RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE PATHWAYS FOR ONLINE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN CHINA HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE ERA OF CONVERGED MEDIA

Abstract:

The deepening development of the integrated media era has profoundly transformed the information dissemination ecosystem and youth cognitive patterns, presenting new challenges and opportunities for online ideological and political education in higher education institutions. Based on research into the physical and mental characteristics, information reception habits, and value recognition mechanisms of contemporary university students, this paper systematically analyzes the structural misconceptions currently facing online ideological and political education in higher education institutions across three dimensions: audience, media, and supply. It proposes innovative strategies for online ideological and political education in higher education institutions with the goal of "winning over the youth." .

This study proposes establishing a content production mechanism centered on "youth resonance" to drive the transformation of ideological and political education from "one-way indoctrination" to "two-way interaction," and from "formalistic dissemination" to "emotional connection." This approach aims to achieve the effective integration and value guidance of ideological and political education within the youth demographic.

This study, as a key initiative to break through the limitations of traditional educational paradigms in the era of converged media, aims to establish an online ideological and political education system that aligns with the principles of converged media communication and resonates with the developmental patterns and cognitive characteristics of young people. It seeks to enhance the effectiveness of online education and fulfill the fundamental mission of fostering virtue and cultivating talent with high quality. The research will be conducted between 2025 and 2027 across multiple projects, including studies on the effectiveness and improvement of online ideological and political education for university students.

This study integrates multiple research methods including literature review, case analysis, and survey research. It is committed to applying

the findings to practical work and teaching, verifying the validity and feasibility of conclusions through practice. The research aims to design and validate teachable online ideological and political education cases, achieving seamless integration between research, implementation, and education.

Research indicates that the deepening development of the converged media era has profoundly transformed the information dissemination ecosystem and young people's cognitive patterns, presenting new challenges and opportunities for online ideological and political education in higher education institutions. In response to the new propositions for online ideological and political education amid the converged media wave, efforts should align with the psychological and behavioral characteristics of young audiences, overcome the structural misconceptions currently present in campus online ideological and political education, and establish breakthrough strategies that shift from merely "appealing to youth" to genuinely "winning over youth."

Only by deeply understanding the cognitive characteristics and emotional structures of contemporary youth, acknowledging the misconceptions in current online ideological and political education practices, and steadfastly advancing content innovation, relationship reconstruction, and technological empowerment centered on "resonating with young people" can we truly bridge the "communication gap." This will enable online ideological and political education to achieve a qualitative leap−transitioning from mere 'reach' to genuine "impact," and evolving from "reaching individuals" to "truly resonating with them."

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Introduction:-

During the fifth collective study session of the 20th Central Political Bureau, General Secretary Xi Jinping explicitly stated: "The internet has become a vital space for the learning and daily lives of young people. We must enhance our capacity for online education and conscientiously advance ideological and political work in schools during the internet era.

Currently, the accelerated penetration of new technologies such as 5G and artificial intelligence is driving media forms from simple "addition" to deep "integration," constructing a new "four-all media" communication paradigm characterized by "all-process media, all-dimensional media, all-participant media, and all-effective media.[[]]" As digital natives, the younger generation's developmental trajectory is highly intertwined with the converged media ecosystem. Short videos, social platforms, and AI interactions have become their primary channels for information acquisition, social engagement, entertainment, and value expression. This highly mediated existence has shaped distinct contemporary characteristics in young people's cognitive structures, thought patterns, and value recognition mechanisms. They possess both highly efficient information filtering abilities and exhibit "fragmented cognition"; they crave equal, dialogic emotional interaction while maintaining an innate wariness toward authoritative discourse; they prioritize practical benefits for personal development while retaining a spiritual pursuit of lofty values.

