The Interaction of the Mainstream Media Group with Other Agents in China under media convergence: A Perspective of Media Ecology

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Abstract

Media convergence and omnimedia communication system construction is not only the development strategy of national cultural undertakings in China, but also the development direction of the mainstream media in China. Under this background, the mainstream media group in China makes effort to develop into new mainstream media groups. The macro media ecology is the external condition for the development of the mainstream media group in China. It is crucial for the mainstream media group to understand the macro media ecology for its development. Under the media convergence environment, the mainstream media group, the government, the audience and other media organizations are the main agents in the macro media ecology. This study is designed to investigate the relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations which reflect the interaction of the mainstream media group with other agents. From the perspective of media ecology, under the theory framework of ecology population relationship theory, with the case study in qualitative research, this study analyzed the relationship of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience, and other media organizations at different stages of media convergence. As the representative of mainstream media group in China, Chongqing Daily Newspaper Group was the selected case. The data were collected from the public literature and personal communication. This study adopted coding method of procedualised grounded theory in a way of open coding, axial coding and selective coding to analyze the data and to build the theory. The results showed that the mainstream media group experienced 3 stages of media convergence development and the mainstream media group had a good interaction with the government, the audience and other media organizations. Their relationships were positive which made a harmonious and balanced macro media ecology for the mainstream media group development under media convergence.

Keywords

media convergence; media ecology; media ecologic population relationship; mainstream media group

Introduction

Since 1996, China's media industry has embarked on the road of group development facilitated by Publicity Department of the Communist Party Central Committee of China. The mainstream media in China gradually develops in the group way. In 2014, the Fourth Meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively

Continuing Reform of the CPC Central Committee approved the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Convergence Development of Traditional Media and New Media (2014) planning to build a few of new mainstream media with diverse forms, advanced means and competitive features. It demonstrates that the new mainstream media construction is part of the media convergence development in China. In March 2021, the People's Republic of China's 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Goals for 2035 (2021) approved by the 13th National People's Congress further put forward that China would promote in-depth media convergence, implement omnimedia communication projects, and strengthen new mainstream media. Media convergence and omnimedia communication system construction is not only the development strategy of national cultural undertakings, but also the development direction of the mainstream media in China. Under this background, the mainstream media group in China make effort to develop into new mainstream media. The macro media ecology is the external condition for the development of the mainstream media group in China.

With the rapid development of media convergence, the world presents a new media landscape and public opinion pattern. The macro media ecology changes with the development of media convergence as well. The mainstream media group can't develop independently without the participation of other agents. Under the media convergence environment, the mainstream media group, the government, the audience and other media organizations are the main agents in communication. The media convergence is a dynamic process with different features at different stages of media convergence development. The mainstream media group, the government, the audience and other media organizations play different roles, and the interactions of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience, and other media organizations change at different stage of media convergence. Because the interactions of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations influence the macro media ecology or even form the media ecology, and the macro media ecology is the external condition for the mainstream media group development in media convergence, it's necessary to research the interactions of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations. The relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations reflect their interaction.

The media ecological population relationship theory of Media Ecology can well explain the relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations. Based on the biotic population relationships, the media ecological population relationship theory proposes 6 types of media ecological population relationships (Shao, 2008a; Sinha, 2020). The relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations can be described in certain media ecological population relationships.

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 investigate the interactions of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations. By examining the relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media organizations at different media convergence development stages of the mainstream media, this paper will contribute to existing related relationship research and provide suggestions for policy makes, industrial practitioners and audience 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, the research questions that this study aims to answer are: (1) How does the mainstream media group interact with the government, the audience and other media at different stage of media convergence? (2) With the media convergence development, how do the interactions change?

Literature Review

Media Convergence

As early as in 1960s, McLuhan used the term "the hybrid of two media" to describe the phenomenon of media convergence, and found the "new form of media" after media convergence. Nevertheless, it was Nicholas Negroponte from Massachusetts Institute of Technology who coined the term "media convergence" in 1978. The three-circle overlapping diagram drawn by Negroponte was used to vividly describe the convergence of computer, printing and broadcasting industries. It was believed that the intersection of the three circles, namely the convergence, would become the fastest growing and most innovative field. In 1983, Pool introduced the concept into communication technology field in his book the Technologies of Freedom, and proposed the convergence modes. He indicated that a given physical network could provide any kind of media device, and conversely, a media device that was once limited to one technology could now be delivered to any physically dispersed network. Various media in the process of continuous development showed the trend of multi-function integration (Pool, 1983).

