

The Reinforced Effect of Integrating New Media and Local Urban Broadcasting

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Abstract: With the rapid advancements in information technology and the onset of the digital age, local urban broadcasting media in China, exemplified by radio stations, confront a slew of challenges and pressures. These range from competition with new media services, online broadcasting, and a myriad of digital media platforms. Yet, amidst these challenges lies the question of how local media can transition successfully in this new media era. Taking Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 as a representative case, this paper delves into the current predicaments faced by local radio stations. Moreover, it highlights strategies leveraging new media ideologies for transformation. The broader context involves a significant shift in listener demographics and preferences, underscored by the decline in traditional radio audience size and the parallel rise in smart device listenership. As local broadcasting stations grapple with these shifts, their strategic responses—including content diversification, multi-platform engagement, and offline event integrations—become pivotal. This research encapsulates these dynamics, offering insights into the evolving landscape of local urban broadcasting in China and presenting a roadmap for traditional media entities striving to remain relevant and impactful in the digital age.

Keywords: New Media, Local Urban Broadcasting, Media Convergence, Traditional Media Transformation, Digital Transition

1. Introduction

The media landscape has experienced tumultuous shifts over the past decade, and nowhere is this transformation more evident than in the radio industry. According to the "2023 China Media Industry Development Report," the radio media audience has seen a slight contraction to 658 million, a decline driven by a 3.3% dip in contact rates. While traditional semiconductor radio listeners, predominantly the middle-aged and elderly, are diminishing, car users have taken a dip to 498 million [1]. However, an intriguing trend has emerged: smart terminals have experienced a resurgence, with the user base surging to over 400 million, marking a robust 10.8% increase from 2021. Local city radio stations, once the stalwarts of daily entertainment and information dissemination, are at a crossroads. Traditionally segmented into primary blocks like news, traffic updates, and music entertainment, these stations are now perceived as outdated, with monotonous content. The challenges don't end there. An economic downturn has precipitated a significant talent drain, with declining revenues leading to staff reductions and loss of seasoned professionals.

But it is not just internal dynamics that are exerting pressure; external factors, particularly the rise of new media, are reshaping the battleground. New media platforms, characterized by their interactivity, allow users to transition from passive consumers to active content creators. The immediacy of these platforms, combined with their multimedia capabilities, has enabled them to capture the zeitgeist, with many individual bloggers now boasting larger followings than established media outlets. Furthermore, the relatively low promotional costs associated with new media present an enticing proposition for advertisers, further intensifying the challenges faced by traditional radio stations.

However, it is not all gloom for the radio industry. As epitomized by Haikou Music Radio 916, traditional broadcasting can still carve out a niche for itself amidst these challenges. By embracing the essence of new media and integrating internet-centric thinking, Haikou Music Radio 916 has rejuvenated its operations, offering a beacon of hope for similar stations. This paper delves into this transformative journey, exploring how traditional broadcasting can innovate under the aegis of media convergence, harnessing the strengths of both worlds to craft a compelling narrative in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

The dynamic evolution of the media landscape has necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional broadcasting paradigms. As the line between traditional and new media blurs, understanding the forces shaping this transformation becomes crucial for broadcasters.

The characteristics of local radio stations further illuminate the challenges faced. Qin's case study on Xinjiang Traffic Radio indicated that local radio stations, in general, have a set pattern of broadcasts, including news, traffic, and music [2]. Zhang noted that this format, though tried and tested, is now perceived as monotonous and outdated [3]. Additionally, Zhou's research in 2020 emphasized the significant talent drain in radio stations, attributing it to declining revenues and subsequent staff reductions [4]. This talent drain, combined with a shrinking traditional listener base, presents a formidable challenge for local radio stations. While many local radio stations have faced a decline in audience size, there are certain demographics and regions where traditional broadcasting remains influential. For instance, Univision Communications Inc. reported that their stations were dominant in top markets such as Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and others, indicating the continued relevance of traditional broadcasting in specific demographics [5].

Historically, traditional broadcasting has played a foundational role in shaping the media landscape in various regions. For instance, Schenectady in New York stands as a testament to the long-standing tradition and impact of radio and television broadcasting services [6]. These stations, while maintaining a broad appeal, have always been finely attuned to local nuances. The economic downturn and the rise of digital platforms have led to a sharp decline in radio advertising revenues, especially in sectors like real estate and automobiles. Yet, it is noteworthy that significant events and entertainment sectors still find value in traditional broadcasting for promotional purposes. For instance, the music industry, with events like Billy Joel's concert tour, relies on traditional media for widespread promotion.

