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Some Reflections on the Transformation and Upgrading of Traditional Publishing in the Context of Internet+: Postprint

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Abstract

The rapid development of information technology and the digital industry has ushered the publishing sector into a brand-new era. Confronted with new circumstances and new business forms, the transformation and upgrading of traditional publishing enterprises is imperative, and the various issues encountered in this process have also become new subjects requiring research for industry development. **【Purpose】** This article explores the misconceptions existing in the process of network-based and digital transformation and upgrading of traditional publishing enterprises, proposes that transformation represents a revolution in thinking rather than switching to other industries, and provides summaries and countermeasures from practical experience regarding the various challenges faced by traditional publishing enterprises—including unclear ideas for transformation and upgrading, insufficient innovation consciousness, lack of interdisciplinary talent, and outdated marketing strategy concepts. **【Methods】** Conduct top-level design to build brand advantages; distinguish between the “changeable” and “unchangeable” aspects in transformation and upgrading, adhering to the principle of “content is king” ; leverage external forces to promote digital transformation; enhance the comprehensive qualities of editors and construct a talent team, implementing a sound working mechanism where the entire publishing house operates as a cohesive unit; achieve mutual integration of roles between editorial and distribution personnel. **【Results】 【Conclusion】** It is hoped that through these summaries of work experience, traditional publishing enterprises can be propelled to achieve new breakthroughs while leveraging their existing advantages, thereby creating a brand-new situation.

Full Text

Preamble

Reflections on the Transformation and Upgrading of Traditional Publishing in the Internet Plus Era

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Abstract: The rapid development of information technology and the digital industry has ushered publishing into a new era. Facing this new situation and business landscape, transformation and upgrading are imperative for traditional publishing enterprises, and the various challenges encountered in this process have become new research topics for the industry. **[Objective]** This article examines the misconceptions that traditional publishing enterprises face during networked and digital transformation, proposing that transformation represents a revolution in thinking rather than a shift to entirely different industries. It also provides practical summaries and solutions for various challenges, including unclear transformation strategies, insufficient innovation consciousness, a lack of interdisciplinary talent, and outdated marketing concepts. **[Method]** The paper advocates for robust top-level design to build brand advantages; distinguishing between what should “change” and what should “remain unchanged” in transformation while adhering to a “content is king” philosophy; leveraging external forces to drive digital transformation; enhancing editors’ comprehensive competencies to build talent teams and establish a cohesive, enterprise-wide work mechanism; and achieving integration between editorial and distribution roles. **[Results][Conclusion]** Through these experiential lessons, the author hopes to propel traditional publishing enterprises to achieve new breakthroughs while leveraging existing strengths, thereby creating a fresh development landscape.

Keywords: Internet Plus; traditional publishing; transformation and upgrading; content is king; integration of editorial and distribution

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The rapid development of information technology and the digital industry has made transformation and upgrading an inevitable trend for traditional publishing enterprises. In this context, publishing professionals have keenly felt the urgency of transformation and its significant practical importance for future enterprise development, actively exploring paths suited to their own growth. However, in this exploratory process, contemporary publishing practitioners of-

ten fall into misconceptions, face numerous challenges, and must analyze the situation to forge ahead and open new horizons in their respective niche fields.

According to the *2020-2021 China Digital Publishing Industry Annual Report*, internet advertising (496.6 billion yuan), online education (257.3 billion yuan), mobile publishing (mobile reading, mobile gaming, etc., 244.836 billion yuan), and digital music (71 billion yuan) rank as the top four revenue sources. In 2020, the total revenue of internet journals, e-books, and digital newspapers (excluding mobile newspapers) reached 9.403 billion yuan, accounting for 0.7% of total digital publishing revenue—continuing a decline from 0.9% in 2019 and 1% in 2018. This indicates that the revenue growth rate of books, newspapers, and periodicals in digital publishing lags behind that of other digital publishing services. Excluding revenues from internet advertising, online education, mobile publishing, and online music, the more specialized publishing field has already exhibited platform-based competition, with digital platforms such as Ximalaya, Baidu Reading, JD.com, NetEase Cloud Reading, and Zhihu aggregating massive content resources and capturing substantial shares of digital publishing output. Traditional publishing enterprises cannot compete with these platforms at the technical level.

