruction of traditional organizational structure (Zhou, Q.Q. 2007). In the new converged media organization environment, it is suitable for the “flat” management mode with fewer levels, and the efficiency is improved through the reduction of levels (Gao, F.A., & Xu, J.H. (2019). The level of management should shift from institutional center to operational center (Wang, G. 2016).

In human resource management, employees should be reasonably classified according to different tasks and responsibilities. At the same time, the comprehensive quality education of



relevant personnel should be strengthened. The specific scope of responsibilities of each person should be clarified (Gao, F.A., & Xu, J.H. (2019). Under the converged media production mode, the staff has transformed from traditional media to converged media (Shi, X 2020). The newspaper group should timely change the way of institutional change in the reform of personnel management system, and give full play to the positive role of induced institutional change (Zhou, G. 2015). The change of personnel requires the reconstruction of assessment, income allocation and incentive mechanism (Chen, N, X., & Li, G. (2016).; Gao, F.A., & Xu, J.H. (2019). Unified performance appraisal should establish at all levels (Zang, , Y.N.2018; Sun, L.2020).

In production management, Shi, X. (2020) believed that technological innovation promoted production and lead media convergence (Jia, L.P., & Li, Z.Y. (2021). The significant change production management was the establishment of central kitchen. The content production of the central kitchen followed the two-way interactive mode of “Demand ↔ supply”, and reformed the production mode of the content supply side through establishing a communication channel matrix, developing technical public service tools, creating a converged media studio, building a database and starting a mobile terminal, responding to the demand-side changes of mobile receiving terminals, social news reception, youth of public opinion positions, cross-border technology, and popularization of we-media establishment (Wang J.C., & Zhang, Y. 2019).

In operation management, the integration trend of multiple profit models in the new media era is strengthened (Yin, X.Y. 2017). The development of expanding business makes the media move towards diversified business management (Wang, M.Y. 2015). “News+information+service” (Gao, F.A., & Xu, J.H. (2019). and “News+government affairs service+ commercial service” (Sun, L. 2020) are common profitable models. Wang, Q (2014) believed that a core asset, copyright management process and industry chain should be established. Under the vision of media convergence, the new mainstream media should abandon the homogenized resources in the traditional business in time, invest the resources spun off from it into the new market, and develop new businesses with appreciation potential (Chen, X., 2019).

In the context of media convergence, approaches of research abroad on media organizations management were mainly carried out in two directions. One was the internal management research of media organizations. Dynamic capabilities and adaptive ability could provide media firms with a competitive advantage in transformative and largely unpredictable media environment (Oliver, J.J. (2015, 2016); Putri et al., 2018). These capabilities made media organizations not only adapt to the business environment, but try to shape it (Teece, D.J. 2018). For the level of uncertainty in the media environment made it difficult for executives to develop media strategy (Oliver, J.J. 2020), and so the development of tools for analysis becomes important, and different tools helped frame strategy (Pettigrew et al., 2009). Oliver, J.J. (2014; 2017; 2018) presented a conceptual framework which focused on the management of intangible resources, skills and capabilities (Knowledge-based View) and tangible resources, skills and capabilities (Resourced-based View). Because both general and specific managerial competencies are crucial for a media company' success (Artero, J.P. & Manfredi, J.L, 2015), media managers mostly use tools like Strategic Alliances, Benchmarking, Social Media



Programs, Outsourcing, Strategic Planning and Scenario and Contingency Planning (Oliver, J.J. 2020). In today's media ecology, the fundamental challenge was not economic, but a change in the mode and structure of news production (Picard, R. G. 2014). To meet the challenge, for example, newspapers diversified the business line to produce online video

The other direction was the research on media ecosystem. Dimmick (2013) explained the media competition with the niche theory. Levins, R. (1968), Schoener, T. W. (1974), Dimmick, J., & Rothenbuhler, E. (1984), Dimmick, J., Patterson S.J., & Albarran, A. (1992) proposed measurement methods and formulas of niche width, niche overlap and niche advantage, which provided tools for investigating media competition. Kostovska, I., et al. (2021). defined media ecosystem as "a multi-layered and dynamic structure of interdependent organizations and stakeholders that interact and co-evolve around one or several focal firms, that provide media products or services, to create a joint value proposition."