In stark contrast to these profound shifts in youth cognition, certain higher education institutions' online ideological and political education still reflects traditional mindsets. Content production often falls into "theoretical preaching," lacking narrative styles appealing to young audiences. Communication methods exhibit pronounced tendencies toward "one-way push" and "traffic worship," neglecting the interactive and community-driven nature of converged media. In team development, the structural contradiction of "understanding theory but not technology, understanding education but not communication" is prominent, making it difficult to meet the professional demands of online education. This mismatch between supply and demand directly leads to ideological and political education falling into the dilemma of "being transmitted but not understood, known but not trusted." Against this backdrop, breaking through the limitations of traditional educational paradigms to construct an online ideological and political education system aligned with the principles of integrated media communication and adapted to the developmental patterns and cognitive characteristics of young people–thereby achieving a strategic shift from "appealing to youth" to "winning over youth"–is not only an urgent necessity for enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political work in higher education institutions but also a strategic task for consolidating Marxism's guiding role in the ideological sphere. This paper explores innovative pathways for online ideological and political education in higher education institutions during the converged media era, beginning with the cognitive characteristics of contemporary youth.

Emotionally, young people seek equality, resonance, and dialogic communication. They resist one-directional authoritative discourse and instead gravitate toward narratives that reflect lived experience and personal emotion. Regarding value orientation, they balance pragmatic concerns–such as academic development and career opportunities–with a desire for meaningful ideals, moral elevation, and collective belonging. These cognitive and emotional characteristics call for profound adjustments in how ideological and political education is conceptualized and delivered in higher education institutions.

However, compared with the rapid transformation of youth cognition and media usage patterns, many universities still rely on traditional approaches to online ideological and political education. Content production often falls into "theoretical preaching," emphasizing abstract discourse that lacks the narrative appeal and emotional resonance required by young audiences. Communication methods remain dominated by one-way content delivery and a "

traffic-centered" mindset, neglecting the importance of interaction, participation, and community-building in the converged media environment. In terms of faculty development, structural issues persist: many educators "understand theory but not technology," or "know education but not communication," resulting in a mismatch between the professional demands of online education and the actual competencies of teaching teams.

These weaknesses directly lead to an educational dilemma often described as "transmitted but not understood, known but not trusted." Although educational content reaches students through digital channels, it fails to meaningfully enter their cognitive world or generate emotional resonance. At the same time, authoritative discourse in ideological and political education faces challenges in competing with diversified online values, making it difficult to establish credibility and influence. Thus, the effective chain of ideological and political education—from cognitive recognition to emotional identification and finally value internalization—often remains incomplete in cyberspace.

Against this backdrop, breaking through traditional educational paradigms and creating an online ideological and political education system that aligns with integrated media communication principles and youth cognitive laws has become not only an urgent task but also a strategic imperative for higher education institutions. The goal is to achieve a shift from merely "appealing to youth" to genuinely "winning over youth," enhancing the attraction, cohesion, and persuasive power of ideological and political education in the digital era. More broadly, this relates to the fundamental mission of consolidating Marxism's guiding role in the ideological sphere and ensuring the effectiveness of value leadership in cyberspace.

To accomplish this, higher education institutions must explore innovative pathways in several key areas:

First, they must take youth cognitive characteristics as the logical starting point and reconstruct digital discourse systems. Abstract and theoretical language should be transformed into experiential, story-driven, and scenario-based narratives that resonate with young people's lived realities.

Second, universities should adhere to the communication logic of the integrated media era and reconstruct dissemination structures. This involves shifting from "push-based" dissemination to "interactive co-creation," forming vibrant online communities where students participate actively in content generation, discussion, and value expression.

Third, digital technologies should be leveraged to enhance the precision, personalization, and immersion of ideological and political education. Big data can help analyze youth interests and concerns; AI can provide intelligent learning support; VR and AR technologies can offer immersive patriotic education and experiential learning scenarios that strengthen emotional engagement.

Fourth, the development of high-quality, interdisciplinary educator teams is essential. Educators must be trained to master both ideological-political theory and digital communication skills, enabling them to serve as facilitators, collaborators, and co-creators in online learning environments rather than merely content transmitters.