Some researchers drew attentions to the way that media convergence affected the whole system. In these researchers' view, far from confining the vision to an exclusively sphere, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of convergence, it was necessary to consider not only the purely instrumental aspects, but also other facets of media production and consumption. Gordon (2003) summarized the research on media convergence at that time and classified the definition of media convergence in different contexts into five categories: tactical convergence, structural convergence, convergence of information gathering and narrative convergence. Deuze (2004) proposed four dimensions of media convergence that cover different phases of the communication process: Integrated production–Content, Multi-skilled professionals–Source, Multiplatform delivery–Medium, Active audience–Receiver. Jenkins (2006) taking an even wider view, emphasized five "areas" of convergence: technological, economic, social or organic, cultural and global. Dennis (2006) considered five areas of convergence in the media, namely: technology, regulatory issues, business matters, contents and human resources. Fagerjord and Storsul (2007), for their part, identified as many as six interpretations of media convergence: convergence of networks, convergence of terminals, convergence of services, market convergence, rhetorical convergence, and regulatory convergence. These perspectives offer an all-round view of convergence as a phenomenon in which different spheres are interconnected, exerting a reciprocal influence on each other.

In China, according to Xu (2020), the process of media convergence practice in China can be divided into four phases:

(1) The phase of the interaction between newspaper and Internet. In September 28, 2010, "People's Daily campus tour" series activities were launched at Tsinghua University. Wu, the editor-in-chief of People's Dai-

ly, gave a keynote speech entitled “Convergence of Newspaper and Internet: Present and Future”. It marked the era of media convergence 1.0 began.

(2) The phase of converged media. In August 2014, the Fourth Meeting of the Leading Group for Comprehensive and In-depth Reform of the CPC Central Committee approved the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Convergence Development of Traditional Media and New Media. Presiding the meeting, President Xi stressed that traditional media and new media should complement each other and develop in integrated way with advanced technology as the support and content construction as the foundation to promote the in-depth convergence of traditional media and new media in content, channel, platform, operation, management and other aspects. This marked that the convergence development of traditional media and new media became a state strategy, which had important guiding significance for comprehensively deepening reform and promoting reform and innovation in the field of publicity and culture. Therefore, the year of 2014 was called the first year of an era of media convergence in China. From 2014 to 2015, the era of media convergence updated to 2.0. Since 2015, media convergence has accelerated its process.

(3) The phase of intelligent media. On February 19, 2016, Xi delivered an important speech at the Party’s press and public opinion work symposium, indicating that mainstream media should move from the phase of “addition” to the phase of “convergence” as soon as possible (Xinhua News Agency Research Group, 2017). The year of 2016, 2017 and 2018 were called the first year of live webcast, AI and county-level converged media respectively. In 2018, the construction of county-level converged media centers started, which was a strategic project to promote the transformation and upgrading of county-level media dedicated to the service for the grassroots society and community. Under the influence of technology industry and policy guidance, intelligent media time arrived. The era of media convergence updated to 3.0. A larger pattern of convergence development was taking shape.

(4) The phase of omnimedia communication. The year of 2019 and 2020 were called the first year of omnimedia communication and content technology respectively. Since 2021, the conception of “Four-all Media” has been put into practice, and media convergence 4.0 has been ushered in.

Mainstream Media and Mainstream Media Group

The mainstream media including all the newspapers, televisions and majority of new media are state owned or state controlled in China, which are twofold in the management: public institutions and enterprises. As public institutions, the mainstream media mainly publicizes policies of the Party and the state, report various important events and foreign affairs activities of state leaders, and displays the glorious deeds and successful experiences in the country development. They stress positive propaganda. 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; Tang & Wang, 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. The mainstream media group in China has the traits as follow (Zhao, 2001): (1) The integration of intensification

of management and specialization of division of labor. (2) Social benefits first with the joint development of social benefits and economic benefits for the political responsibility. (3) The combination of unified planning and decentralization of authority for promoting the rational allocation of resources, forming economies of scale and optimizing the internal structure, and giving full play to the enthusiasm and creativity of all departments and media in the group.

