

An Empirical Study on the County-Level Integrated Media in the Context of Rural Revitalization: the Analysis of Factors Affecting the Audience's Evaluation of Service Function

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Abstract: The construction of county-level integrated media centers has been an important field for the development of new mainstream media in China. Based on the data of the questionnaire survey, using correlation analysis and causal step-wise regression methods, this study examined the relevant factors that affect the audience's evaluation of service function of county-level integrated media in China. The study finds out that the media credibility of the county-level integrated media serves as a mediating variable, and it plays an important mediating role between the media contact behavior and the evaluation of its basic service function and of its role in promoting rural revitalization. Therefore, in the context of rural revitalization, in order to better construct county-level integrated media centers, we should attach great importance to cultivating audience's media contact habits and enhancing the credibility in county-level integrated media.

Keywords: County-Level Integrated Media; Media Contact; Media Credibility; Media Convergence; Rural Revitalization

Introduction

County-level integrated media is a new type of mainstream media born in 2014 under the background of China's promotion of "integrated media" as a national strategy. The construction and development of it has always adhered to the tenet of "guiding the masses and serving the masses", constantly creating and improving various convenient service functions. With its natural advantage of being close to the grassroots and rural areas, county-level integrated media bridges the "last kilometer" in rural revitalization of information dissemination. While the academic world has also conducted normative discussions on the current situation and problems of the media center construction from the angle of the communicator. However, the research of the audience's angle remains few. Therefore, based on the survey data of the audience, in this study, we first conduct an empirical investigation on the factors affecting audience's evaluation of the effects of the county-level integrated media.

1. Literature review and research hypothesis

At present, most of the academic literature on county-level integrated media take the media as a research object, or the research starts from the angle of the communicator; the paper from the angle of the audience and the literature using "audience" as the research object is very rare. The following part is the summary of previous academic literature on media contact and media credibility of the audience.

The research on media credibility in the international academic circle can be traced back to Charnley, M.V.'s research on the accuracy of news reports in newspaper in 1936, and Hovland, C.'s series of experimental studies on the influence of information source credibility on the persuasion effect in the 1950s.^[1] Chinese academic world has been paying attention to media credibility since 2003.

In 2005, Li Xiaojing discussed the indicators of China's media credibility and what factors might affect the Chinese audience's evaluation of the media credibility in the article *Research on Chinese Mass Media Credibility Indicators*.^[2]

In the same year, Yu Guoming published an article on the concept, empirical investigation and component of mass media credibility^[3], which was an early qualitative research document on media credibility. The empirical research in this paper was conducted by taking media credibility as an independent variable.

Written in 2017, The sources and occurrence mechanism of media credibility in China: An empirical study based on CGSS2010 Data^[4], the paper took the central media credibility as the explained variable, revealed how influencing factors and mechanism judged and explained the changing trend of media credibility.

In 2018, Ma Chao published Research on Media Use and Media Literacy of Urban and Rural Youth in the Digital Media Era: An Empirical Survey of the Youth in S Province^[5], which explored the differences in youth media literacy caused by different demographic attributes such as gender, urban and rural household registration in the context of new media. The research also found that the audience's credibility evaluation of new media could be positively predicted by their dependence on traditional and new media.

We looking back on the existing research in domestic academic circles, generally speaking, there exists the following characteristics: normative discussions dominate and empirical studies remain few; most of the empirical studies focus on mass media, and few on county-level integrated media; the empirical research with media credibility as the explanatory variable is still to be accomplished. The purpose of this paper is first to take the audience's evaluation on the county-level integrated media service function as the explained variable, and reveal the mediating role and the occurrence mechanism of media credibility between the media contact and the service function evaluation; secondly, according to the research findings, this paper seeks to providing suggestions for the development of integrated media.

This research constructed a model of "Media contact—Media credibility—Service function evaluation" for county-level integrated media audiences, and we proposed the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The contact behavior of county-level integrated media is positively correlated with the media credibility.