4. Niche Strategy

According to Dimmick, J. (2013). a media niche is the relationship between a medium and its environment. When two media units or communication populations share a niche or use the same resource, competition occur due to overlapping niches. In order to avoid the competition or be at an advantage, the population adopts different niche strategies. Usually, there are four niche strategies: niche integration, niche separation, niche segmentation, niche creation (Shao, R.P. 2008). Niche integration strategy refers to centering on the main brand and core niche, recombining and reasonably transforming multiple media according to their correlation with the center, or even merging other media, while gradually giving up or publicly auctioning its own investment or assets that are far from the core business of the media, and focusing its main resources and energy on the most advantageous projects of the media to launch new competition. Niche separation strategy refers to the competitive mechanism and means by which two or more media species, when competing for the same niche that is not rich, avoid high-intensity competition and take reasonable avoidance, separation or even complete separation of each other for the amount of resources contained in different niche sequences or levels. Niche segmentation strategy refers to the full utilization of ecological resources and media advantages according to the characteristics and functions of the media to achieve media differentiation competition. Niche creation strategy is a competitive measure that indicates the advantage of filling a blank niche quickly. In essence, niche strategy is a way to reorganize and deploy media resources and elements. Therefore, it can be regarded a kind of management strategy.

Media management is interested in the effective management of media outlets. It means for a media organization, management can be improved in all functional areas including strategy, personnel, operations, marketing, finance and entrepreneurship (Khajeheian, 2020). All these functional areas involving the media elements construct the micro media ecology. In micro media ecology, this research focused on the functional areas of management: organizational structure, human resource management, production management, and operation management.



Research Methodology

Research Method

This study adopts case research methodology, which is particularly appropriate. First, there were “how” questions in this research. Case study is most suitable for answering “how” and “why” questions, and for uncontrollable research objects and events, case study facilitates the interpretation of current phenomena or in-depth analysis of social phenomena (Yin, R.K. 2010), which is conducive to a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena or processes (Pan, S. L., & Tan, B. (2011). Second, the mainstream media management is going through a major transition in the situation of media convergence development. The case study method allows one to examine situation. It means the situation itself is part of the story (Myers, M.D. (2009)

Population and sample

According to News and Publishing Industry Analysis Report of 2021 (2022), there were 43 newspaper publishing groups and 75 radio, film and television groups in China. This research selected Chongqing Daily Newspaper Group (CDNG) as the case. CDNG is a provincial Party newspaper group, a representative of the mainstream media group in China. It founded in 2001, which experienced the whole processes of media convergence in China. Since the foundation of CDNG, it has been owned both legacy media and emerging media. The media composition can provide good condition to observe the media convergence development at different times. As a provincial mainstream media group, CDNG enjoyed moderate resource without extremely condition unlike the national and district & county media group. This condition is helpful to present representative data for generalizability.

Data Collection

Data collected in this study were from open source such as articles by the staff of CDNG, annual reports of CDNG, documents of the government, media interviews with the senior managers of CDNG, news reports on CDNG, official websites profiles of CDNG, personal communication with the staff of CDNG, studies by scholars and officials outside CDNG. This research collected data from 115 piece of sources. Among them, articles written by CNDG staff, annual report, media interviews with the senior managers of CDNG, official websites profile of CDNG and personal communication with CDNG staff accounted for 52.16%, which were believed relative direct sources with high reliability.

Data Analysis

The data collected were divided into two types. One appeared to be anchored on an evolutionary process. This type of data was roughly classified by the year. According to the development stage of media convergence proposed in the literature review, these data were classified into different stages by the year. With repeated comparison and interpretation of the data, this study presented the media convergence development stages of CDNG with different features: the stage of website development (2001-2013), the stage of mobile application development (2014-2018), the stage of key platform Development (2019 to present).

