

Broadcasting for the Silver Generation: Hosting Strategies and Communication Models for Radio Programs Targeting Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

As China's population aging accelerates, its 310 million elderly have become a core audience for broadcast media. With its natural advantages of simple operation and strong companionship, radio serves as an important vehicle for the elderly to obtain information and alleviate loneliness. This paper analyzes typical cases, including Anhui Senior Radio, Hunan Aiwan Channel, and Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio, to systematically outline hosting strategies and integrated communication models adapted for aging audiences. Starting from the needs and media usage habits of this group, the article provides practical references for broadcast media to serve the silver generation and develop the silver economy.

KEYWORDS

Hosting strategies; Integrated communication; Silver economy

1 Introduction

By the end of 2024, China's elderly population aged 60 and above numbered 310 million, accounting for 22.0% of the total population, which has made population aging a core feature of social development. Amidst the transformation of the omnimedia landscape, radio has become the preferred medium for older adults because of its characteristics of "requiring no visual focus" and having a "low barrier to operation." Recently, platforms like Anhui Senior Radio, Hunan Aiwan Channel, and Jiangsu Radio's Lao Kai Xin La have achieved notable success in serving the silver generation via age-friendly innovations, yet problems such as content homogenization and inadequate adaptation for seniors still exist. This paper focuses on the two central elements of "hosting strategies" and "communication models," and explores paths to optimize senior-oriented radio by integrating practical case studies.

2 Analysis of Media Usage Characteristics and Needs of Older Audiences

2.1 Characteristics of Content Needs among Older Audiences

The content preferences of older adults exhibit a high degree of homogeneity, with health and wellness, emotional connection, and social participation emerging as core needs. These are manifested as follows:

Health Needs: The demand for disease prevention and health management is exceptionally strong within this demographic. For instance, the program Yangsheng You Dao (The Way of Health Preservation) on Anhui Senior Radio integrates high-quality medical resources from across the province, assembling an expert team from various medical departments^[1]. Through live radio broadcasts and offline lectures, it provides professional and reliable health guidance to its elderly listeners.

Emotional Needs: Amidst shifting social structures, the need for romantic companionship among single seniors and the demand for spiritual comfort among "empty-nest" older adults have become increasingly prominent. The program Xingfu 97 (Happiness 97) on Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio established a matchmaking segment for the silver generation, successfully connecting numerous senior couples through multi-platform operations including hotlines and WeChat groups. Similarly, Hunan Aiwan Channel's Cihai Queqiaohui (Magpie Bridge of Compassion) offers a sincere and secure social platform tailored for middle-aged and older adults.

Social Participation Needs: Many older adults remain eager to contribute their skills and experience after retirement. The Yinfan Zaixian (Silver Sail Online) platform, created by Longkou Radio and Television Station in Shandong Province, features two signature segments: "Silver Sail Vanguard" and "Warmth in the Sunset Years." These segments not only publicize the exemplary deeds of senior volunteers but also provide an interactive platform for them to pass on experience and share skills, guiding them to serve their communities and give back to society.

Entertainment and Learning Needs: Older adults enjoy traditional cultural forms like opera and calligraphy, while also harboring a desire to learn new skills, such as using smartphone applications. The program Rensheng Ruge (Life is a Song) on Hunan Aiwan Channel provides a stage for the silver generation to showcase their talents. Meanwhile, initiatives like the "Grandparents' Digital Storytelling" workshop empower older adults with digital skills, facilitating their transition from passive content consumers to active creators.

2.2 Media Usage Habits of Older Audiences

The media consumption of older adults displays a distinct dual-track characteristic: a primary reliance on traditional media supplemented by emerging new media. This reflects both generational differences and a gradual shift in their media habits.

High Dependence on Traditional Radio: Older adults have deep-seated usage habits and a strong emotional attachment to radio. Due to the simple and convenient operation of radio sets, listening is often a companionate activity. A case in point is Shiguang Dianchangji (Time's Jukebox) from Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio. After 20 years on air, its format of "listener song requests via phone calls + warm narrative connections by the host" continues to meet entertainment needs and build emotional bonds, establishing a strong brand effect that maintains its appeal through intimacy and ease of use.