In summary, innovating online ideological and political education in the era of integrated media is not only a response to technological transformation but also a strategic necessity for implementing the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education. Only by deeply understanding youth, grasping media logic, and utilizing technological empowerment can higher education institutions build a new online ideological and political education ecosystem that is engaging, effective, and aligned with the expectations of the digital age. This study therefore explores innovative pathways for online ideological and political education by beginning with the cognitive characteristics of contemporary youth, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for strengthening ideological and political work in Chinese universities.

Cognitive Shift: Psychological Traits and Behavioral Patterns of Young Audiences in the Converged Media Era

During the fifth collective study session of the 20th Central Political Bureau, General Secretary Xi Jinping explicitly stated: "The internet has become a vital space for the learning and daily lives of young people. We must enhance our capacity for online education and conscientiously advance ideological and political work in schools during the internet era.

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As the new force and primary demographic on campus, contemporary youth are also digital natives who often exhibit more open, independent, and self-centered thought patterns[[]]. "Emotional resonance" has become the foremost criterion for information selection among young people. Whether content is engaging and evokes empathy directly determines students' willingness to click, with this factor outweighing the content's inherent importance or the authority of its source. This emotion-first information selection logic manifests in two key characteristics. First, a preference for "high-perceptual-density" content. Youth favor formats with "high bitrate" (high information density per unit time and strong emotional impact), making short videos, interactive H5s, and virtual experiences the most popular carriers for ideological and political education. Through visual symbols, scene construction, and emotional rendering, such content can rapidly evoke emotional resonance. For example, the AI digital human ideological and political micro-video created by Changsha University's "Jiege's Everything Shop" studio uses a 3D virtual character to portray the confusion of university life. Each video averages 86,000 views, more than 20 times that of traditional text-based posts. Simultaneously, young audiences demand rigorous "rhythm" and "meme density" in content. Stilted theoretical insertion or sluggish narrative pacing directly triggers "scrolling away," becoming a critical factor affecting dissemination effectiveness. Secondly, there is a strong demand for "participatory communication." Converged media communication breaks the "broadcaster-audience" dichotomy, transforming young people from information recipients into meaning producers. Students actively participate in dissemination through comments, reposts, and derivative works to express emotions, construct values, and seek validation, creating a virtuous cycle of "dissemination-feedback-redissemination."

With the deepening development of the market economy and the transformation of social structures, the values of contemporary youth increasingly exhibit characteristics of "pragmatism and rationality." However, this pragmatism refers to the dialectical unity of ideals and reality, primarily manifested in two dimensions. First is the "reality-oriented" nature of value judgments. When confronting major life decisions involving personal interests—such as career choices and life planning—young people prioritize tangible benefits for individual development. Factors like "salary and benefits" and "career growth opportunities" often top their considerations. This pragmatic tendency extends to their reception of online ideological and political content, manifesting as a rejection

of "vague slogans" and a heightened focus on "practical value." Second, the "latent persistence" of ideals and convictions. The pragmatism of young people has not diminished their spiritual pursuit of noble values; rather, it has taken on characteristics of being "implicit and contextualized." Positive content consistently resonates emotionally with youth, and many students genuinely feel that "stories of role models close to home move them more than distant heroes." Take the "Outstanding Youth in Trade and Economics" series of new media products from Jiangsu Vocational College of Trade and Economics as an example. By sharing the "Persevere in striving" journeys of role models in their midst and weaving patriotic sentiments into personal growth narratives, the comments section is filled with remarks like "using role models as mirrors" and "striving to grow." This demonstrates that young people are not averse to ideals and beliefs, but rather reject grand narratives detached from personal experience. They yearn to establish tangible emotional connections between their individual development and the nation's destiny.

Practical Dilemmas: Structural Misconceptions in Current Online Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions

Currently, some educators fail to fully recognize the heightened agency of young people in the era of converged media. They continue to view students as passive "educational subjects" or even "managed entities," potentially revealing tendencies toward "top-down authoritarianism" and "self-centeredness" in communication. For instance, after pushing ideological content, they neither analyze user data (such as reading duration, interaction rates, or sharing paths) nor collect student feedback. In comment section management, "selective replies" and "mechanical responses" are commonplace, with critical opinions often met with simplistic "deletion or blocking." This misaligned educational relationship directly leads to young people feeling alienated or even resistant toward online ideological and political content, trapping such education in a predicament where messages are transmitted but not understood.

