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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL PUBLICATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT : This article offers a comparative analysis of the regional press in the United States and the People's Republic of China within the context of media convergence and digital transformation. The study examines the US media model, which is fundamentally rooted in a market economy and paywall systems but currently faces the critical threat of "news deserts" due to the pressure exerted by global tech giants. Concurrently, it explores the Chinese model of high-tech convergence, which relies heavily on artificial intelligence (AI) and super-platforms under strict ideological oversight. Furthermore, the paper synthesizes both the positive and negative aspects of Western and Eastern media practices, advancing practical recommendations aimed at digitalizing and revitalizing the local press in Uzbekistan to guide it out of its current crisis.

Keywords: Media convergence, regional press, digital transformation, paywall, news deserts, spirit newspapers, super-platforms, artificial intelligence, 3D virtual anchors, media economics.

In today's global information space, the rapid advancement of digital technologies presents unprecedented demands to traditional mass media, particularly the regional press. Media convergence entails not merely technological integration, but a fundamental transformation of editorial management, economic models, and audience engagement strategies. In the world's leading media ecosystems, such as the United States and China, the regional press undergoes this process within vastly different economic and political contexts. In the United States, the absence of a centralized "state newspaper" concept and the inherently regional roots of all influential publications have fostered a uniquely liberal market. Conversely, China has developed a system of state and party-supported technological "super-platforms" operating under a strict hierarchical structure. A comparative study of this bipolar international experience holds profound scientific and practical significance in laying the foundation for transitioning Uzbekistan's local press into a contemporary ecosystem.

It is appropriate to examine the distinct characteristics of the private and commercial regional press in the United States within the context of media convergence. In the US, the most influential publications include The New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, The Boston Globe, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Miami Herald, and Houston Chronicle"[1].

[1] Vikipediya. (2008). The New York Times. Uzbek Vikipediya. URL: https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times.

In the United States, regional publications (such as the Los Angeles Times or The Boston Globe) have already transformed into multimedia hubs. Moving beyond traditional text production, they now incorporate podcasts, audio versions, data journalism visualizations, and operate under paywall (paid subscription) systems. These outlets provide in-depth coverage of local community issues and successfully generate revenue through digital subscriptions. Furthermore, they offer advertisers precisely targeted audience segments. Operating independently of state financial support, their editorial policies and multimedia content are shaped within a framework of journalistic freedom[2]. Due to digital giants (such as Google and Meta) monopolizing advertising revenues, numerous small-town newspapers are facing closures. Regional newspaper websites (such as The Seattle Times or The Miami Herald) serve as the primary digital information hubs for their respective areas. They utilize highly sophisticated paywall systems, where local residents pay to access analytical and in-depth content. These websites integrate specialized podcast platforms and interactive data maps.

MIT Professor Henry Jenkins, widely recognized as a foundational theorist of media convergence, has conducted extensive research in this field. In his seminal work, Convergence Culture (2006), he analyzes how regional media platforms (local newspapers, radio, and television) unify through digital convergence to retain their audiences. Jenkins demonstrates that local publications sustain their readership by integrating with websites, mobile applications, and social media networks. Furthermore, he identifies interactive elements such as infographics, mini-games, and User-Generated Content (UGC) as pivotal trends in local media development, which ultimately foster public engagement and strengthen community trust[3].

Penny Abernathy is an American professor and a leading expert in the field of local journalism. With over 30 years of experience in journalism and media management, she has held prestigious academic positions. Penelope (Penny) Muse Abernathy is a former business executive who held senior positions at The New York Times, Harvard Business Review, and The Wall Street Journal. She is currently a professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. From 2008 to 2020, she served as the Knight Chair in Digital Media Economics at the University of North Carolina (UNC), focusing on developing sustainable business strategies for local news.

As the author of two books and five reports on the state of local journalism, she is most renowned for her seminal work, News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive? In this study, Abernathy provides a comprehensive academic analysis of the local media crisis, deeply exploring the disappearance of community newspapers and the phenomenon of "ghost newspapers"[4]. In her book, she attributes the disappearance of local newspapers to economic, demographic, and technological factors. US professor P. Abernathy refers to areas where local newspapers have vanished as "news deserts". In these places, residents are left with no local news

[2] Amerika Ovozi. (2024). Matbuot erkinligi uchun tinimsiz kurash, AQSh misolida. Amerika Ovozi. URL: https://www.amerikaovozi.com/a/us-media-challenges/7447639.html.

[3] Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 15-20-betlar.

[4] Abernathy, P. M. (2020). News deserts and ghost newspapers: Will local news survive? University of North Carolina Press.

sources at all. She supports this with statistical data, confirming that between 2004 and 2020, more than 2,500 newspapers closed in the US, turning over 300 cities into "deserts". This situation poses a threat to democracy, as elections, corruption, and public issues go unreported"[5].