1. Misconceptions in the Transformation of Traditional Publishing Enterprises

1.1 Misconceptions About Networked and Digital Transformation

Many view publishing as a sunset industry, and numerous practitioners feel their sector is besieged on all sides: rising labor and material costs, massive impacts on print books from channels and e-books, and sharp declines in retail store sales. Just as they find themselves at a loss, they discover the internet at their doorstep, followed by a cascade of new concepts: Industry 4.0, CPS, C2M, O2O, Internet Plus, smart factories, and more. Consequently, some traditional publishing enterprises rush to transform toward the internet and upgrade digitally, investing substantial time and resources to build editorial platforms, sales platforms, and reader service platforms, and developing marketing apps. Yet after building these platforms and developing the apps, they discover a shortage of professional technical personnel to operate and maintain them, forcing them to seek internet specialists. Even if platform development is outsourced, operational talent remains scarce in traditional publishing enterprises. Under current circumstances, it is highly unrealistic—especially for small and medium-sized publishing enterprises—to invest heavily in development and then pour more funds into operations, taking on such enormous investment risks.

Enterprise transformation refers to the structural reform of business operations and management to achieve improved performance. It is a process of reshaping competitive advantages and enhancing enterprise value to reach a new business state—one that involves breaking free from conventional thinking frameworks within a familiar industry to change the status quo and secure survival through

innovation within known tracks. Changing industries, by contrast, means shifting from one industry to an entirely new field with weak or no relevance to one's previous business domain. Only through focused operation and long-term intensive cultivation within an industry can enterprises identify key developmental problems and devise effective solutions.

In the AI era, Baidu launched driverless cars. Did Baidu change industries to become an automaker, or did it successfully transform and upgrade in response to the AI era? As is well known, driverless vehicles use onboard sensors to perceive the surrounding environment, obtaining information about roads, vehicle positions, and obstacles to control steering and speed. Through its in-vehicle sensing system, the vehicle perceives road conditions and automatically plans routes to reach predetermined destinations. Therefore, the core of driverless cars lies in powerful data processing and image processing technologies—precisely Baidu's strongest suit. Its internet search and mapping businesses have accumulated massive data, providing foundational support for driverless technology, while its substantial expertise in speech recognition, computer vision, data mining, and deep learning constitutes essential core technologies for autonomous driving. Thus, Baidu's development of driverless cars does not represent a change of industry but rather a classic case of successful transformation and upgrading in the AI era.

For traditional publishing enterprises, transformation means advancing from traditional book markets to emerging reading markets, knowledge service markets, and knowledge payment markets against the backdrop of digital, networked, and information-driven changes in media and platforms, as well as changing reader purchasing habits and reading preferences. It is a process of establishing a foothold in the publishing industry, reshaping vitality through changed thinking and enhanced technical means—not blindly following trends into completely unfamiliar and unskilled internet industries. A enterprise that rashly enters an entirely new industry, lacking both industry experience and a customer base, is likely to fail.

1.2 Unclear Transformation and Upgrading Strategies

In the Internet Plus era, technological progress continuously disrupts and reshapes the publishing landscape in numerous ways. Although publishing enterprises have developed a profound understanding of and consensus on the urgency of transformation, many remain perplexed by questions such as: how to adapt to the impact of new technologies, how to fully understand and utilize the internet that connects digital and traditional publishing, how to balance social and economic benefits, how small and medium-sized publishing enterprises can cultivate niche publishing fields amid pressure from large publishing groups, how to pursue innovation and development under operational pressures, and how to escape dilemmas of technology, capital, and human resources. Without clear strategies to address these issues, enterprises' transformation and upgrading efforts will face significant constraints.

