

Exploring Development Paths for Vocational College Journals in the Context of Media Convergence: A Case Study of the Journal of Suzhou Vocational University (Postprint)

Authors: Sun Wen

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of media convergence, academic journals—especially those of higher vocational colleges—face severe challenges. Based on an analysis of the current development status of higher vocational college journals, this article explores pathways for media convergence in response to both the dilemmas and opportunities encountered. It presents the media convergence approach of the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* from four dimensions: self-positioning, construction of characteristic columns, resource dissemination pathways, and editorial team building, with the aim of providing reference for similar journals engaged in media convergence.

Full Text

Preamble

Exploring Development Paths for Higher Vocational College Journals Under Media Convergence: A Case Study of the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University*

(Academic Journal Center, Suzhou Vocational University, Suzhou, Jiangsu 215104)

Abstract: In the context of media convergence, academic journals—particularly higher vocational college journals—face severe challenges. This article analyzes the current development status of higher vocational college journals, examines the dilemmas and opportunities they encounter in media convergence, and explores potential integration pathways. It introduces the media convergence approach of the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* from four perspectives: self-positioning, featured column construction, resource dissemination pathways,

and editorial team development, aiming to provide a reference for similar journals undertaking media convergence.

Keywords: media convergence; higher vocational college journals; academic journals; development path

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In 2015, the Ministry of Education and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television jointly issued the *Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving University Publishing Work* (Document No. [2015] of the Department of Social Sciences), which called for deepening reforms in university publishing systems and accelerating the pace of integrated publishing development [?]. According to the *Blue Book on Media Convergence: China Media Convergence Development Report (2019)*, China's media convergence has entered a multi-point development period, leaping from the 2.0 era of formal and content integration to the 3.0 era dominated by mechanism integration [?]. Against this backdrop, academic journals have continuously explored convergence pathways, achieving revolutionary transformations in editing, publishing, and distribution. However, due to weak dissemination capacity, insufficient resource supply, and funding constraints, academic journals have struggled with media convergence, making slow progress. In particular, higher vocational college journals face severe challenges from market transformations and must take proactive measures to strengthen and expand their media convergence efforts. This article uses the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* as a case study to explore media convergence pathways for higher vocational college journals, aiming to provide valuable experience for similar publications.

1. Current Development Status of Higher Vocational College Journals Under Media Convergence

Higher vocational college journals differ from mass media and specialized periodicals, and their media convergence development has been notably slow. As subsidiaries of vocational colleges, these journals are heavily influenced by relevant policies and institutional leadership decisions, facing significant constraints in funding, talent, and technology that hinder independent media convergence initiatives. Editorial staff turnover is high, making it difficult for editors to fully commit to media convergence efforts, and their enthusiasm for participation re-

mains low. Overall, media convergence in higher vocational college journals is still in its infancy, with numerous unresolved issues requiring urgent attention.

2. Dilemmas and Opportunities in Media Convergence for Higher Vocational College Journals

2.1.1 Declining Print Circulation and Lack of Competitive Advantage

Under media convergence, readers' habits have undergone dramatic changes. They no longer rely on print journals for academic information, instead retrieving vast amounts of literature directly through databases such as CNKI, VIP, Wanfang, and Chaoxing—an approach that is both convenient and efficient. This shift has led to a rapid decline in print circulation, with the remaining print copies primarily used for peer and institutional exchanges, author collections, and preservation for professional title evaluations [?].

2.1.2 Weak New Media Competencies Among Editors and Shortage of Technical Talent

Editors at higher vocational college journals generally fall into three categories. The first comprises senior editors with associate senior-level titles or above and extensive experience (a minority group). These individuals show little interest in new media technologies or media convergence, preferring to focus solely on traditional publishing techniques and completing basic editing and publishing tasks. The second category consists of young editors with intermediate-level publishing qualifications or above, who form the backbone of editorial departments. In addition to their regular editing and publishing duties, they often handle numerous non-editorial affairs, leaving them no time to learn digital new media technologies. The third group includes junior editors with less than three years of experience who are primarily focused on building foundational knowledge of editorial standards, publishing regulations, and relevant laws, leaving them insufficient time for in-depth new media technology training. Consequently, their understanding of new media remains superficial.

2.1.3 Further Compression of Survival Space

Higher vocational college journals typically function as auxiliary teaching and research departments, primarily serving faculty research needs at their institutions. However, due to the relatively low institutional status of these colleges, such journals struggle to attract high-quality submissions. Most authors prefer to submit their work to higher-level journals first, only resorting to their institution's journal after receiving explicit rejection notices. This directly results in poor manuscript quality and a lack of featured columns. In the media convergence era, where authors can conveniently submit through editorial websites, email, or WeChat public platforms, higher vocational college journals face even fewer and lower-quality submissions, further compressing their survival space [?].