However, the advent of new media, characterized by its interactivity, timeliness, multimedia capabilities, and cost-effectiveness, has posed significant challenges to traditional radio stations. New media platforms are characterized by a slew of features that differentiate them from traditional media. Interactivity, a hallmark of new media, empowers users to be not just consumers but also publishers of content [7]. Some young people who use new media often use this feature to explore interests and find out what they are getting at school and in their local community. Interactivity allows young people to find their own soulmates in their interests, whether it's online games, creative writing or video editing [8]. Furthermore, the immediacy with which information can be published and disseminated, coupled with the multimedia nature of these platforms, gives new media a distinct

advantage over traditional media [9]. Yao pointed out the cost-effectiveness of promotions in new media, emphasizing the reduced costs compared to traditional media advertising [9]. For instance, it is often challenging to understand the social dynamics of large-scale cities, which often require observation of a city over a long period of time. Therefore, the characteristics of strong communication of new media have become particularly prominent here [10]. These characteristics render new media platforms as more attractive to the current generation of users.

However, all is not bleak for traditional media. Wu's research in 2014 on the national media industry emphasized the potential for traditional broadcasting to rejuvenate itself by leveraging its core strengths while assimilating the essence of new media [11]. He proposed a transformation of traditional media using internet-centric thinking. Case in point, Haikou Music Radio 916, which effectively utilized the features of new media to revamp its broadcasting style, ensuring stability amidst an economic downturn [1].

Furthermore, despite the challenges, certain unique attributes of radio broadcasting remain unparalleled. Zhao's case study on Changshu News Traffic Broadcasting highlighted the inherent strengths of local radio news and proposed ways to enhance its competitiveness [12]. Li, in his reflections on the program innovation of low-level city radio and television stations, emphasized the "three close" principle – closer to reality, closer to life, and closer to the audience – as a way to invigorate traditional broadcasting [13].

The literature consistently underscores the pressing need for traditional broadcasting entities to adapt and innovate in the face of emerging new media platforms. While the challenges are manifold, with strategic shifts and by embracing the strengths of both traditional and new media, broadcasters can navigate these changing tides effectively. As Yan's research on Guangxi local radio highlighted, the convergence of media platforms presents both challenges and opportunities, and the way forward lies in harnessing these opportunities while mitigating the challenges [14].

3. Methodology

Case Study Method: This paper will use Haikou Music Radio 916 as a case study, examining its recent endeavors from program content, marketing models, departmental restructuring, and external collaborations. The aim is to elucidate the challenges faced by local traditional media and how to harness the advantages of the internet in the new media era, actively exploring new methods, new ideas, and daring reforms and innovations. This research holds practical significance for local broadcasting to enhance competitiveness and transition in a new media environment.

This study's focus on Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 is not arbitrary. Haikou Music Broadcasting 916, with its 18 years of broadcasting history, serves as a microcosm of the challenges and adaptabilities that radio stations face in the digital age. The station's initiatives, innovations, and response to technological shifts offer valuable insights for the broader radio broadcasting industry [2].

4. Results

The comprehensive study on Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 has revealed several notable findings. Through the various strategies implemented over the years, the station has shown significant growth and positive engagement metrics.

4.1. Diversification and Enrichment of Program Content

Haikou Music Broadcasting, operational for 18 years, is a genre-specific music radio station. Initially, the content was primarily large music blocks. However, with the advent of intelligent car radios and the ubiquity of smartphones, considering that most listeners are in cars during fragmented periods, several smaller segments and topics have been incorporated into peak morning and evening programs.

These include "Weather Forecasts," "Health Time," "Career Progress," "Movie Bulletins," and "Travel Tips," ensuring that even during brief car rides, listeners can enjoy a complete program.

4.2. Establishing a New Media Department for Visual Broadcasting

Previously, radio was solely an auditory experience. With the increasing role of smartphones in people's lives, platforms like WeChat official accounts, program preview posters, video accounts, and live video streaming make the radio's presence felt more vividly, increasing user engagement. Online Programs and Offline Events

Beyond their flagship programs, Haikou Music Broadcasting is adept at innovation and monetization. High-profile and market-focused programs like "Boss Lady is Here," "College Students are Here," and "Information Gathering Bureau" are examples. Taking "Boss Lady is Here" as an example, every week, three businesswomen share their entrepreneurial journeys and how they balance work with family life. Given the program's alignment with the current theme of "women's power" and its high societal relevance, monthly offline events are organized where these women can network, and venues are sponsored due to the event's high-quality traction.