In practice, this misalignment is manifested in multiple ways. After publishing ideological and political content online, many educators consider their responsibilities fulfilled once the information is "sent out." They seldom examine backend data—such as reading duration, click hotspots, interaction frequencies, or patterns of secondary sharing—to understand whether the content actually resonates with students. Likewise, they often fail to collect student feedback regarding content quality, narrative style, emotional tone, or ideological relevance. The absence of such reflective and iterative practices indicates a lack of awareness that effective communication requires ongoing evaluation and adaptation.

Comment section management further illustrates this issue. On many official accounts, interaction remains highly selective and mechanical: only comments that align with the prescribed stance receive responses, while questions, critiques, or nuanced reflections from students are often ignored. Critical opinions may even be handled through simplistic measures such as deletion, muting, or blocking. These practices weaken the openness and authenticity of online dialogue spaces and reinforce a unilateral communication model in which educators speak and students are expected merely to listen.

Under such non-reciprocal and low-trust conditions, it becomes difficult for young people to develop emotional identification with ideological and political education. Instead of perceiving online ideological content as meaningful or relevant, they often view it as "mandatory reading" or "propagandistic discourse" detached from their lived experiences. Consequently, the messaging may be successfully transmitted at a technical level but fails to be genuinely understood, accepted, or internalized at the cognitive or affective level. Over time, this communication gap leads to a predicament in which ideological education appears outwardly active yet substantively ineffective: content is produced abundantly, but genuine value resonance remains scarce..

Although various university-affiliated educational new media platforms have become key battlegrounds for online ideological and political education—forming a new media matrix encompassing Weibo, WeChat, mobile apps, and Douyin—media utilization remains confined to superficial "technological layering." There is no "deep integration" across platforms, resulting in a formalistic approach that prioritizes quantity over quality. The interactive, community-driven, and algorithmic characteristics of converged media communication are not fully grasped. Content production often amounts to "changing the packaging but not the substance," Traditional educational content is merely repurposed for online platforms, while the application of new technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality often remains at a superficial "demonstration level." There is a lack of deeply integrated educational design, narrative adaptation suited to youth communication contexts, and visual expression, preventing technological advantages from translating into tangible educational outcomes. This significantly limits the dissemination effectiveness of online ideological and political education.

Content production serves as the core vehicle for online ideological education, yet it is also the domain where supply-demand mismatches are most pronounced. Some universities produce content that disregards young people's cognitive habits and emotional needs, exhibiting characteristics of "theorization, hollowness, and homogenization," making it difficult to achieve the educational goal of "sinking into the hearts and minds." First, the "grandiosity" and 'detachment' in narrative approaches. Educators overemphasize "grand narratives," confining ideological content to policy interpretations and theoretical expositions while neglecting micro-narratives closely tied to young people's lives. Students report that "ideological content feels too distant from daily life," struggling to engage with abstract theoretical lectures. Second, the rigid and emotionless delivery of values. Some ideological and political content pits its "educational function" against its "communication function," overemphasizing theoretical solemnity while neglecting emotional resonance. Students perceive such content as "lacking emotional warmth" and express aversion to rigid value indoctrination.