Relationship of the Mainstream Media with Other Agents in China

Because of the socialism political system, the Communist Party of China is the ruling party and "it exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor in every part of the country" (The Communist Party of China, 2022). Therefore, the expression of "the government" in this study represents both the CPC and the government for convenience. The mainstream media in China at all levels are under the regulation and administration of different departments of the Party and the government. China's mainstream media groups are under the administration of a four-level regulation system with multiple management, industry affiliation, ministry ownership and divisions. At the national level, in media business, the National Press and Publication Administration supervises and administrates the content and quality of publications and the printing industry. The National Radio and Television Administration makes policies and measures for radio and television administration and supervises their implementation. It also supervises, administrates and examines the content and quality of audio-visual programs on radio, television and the Internet. The China Film Administration administrates film administrative affairs, guides and supervises the production, distribution and screening of films. The Cyberspace Administration of China guides, coordinates and urges relevant departments to strengthen the management of Internet information content and is responsible for the examination and approval and daily supervision of Internet news business and other related businesses. The State Council Information Office of China also participates in the administration of Internet new business. It makes development plans for Internet journalism, guides and coordinates Internet news reporting. in the management of ideology, the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC is responsible for guiding public opinion and the production of spiritual products from a macro perspective. Basically, at the level of province, prefecture and county, the mainstream media are multiple regulated in administrative regions by the above model, and newspapers, television and radio stations within their respective administrative regions and systems run in closed-ended administration. The development and management of the mainstream media depend largely on the policy and regulation of the government. The government relies on the media to convey the voice, keep the right direction of public opinion and control the people's thoughts; The media rely on the government to obtain information sources, and need the help and support of the government to develop and grow (Hong & Cai, 2009; Gao, 2014). Jin (2016) stated on the one hand, the government should strengthen the supervision of the media. On the other hand, it is necessary to create a good industry environment for the media, form a communication channel and a benign interaction mechanism between the government and the media, and achieve a win-win situation for the credibility of the government and the media.

For a long time, the mainstream media has formed one-way and serious communication convention: media is the sender of information and audience is the receiver. But now the media ecosystem is changing, and the relationship between the media and the audience is no longer the sender and receiver of one-way. The audience can use new media to produce, acquire and disseminate information (Yu & Cheng, 2011), therefore, the audience is not only the receiver of information, but also a content producer. To attract more audience, the mainstream media group needs to reconstruct the relationship chain, strive to become a new relationship cen-

ter, find and meet the core demands of all parties in society, and create the new media platform needed by all (Sun, 2020). Chen (2019) argued that the media should deal with relationship with the audience in the following three aspects: First, to solve the positioning problem of media products or services. The second is to solve the problem of user matching and connection of products or services. The third is to solve the problem of user acquisition and maintenance costs of products or services. Wang (2016) proposed a basic framework for the reconstruction of the relationship between media and audience in the era of omnimedia to improve audience loyalty through the establishment of audience relationship management. But this was far from concrete methods and practices.

Huang (2010) proposed four models of coopetition in China's mass media: media integration, media interaction, media alliance and media merger and acquisition. The mainstream media can seek cooperation and build joint network operation with other media. On the one hand, in order to counter the pressure of other media organizations and platforms, it is possible to seek joint efforts from top to bottom and from central to local media. On the other hand, in order to realize effective communication and sharing of information, cross-regional and even cross-industry joint platforms can be built between the same level to counter the competitive pressure from the senior level of the same industry (Chen, 2019). Coopetition seems the main relationship between the mainstream media and other media. At different stage of media convergence, the depth and scope of coopetition for the mainstream media are different, which reshapes the landscape of the mainstream media and reengineers the process of media product.

Media Ecology Population Relationship

Over the past few years, an ecological perspective becomes increasingly important in research on media development (Anderson, 2016). In China, media ecology focuses on the environment where media survive and develop. The concept of media ecology is defined by Chinese academics as "a study that explores and reveals the nature and laws of the development and the change of the interrelations among human, media, society and nature with the viewpoint and method of ecology" (Shao, 2008a, p.5). The research is media centered and emphasizes the relationship between media and the environment of society, culture, economy, politic, technology, etc. Chinese academics more incline to study media management and media economy. The specific approach is to observe the media in the context of social system, regard various media as a large media population (Shao, 2008b), separate it from the social system, and then study its interaction with other ecologic population.