Hypothesis 1a: The emergence of usage is positively correlated with the media credibility.

Hypothesis 1b: The contact frequency is positively correlated with the media credibility.

Hypothesis 2: The credibility of county-level integrated media is positively correlated with the evaluation of its service function.

Hypothesis 2a: The credibility is positively correlated with the evaluation of the feedback of its basic service function.

Hypothesis 2b: The credibility is positively correlated with the evaluation of its promotion of rural revitalization.

Hypothesis 3: The credibility of county-level integrated media plays a mediating role between media contact and service function evaluation.

Hypothesis 3a: The credibility plays a mediating role between media contact and basic service function evaluation.

Hypothesis 3b: The credibility plays a mediating role between media contact and evaluation of its promotion of the rural revitalization.

Hypothesis 4: There is a certain correlation between individual's population attributes and media contact behavior.

2. Statistics, variables and measures

The data used in this paper were collected from questionnaires. In order to verify the hypothesis proposed, this study designed a questionnaire and conducted research through the Tencent Questionnaire platform, a total of 284 valid samples being collected.

2.1 Service function and operationalization of county-level integrated media

The explained variable in this paper is the respondents' evaluation of the service function of the county-level integrated media, reflecting the degree of the extension and development of basic media function, service function and governance function in the framework of integrated media construction^[6]. The questionnaire includes two scales: Scale A is an evaluation of the basic functions of county-level integrated media; Scale B is an evaluation of its effect in promoting rural revitalization.

In Scale A, the basic media function was divided into three categories: information communication function, public opinion guidance and response function, and external publicity and promotion function. The service function was in two categories: government service function and life service function. The governance function was in two categories: inquiry of

politics in network and community governance. The actual effect of the functions above was measured by specific guiding questions, using Likert scale. The higher is the score, the better is the actual effect. Using the factor analysis method, the three indicators were synthesized into a common factor "the actual service function of county-level integrated media in promoting rural revitalization". Then, reliability analysis and factor analysis were performed on them. The Cronbach' Alpha was 0.958, KMO=0.948, indicating that the scale data were highly correlated and suitable for factor analysis.

Scale B referred to the index description of China's national policies on rural revitalization, including five indicators, which were obtained directly from the respondents' scores given to the service function. The higher is the score, the more the function was recognized by respondents. The sum of the scores is the respondents' evaluation of the overall effect of county-level integrated media in promoting rural revitalization. Then, reliability analysis and factor analysis were performed on them. The Cronbach' Alpha was 0.974, KMO=0.959>0.5, indicating that the scale data were highly correlated and suitable for factor analysis.

The significance of spherical test showed $P=0.000<0.05$ in both of 2 scales, confirming that the differences were statistically significant.

2.2 County-level integrated media contact

An important explanatory variable in this study is county-level integrated media contact. "Media contact" is a general concept, the operation and measurement methods of which are various in the current academic circle^[7]. In previous studies, Den's research^[8] focused on the specific content of the audience's attention; Lee^[9] abandoned the simple measurement of media usage time, instead he inquired the audience's media contact to messages. This questionnaire had a total of 5 sets of items to describe the interviewee's using habits of integrated media, including the emergence of using behavior, the specific name of media, contact frequency, type of content concerned, and media credibility.

The emergence of using behavior is whether the first occurrence of using integrated media exists, which was a question in the questionnaire: "whether you've used or exposed to county-level integrated media."

Media contact to messages was a question in the questionnaire: "How often do you use the county-level integrated media platforms (choose the one closest to your usual use frequency)?" The virtual variables were assigned 5-1 points. The score goes higher as the contact becomes more frequent.

2.3 County-level integrated media credibility

In the hypothesis of this study, the credibility of county-level integrated media exists as an intermediary variable. The media credibility has been obtained by asking the respondents to rate the credit of integrated media. The virtual variables were assigned 1-5 points respectively.