Gradual Increase in New Media Adoption: The push for digitalization has encouraged more older adults to engage with new media platforms like WeChat and Douyin (TikTok). However, constrained by their technological proficiency and established habits, their engagement often remains superficial, highlighting the need for age-friendly design and guidance. Anhui Senior Radio has constructed a "traditional radio + new media" ecosystem, attracting over 500,000 followers by distributing short-form videos on life services via digital platforms. This innovation expands communication channels while lowering the digital barrier to entry through simplified operations and optimized interfaces, thereby facilitating the adaptation of older adults to new media.

3 Program Hosting Strategies for Older Audiences

3.1 Age-friendly Linguistic Expression

Given the physiological characteristics of older adults, such as declining auditory function and a relatively slower speed of information reception and processing, the host's linguistic delivery must focus on the dual objectives of lowering the comprehension threshold and enhancing emotional warmth. This can be optimized across the following three dimensions:

Scientific Control of Pacing and Pausing: During broadcasts, a moderate-to-slow pace of 180-200 words per minute is recommended, maintaining a steady and smooth cadence. Particularly when announcing important statistics, key policy information, or complex concepts, the host should consciously insert a brief pause of 0.5 to 1 second before and after the information point. These deliberately designed pauses create a necessary cognitive buffer for elderly listeners, aiding them in the reception, comprehension, and retention of information^[2].

Simplification and Accessibility of Language: The use of internet slang, foreign loanwords, and complex professional jargon should be strictly avoided. Hosts should excel at "transcoding" abstract policy terms into vivid, relatable, everyday language. For example, the program team of Lao Kai Xin La (Happy Seniors) on Jiangsu Radio creatively explained the technical concept of the "medical insurance unified account" as "a public account we can all use for reimbursement when we see a doctor." By analogizing it to the familiar scenario of a collective fund, they significantly reduced the cognitive difficulty for the older audience.

Cultivating a Warm and Approachable Tone: It is essential to employ a vocal tone that is warm, natural, sincere, and patient to create an atmosphere of "family-like" companionship. The "Companionship is the Longest Confession of Love" series on Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio serves as an excellent model. Hosts use a calm and soothing tone to patiently listen to the daily trifles and emotional needs of their audience, effectively enhancing listener trust and program stickiness through empathetic responses.

3.2 Human-centric Content Design

Content design must fully consider the cognitive characteristics and consumption habits of older adults, emphasizing three core elements: high practicality, clear structure, and strong interactivity. This can be approached from the following aspects:

Topics Closely Tied to Essential Daily Needs: Each episode should focus on an in-depth exploration of a single topic highly relevant to the daily lives of seniors. For instance, the program Jia You Bencao (Herbs at Home) on Hunan Aiwang Channel specializes in traditional Chinese medicine and wellness—a topic of great interest to older adults. It employs an innovative tripartite presentation model: "on-site visits to the origins of medicinal herbs + lively and story-driven explanations + live Q&A with authoritative experts." This approach ensures the content is both professional and authoritative while also being entertaining and engaging.

Clearly Structured Program Format: A standardized program architecture is recommended: "a brief overview at the beginning + a detailed step-by-step explanation in the main body + a summary of key points at the end." This progressive,

linear narrative structure with thematic consistency helps older audiences better understand and remember the content. Anhui Senior Radio demonstrates this well by scheduling 10 distinct, clearly positioned programs at fixed times each day. This regular scheduling cultivates stable listening habits and brand loyalty.

Simple and Accessible Forms of Interaction: Interactive segments should be designed with low barriers to entry and convenient participation methods, such as "calling a hotline to request a classic song" or "sharing a personal story via voice message." The innovative practices of the Dalin DOC (Digital Opportunity Center) are particularly noteworthy. By organizing professional training, they encourage seniors to participate directly in the entire process of audio-visual content creation, satisfying their psychological need to "contribute their experience and realize their self-worth," which has yielded excellent social outcomes.

4 Building Emotional Connection and Identity

The core value of radio for seniors lies in "emotional resonance," a concept that reflects a precise understanding of their spiritual needs. Hosts can establish deep connections and facilitate a genuine spiritual dialogue through three key strategies:

Story-based Expression: This is the most powerful way to touch an audience. Skilled hosts excel at unearthing true stories of ordinary seniors from daily life, presenting their unique life experiences through nuanced narrative techniques. The program Xinyuan (Heart's Wish) on Hunan Aiwang Channel innovatively uses the premise of "helping seniors fulfill small wishes" as a vehicle. In the process of realizing these wishes, the program naturally elicits touching stories of family bonds, moving romantic histories, and warm neighborhood friendships, sparking cross-generational social resonance.

