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Social Relations and Book Publishing Strategies in the Information Age: Postprint

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Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose] In the information age, social relationships exhibit a dual trend of “homebody” and “cloud,” and the book publishing industry faces severe industrial transformation. The book publishing industry must strengthen research and practice in publishing strategies to better meet the increasingly diverse cultural needs of the general readership. **[Method]** This article conducts an in-depth analysis of two characteristics of current social relationships—the inward-oriented “homebody” and the outward-oriented “cloud” and their respective manifestations, and proposes five practical strategies for book publishing based on this analysis. **[Result]** In the information age, the book publishing industry needs to create new opportunities amidst transformation, strengthen practical exploration in brand building, digital publishing, innovative marketing, data mining, Internet of Things networks, and other areas, thereby promoting the overall strategic transformation of the industry. **[Conclusion]** The rapid development of the information age presents both challenges and opportunities for publishing institutions. The challenge lies in how to survive in the rapidly changing tide of the times, while the opportunity lies in how to leverage the development trends of the era to compel itself to adapt to new situational changes, thereby achieving the overall strategic transformation of the industry.

Full Text

Preamble

ChinaXiv Collaborative Journal: A Brief Discussion on Social Relations and Book Publishing Strategies in the Information Age (Jinan Publishing Co., Ltd., Jinan, Shandong 250002)

Abstract

[Objective] In the information age, social relations exhibit a dual orientation of “Zhai” (inward, home-centered) and “Cloud” (outward, network-based), presenting the book publishing industry with severe industrial transformation challenges. The industry must strengthen research and practice in publishing strategies to better meet the increasingly diverse cultural demands of readers. **[Method]** This article thoroughly analyzes two key characteristics of contemporary social relations—the inward “Zhai” and outward “Cloud” orientations and their distinct manifestations—and proposes five practical strategies for book publishing based on this analysis. **[Results]** In the information age, the book publishing industry must forge new opportunities amidst transformation by strengthening practical exploration in brand building, digital publishing, innovative marketing, data mining, and the Internet of Things to drive overall strategic industry transformation. **[Conclusion]** The rapid development of the information age presents both challenges and opportunities for publishing institutions. The challenge lies in surviving the rapidly changing tides of the era, while the opportunity lies in leveraging developmental trends to compel adaptation to new circumstances, thereby achieving overall strategic industry transformation.

Keywords: Information Age; Social Relations; “Zhai” ; “Cloud” ; Book Publishing Strategies

CLC Number: G237

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2023)02-134-05

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2023.02.027

Citation Format: Ding Hongyu. A Brief Discussion on Social Relations and Book Publishing Strategies in the Information Age [J]. China Media Technology, 2023(02): 134-137, 158.

In addition to being influenced by overall social purchasing power and residents' primary consumption structures, the book publishing industry faces significant constraints from current reading patterns. In some respects, these reading patterns exert a more profound influence on the industry' s future development. Since entering the information age, the public' s proficiency with and dependence on various terminal devices—such as computers, iPads, and mobile phones —and new media applications have steadily increased. While this creates new opportunities for publishing, it also poses novel challenges. Marxism posits that human essence, in its reality, is the aggregate of all social relations. In this sense, the highly information-based era has seen people increasingly rely on internet infrastructure and information technology for remote work, online learning, and e-commerce, directly reconstructing social relations.

1. Social Relations in the Information Age

In the information age, the traditional book publishing industry has undergone objectively disruptive changes. The explosion of short-video platforms such as Douyin and WeChat Channels has popularized the concept of the “Zhai economy,” with its momentum growing annually. Citizens’ cultural consumption habits have changed unprecedentedly, with more readers developing habits of digital reading. Influenced by the pandemic, online learning has gradually become a trend with increasingly broad reach. Meanwhile, audiobooks, e-books, and knowledge-based paid services from major platforms have risen powerfully; new media marketing methods such as cloud-based library distribution, online reading clubs, new book launches, and live-streamed book sales have gained deep public acceptance. In recent years, “Zhai” and “Cloud” have become the defining terms for social relations in the information age and will likely remain the most direct manifestations for a considerable time.

1.1 Inward-Oriented Social Relations: Zhai

“Zhai culture” originates from Japan’ s two-dimensional world, referring to a subculture where individuals deeply focus on personal hobbies and interests, immersing themselves completely without actively seeking broad external knowledge or communication, resulting in long-term social interaction deficits and minor barriers. Essentially, Zhai culture represents a pursuit of private space, spiritual focus, and informality—a subcultural phenomenon emerging under globalized development. In this sense, “Zhai” describes a state of interpersonal relations at advanced stages of socioeconomic development under modern globalization, transcending traditional organizational forms based on blood or geographic ties. Its fundamental orientation is individuals’ active choice to isolate from real-world social interaction due to inward-focused needs, exhibiting certain closed and passive characteristics.