Path Innovation: Breakthrough Strategies for University Online Ideological and Political Education—From "Catering" to "Winning Over"

Youth constitute the main force of the internet; winning over youth means winning over the internet.[[]] Ideological and belief education is the core mission of online ideological and political education. Value shaping must be integrated into environmental immersion, practical cultivation, and emotional experiences[[]], permeating the entire process of youth development. Educators should adeptly employ "scenario-based narratives" and "storytelling expressions" to translate grand theories into tangible, relatable life logic, forging emotional connections between the Chinese Dream and the aspirations of young people. Simultaneously, educators should respect young people's multi-layered psychological needs—such as self-actualization and respect—by constructing recognition pathways aligned with their pragmatic values. This guides them toward naturally embracing collective values during personal development, achieving a progressive ascent from "shared interests" to "emotional resonance" and ultimately "established conviction." For instance, Changsha University's "Jiege's All-Purpose Shop" studio launched the series "You're Not Alone on Your Postgraduate Journey" to address student anxiety about graduate school entrance exams, offering study guidance while conveying the value of "perseverance and hard work." Yichun University established a "Policy Interpretation + Role Model Sharing" column focused on graduate employment, interpreting job policies while promoting the exemplary deeds of graduates working in grassroots positions, achieving resonance between "solving practical problems" and "value guidance."

To overcome the dilemma where higher education online ideological and political education teams "understand education but not communication, and grasp theory but not technology," it is essential to establish a professional,

multidisciplinary online ideological and political work team to provide talent support for educational innovation. First, construct a "faculty-student collaboration" team structure. Break away from the single "teacher-led" model to form collaborative teams comprising "subject faculty + counselors + student leaders." Integrate on-campus and off-campus resources, online and offline platforms, and ideological courses with specialized curricula [[]]. Subject faculty oversee theoretical accuracy and content planning to ensure ideological correctness; counselors address student needs and emotional guidance to enhance relevance; student leaders handle technical implementation and dissemination to boost appeal. Second, establish a "three-dimensional integration" training system. Addressing team capability gaps, enhance political literacy through specialized training and theoretical study; improve media literacy via new media skills workshops and dissemination pattern discussions to master practical skills like short video production and live-stream interaction; strengthen professional competence through interdisciplinary exchanges and case analysis, achieving deep integration of theory and practice. Third, refine a long-term "incentive and safeguard" mechanism. Establish a scientific assessment system that prioritizes "educational effectiveness" over "traffic metrics" as the core indicator. Conduct comprehensive evaluations based on content quality, student feedback, and value guidance. Allocate dedicated funding and incentive policies to stimulate the team's intrinsic motivation.Benchmarking: It is recommended to construct an open-set evaluation using Objaverse-XL multi-category sampling + a subset of OmniObject3D real-world objects, supplemented by task-oriented metrics (e.g., assembly/animation feasibility).

Content innovation is the core competitiveness of online ideological and political education. To address Generation Z's unique information consumption habits, communication strategies must shift from a "supply-side" to a "demand-side" approach, building a youth-centered content production system[[]] and establishing content mechanisms guided by the principle of "resonating with youth." First, achieve 'precision' in thematic planning to ensure "knowledge utility." Establish a "students order, teachers cook" topic selection mechanism. Through surveys, topic collection, and data analysis, precisely identify young people's content needs. For example, launch "employment policies + career planning" themes during "graduation season" and "adaptation guides + safety education" content during "back-to-school season," integrating ideological education into key growth milestones. Second, adopt "scenario-based" narrative expression to achieve "engaging delivery." We employ communication symbols and narrative styles familiar to young people, transforming abstract theories into concrete scenarios: In discourse, we appropriately use internet memes and peer-to-peer language while avoiding vulgarity or excessive entertainment; In presentation, short videos, vlogs, and interactive Q&A formats are employed with vivid visuals and background music. Narrative structures follow a "problem introduction−story development−value elevation" model: the first 3 seconds set a "hook" to grab attention, the middle section strengthens emotional resonance, and the conclusion delivers value transmission. Third, emotional interaction is 'equalized' to achieve "empathy and resonance." Build a "two-way dialogue" content ecosystem by incorporating interactive topics that encourage student comments and replies. Establish a "timely feedback" mechanism to ensure every student comment receives a response, fostering emotional connections. Respect youth as active participants by encouraging co-creation of content−soliciting student submissions, inviting student hosts, and empowering young people to become producers and disseminators of ideological and political content.