2.4 Individual characteristics

The study has referred to other literature and included controlled variables for individual characteristics. Since the population attributes can affect using habits of integrated media, the questionnaire has inquired the information of population attributes of the respondents, covering the basic information of the respondents, such as gender, age, education level, political status, household registration and permanent residence.

3. Method and Conclusion

3.1 The contact behavior of county-level integrated media is positively correlated with the media credibility.

The study selected two of the items measuring "media contact" as important explanatory variables and carried out a correlation analysis between the two variables and media credibility respectively. At 0.01 level (two-tailed test), All results show significant correlation:

The emergence of audience's using behavior of the county-level integrated media is correlated with the media credibility. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is 0.241, which means positively correlated. That is, the audiences who have used these media will be more inclined to trust these media.

The audience's frequency of the county-level integrated media use is weakly correlated with the media credibility. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is 0.2, which means positively correlated. That is, the audience who uses these media more frequently will be more inclined to trust these media.

3.2 The credibility of county-level integrated media is positively correlated with the evaluation of its service function.

Two scales were designed to calculate the audience's evaluation of the basic service function of county-level integrated media and the effect in promoting rural revitalization. The study carried out a correlation analysis between the two variables and media credibility respectively. At 0.01 level (two-tailed test), all results show significant correlation:

The credibility of county-level integrated media is correlated with the evaluation of its basic service function. The Pearson coefficient is 0.443, which is positively correlated. That is, the audience who trusts more these media are more inclined to recognize the performance of its basic service function, and thus make higher evaluations.

The credibility of county-level integrated media is correlated with the evaluation of its effect in promoting rural revitalization. The Pearson coefficient is 0.238, which is positively correlated. That is, the audience who trusts more these media are more inclined to recognize its performance in rural revitalization, and thus make higher evaluations.

3.3 The credibility of county-level integrated media plays a mediating role between media contact and service function evaluation.

The study adopted the causal step-wise regression test among the common intermediary effect test methods as follow:

Analyze the regression of media contact to service function evaluation, and media contact to audiences' media credibility, then conduct a significance test on the regression coefficient;

Analyze the regression of media contact to service function evaluation after adding the intermediary variable of media credibility, and conduct a significance test on the regression coefficient.

The following results were obtained, and the specific data are shown in Table 1:

Media contact (emergence) -media credibility-basic service function evaluation: a complete mediation;

Media contact (frequency) -media credibility-basic service function evaluation: mediating effect is not obvious, but can play a moderating role;

Media contact (emergence) -media credibility- evaluation of the promotion of rural revitalization: a complete mediation;

Media contact (frequency) -media credibility- evaluation of the promotion of rural revitalization: mediating effect is not obvious, but can play a moderating role.

Table 1. Summary of mediation test results

Item	c Total effect	a	b	a*b intermediary effect value	a*b (Boot SE)	a*b (z value)	a*b (p value)	a*b (95% BootCI)	c' direct effect	Test conclusion
(1)	-0.487	-0.398*	5.089*	-2.026	0.002	-1032.098	0.000	-0.170 ~ -0.041	1.538	complete mediation
(2)	0.574	-0.398*	4.739*	-1.886	0.001	-1335.815	0.000	-0.110 ~ -0.017	2.461	complete mediation

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

3.4 There is a certain correlation between individual population attribute and county-level integrated media contact behavior.

The study firstly conducted independent-sample T test, single factor ANOVA analysis and homogeneity test of variance on population attributes and media contact. The detailed data are shown in Table 2.

Controlled variable: Population attributes	Explanatory variable: Media contact	Levine statistics (based on the average)	Significance of ANOVA analysis	Independent -sample T test	Correlation coefficient
Education level	Emergence of usage	4.743	0.330	/	0.307
Age	Contact frequency	1.969	0.936	/	-0.333
Political status	Contact frequency	0.687	0.260	/	0.214
Household registration	Contact frequency	1.202	/	2.001	-0.238

Conclusions are as follows:

The emergence of usage of county-level integrated media is positively correlated with audience's education level. The emergence of using behavior occurs more in the group where audiences get better education .