In the information age, particularly the short-video era, Zhai culture appears to have reached new heights, with diverse related social activities and emerging economic models springing up like mushrooms. Industries such as film and entertainment, online education, e-commerce, gaming, telemedicine, and video livestreaming have experienced unexpected explosive growth. Many analysts view this phenomenon as a catalyst accelerating socioeconomic transformation and epochal change. From the perspective of interpersonal social relations, staying home “Zhai” represents both a passive choice and a distinctly open orientation, not limited to specific domains and thus endowed with certain social attributes. It is no exaggeration to say that “Zhai” has completed a remarkable transformation in the information age, shifting from a passive, escapist attitude toward worldly affairs to an optimistic, active engagement with society. In this sense, “Zhai” constitutes a form of self-restriction in behavior that will persist as society further develops, making it the current manifestation of inward-oriented social relations.

1.2 Outward-Oriented Social Relations: Cloud

“Cloud” is a metaphorical term for networks and the internet. The fundamental characteristics of cloud technology are virtualization and distribution. Virtualization technology abstracts and transforms computing resources such as servers, networks, memory, and storage, enabling users to better utilize these resources without being constrained by their physical form or geographic location. In plain terms, “Cloud” is a medium for sharing various online resources. As a commercial science and technology, cloud technology matured relatively early, though it remained unfamiliar to ordinary people for a considerable period. People used the technology without understanding its principles—it simply existed as an objective scientific technology.

In the information age, short videos have thrust cloud technology into the spotlight, creating a global “Cloud + Everything” social ecosystem. From “cloud offices” and “cloud classrooms” to “cloud exhibitions,” “cloud tourism,” “cloud clubbing,” and “cloud library distribution” in book publishing, “Cloud” has become a normalized manifestation of social relations, with trends toward forming a “cloud economy” and “cloud industry.” The “cloud participation” model is highly esteemed, and “Cloud” has become a fundamental business model widely adopted across industries and a highly regarded medium for interaction. Media are no longer satisfied with simple information distribution but have developed more online functions. Platforms such as Alibaba Cloud, Tencent Cloud, and Baidu Cloud have rapidly developed practical functions like “cloud classrooms,” “cloud conferences,” and “cloud livestreaming,” which have entered public view and perfectly aligned with real-life needs.

Marshall McLuhan noted in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that “the medium is the message.” In the long term, truly meaningful information is not the content transmitted by media in various eras but the media themselves—these media transform how people transmit and receive information, as well as their work and lifestyles, generating social transformation. In this sense, “Cloud” as a medium itself is gradually changing not only how people transmit and receive information but also their work, lifestyle, and even production modes. In the information age, “Cloud + XX” will become an important way for people to understand the world, even a normalized lifestyle, making “Cloud” the manifestation of outward-oriented social relations.

2. Book Publishing Strategies in the Information Age

Faced with the practical challenges of the information age, particularly the growing prevalence of short videos, the publishing industry’s viable response and path to self-redemption lies in striving to achieve a balanced dynamic between deconstruction and construction within the “Zhai” and “Cloud” paradigms. This process will require publishing institutions to pay a significant price while also using it as an opportunity to accelerate overall industry transformation and upgrading. Today’s publishing media enterprises differ from traditional publishers

of the past, forming a new publishing media landscape that extends from the traditional editorial, publishing, and distribution industrial chain through connotative expansion to denotative expansion, shifting from editorial and publishing mainstays to diversified development, transforming from traditional content providers to new content service providers, and achieving deep integration and vertical development from traditional to new media publishing.

The normalization of social relations manifested as “Zhai” and “Cloud” will create new turning points in how people perceive books. Two specific expectations emerge: First, the proportion of digital reading will continue to increase. Although digital publishing trends will not eliminate print books, digital publishing’s weight in the publishing field will gradually strengthen. In recent years, print book reading volume in China has continuously declined, while internet-based digital reading models have gained majority support and recognition. Over time, this will create a user generation gap in traditional book publishing—unable to acquire new users while existing users gradually decrease, leaving the traditional book industry in an awkward position. Second, niche experiential reading will receive increasing attention, and mass industrialized book production will gradually be replaced by personalized reading demands. Simultaneously, fragmented reading will further increase and develop into a normalized reading form. Even during relatively complete time periods, people’s reading will primarily be fragmented. Scholars term this new reading approach—characterized by decentralization, diversification, fragmentation, and experientialization—“post-reading.” Its most fundamental and revolutionary feature lies in overturning traditional reading methods while imposing new requirements on reading content carriers. The diversified value of user-generated texts adds entertainment, popularity, and practicality to reading, forcing the publishing industry to adapt its content production and textual forms to changing reading environments.