Awakening Collective Memory: This is an effective pathway to building emotional bonds. The careful selection of nostalgic elements—such as old songs, classic film clips, and traditional opera—can instantly evoke the collective memories of the older generation. The program Time's Jukebox excels in this area, frequently playing timeless classics like Honghu Shui Lang Da Lang (Waves upon Waves in Honghu Lake) and My Motherland. It invites listeners to share personal experiences related to these works, such as their struggles during youth or unforgettable memories, thereby strengthening the audience's cultural identity and sense of generational belonging.

Affirming Self-Worth: This is crucial for enhancing the social identity of older adults^[3]. Through meticulously designed segments, the lifelong contributions and current value of seniors are systematically showcased. The "Red Heart for the Party" segment on Silver Sail Online is a prime example. It regularly invites veteran Party members, model workers, and old soldiers to share their inspiring stories of struggle and dedication. This content not only educates the younger generation about history but also makes senior listeners feel that their contributions are remembered by society, thereby instilling a strong sense of self-worth and social dignity.

5 Technological Adaptation and Digital Empowerment

Hosts must act as a "digital bridge," helping older adults cross the digital divide:

Bite-sized Technology Tutorials: Programs should incorporate step-by-step, detailed instructional segments on using smart devices. For example, a practical tutorial unit like "A Guide for Seniors on Making WeChat Video Calls" could be created. Complex procedures must be broken down into simple, digestible steps. A topic such as "how to video call your children on WeChat" should start from opening the app and explain each interface and button function one step at a time.

Collaborative Anti-Fraud Public Education: Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio partnered with several major provincial banks to launch the "Elderly Assistance Anti-Fraud Public Service Campaign." Using radio, a medium trusted and enjoyed by seniors, they broadcast weekly special programs. By analyzing the methods and scripted tactics of fraudsters, these programs help listeners acquire practical skills to identify scams. A hotline for consultations was also established to provide one-on-one anti-fraud guidance.

Guiding New Media Interaction: Jiangsu Variety Channel produced a series of video tutorials, such as "How to Leave a Comment on a WeChat Official Account Article," using a combination of images and text to detail each operational step and help seniors quickly master new media interaction skills^[4]. The channel also innovatively piloted an "online-first, broadcast-later" model. Content is premiered on a web platform, encouraging older viewers to interact in real-time by sending bullet comments (danmu) from their phones, before the program is subsequently aired on television.

6 The Application of Convergent Communication Models in Radio for Older Adults

6.1 Omnimedia Strategy and Multi-platform Reach

Successful radio broadcasters for seniors have universally constructed a "radio + new media" convergent communication matrix. This achieves comprehensive online and offline channel coverage, forming a multi-dimensional communication framework.

Anhui Senior Radio: While maintaining the strengths of its traditional programming, the station has actively expanded its presence on new media platforms. Through the refined management of multiple new media accounts on platforms like WeChat Official Accounts, Douyin, and Kuaishou, it produces and disseminates short-form videos and illustrated articles tailored to the information consumption habits of older adults. Currently, its total number of followers across all platforms has surpassed 500,000, establishing a virtuous cycle where "traditional radio secures the core listenership, while new media platforms expand its communication influence."

Jiangsu's Lao Kai Xin La Program: This program has innovatively developed a "1+N" convergent communication model. This model is based on one core television program (the "1"), which anchors a new media content matrix spanning multiple platforms, while also establishing numerous ("N") offline WeChat service communities. This approach ensures content quality while simultaneously expanding distribution channels. Within just six months of its launch, the program's total online viewership exceeded 500 million, successfully reaching the relatively younger "silver generation" demographic of 50-65 year-olds and achieving precision communication.

Heilongjiang Senior and Children's Radio: Adopting a systematic operational strategy, this broadcaster has established a cluster of over 20 Douyin accounts in vertically segmented fields. By repurposing the best content from its traditional programs and re-editing it into practical, 1-to-3-minute information clips, this content strategy makes it extremely convenient for seniors to find relevant information based on their needs. They can also watch and learn from the content repeatedly at any time, significantly improving information acquisition efficiency.

6.2 Online-Offline Integration and Community-based Services

These models bridge the gap between "online content" and "offline services," facilitating a crucial transition from "listening" to "applying."