1.3 Insufficient Innovation Consciousness

Traditional publishing enterprises, with their relatively stable readerships, tend toward risk-averse mindsets and insufficient innovation consciousness. On one hand, the internet has made information access more convenient, often leading publishing enterprises to focus excessively on technology while neglecting product and content innovation. On the other hand, they lack innovation in book marketing and after-sales service, channel construction, content and author resource integration, and editorial processing and proofreading methods. Meanwhile, publishing houses' management systems, performance evaluation systems, and reward-punishment mechanisms remain stagnant at the traditional print publishing stage, making it difficult to adapt to modern information technology progress and development. Consequently, although traditional publishing enterprises hold customer groups accumulated over the years, they cannot open new breakthroughs without continuous progress and innovation in these areas.

1.4 Lack of Interdisciplinary Talent

Talent teams constitute the primary element for sustainable development in publishing enterprises. First, from editors' perspective, the digital wave is quietly transforming the industry's carrier forms, author teams, publishing content, and user consumption behaviors, posing severe transformation challenges for editors. Editors in traditional publishing enterprises generally possess strong educational backgrounds and solid professional expertise, enabling them to perceive knowledge frontiers in relevant fields and develop new editorial directions. However, facing the new challenge of transitioning from pure print book editors to multimedia editors, their existing knowledge structures cannot meet the demands of the internet era. Editors lack the planning concepts, marketing philosophies, traffic attraction strategies, and market consciousness required in the internet age.

Second, from the perspective of overall personnel structure, traditional publishing institutions often have more administrative staff than editorial talent. Meanwhile, personnel in editorial, distribution, marketing, digital publishing, copyright, and network maintenance departments work in parallel with few intersection points and insufficient communication. This results in an abundance of professionals meeting single-position requirements but a shortage of interdisciplinary talent proficient in publishing, marketing, and copyright within integrated media environments.

1.5 Outdated Marketing Strategy Concepts

Book marketing constitutes a crucial link in publishing enterprise development, yet traditional publishing enterprises generally suffer from having distribution without marketing. Distribution personnel lack in-depth understanding of books, and their promotion remains limited to order forms. The absence of business exchange between distribution staff and frontline editors, coupled with

the lack of smooth data transmission channels, means distribution personnel have low participation in topic planning stages and cannot provide market and reader demand perspectives. Various sales data and reader needs fail to be timely and effectively received and utilized by editors. The lack of 磨合沟通 (磨合沟通) in later stages prevents precise marketing through channels, especially e-commerce and self-media platforms, resulting in serious disconnects between early-stage planning and later-stage sales. After-sales service fails to leverage the internet for interacting with readers, collecting reader information and feedback, increasing reader stickiness, enhancing readers' desire to purchase related products, or even mining new authors from reader communities.

2. Countermeasures for the Transformation and Upgrading Process

2.1 Robust Top-Level Design and Brand Advantage Development

As new media continuously squeezes publishing market space, traditional publishing enterprises must expand their development horizons through comprehensive planning: reforming and innovating work methods, content, and processes; strengthening employee business training and capability enhancement to help them understand and master internet application skills and use internet thinking to solve practical problems; and maintaining momentum across the entire workforce. Enterprises should create deeply integrated models covering planning, editing, distribution, marketing, copyright, and derivative product development, organically combining technology, content, platforms, and business. This means developing more effective, higher-level, and higher-quality strategies based on market and reader demands to enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of traditional publishing enterprises.