In summary, book publishing in the information age must seek new growth points and maximize benefits by responding to these cognitive shifts within the “Zhai” and “Cloud” social relation paradigms. To this end, publishing institutions must research and implement targeted publishing strategies in the following areas.

2.1 Refining Quality Content and Building Brands

The publishing industry has long adhered to the content-is-king philosophy, with content as its core competitiveness and books as the monetization form. In the information age, publishing institutions should further strengthen this culture-is-king philosophy, consistently pursuing premium strategies to expand and strengthen precise content publishing, deeply and meticulously exploring core products, making every effort to build book brands, and improving per-title benefits. To gain discourse power in the publishing industry’s upstream and downstream industrial chain, traditional book publishers must create premium content and core products while providing derived brand services, thereby form-

ing core competitiveness. As information acquisition methods evolve rapidly in the information age, the book terminal market will inevitably undergo major adjustments and reshuffling, with low-quality, poorly produced books yielding to premium titles. The content value carried by book products will receive greater emphasis. For publishing institutions, the ultimate pursuit of the premium strategy is building highly recognizable publishing brands, which include work brands, author brands, editor brands, publishing house brands, work image brands, media brands, and overall brands. Planning and publishing brand books to build brand publishing institutions, achieving relative or even absolute leadership in specific vertical segments of the book market, and thereby improving profitability and risk resistance will be crucial future development directions. Publishing brands built on quality content resources represent the industry's true core competitiveness—the higher the brand value, the stronger the institution's bargaining power. Building publishing brands and enhancing bargaining power constitute the foundation for sustainable, high-quality development.

2.2 Deepening Digital Publishing and Building Proprietary Platforms

For the publishing industry, content-centered converged and all-media publishing represents an undisputed development trend. The concept and practice of all-media publishing will achieve greater development and ultimately become the industry's new normal and business form. While most publishing institutions still primarily produce print books, the “Cloud +” model has objectively accelerated digital reading development. In the information age, traditional publishers who have experienced industry crises will more clearly and painfully recognize the severe challenges and opportunities of digital transformation. Publishing institutions should quickly shift perspectives, seize this opportunity, continuously deepen digital publishing, actively build proprietary digital publishing platforms, accelerate digital transformation, and perfect their industrial chains to achieve a complete closed loop—from content planning and editorial processing to platform launch, marketing, distribution, sales, and after-sales service—all centralized on their own platforms. This breaks digital publishing platform barriers and technical constraints, granting absolute control over content and products to adapt more proactively and flexibly to external market changes. To some extent, when publishing institutions freely release proprietary digital content to major platforms for reader convenience, they have already begun preliminary attempts at building proprietary digital platforms. Undoubtedly, publishers who gain first-mover advantage in digital publishing will remain invincible in future publishing formats.

2.3 Innovating Marketing Models and Consolidating Sales Synergy

In the information age, publishing institutions' sales terminals—their connection points with readers—are most vulnerable to external impacts. During pandemic prevention and control, print book sales channels and terminals faced severe tests. In this context, short-video/live-streaming platforms represented by

Douyin have rapidly become effective yet controversial marketing tools. Amid this overwhelming trend, nearly all publishing institutions have launched diverse online activities: opening WeChat stores, creating Douyin content, live-streaming, and offering online courses, achieving notable marketing results. However, upon final accounting, most publishers have merely generated buzz and excitement. From a long-term industry perspective, the diversification, virtualization, and interactivity of book sales channels represent an unstoppable trend that may become the mainstream marketing model for the foreseeable future. The real challenge for publishing institutions is not sales technology but transforming mindsets, innovating marketing models, continuously advancing normalized online-offline integrated marketing across the entire industrial chain, and maximizing sales synergy to achieve sustainable, high-quality development. Specific explorations can proceed in the following areas.

2.3.1 Industrial Convergence For traditional publishers, industrial convergence means integrating high-quality resources from other cultural fields while maintaining book publishing as the main business, conducting multi-category R&D, diversified dissemination, and differentiated sales of specific content to form scaled, industrialized operations based on book content and ultimately achieve full industrial chain operation. Under this concept, publishing will no longer be limited to print books but will combine print publishing, digital publishing, converged publishing, audiobook production, and peripheral product development for comprehensive, three-dimensional, pan-publishing operations to better satisfy readers' growing spiritual and cultural needs. In the information age, convergence between publishing and adjacent cultural industries has become tighter and faster, with industry boundaries increasingly blurring and eventually merging into large industrial clusters. Leading publishing institutions have already demonstrated that breaking free from traditional publishing circles, emancipating minds, innovating models, and optimizing resource allocation through "circle-breaking" publishing often yields impressive results. The convergence landscape can explore integration paths between book publishing and film/TV literature, animation, music, painting, stationery, toys, advertising, study tours, and even more publicly relevant industries like fashion and cuisine, enabling mutual empowerment to form IP-based industrial clusters centered on book content and ultimately achieving full industrial chain control and true integrated development.