These nearly defunct newspapers are typically shaped in two ways:

First, small weeklies are acquired by larger newspapers, resulting in their newsrooms being completely shut down and the publications turned into mere advertising supplements.

Second, newsroom staff is cut by 50–80%, leaving the paper to cover only "soft" topics (events, lifestyle). Consequently, journalists fail to provide comprehensive coverage for the community. Abernathy notes that 1,000 to 1,500 out of 7,200 newspapers are in this state. The primary reasons cited for this are that over 80% of advertising revenue has shifted to Google and Facebook, young people have abandoned print media, and consolidation meaning acquisitions by large corporations has taken over. As a solution, the American professor proposes non-profit models, community financing, and government assistance"[6].

This demonstrates that through her books, P. Abernathy is among the scholars who have scientifically analyzed the challenges faced by local media platforms in the era of digital convergence. Expanding upon Jenkins' theory within an economic context, she explains the audience loss of local newspapers through demographic shifts and declining advertising revenues.

Professor Philip M. Napoli of Duke University, in his book "Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences" (Columbia University Press, 2011), offers one of the most in-depth analyses of the changes regional publications in the US undergo during media convergence. In this work, the digital transformation of local newspapers and television via mobile applications and social networks is examined from the perspective of audience measurement, highlighting audience market fragmentation and autonomy as key trends. The book describes the integration of regional media into global networks through local content mobile apps (e.g., iPhone apps) and social media (Facebook, Twitter), driven by shifting media consumption and the transformation of audience data collection systems. Furthermore, the transition to digital formats by local television stations (such as state affiliates of NBC or ABC) and city newspapers (The New York Times, Chicago Tribune) is discussed within the context of general audience measurement"[7], however, specific individual examples are limited, as the primary focus is placed on theoretical analysis and broad trends.

Consequently, the work of the aforementioned scholars illustrates how American regional publications (New York Post, local TV stations) merge print and digital formats, transitioning toward interactivity and real-time news.

The Chinese regional press has developed since the Qing Dynasty, during which

[5] "The Rise of the Ghost Newspaper". US News Deserts. https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/expanding-news-desert/loss-of-local-news/the-rise-of-the-ghost-newspaper/.

[6] Abernathy, Penny Muse. News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive? Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020.

[7] Napoli, Philip M. Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences. Columbia University Press, – 2011. P. 248.

newspapers were permitted to adapt to provincial needs. During the Ming Dynasty, manuscript and printing methods became widespread, expanding the audience of scholars and intellectuals. Regional publications reached an average circulation of 2 million copies and evolved into massive holdings. In China, the regional press has a strict hierarchical structure, where local committees of the Communist Party and their subsidiary publications operate in every province (region) and major city. The regional press consists of the following[8].

Beijing Daily (Pekin ribao) – A regional publication of Beijing city;
Jiefang Daily (Jiefang ribao) – The main regional newspaper of Shanghai city;
Guangzhou Daily (Guangzhou ribao) – Guangdong province (one of the most influential and profitable regional media groups in the country);
Nanfang Daily – A major regional publication covering the Southern China region;
Sichuan Daily – A publication of Sichuan province;
Dazhong Daily – A regional newspaper of Shandong province;
Yangtse Evening Post – A popular local evening newspaper targeted at Jiangsu province and the Yangtze River coastal regions"[9].

Chinese media convergence is based on the "all-in-one" principle (super-platforms)"[10]. *"Guangzhou Daily"* yoki *"Beijing Daily"*. Regional publications such as "Guangzhou Daily" or "Beijing Daily" boast massive audiences not only on their websites but also across ecosystems like WeChat and Douyin (TikTok), and they utilize their own Artificial Intelligence-driven virtual anchors"[11].

Artificial Intelligence, automated news production, and short-form video content (Shorts/Reels) formats are highly advanced. In fact, the world's first virtual AI anchor was introduced by China's Xinhua News Agency back in 2018. Local governments provide digital platforms with the most modern technologies from both financial and infrastructural standpoints"[12].

Currently, regional media groups in China's major provinces have deployed 3D digital announcers (avatars) that do not just convert text to speech but operate completely autonomously.

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[8] Zenodo. (2024). "XITOY TARIXIDA SIN SULOLASI". Zenodo Records.
URL: https://zenodo.org/records/6792684

[9] Nanfang Daily. (n.d.). About Nanfang Daily. Nanfang Media Group.
URL: https://www.nandaily.com.cn/about

[10] AIRI.uz. (2023). Xitoyda sun'iy intellekt asosida virtual teleboshlovchi yaratildi. AIRI.uz.
URL: https://old.airi.uz/uz/news/c/xitoyda-suniy-intellekt-asosida-virtual-teleboshlovchi-yaratildi/.