The other type of the data collected, which appeared to be centered on a unique organizational routine, were organized through “open coding” (Strauss A., & Corbin, J. 1998). This type data was marked with year information for follow-up analysis, according to the



context of the data. Those roughly coded data were classified into corresponding niche strategy type. Vertically, data collected were organized diachronically according to the development stage of media convergence of CDNG, and horizontally, were organized synchronically according to the themes.

After all the data were classified into correct themes, this study followed the coding steps of proceduralized grounded theory (Strauss A., & Corbin, J. 1998; Chen, X. (2019). with open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Finally there were 6 main categories in organization structure niche strategies, 10 main categories in human resource management niche strategies, 12 main categories in production management niche strategies, 14 main categories in operation management niche strategies.

Research Results

Niche Strategies in Organization Structure

Niche strategies in the organization structure experienced a process from separation to integration because of the acceleration of media convergence. The integration happened in post, department, media and the key platforms. The department and divisions were established to adapt to the constant change of media convergence.

Table 1 Niche Strategies in Organization Structure at Different Media Convergence Stages

Niche Strategy	Website Development (2001-2013)	Mobile Application Development (2014-2018)	Key Platform Development (2019 to present)
Integration	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key platforms
Separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media 	-	-
Segmentation	-	-	-
Creation	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department setting

Note. Compiled by the author.

Niche Strategies in Human Resource Management

In human resource management, multiple niche strategies were adopted. At the stage of mobile application development, the adoption of multiple niche strategies was most significant. News team firstly integrated at the stage of mobile application development. As technology played a more important role in media convergence, technical team integrates at the stage of key platform development. Employee management separation occurred at the stage of website development due to media separation. With mobile application development, human resources separated from print media to mobile clients, and from ordinary mobile clients to key clients. Human resources deployment, assessment and training were segmented. For creation, human



resource development by employing talents changed to employing talents and training. It reflected that media convergence urged traditional media talent to transform into talents with omnimedia skill by constant training. The employee assessment adjusted the assessment indicators to stress the assessment of the new media, as the new media became the dominant media.

Table 2 Niche Strategies in Human Resource Management at Different Media Convergence Stages

Niche Strategy	Website Development (2001-2013)	Mobile Application Development (2014-2018)	Key Development (2019 to present)	Platform
Integration	-	• News team	• Technical team • News team	-
Separation	• Employee management	• Print media and ordinary new media human resources	-	-
Segmentation	-	• News resources deployment • Employee assessment • Training	human	-
Creation	• External human resource development	• Internal human resource development • External human resource development	• Internal human resource development • External human resource development • Employee assessment	-

Note. Compiled by the author.

Niche Strategies in Production Management

Integration and creation strategies were the main strategy in production management. As the media convergence developed, niche strategies changes almost every aspect of production management. Although at the beginning of media convergence, the production process was separated, integration and creation were the main niche strategies adopted in the production management at the stages of mobile application development and key platform development. The production was all-round integrated including producers from different media and post, the process, the platform, regulation, and elements. Among them, production process was constantly integrated in different ways. Creations emerged in all aspects of production including producers, tools, technology, process, mechanism, mode, management, products and the news access to the audience. Among them, products were always created. It showed that



the change in production management was most significant at the stage of mobile application development.

Table 3 Niche Strategies in Production Management at Different Media Convergence Stages

Niche Strategy	Website Development (2001-2013)	Mobile Application Development (2014-2018)	Key Platform Development (2019 to present)
Integration	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers • Process • Platform • Regulation • Elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers • Process
Separation	• Process	-	-
Segmentation	-	-	• Professional production
Creation	• Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers • Tools • Technology • Process • Mechanism • Mode • Products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanism • Products • The news access to the audience

Note. Compiled by the author.

