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Postprint of Research on Information Dissemination Capacity Building of Industry Journals

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Abstract

The lifeblood of a journal resides in its dissemination capacity. The survival predicament currently faced by many industry journals—manifested as audience attrition, shrinking operational revenue, and drastically diminished influence—fundamentally constitutes a loss of information dissemination capability. This paper proceeds from the most basic information dissemination function of industry journals, analyzes the factors affecting information dissemination and existing problems, clarifies the key crux of the gradual marginalization of industry journals amidst media competition, and explores how industry journals may construct a precise information dissemination mechanism within the macro-environment of media landscape reconfiguration, thereby enhancing their information dissemination capacity.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: Research on the Construction of Information Dissemination Capacity of Industry Journals

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Abstract: The lifeblood of a journal lies in its dissemination power. The survival predicament currently faced by many industry journals—such as audience loss, shrinking operating revenue, and declining influence—fundamentally stems from the loss of information dissemination capacity. This article begins with the most basic information dissemination function of industry journals, analyzes the factors affecting their information dissemination and existing problems, clarifies the key crux of their gradual marginalization in media competition, and explores how industry journals can construct a precise information dissemination mechanism within the reshaped media landscape, thereby enhancing their information dissemination capacity.

Keywords: industry journals; information dissemination capacity; online publishing; media competition; information dissemination mechanism

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Industry journals are periodicals based in specific industries that serve their development. Although niche publications within traditional media, they once performed exceptionally well in media competition due to their concentrated audience and highly targeted content. However, with the rise of emerging media represented by mobile internet, these advantages have vanished completely, leaving industry journals facing a severe existential crisis. It has become commonplace for industry journal WeChat official accounts to have subscription numbers far exceeding print circulation, with professional publications like *News Enthusiast* having shifted most of their energy to online publishing. According to the *Announcement of the National Press and Publication Administration on the List of Deregistered Journals* (No. 2, 2020), most of the 72 journals deregistered in the latest batch were industry journals [1]. As information dissemination tools, journals only have vitality through dissemination. The problems facing industry journals—advertisers withdrawing, readers leaving, and failed information dissemination—undoubtedly represent a loss of information dissemination capacity. In the all-media era, industry practitioners must confront and consider how to break through development bottlenecks, enhance dissemination power and influence, and achieve successful transformation within the reshaped media environment.

1. Overview of Industry Journal Information Dissemination Capacity

To resolve the survival predicament of industry journals, we must re-examine their most basic function as information dissemination tools, as only fundamental analysis can identify the crux of the problem.

1.1 Concept and Connotation of Industry Journal Information Dissemination Capacity

As an information dissemination medium, industry journals are both producers of industry information that create content for audiences and transmission channels that deliver information to industry audiences through periodic publications. Audiences or stakeholders sustain normal journal operations by purchasing information services. The smooth operation of this process involves

communication elements such as information producers, transmission channels, and audiences—any breakdown in one link can cause the entire process to collapse. In this information transfer process, these elements also interact and influence each other through information exchange. Based on this analysis, the information dissemination capacity of industry journals refers to the influence and guiding power that their produced and transmitted information can exert on audiences. This involves not only dissemination hardware but also the breadth, precision, and effectiveness of dissemination.

1.2 Factors Influencing Industry Journal Information Dissemination Capacity

The communication elements involved in industry journal information dissemination—including communicators, channels, content, and audiences—affect dissemination effectiveness at different levels and from different perspectives.

Information Communicators. Industry journals are the materialized image of information creators and the crystallization of the editorial team’s collective will. The vision and character of the team producing an industry journal determine its height and style. Good industry journals cannot exist without good teams.

Information Dissemination Channels. As information channels, industry journals must enable audiences to access information easily and conveniently when they want it. If usage is inconvenient or information access is difficult, it adversely affects audience reception.

Information Content and Presentation. Whether the information created and disseminated by industry journals is of interest to industry audiences, how valuable it is, whether it is authentic and credible, whether its presentation format is suitable for viewing and reading, whether it provides reading pleasure, and its level of difficulty all affect dissemination effectiveness.

Audience Characteristics. Industry journal audiences are people within the served industry. Their interests, hobbies, consumption capacity, and information needs affect journal production to some extent. As information recipients and consumers, their views and opinions also react upon information production and dissemination.

2. Problems in Industry Journal Information Dissemination

The traditional industry journal information dissemination system follows a largely linear model. However, in the all-media era where information is ubiquitous and omnipresent, the traditional information dissemination mechanism can no longer meet development needs, manifesting in several specific aspects.

2.1 Rapid Platform Scale Contraction

With the arrival of the mobile internet era, audience media contact methods have changed dramatically. According to the 47th *Statistical Report on China's Internet Development* released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on February 3, 2021, China's internet user population reached 989 million by December 2020, with an internet penetration rate of 70.4% [3]. Compared with mobile internet platforms, industry journals as paper-based media suffer from insufficient dissemination speed, convenience, and interactivity, causing rapid decline in their dissemination power and influence. Particularly with rising paper costs, major publications that once had circulations in the hundreds of thousands are now reducing print runs to save expenses, inadvertently causing platform scale contraction. Industry journals were already small-scale, and now they are even smaller. Moreover, online development results have been unsatisfactory, with many industry journals' so-called integrated development merely involving opening a WeChat official account and reposting print content, without completely breaking away from traditional production and operation models.