Simultaneously, traditional publishing enterprises should vigorously build their own brands, which benefits both the improvement of economic and social benefits and long-term development. In China's scientific and technological publishing field, many publishers produce computer science books, yet readers tend to favor titles from Posts & Telecom Press, Tsinghua University Press, and Publishing House of Electronics Industry. Similarly, while multiple publishers produce architecture books, readers trust those from China Architecture & Building Press. This brand effect stems from adhering to the original aspiration of professional publishing and cultivating deep expertise in specific fields, for which the market and readers have rewarded their persistence. Publishing enterprises should establish themselves based on their own advantages, winning users, reputation, and future through quality books.

2.2 Distinguishing “Change” from “Unchange” in Upgrading and Adhering to “Content is King”

In human military history, soldiers' weapons have continuously evolved from sticks to swords and guns, then to aircraft and missiles. What has never changed

for millennia are the tactics: “Take the circuitous route as the direct path,” “Turn disadvantage into advantage,” and “Know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated.” From Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* in the Spring and Autumn Period to Clausewitz’s *On War* in Prussian times, this holds true both in China and abroad. A great general’s winning formula has always been unchanging military strategy, not continuously upgraded weapons. The same applies to upgrading traditional publishing enterprises. Whether developing editorial platforms or building value-added service platforms, whether using Weibo and WeChat marketing or live-streaming e-commerce, whether traditional or digital printing—these are all “weapons” for publishing enterprises to win the “war.” As the saying goes, “A thousand changes, but the principle remains one.” No matter how weapons upgrade, what consistently wins markets is high-quality publishing content. High-quality publications converge to form a publishing enterprise’s brand advantage. Regardless of how publishing models or marketing channels change, publishing enterprises can overcome obstacles and achieve development through their brand advantages. Conversely, even with support from platforms like Alibaba, JD.com, or Dangdang, enterprises with poor publishing content quality will gradually decline.

2.3 Leveraging External Forces to Drive Digital Transformation and Upgrading

Traditional small and medium-sized publishing enterprises face technological, financial, and operational pressures when establishing online open learning platforms or creating digital publishing platforms. Therefore, leveraging external forces to drive digital transformation becomes a viable path. This approach effectively mitigates risks while capitalizing on advantages from technology enterprises, achieving complementarity in technology, experience, and resources. For example, the author’s publishing house collaborated with Beijing Zhiqi Lanmo Information Technology Co., Ltd. to develop cloud-based textbooks. The company provides mobile interactive digital textbook core technology systems for publishers and readers, while the publishing house leverages its advantages in planning, author resources, and information integration to supply high-quality content. Their co-published *Aircraft Overall Design* cloud textbook was recognized as one of the “First Batch of Top Ten Excellent Cloud Textbooks for National Transportation” in 2021.

The integration of traditional and digital publishing has further accelerated, evident in the vigorous development of new integrated textbooks that closely combine traditional print materials with digital resources. Digital resources in these new integrated textbooks can include micro-lectures, exercise databases, material libraries, and courseware, incorporating authors’ achievements from school curriculum construction—selected and processed by editors—to reduce production costs and improve publishing efficiency. For instance, in the higher vocational textbook *Tolerance Fit and Technical Measurement (5th Edition)*, which the author oversees, micro-lecture videos on using vernier calipers, uni-

versal angle gauges, external micrometers, coordinate measuring machines, and other precision measurement tools were integrated, making the textbook content richer and more intuitive.

2.4 Enhancing Editors' Comprehensive Competencies and Building Talent Teams for Cohesive Enterprise-Wide Mechanisms

All first-class publishing houses nationwide undoubtedly possess high-quality editorial teams. Beyond authors and manuscript quality, editors—as book planners and executors—determine publication quality through their political literacy, professional competence, research capabilities, innovation capacity, and dedication.