The contact frequency is negatively correlated with audience's age, which means older audiences have lower frequency of using media.

The contact frequency is positively correlated with audience's political appearance. Audiences with more distinct political identities show higher frequency of media contact.

The contact frequency is negatively correlated with audience's household registration. Urban residents' using frequency is higher than that of rural residents.

4. Discussion and Suggestion

With these conclusions, this paper offers the following suggestions, which can be discussed based on the three functional orientation and the practical exploration of the existing construction mode of county-level integrated media center, so as to empower the integrated media to boost rural revitalization.

4.1 Improve the service function as a trigger to attract audience

According to the concept of "media plus", county-level integrated media should be expanded from simple field of news publicity to the field of public services, from one-way communication to diversified and interactive communication, and thus enhance the interactivity. For example, county-level integrated media can influence almost every aspect of people's life. It should evolve into a "great service" concept. It is extended from the narrow sense of traditional public services to a huge public service scope covering all aspects of daily life, also shifted from single information service media to comprehensive service platform: online shopping and payment, data transaction, online medical care, online car hailing, online travel booking etc., so as to fully meet people's diversified service needs.^[10] Diligently created, county-level integrated media, a good helper of the audience, opens source to attract more people to start the use of integrated media.

4.1 Optimize communication products to enhance user engagement

In the context of the Internet, the extensive socialization of communication resources and the popularization of communication power force the county-level integrated media center to provide communication products that are more in line with users' lifestyle and habits, and firmly bond users to the platform. Therefore, it needs to significantly improve the capacity of content production and information aggregation, tap the characteristic of local culture and create localized products to the greatest extent, and enhance users' stickiness with distinctive regional characteristics and personalized services.

In the understanding of the function positioning of "News+Government+Service" of county-level integrated media center, the academic circle and industry once put the "News" function in the first place of the media, and regard government affairs and service as the marginalized product of icing on the cake. However, a new pattern of social governance is being constructed at the grassroots level. The functions of local government in China are shifting from control to service, from economic construction to public governance, and the focus of social governance and service is moving down to the grassroots level. These changes require to take non-news service functions as an important part of communication product design in order to enhance users' stickiness.

4.2 Bridge the knowledge-gap to boost rural revitalization

The 47th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China pointed out that as of December 2020, the number of netizen in our country was 989 million, and Internet popularizing rate reached 70.4%.^[11] It showed that the Internet had been fully integrated into the daily life of farmers, but the Internet popularizing rate in rural areas was still far below the national average level, the degree of mediation of farmers was generally low, and the "digital gap" between urban and rural areas was still large.

The essential attribute of county-level integrated media lies in the development concept based on Internet thinking. With the natural advantages of being close to farmers, county-level integrated media can maximize its potential of serving the countryside, agriculture and farmers from the bottom up. County-level integrated media should serve as a "window of integrated media information" ^[12] for opening agricultural information services, that is, a tiny information service window at the fingertips of farmers. On the one hand, the government needs to establish a "knowledge-based station" for farmers' training services from top to bottom, in order to break the constraints that need long-term efforts to fundamentally change, such as backward education. As the lack of knowledge and technology has led to insufficient stamina in rural development, we can broaden the ways of solving problems by integrating media products. On the other hand, we should learn the changes of farmers' information needs from authoritative experts in agriculture and rural industrial pilots from the bottom up, so as to improve the matching degree of supply and demand in agricultural information.

To realize the transmission of information in the "last one kilometer", we should not only comprehensively look into the practical rural production, but also carry out a full research on the media contact of local farmers. On this basis, we can effectively integrate all the resources, so as to create good programs and good contents in line with local farmers' aesthetic demands.

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