2.3.2 Cross-Boundary Marketing Cross-boundary refers to non-professional enterprises or individuals entering another field to construct new business models and engage in new commercial activities. In simple terms, cross-boundary marketing in publishing means traditional publishers crossing established industry boundaries and barriers from pure book publishing into adjacent industries or fields, borrowing resources and models from other sectors to launch new marketing transformations. Cross-boundary marketing's advantage lies in bringing new thinking, concepts, models, capital, resources,

and opportunities to publishing. Its core and most critical element is breaking conventions and forging unique paths, integrating various resources, extending industrial chains, enabling adjacent and seemingly unrelated industries to communicate, learn from each other, cooperate, and eventually merge, thereby leveraging strengths, compensating for weaknesses, achieving resource complementarity and sharing, and ultimately reaching win-win cooperation. Cross-boundary marketing and industrial convergence are two sides of the same coin, converging toward the same goal and leading publishing to create new profit growth points.

2.3.3 Integrated Marketing The rapid development of mobile internet in recent years has spawned numerous social media platforms, giving ordinary people their own self-media accounts. However, these have primarily served as channels for self-expression, lacking direct integration with publishing and having little connection to book marketing and sales. The emergence of short videos has amplified these platforms' value realization capabilities, ushering publishing into an optimal period for integrated marketing. In the information age, integrated book marketing can consolidate several forces. First, community marketing, including WeChat Official Accounts, WeChat groups, Moments, KuaiTuTuan, Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu, features explosive dissemination, broad audiences, significant promotional impact, and short payment cycles. Second, all-staff marketing—publishing institutions must mobilize all employees. Every individual' s social platform account represents potential marketing resources, and all-staff marketing enables geometric progression in marketing message dissemination for maximum reach. Third, distribution. In the information age, group buying has become an important consumer purchase channel. For relatively scattered and small-volume book group purchases, publishers often face a dilemma. Distribution mechanisms from platforms like Youzan, Weidian, and KuaiTuTuan are well-developed, allowing publishers to establish distribution channels, directly share profits with distributors, and maximize benefits and efficiency. Fourth, editors must deeply participate in marketing. Currently, most publishers' livestreams, courses, and short videos center on editors as protagonists. Editors' active participation in online marketing activities provides readers with fresh experiences. Whether online or offline, book editors will participate deeply as key players, placing new demands on their competencies (beyond this discussion' s scope).

2.4 Mining Data and Enhancing User Services

In the information age, data will become a more competitive core resource than products for traditional publishers, with “users” replacing “customers” as the industry' s new priority. User services based on data mining will become the new high ground for publishing competition. On one hand, in the big data era, “data” has become a pivotal resource across all industries. Traditional publishing content resources are transforming into data resources, which will become the most valuable assets in the new publishing or all-media era and publishers'

most competitive core resource. Converting content resources into marketable data resources and digital products requires serious research and careful consideration, as content resources do not automatically transform into data resources and digital products. On the other hand, publishing's underlying operational logic has faced disruptive impact, forcing a shift from product-centered to user-centered service strategies. Although publishers previously claimed to create products based on user needs, the ultimate focus remained on the book product itself. When book products cannot effectively reach users, their value cannot be realized, yet user needs can be satisfied through other forms. This provides a profound revelation: only user needs are eternal. Publishing must shift from product-centered to user-centered operations, with improving user service levels as the fundamental foothold. An increasingly evident trend in the information age is that both content and user resources will ultimately become data resources. Publishers must enhance user and service awareness, effectively collect, organize, mine, and analyze user data through online and community marketing, leverage massive data from big data technology and "algorithms" from AI technology to deeply understand users' cultural needs, grasp market subtleties, provide effective data support for continuous product development and service improvement, and achieve the strategic transformation from product-centered to user-service-centered operations.

2.5 Strengthening Logistics Support and Building IoT Networks

A logistics system is an integrated whole that organically combines transportation, storage, loading/unloading, handling, packaging, circulation processing, distribution, and information processing during the physical flow of goods from supply to receiving locations. For publishers, whether online or offline, products or services heavily depend on third-party warehousing and logistics services. In recent years, publishers have personally experienced the embarrassment and helplessness of being "choked" by warehousing logistics, making logistics support a weak link that must be strengthened. In the information age, logistics support will become a strategic focus for publishers. Publishers with adequate resources can explore new cooperation or development models in warehousing and logistics, deeply 介入 all aspects of the warehousing logistics industrial chain, and establish a solid foundation for future positioning in the Internet of Things.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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