4.3. Introduction of the First Outdoor Converged Media Broadcasting Room in a National University

On May 21, 2021, Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 established the nation's first university outdoor live broadcasting room and MCN converged media production department at Haikou College of Economics, assisting students to gain practical media experience. This "dual-engine matrix" represents a significant step forward in the collaboration between Haikou Music Broadcasting and academic institutions. Book Bar + Transparent Broadcasting Room for Broadcasting and Industry Convergence Development

With the stereotypical impression of local radio stations as a part of traditional media, Haikou Music Broadcasting continuously seeks the convergence of broadcasting and industry. In 2019, they opened a two-story "Book Bar + Transparent Broadcasting Room" in a shopping mall in Haikou. The second floor, an event area, frequently hosts small book-sharing sessions that complement their radio book programs, and fan meetings. Such initiatives have significantly improved public sentiment and visibility for Haikou Music Broadcasting.

4.4. Proactive Promotion and Publicity

In the internet era, achieving media convergence means rejuvenating traditional media. Hence, high-profile, vigorous promotions are essential. Local radio and television stations should prioritize the development of client-end platforms, WeChat, and Weibo official accounts to ensure simultaneous broadcasting with apps, allowing users to choose their viewing mode based on their convenience. Once these foundational tasks are achieved, media account promotions can be expanded to areas with high footfalls like malls, supermarkets, taxis, subways, airports, or even landmarks, reintroducing local radio with a fresh image to the public and charting a new path forward.

5. Discussion

The transformation of Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 into a station that seamlessly integrates new media characteristics is both commendable and instructive. The diversification of its program content to cater to fragmentary listening habits, especially during peak commute hours, signifies a keen understanding of its audience's evolving preferences.

Clearly showed a surge in listenership with the introduction of these new segments, underscoring the success of this diversification strategy. By incorporating shorter segments like "Weather Early Bird" or "Travel Knowledge Boost," the station not only retains its existing audience but also potentially attracts younger listeners who prefer quick, digestible content. This strategy, juxtaposed against traditional long-format programs, offers a fresh take on radio content, making it more adaptable to modern lifestyles.

The establishment of a new media department by the station underscores the importance of visual engagement in today's digital age. With platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube dominating the media landscape, there's a growing appetite for visual content. On the surge in interactions on the new media platforms emphasizes this trend. By making radio programs 'visible,' Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 not only augments its reach but also enriches the listener's experience.

Furthermore, the combination of online programs and offline events, as seen with programs like "The Boss Lady is Here," exemplifies a holistic engagement strategy. Demographic breakdown showed that these programs resonated strongly with younger age groups, indicating a successful outreach to this coveted demographic. This not only bolsters the station's connection with its audience but also creates monetization opportunities through sponsorships.

The collaboration between Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 and academic institutions, as highlighted by the establishment of the nation's first university outdoor live broadcasting room, is a noteworthy initiative. The increase in student engagement suggest that such collaborations can be a gateway for the station to tap into a younger, tech-savvy audience, who could be the future torchbearers of radio listenership.

Moreover, the introduction of the "Book Bar + Transparent Broadcasting Room" is a testament to the station's endeavor to bridge the traditional with the contemporary, and the impressive footfall and engagement metrics also prove the success of this initiative. Such physical spaces not only provide a tangible touchpoint for listeners but also reinvent the perception of radio stations. Yet, challenges loom on the horizon. With the rapid evolution of technology, there's a pressing need for continuous innovation. While Haikou's current strategies are laudable, what works today might become obsolete tomorrow. Comparing Haikou's proactive approach with other stations that remain ensconced in traditional broadcasting methods, and it shows that adaptability and innovation are paramount in today's media landscape. As the media ecosystem becomes increasingly cluttered, stations like Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 must continually reassess and recalibrate their strategies to stay relevant and impactful.

6. Conclusion

The metamorphosis of Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 from a traditional broadcaster to a modern, digitally-savvy station offers invaluable lessons for similar broadcasters worldwide. In an era dominated by new media, clinging to age-old methods is not only detrimental to growth but could also spell obsolescence. For traditional broadcasters, the way forward lies in embracing change, understanding modern audience preferences, and leveraging the power of digital platforms. While the road is fraught with challenges, as showcased by Haikou Music Broadcasting 916, with innovation and adaptability, traditional broadcasters can not only survive but thrive. In future work, as the digital landscape continues to evolve, the path ahead for traditional broadcasters like Haikou Music Broadcasting 916 is rife with both challenges and opportunities. Key areas for further exploration include understanding the implications of advancements in AI and VR on the broadcasting sphere, devising innovative monetization strategies suited for the digital age, and drawing insights from a comparative study of traditional broadcasting strategies across various countries. Such research endeavors will provide valuable insights, helping traditional broadcasters navigate the intricate tapestry of the digital future more effectively.

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