Based on the Chinese research paradigm, media development is understood as a complex system. The whole media ecosystem is made up of media ecological factors (the structure of relative balance among media elements.) and environmental factors (the structure of relative balance among political, economic and other external environmental factors interacting with media). The interaction among the media ecological factors generates micro media ecology. The interaction between the environmental factors and media generates the macro media ecology (Shao, 2008a, 2008b). It demonstrates that the media ecology is the result of dynamic interaction.

A single ecological factor cannot form an environment. Only the aggregation of many ecological factors can form the basis and conditions for communication activities. In a sense, the media environment is the aggregation of various factors including media ecological factors and environmental factors (Shao, 2008a). This kind

of media environment is the realistic environment for the media to survive and develop (Altheide, 2003). This is the macro media environment. The overall atmosphere presents in the operation and management of media organization, and a habit pattern formed by the aggregation of the behavior of all participants in the media organization construct the micro media environment (Shao, 2008a). It implies that the media environment is static.

Cui (2005) suggested a media environmental analysis framework including symbol environment, audience environment, resource environment, technology environment, industry environment and regulation environment. This study focuses on the regulation environment, the audience environment and industry environment. Li (2007) argued politics is one of factors that are most closely related to the development of media ecosystem. Political factors include not only the macro-political situation of the region and the country, but also the specific media administration policies formulated by the government and political parties. In regulation environment, the main agents are the media and the government. In the audience environment, the main agents are the media and the audience. In the industry environment, the main agents are different media organization. The interaction between the media ecological factors and the environment factors in this study converts to the relationships of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other media outside the mainstream media group.

In media ecology, a population can be defined as a collection of individuals that occupy a certain amount of time and space with the same elements of communication (Shao, 2008a). It shows that the media organizations are regarded as a media population. In the macro media ecology, besides the media organization, there are other media populations. Therefore, media population relationship is the interaction among different media populations. There are positive and negative effects in the media population relationships. The positive effects are divided into commensalism, mutualism, protocooperation. The negative effects are divided into predation, parasitism and amensalism (Shao, 2008a; Sinha, 2020). According to the definition of ecological population (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Shao, 2008a), the four agents are regarded as four media ecological populations. They interact in different population relationship.

The literature review proposed the media convergence development stages of China, which could be used as a reference for the media convergence development stage division of the study case. Researches on the relationship of the mainstream media with other agents in China gave the outline of the macro media ecology of the mainstream media group in China. Media ecological population theory provided the theory framework for this study.

Research Methods

The case research methodology is particularly appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, this research questions are “how” questions (Walsham 1995) that delve into the relationship changes of the mainstream media group with the government, the audience and other organizations. Second, as the relationships are complex, multi-faceted phenomena that are inextricable from the group context (Pentland 1999), an objective approach to research may be difficult, making it more appropriate to examine the phenomenon by interpreting the shared understanding of the relevant stakeholders (Klein and Myers 1999).

As the representative of the mainstream media group in China, CDNG is a provincial Party newspaper group with the leading newspaper of Chongqing Daily. Chongqing Daily, the main media, was first published in 1952 as the official newspaper of Chongqing CPC Committee with prominent characteristics of the mainstream media. CDNG is state owned, which can better reveal its relationship with the government. It has both legacy media and emerging media since its foundation, which can better present the media convergence within the Group. CDNG is particularly appropriate for our purpose as a mainstream media group with different media convergence development stages to show the interaction changes.

This study collected data from various source. Because of the nature of media organization, CDNG and its media were apt to publicize events and activities by the media they owned and media outside the Group. CDNG ran a periodical called Journal of News Research. Lots of the Group staffs were the contributors. Since 2021, the mainstream media group has been required to publicize the Annual Report of Public Institution Legal Person. Every year the main media Chongqing Daily, CQNEWS and Upstream News publicized Social Responsibility Report of last year since 2016, 2018, 2022 respectively. Besides these, there were other materials. For coding, these materials were divided into 8 categories: articles written by CNDG staff, annual report (including Annual Report of Public Institution Legal Person and Social Responsibility Report), documents of the government, media interviews with the senior managers of CDNG, news report on CDNG, official websites profile of CDNG, personal communication with CDNG staff, 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.