Editors should continuously learn professional skills and publishing knowledge through every available opportunity (such as editorial training, in-house lectures, professional group sharing, and following specialized WeChat public accounts) while fully mobilizing existing content resources, author resources, and new technologies to excel in topic planning, book presentation, promotion, post-sales service, and derivative products. In the Internet Plus era, as publishing enterprises open public accounts on major platforms, editors should step from behind the scenes—where they “make wedding clothes for others”—to the forefront, becoming spokespeople for their books. For example, editors at Peking University Press created a video promotion for *Introduction to Chinese, Western, and Indian Philosophy*, using the familiar example of medical consultations to illustrate differences in diagnostic approaches among Chinese, Western, and Indian doctors. Through images, explanations, and videos, they sketched the philosophical characteristics of each tradition in an accessible way. The book has received over 1,000 comments on JD.com's Peking University Press flagship store, including many from readers whose purchase desire was stimulated by the promotional video.

Building rational talent echelons is essential. Publishing enterprises should recruit timely to inject fresh blood while veteran editors pass on their craftsmanship spirit to younger colleagues. New editors must quickly adapt to position requirements and grow rapidly while leveraging their strong curiosity and quick adoption of new things to introduce new technologies and methods into their work, seeking new breakthroughs.

Furthermore, editors should strengthen effective communication with various internal departments. Excellent editors are outstanding product managers who conduct full-process management of books from planning and marketing to after-sales service. Therefore, they must establish 良性工作机制 (良性工作机制) with internal departments characterized by shared goals, mutual understanding, complementary functions, and close cooperation to jointly promote product development and innovation.

2.5 Integration of Editorial and Distribution Roles and Full Utilization of After-Sales Data

Book marketing is not an isolated responsibility of a single department; marketing consciousness should permeate every 环节 (环节) from planning, design, and production to promotion, sales, and after-sales service. Editors and marketing personnel should adapt to changes in reading methods, product forms, and promotion modes under new circumstances. Editors must better understand evolving sales channels and analyze market data, while marketing personnel must gain deeper product knowledge and participate in marketing creativity. This mutual understanding promotes integration between editorial and distribution work, achieving synergistic effects in book planning and marketing. Both editors and marketers should jointly participate in building networked marketing teams, fully utilizing traditional e-commerce platforms (JD.com, Dangdang, Tmall) and new media platforms (such as publishing houses' WeChat public accounts, WeChat video channels, Weibo, Douyin, Kuaishou, and Bilibili) to expand marketing depth and breadth.

Good after-sales service not only enhances the publishing house's overall brand image but also helps understand and analyze niche market conditions through organizing and mining after-sales big data. By building tripartite communication platforms among authors, readers, and publishers, organizing various academic exchange activities, and providing book supporting resources, publishers can collect reader information and feedback to establish big data platforms. Fully utilizing and analyzing these massive, precise user datasets can support planning and marketing efforts. For example, the author planned *UAV Communication and Navigation* in 2020, an undergraduate textbook for UAV engineering, flight guidance and control, aerospace vehicles, electronic information, and related majors. After publication, information from over twenty adopting institutions was collected through providing supporting materials, establishing connections with instructors. Recently, during the book's revision, the author and editors created a WeChat group, using previously collected information to invite instructors to join and contribute suggestions: providing perspectives on the first edition's overall structure while correcting errors and inappropriate content for the author's reference. With reader input, the author's revision work became more directional; simultaneously, readers who participated in the revision became more anticipating of the new edition, increasing reader stickiness. Furthermore, *UAV Communication and Navigation* is part of Beihang University Press's "UAV Professional Applied Talent Training Planning Textbook" series. Through this group, the series was successfully promoted, along with other UAV-related books, establishing Beihang University Press's brand in UAV publications and creating a virtuous cycle of "planning—marketing—after-sales—re-promotion—re-planning."

As national policies promoting publishing industry transformation and upgrading continue to emerge, and as big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, 5G, and other technologies develop and deeply integrate with publishing, tradi-

tional publishing enterprises face more opportunities and challenges. Publishing enterprises should clarify their positioning, integrate quality resources, leverage traditional advantages, utilize external resources, boldly pioneer innovation, continuously adapt to market and technological changes, seek new breakthroughs, and open new chapters.

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

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