Converged media technology is not merely a communication tool but a force for reconstructing educational environments. Universities should proactively embrace new technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality to construct a new online ideological and political education environment featuring "immersive experiences, intelligent services, and targeted content delivery," achieving a dialectical unity of technological empowerment and value guidance. First, develop "immersive" educational products to enhance experiential engagement. Leverage VR/AR technologies to construct virtual ideological and political education environments, enabling young students to deepen emotional engagement through immersive experiences. For instance, develop "virtual revolutionary

exhibition halls" where students can "enter" historical sites via VR devices and interact with historical scenes. Second, establish an 'intelligent' service system to enhance precision by creating "AI ideological and political assistants" powered by artificial intelligence, delivering personalized services around the clock. Third, optimize a "matrix-based" dissemination network to broaden coverage. Build differentiated converged media matrices tailored to each platform's characteristics−such as WeChat Official Accounts focusing on in-depth theoretical interpretations and policy analysis, Douyin emphasizing short video narratives and interactive content, and Xiaohongshu prioritizing lifestyle-integrated ideological and political content. Simultaneously establish a "campus-wide coordination + university-media collaboration" dissemination mechanism, internally integrating new media resources from departments and student organizations to form a unified communication force.

Conclusions

In the era of converged media, ideological and political education in higher education institutions fundamentally represents a profound transformation concerning discourse power, identity, and connectivity. Within this transformation, the younger generation is no longer passive recipients of education but rather communicators and participants with autonomous consciousness, emotional needs, and creative capabilities. This transformation is by no means a simple technological overlay or superficial innovation; rather, it constitutes a systematic reshaping of educational philosophies, communication logic, and practical paradigms− −shifting from one-way indoctrination to two-way resonance within communities, from content relocation to value transmission through emotional immersion, and from isolated platform operations to collaborative ecosystem building. Each transformation aligns with the core characteristics of contemporary youth: fragmented cognition, emotional decision-making, and pragmatic identification.

The four-dimensional innovation system proposed earlier− "value anchoring, team empowerment, content innovation, and technological support"−is not a collection of isolated elements but an organically interconnected whole: Value anchoring serves as directional guidance, ensuring ideological and political education remains anchored to the fundamental mission of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent," preventing it from losing its way in the pursuit of traffic. Team Empowerment serves as the core support, cultivating multidisciplinary teams proficient in theory, communication, and technology as the driving force of innovation; Content Innovation acts as the key vehicle, breaking through communication barriers with works that are "knowledgeably useful, engagingly expressed, and emotionally resonant"; Technical Support extends the educational landscape, integrating ideological and political education into young people's daily lives through intelligent tools and immersive experiences. From the AI counselor in "Jiege's Everything Shop" to Yichun University's "Walking Ideological and Political Education Class," these practical examples demonstrate that only by organically integrating these four elements can ideological and political content truly enter young people's field of vision and integrate into their lives.

At the same time, we must clearly recognize that converged media technology is a double-edged sword. Risks such as algorithmic recommendation creating cognitive echo chambers and excessive entertainment undermining values must be vigilantly guarded against in innovative practices. This demands that ideological educators not only maintain sensitivity to new technologies and proactively leverage virtual reality and artificial intelligence to expand educational scenarios, but also steadfastly uphold the original mission of education. They must ensure theoretical depth and emotional resonance in content creation, avoiding the pitfalls of "technology supremacy" and "traffic-driven content."

Only by deeply understanding young people's cognitive traits and emotional structures, confronting existing misconceptions in current online ideological education practices, and steadfastly advancing content innovation, relationship reconstruction, and technological empowerment centered on "resonating with youth" can we truly

bridge the "communication gap." This will enable online ideological education to achieve a qualitative leap-transitioning from mere 'reach' to genuine "impact," and from "reaching individuals" to "sinking into hearts." This is not only an essential requirement for fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering virtue and cultivating talent, but also a mission and responsibility that ideological and political educators in higher education institutions must shoulder in the new era. Moreover, it is an inherent part of cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the great task of national rejuvenation for the construction of an education powerhouse.

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