The data collected had two “general shapes” (Pan & Tan, 2011). 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. After the first turn of classification, this researcher found that some data recorded the same event type, but was classified into different stages because of different year, and vice versa. Data should be classified by the same year and the same kind of events. With repeated comparison and interpretation of the data, this researcher adjusted the classification until event type were correctly classified. At this moment, the timeline and development stages became different from the preexisting research proposed, but this was the very media convergence development stages of the case. In this way, the division of media convergence development stages of the case completed and found the mark of different stages. According to the case’s media change trend and events information in the clustered data, the feature of media convergence at different stage were presented. The media convergence development stages of CDNG were like this: 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 & Corbin, 1998). Even the latter type data were marked with year information for follow-up analysis, according to the context of the data. Those roughly coded data were classified into corresponding relationship 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 proceduralised grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Chen, 1999) with with open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Finally there were 7 main categories, 8 main categories and 8 main categories respectively in the analysis of the relationships between the mainstream media group with the government; between the mainstream media group with the audience and between the mainstream media group with other media organizations.

The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and the Government

At any stage, the mainstream media group was under the government absolute control in its foundation, leadership, the media's nature and key staff management. mainstream media always played the role of publicity tool of the government. The control of the government and the role the mainstream media played are more of political interest for the government. On the other hand, the government actively led and facilitated the media convergence, which was beneficial for promoting the competitiveness of the mainstream media against media in private ownership home and abroad. Therefore, the relationship between the mainstream media and the government was commensalism in the government's favor from the perspective of political ideology and in the mainstream media group's favor from the perspective of media development. Meanwhile, the mainstream media and the government were interdependent with each other. The mainstream media could provide the government publicity service, large-scale activity organization, official media operation agent service and technology support in market supervision. In return, the government could give the mainstream media authority in news release and commercial business. There was strong cooperation between the mainstream media and the government, and one could get benefit from the other. Therefore, the relationship of the two was mutualism as well. The relationships of the two are commensalism and mutualism. They kept a stable relationship.

Table 1 The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and the Government at Different Stages Media Convergence

Media Convergence Stage	Commensalism	Mutualism	Protocooperation
Website Development (2001-2013)	The government as the controller CDNG as the publicity tool of the government	Interdependency between CDNG and the government in publicity and economic benefit	-

News Client Development (2014-2018)	The government as the controller CDNG as the publicity tool of the government The government as the leader in media convergence of CDNG	Interdependency between CDNG and the government in publicity, technology and authoritative information sharing	-
Key Platform Development (2019 to present)	The government as the controller CDNG as the publicity tool of the government The government as the facilitator in media convergence of CDNG	Interdependency between CDNG and the government in publicity, large-scale activity organization, market supervision and new media operation	-

Note. Compiled by the author.

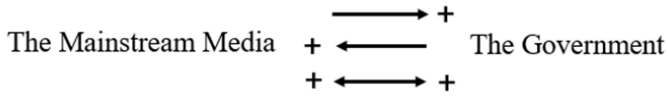


Figure 1. The model of interaction between the mainstream media and the government. " " represents the interaction type of commensalism. " " represents the interaction type of mutualism. "+" represents positive interaction.

The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and the Audience

The mainstream media were the content provider and service provider for the audience. With the development of media convergence, the mainstream media group could provide more accurate content and more service ranging from the government affairs service to public affairs service and privilege. In order to attract and retain more audience, the mainstream media actively maintained the connection with the audience. The interaction between the mainstream media and the audience was commensalism, in which the audience enjoys more benefit provided by the mainstream media.

Since the stage of mobile application development, for the mainstream media provided the UGC platform for we-media, the audience became the content producer instead of passively receiving content provided by the mainstream media. Furthermore, guided by the mainstream media, the audience as the content producer developed into the co-creator of mainstream public opinion with the mainstream media. The audience produced content through the mainstream media, and the mainstream media strengthened mainstream public opinion guiding by we-media of the audience. They needed each other, but the cooperative relationship was not obligatory as mutualism. Therefore, the relationship between the two was protocooperation as well. The two

always kept the same relationship except for the website development stage.