[11] Daryo.uz. (2023). Xitoyda sun'iy intellekt asosida virtual teleboshlovchi yaratildi (video). Daryo.uz.
URL: https://daryo.uz/2023/03/23/xitoyda-suniy-intellekt-asosida-virtual-teleboshlovchi-yaratildi-video/.

[12] Spot.uz. (2018). Xitoyda dastlabki sun'iy teleboshlovchi yaratildi. Spot.uz.
URL: https://www.spot.uz/oz/2018/11/09/suniy-boshlovchi/.

While virtual anchors in our country (Uzbekistan) are often just visual elements (mostly animations) that read pre-written text, Chinese AI anchors can analyze incoming news feeds in real-time and automatically adjust their facial expressions and emotions (sad or cheerful) based on the context of the text.

The primary disadvantage of Chinese media is censorship. All regional convergent platforms adhere to a single state ideological line, which restricts the freedom to critically cover private or sensitive issues.

N. O‘ktamova is one of the Uzbek scholars who raised the study of Chinese culture to an academic level, analyzing the Chinese press through the lens of historical dynasties. Because the press in China is under strict censorship, Chinese scholars themselves face certain restrictions when conducting independent analyses of regional publications. Consequently, academic works dedicated specifically to digital integration issues in the regional press are rare. However, several studies exist on close and similar topics, particularly regarding digital culture, media technologies, and online platforms.

The following scholars have conducted academic research within the context of China’s general digital strategy:

Saydalieva Nigora – In her dissertation titled “Cultural Policy at the Current Stage of China’s Development, “she analyzed the integration of the Chinese press and cultural influence through digital culture and online platforms”[13].

O‘ktamova Nazokat – In her dissertation titled “History and Development Trends of the Chinese Press, “the historical evolution of the press and modern digital transition trends were examined using the example of regional publications”[14].

“Regional press in China (for instance, in Shanghai and Guangdong newspapers) has been studied within the framework of digital integration 5G+ industrial internet and “Digital Media Technology” courses. Scholars from the Xi’an and Yangzhou Polytechnic Institutes have conducted training programs in this field”[15].

In April 1994, the internet officially entered China’s public information system. In the process of transitioning to the internet, Chinese regional newspapers actively utilized digital platforms, moving from traditional print formats to online and mobile content. This transition intensified starting from the 2000s, leading many publications to transform into large holding companies. For example, through the website of the Chengdu Daily, millions of readers have the opportunity to follow multimedia and interactive news. The Guangzhou Daily has also significantly developed its online format, distributing local news in real-time. As a result, the newspaper’s revenue increased substantially. After transitioning to the online format, the Henan Daily and Dazhong Daily

[13] Saydaliyeva Nigora (O‘zbekiston): “Xitoy taraqqiyotida madaniyat siyosati” (2025). Raqamli platformalar orqali hududiy matbuot integratsiyasi.

[14] O‘ktamova, N. (2023). Xitoy matbuoti tarixi va rivojlanish tendensiyalari (618–1912 yillar). Oriens: Ilmiy-amaliy konferensiya materiallari, 3(22), 272–276. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10199289

[15] Raqamli transformatsiya va innovatsion siyosat: Xitoy tajribasi. Infocom.uz, – 2025. Raqamli media integratsiyasi.

strengthened their focus on analytical articles and entertainment content"[16]. This strategy successfully preserved the audience despite the reduction in the number of print publications. The Harbin Print Media Corporation created a unified digital ecosystem by integrating six daily newspapers and an internet website.

In conclusion, a systematic and comparative analysis of the regional press's performance under conditions of media convergence demonstrates that within the modern information space, local newspapers are transitioning into an integrated digital ecosystem based on the "Print + Website + Social Media" model, without entirely abandoning the traditional print format. Using the example of the Qashqadaryo newspaper, this process led to a 2–3-fold increase in circulation and an expanded audience reach by discarding dry statistical reports in favor of analytical, infographic, and practical problem-solving content. Historically, an analysis of Xalq So'zi newspaper's transition-period issues from the 1990s demonstrates that it served as a unique foundation for today's digital and ideological transformation.

International experience highlights three distinctive models. While Russia is dominated by multi-level cross-platform strategies and the use of AI to reduce content production costs, the United States relies on a model driven by paywalls (paid subscriptions) without state support; however, this poses a risk of creating "news deserts" due to competition from global giants. In contrast, China exhibits high-tech integration such as super-platforms and advanced, real-time 3D virtual AI anchors-all under strict ideological control. To save Uzbekistan's local press from crisis and ensure its development, it is essential not to limit efforts solely to Telegram, but to establish a system of targeted funding for regional publications' mobile applications and audio-visual platforms (podcasts, short videos) through state grants and subsidies.

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[16] https://uzhurriyat.uz/2017/05/30/o-zbekiston-xitoy/ - O'zbekiston-Xitoy matbuot tajribasi, Chendu va Guanchjou gazetalari haqida

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