2.2.1 Real-Time Interaction Among Editors, Authors, and Readers to Enhance Journal Dissemination

Under media convergence, most higher vocational college journal editorial offices have adopted online office systems that integrate author submission, peer review, and editorial management into a one-stop workflow, significantly improving processing speed and communication efficiency. Many have also established WeChat groups for readers, authors, and reviewers to facilitate timely feedback and better serve different stakeholder groups. Furthermore, some journals have launched WeChat public accounts and joined the “OSID Open Science” initiative. For instance, the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* launched its official WeChat public account in 2015 and was selected for the third batch of Class A funded journals on June 15, 2019, officially joining the OSID program. These initiatives have greatly facilitated journal communication and dissemination, enabling real-time interaction among editors, authors, and readers.

2.2.2 Blurring Hierarchical Distinctions to Expand Survival Space

In the media convergence environment, readers search for, browse, and download desired literature through networks (databases, WeChat accounts, etc.). During this process, to obtain more valuable information, readers typically enter thematic keywords rather than limiting their search to specific core journals. This places higher vocational college journals on the same “starting line” as other publications (including core journals), granting them equal competitive opportunities. If a journal’s column articles demonstrate distinctive content, quality, and perspectives that meet reader requirements and receive author recognition, readers will browse, download, and even cite them. Consequently, a higher vocational college journal may have a low overall impact factor while a particular column gains significant popularity, with some readers discovering the journal—and even the college’s distinctive features—through these featured columns. This process provides higher vocational college journals with the same exhibition opportunities as core journals, effectively expanding their survival space, reaching broader audiences, and enhancing brand value.

3. Exploring Development Paths for Higher Vocational College Journals Under Media Convergence

Despite numerous challenges, media convergence also brings unexpected hope and opportunities for higher vocational college journals. Identifying new development paths to overcome difficulties, seize opportunities, break through traditional media era barriers, and promote healthy, sustainable, and stable development is crucial.

3.1 Repositioning Based on Media Convergence to Clarify Development Priorities

Under media convergence, higher vocational college journals must re-examine themselves and clarify development priorities. First, reading patterns have changed fundamentally. Readers no longer rely on print publications but access information anytime and anywhere through mobile internet terminals. Therefore, journals should strive to broaden, enrich, and update knowledge dissemination pathways to enable more convenient information access. Second, they must emphasize the impact of individual articles. Readers increasingly discover columns and journals through keyword searches for specific articles, highlighting the unique value of single-article impact. Consequently, editorial offices should pre-select key and featured articles from each issue and promote high-quality, priority, and distinctive pieces through self-media platforms (WeChat public accounts, websites, etc.) to attract readers, increase engagement, and expand brand influence [?].

3.2 Building Featured Columns Around Institutional Strengths and Local Social Issues

Although higher vocational college journals have limited influence, their content should have distinctive characteristics. First, they should identify social hotspot issues for concentrated research and discussion based on local development features and institutional professional strengths, conducting thorough 论证会 (feasibility studies) to refine featured column themes. Second, they should actively engage with experts and scholars researching these issues and solicit contributions. Third, they should invite one or two experts to serve as column editors and write introductory remarks. Finally, they should hold thematic seminars for featured columns, inviting relevant specialists and conducting effective promotional activities. For example, the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* integrated and optimized some columns in March 2020 based on local development priorities and institutional strengths, focusing on building “Intelligent Manufacturing” and “Engineering Foundation Research and Application” columns. This significantly improved manuscript quality and achieved excellent results.

3.3 Constructing a Multi-Dimensional, Three-Dimensional Dissemination Platform to Strengthen Resource Pathways

The rapid development of internet technology has diversified resource dissemination channels. Academic journals should leverage various self-media platforms to expand brand influence, integrating publishing resources under the “Internet + Academic Journals” model. With the journal as the link and serving readers, authors, and reviewers as the core mission, they should build a three-dimensional, multi-dimensional, one-stop dissemination pathway. Currently, the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* has completed three key tasks tailored to its characteristics: First, integrating journal resources and clarifying target audiences

to determine knowledge and information dissemination models and pathways, specifically creating a precise push model combining print distribution with self-media (WeChat public accounts, websites, etc.). Second, highlighting key priorities by focusing on precisely pushing hot articles and column editor introductions through WeChat public accounts while timely adjusting push content. Third, valuing feedback from readers, authors, and reviewers by maintaining constant interaction, promptly responding to user needs and suggestions, and sustaining user engagement [?].

3.4 Strengthening Editorial Team Capacity Building

As comprehensive publications disseminating academic knowledge, higher vocational college journals require editors with broad yet deep knowledge—both “specialized” and “versatile” —emphasizing parallel development of professional expertise and editorial skills. Regarding editorial knowledge, editors must possess solid competencies in reviewing, editing, and proofreading manuscripts. In terms of subject expertise, editors should demonstrate mastery of their disciplines and the ability to engage in in-depth exchanges with field experts while maintaining high aesthetic judgment. As an academic journal, the *Journal of Suzhou Vocational University* is strengthening its editorial team through five approaches: First, emphasizing fundamental skills by thoroughly understanding laws and regulations to ensure standardized editing processes. Second, prioritizing proofreading work by strictly following proofreading procedures and upholding the principle that “quality is essential for journal survival.” Third, cultivating editorial responsibility consciousness, as editors serve as gatekeepers who must neither shift responsibility to authors nor rely entirely on peer reviewers, but instead approach their work with professional accountability.

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

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