Table 2 The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and the Audience at Different Stages

Media Convergence Stage	Commensalism	Mutualism	Protocooperation
Website Development (2001-2013)	CDNG as the content provider CDNG as the government affairs service provider	-	-
News Client Development (2014-2018)	CDNG as the content provider CDNG as the government and affairs public affairs service provider CDNG as the privilege provider	-	The audience as the content producer
Key Platform Development (2019 to present)	CDNG as the accurate content provider CDNG as the government affairs and public affairs service provider CDNG as the active maintainer in the interaction with the audience	-	We-media of CDNG UGC platform as the co-creator of mainstream public opinion with media under CDNG

Note. Compiled by the author.

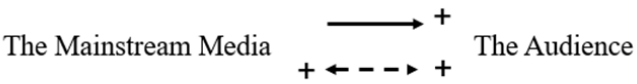


Figure 2. The model of interaction between the mainstream media and the audience. " " represents the interaction type of commensalism. " " represents the interaction type of protocooperation. "+" represents positive interaction.

The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and Media Outside the Group

At any stage, there were mutualism and protocooperation in the interaction between the mainstream media and media outside the Group. Interdependence of the two was gradually increasing. The cooperation between the mainstream media and the commercial media outside the Group focused on the technology and media resource; and the cooperation between the mainstream media and other mainstream media outside the Group ranges from technology and information resources to communication channel and talent training.

By entering commercial media's social platforms outside the Group, the mainstream media improved its

media matrix. However, commercial media's social platforms had different position in the media matrix at different stage. At the stage of website development, commercial media's social platforms were the only social media of the Group. With the development of independent and controllable new media of the Group, commercial media's social platforms outside the Group became important supplement to the media matrix. In this view, the interaction of the mainstream media and the commercial media outside the Group was protocooperation with loose cooperation.

At the stage of mobile application development, the interaction between the mainstream media and media outside the Group began to show commensalism in favor of the mainstream media for copyright income from commercial media outside the Group, and in favor of the national mainstream media outside the Group for technology export to the mainstream media group.

Table 3
The Interaction Between the Mainstream Media and Other Media at Different Stages

Media Convergence Stage	Commensalism	Mutualism	Protocooperation
Website Development (2001-2013)	-	Interdependency between CDNG and the commercial media outside the Group in technology and media resources	Commercial media's social platforms outside the Group as the only social media of CDNG
News Client Development (2014-2018)	CDNG as the news resource exporter for commercial media outside the Group CDNG as the technology importer for the national mainstream media outside the Group	Interdependency between the mainstream media and the district & county media in technology, resources and communication channels CDNG as the nonprofit resource sharer with other mainstream media outside the Group	Commercial media outside the Group as important supplement to the media matrix of CDNG
Key Platform Development (2019 to present)	-	Interdependency between CDNG and the district & county media in technology, talent training and information resources	Commercial media outside the Group as important supplement to the media matrix of CDNG

Note. Compiled by the author.

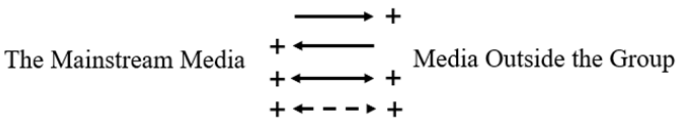


Figure 3. The model of interaction the mainstream media and other media. “ ” represents the interaction type of commensalism. “ ” represents the interaction type of mutualism. “ ” represents the interaction type of protocooperation. “+” represents positive interaction.

Discussion

Overall, the mainstream media group had a good interaction with the government, the audience and other media outside the Group. Their relationships were positive which made a harmonious and balanced macro media ecology for the mainstream media group development under media convergence.

At the stage of website development (2001-2013), the relationship between the mainstream media group and the government were commensalism in the government’s favor from the perspective of political ideology and mutualism for interdependent in publicity and economic benefit. The relationship between the mainstream media group and the audience was commensalism in the audience’s favor for obtaining information and enjoying government affairs service. The relationship between the mainstream media group and the media outside the group were mutualism and protocooperation. The mainstream media group and the commercial media outside the Group were interdependent in technology and media resources. Commercial media’s social platforms outside the Group were the only social media of the mainstream media group.