Anhui Senior Radio's "Companion Community Service Center": As a professional senior care service organization, it has established an extensive service network nationwide, forging long-term, stable partnerships with communities in over 200 cities of varying sizes^[5]. Through a grassroots service model deeply rooted in local communities, the center's services now cover approximately 600,000 older adults, forming a comprehensive senior care system. In terms of service content, the center not only provides basic free health check-up appointments but also offers a diverse range of offline services, including professional legal aid and a variety of recreational courses for seniors.

Hunan Aiwan Channel's "Three-Screen Integration" Convergent Media Model: This innovative model deeply integrates three key distribution channels: the traditional large television screen, the small screen of mobile devices, and public LED information screens in communities. This creates a comprehensive and multi-dimensional content dissemination matrix. The online platform features a "Community Big Stage" talent showcase, providing a digital stage for residents to express themselves. Concurrently, offline auditions and artistic performances are held at local "Happy Neighborhood Centers," achieving a seamless fusion of online and offline interaction.

Heilongjiang's "Super Grandparents and Grandchildren" Public Welfare Event: As a socially significant and innovative initiative themed around "passing on family values and strengthening intergenerational bonds," this event was meticulously organized to reach communities, senior centers, and primary and secondary schools across 13 cities in the province. The event featured a rich variety of segments, including grandparent-grandchild interactive game auditions, traditional culture knowledge competitions, and talent shows. Statistics show that direct offline participation exceeded 20,000 people, with the event indirectly reaching an audience of over 100,000.

7 Industrial Expansion and Value Conversion

Radio for seniors can tap into the potential of the silver economy through a "Content + Services" model, achieving a win-win outcome for both social and economic benefits.

Anhui Senior Radio's "Heartwarming Selections" Project: This project employs a dual-track model of "professional host recommendations + online community group buying." Radio hosts carefully select high-quality products, which are then offered through group purchasing events organized on social platforms like WeChat. This service has provided nearly 20,000 seniors across the province with access to essential goods, from fresh agricultural produce to daily necessities. This initiative not only solves the shopping difficulties seniors face due to mobility issues or information gaps, allowing them

to buy affordable, quality goods from home, but also opens up a new revenue stream for the radio frequency beyond advertising.

Jiangsu Variety Channel's "Litchi-Silver Age Arts Festival": This initiative organically integrates three functional modules: stage art performances, health and wellness services, and cultural tourism promotion. Through a vibrant array of artistic shows, professional health lectures, and well-planned tour recommendations, it offers a holistic cultural and entertainment experience for middle-aged and older adults. The platform leverages the media resources of Jiangsu Variety Channel to build deep partnerships with high-quality senior care facilities and famous tourist attractions, effectively driving foot traffic and brand exposure for its partners through online-offline synergy^[6].

Anhui Senior Radio's "Rural Revitalization Group Buying" Project: A professional team travels to rural areas within Anhui Province to rigorously select high-quality agricultural products with unique local characteristics, including fresh produce, organic poultry and eggs, and specialty dried goods. In addition to detailed promotion on traditional radio programs, these products are also extensively advertised through a new media matrix, including WeChat Official Accounts and short-video platforms. This innovative measure achieves dual value: on one hand, it effectively supports rural industrial development, helps farmers increase their income, and promotes the implementation of the national rural revitalization strategy; on the other hand, it provides a safe, reliable, and affordable channel for urban seniors to purchase agricultural products, tangibly improving their quality of life and sense of well-being.

8 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of an aging society, radio for older adults transcends its function as a mere information dissemination tool. It serves as a "spiritual companion for the silver generation" and an "effective link to social services," playing a unique role in mitigating loneliness. By implementing age-friendly hosting strategies and constructing convergent communication models, broadcast media can satisfy the spiritual and cultural needs of older adults, secure a favorable position within the silver economy, and achieve a unification of social and market value.

Looking forward, radio for seniors must adhere to a "senior-centric" principle—deepening content innovation, expanding service boundaries, optimizing the user experience, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration to build an "age-friendly media ecosystem." Only in this way can radio truly become a "trusted friend" and a "heartwarming assistant" for older adults, contributing the media's power to the social vision of "ensuring the old are cared for, culturally enriched, and secure" (lao you suo yang, lao you suo le, lao you suo an).

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