Niche Strategies in Operation Management

Except separation, multiple niche strategies were adopted in operation management. In operation management, changes were significant generated by different niche strategies. Firstly, the integrated information system was established covering all the data from different systems of CDNG. Then advertising and marketing business were integrated synchronizing with the marketing business management. In order to facilitate new media development at the early stage of media convergence, the assessment of legacy media and emerging media was integrated, so that the both media were attached the same importance to. With increase of media and media types within the mainstream media group, there was constantly media reposition and segmentation in the terms of target audience and media nature to avoid intra-competition. The segmentation of media position resulted in the assessment segmentation of media and department. Marketing business was segmented into different levels as well. As the new media types increase, the new matrix constantly renewed ranging from websites, mobile apps to the third-party platforms outside the Group. The business field expanded with the media convergence development from digital newspaper, printing, distribution to big data management, Internet of Things application, Internet credit and management business and game sports. The business mode developed from distribution model, the advertising model, the advertising + distribution model to “content + technology + operation” and “news + government service + commercial business”. Based on the transformation of media industry to



the Internet and converged media industry, diversified industries develop covering tourism, real estate, culture, creativity, exhibition, sports and health industry and asset capital operation. New media matrix, industry and business constantly expanded. Besides, creation niche strategy was applied in copyright management, media assessment management, new media function and media resource management.

Table 4 Niche Strategies in Operation Management at Different Media Convergence Stages

Niche Strategy	Website Development (2001-2013)	Mobile Application Development (2014-2018)	Key Platform Development (2019 to present)
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information system in the later period Advertising business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing business Media resource management Media assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing business management
Separation	-	-	-
Segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media position Media and department assessment Marketing business 	-
Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New media matrix Industry development Business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New media matrix Copyright management Media assessment Media function Industry development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New media matrix Industry development Business Business management Media resource management

Note. Compiled by the author.

Research Discussion

In the perspective of the media convergence development stage of the mainstream media, as the media convergence developed, more niche strategies were adopted to ensure the management innovation could keep pace with the media ecological environment change. It demonstrated that management reform was most significant at the stage of mobile application development. At this stage, there was tremendous technology upgrading in production, which



drove the integration of news team in human resource management, media resource management and created copyright management and media assessment management in operation management. It found technology innovation was the main driving force of management mode change under media convergence.

In the perspective of functional areas of management, the use of strategies was uneven in different functional areas. It implied that organization structure in integrated way could adapt to media convergence. In human resource management, creation strategy applied to human resource development at every media convergence development stage of the mainstream media group. Training was the main measure to develop internal human resource. In production management, it showed that production management reform was most significant and deep under the media convergence. Production process experienced reform from separation to integration. In operation management, it seemed media matrix, media position, industry, business and marketing business management were the most important aspects of operation management.

In the perspective of niche strategy, integration and creation strategies were used most widely. It revealed that integration and creation were the main measure for the mainstream media group to manage media convergence change. Niche strategies were adopted most in production management and operation management, which showed these two were the most active and important functional areas of the mainstream media group under media convergence.

Recommendation

1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research converted the extroversion-oriented niche strategy to introversion management strategy. Niche strategy was used to analyze external competition, now this research provided niche strategy as the tool for media management research.

The significant change in niche strategy happened at the stage of mobile application. At that time, CDNG researched & developed the central kitchen, which reengineered the production process. There was a continual technological upgrading on the central kitchen. Only during 2013-2018, it iterated for 3 times. Therefore, Technology is and will continue to be the direct driving power for media convergence development of the mainstream media group.

2. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations of the study. Although the single case is representative, generalizability is a common criticism of the approach. Future research should adopt the multi-case study to improve the generality of the results. The date source derived from all kinds of literature as the public literature due to the failure of finding enough proper informants involving the whole process of media convergence development of CDNG, which may weaken the reality and accurate of the data. Future research should interview related informants as far as possible to ensure that all the information used are well triangulated. Data in this study are coded with the three types of coding in the ground theory. The coding is subjective in some degree. Subjectivity results in different data interpretation, which may affect the validity of the results. Future research should adopt a mixed method to verify the qualitative results.



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