At the stage of mobile application development (2014-2018), the relationship between the mainstream media group and the government were commensalism in the government’s favor from the perspective of political ideology and in the mainstream media group’s favor from the perspective of media development, and mutualism for interdependent in publicity, technology and authoritative information sharing. The relationship between the mainstream media group and the audience were commensalism in the audience’s favor for obtaining information and enjoying government affairs service, public affairs service and privilege, and protocooperation for coproducing content. The relationship between the mainstream media group and the media outside the group were commensalism, mutualism and protocooperation. The commensalism was in the mainstream media group’s favor for copyright income from commercial media outside the Group, and commensalism in the national mainstream media’s favor for techonolgy export to the mainstream media group. The mainstream media group and the district & county media were interdependent in technology, resources and communication channels. The mainstream media group and other mainstream media outside the Group share resource for free. Commercial media’s social platforms outside the Group were important supplement to the media matrix of the mainstream media. They were no longer the only the only social media of the mainstream media group.

At the stage of key platform Development (2019 to present), the relationships of the mainstream media group and the government were commensalism in the government’s favor from the perspective of political ideology and in the mainstream media group’s favor from the perspective of media development, and mutualism for interdependent in publicity, large-scale activity organization, market supervision and new media operation. The relationship between the mainstream media group and the audience were commensalism in the audience’s favor for obtaining accurate content and enjoying government affairs service, public affairs service and outcome from the mainstream media group’s maintenance in the interaction with the audience, and protocooperation for co-creating mainstream public opinion. The relationship between the mainstream media group

and the media outside the group were mutualism and protocooperation. The mainstream media group and the district & county media were interdependent in technology, talent training and information resources. Commercial media's social platforms outside the Group were still important supplement to the media matrix of the mainstream media.

The mainstream media group and the government kept a stable relationship in commensalism and mutualism. The mainstream media group and the audience always kept the same relationship in commensalism and protocooperation except for the website development stage. The mainstream media group and media outside the group always kept the same relationship in mutualism and protocooperation except for at the mobile application development stage there was commensalism.

Conclusion

Recommendation and Suggestions

In China, the government plays a decisive role in the mainstream media group's development. It controls the mainstream media group, and provides privileged policy, special resources and tremendous finance. These are the advantages of the mainstream media group in competition. It should continue support the mainstream media group in finance and policies. The audience becomes an important force in content production, who can make use of the mainstream media platform to express themselves with the commercial media's social platforms. With the development of the mainstream media group, the government more and more depends on the mainstream media group for the service ranging from publicity, monitoring public opinion to social supervisions. The mainstream media group provides government affairs service for the audience and conveys public opinion to the government. Therefore, the mainstream media group connects the government and the audience, which is an intermediate force to promote social governance. The media outside the group is a more cooperative partner than competitor for more resources exchange and sharing for free or in charge.

Development of controllable platform is the mainstream media group pursuit. At the early stage of media convergence, commercial media was the main new media for the mainstream media group. But in order to better guiding public opinion and aggregate resources, the mainstream media group peruse the control on the platform. Because the mainstream media interacts with other three agents so closely, and expects to construct a controllable platform, the mainstream media group should transforming from media to platisher. The mainstream media group is transforming from media to platisher. Platform media has both the professional editorial authority of media and the unique openness of user-oriented platforms. Therefore, it is not about content production and distribution on its own, but about creating a benign open platform with various regulations, services and balancing forces, and open to all content providers and service providers, including the government and the audience. Platform builders formulate certain production and dissemination rules, and allow users to organize and produce content on this open public platform, and complete the consumption and circulation services between information. "Platform + service" is the direction and development model of the mainstream media group in the future. As the main body participating in the platform content construction service and information consumption, "prosumers" will certainly play a crucial role in the development of platform media.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations of the study. In the terms of case selection, due to the unbalanced development

level of media in different regions, the status quo of the mainstream media group in China is quite different. Because of the different characteristics of different media organizations even in the same region, the operation and management modes also differ greatly. The differences of the mainstream media groups and the single case study may weaken the generalizability of the results in this research. In the terms of data sources, the date source derived from all kinds of literature of different sources, which may weaken the reality and accurate of the data. All the limitations above are the improving base for the future work. In the future research will focus more on: (1) the multi-case study to improve the generality of the results. (2) the first-hand data collection such as interviews to improve the authenticity of data.

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