2.2 Deviation from Audience Needs

Although industry journal audiences are relatively narrow, highly concentrated, and loyal, they now have more choices in the reshaped media environment. Free access and quick reading have become primary audience characteristics. On one hand, new media forms represented by mobile internet can provide massive amounts of information for free; on the other hand, these platforms use advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and big data to push content that audiences prefer. By comparison, industry journal content appears monotonous and uninteresting, naturally lacking appeal. At the end of the 20th century, women's lifestyle journals led trends, but some now struggle to survive, as WeChat official accounts alone can attract followers and generate traffic. Audiences can easily access content for free on their phones without needing magazines as information bridges.

2.3 Ambiguity in Information Dissemination

A frequently overlooked issue when discussing industry journal information dissemination capacity is that traditional industry journal dissemination effects are actually unmeasurable. Editors produce content based on their understanding and market analysis, but they cannot know what impact this information has on audiences. Some industry journals conduct survey reports to understand audience reactions or publish a few reader letters expressing opinions, but such interactions are superficial. Communicators and audiences cannot form positive interaction due to temporal and spatial barriers.

3. Four Dimensions for Enhancing Industry Journal Information Dissemination Capacity

Traditional industry journals have shortcomings in information dissemination that become more prominent in the all-media era. However, this is not hopeless. Technological innovation is double-edged, bringing both opportunities and challenges. Industry journals can leverage the major trend of media convergence to enhance their information dissemination capacity. As President Xi Jinping stated: “Traditional media and emerging media are not in a relationship of replacement, but of iteration; not a matter of primary versus secondary, but of mutual growth; not a question of who is stronger or weaker, but of complementary advantages” [4]. The practices and experiences of some industry journals demonstrate that accelerating media convergence facilitates transformation and upgrading of traditional media and enhances information dissemination capacity. For industry journals, information dissemination must transform from mass communication to precision communication. In the all-media era, enhancing industry journal information dissemination capacity requires improvement across four dimensions.

3.1 Dimension of Professionalism and Accuracy in Information Production

In the all-media era, free and abundant information provides audiences with convenience but also leaves them at a loss about what is useful. Driven by profit, emotional content, and even false information and rumors, flood various self-media platforms, while scientifically authoritative voices become exceptionally rare. For instance, when the COVID-19 pandemic raged globally, rumors about vaccine conspiracies spread widely. Prioritizing user interest-based pushing without regard for publishing value ultimately consumes audience trust in media. After the dust settles, professional and authoritative information will prevail. Industry journals are positioned to serve specific industries, making them representatives of professional authority with access to many authoritative expert resources. These are advantages that, if fully utilized, can cultivate a large loyal audience.

3.2 Dimension of Diversity in Information Dissemination Methods

In an era where everything can serve as media, relying solely on paper media for information dissemination is clearly insufficient. This requires building an information dissemination matrix based on but not limited to paper media, incorporating websites, WeChat official accounts, video channels, and other media forms to transform from a single linear dissemination model to a bidirectional and multidirectional model. While transmitting text, audio, video, web pages, and other information products can also be delivered, enabling audiences to easily access desired information through whatever media channel they prefer.

3.3 Dimension of Personalized Information Services

If a thousand people see a thousand different Hamlets, then a thousand audiences will have a thousand different faces and needs. Although industry journals face relatively fixed audiences, their interests, hobbies, and views on matters may differ vastly. In the traditional industry journal era, products were created and disseminated uniformly across regions and audiences, with everyone receiving identical information. However, the all-media era requires understanding audience needs, creating audience profiles, producing different content products based on different needs, and conducting differentiated transmission. Even for products with the same content, different versions should be produced and transmitted according to users' reception habits. Personalized information services and precision communication are the most effective dissemination methods in the all-media era—the stronger the targeting, the better the dissemination effect.

3.4 Dimension of Interactivity in Information Dissemination

Audiences inevitably have their own opinions and views when receiving information. If positive feedback can be provided on these opinions and views, it will enhance audience loyalty and stickiness to industry journals. The ultimate realization of media information dissemination power is to hold these audiences tightly. If in the past, communication was 隔空对话 (talking across empty space) that could not form effective positive interaction, then in the all-media era, information technology plays a crucial role in allowing audience reactions to messages to be transmitted back to communicators at any time.

4. Constructing an Integrated Development Information Dissemination Mechanism for Industry Journals

Strengthening industry journal information dissemination capacity requires constructing an integrated development information dissemination model. This means repositioning industry journals by leveraging network information technologies, particularly advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, to reshape organizational structures, content production models, and information dissemination patterns, thereby achieving precise information delivery.

4.1 Transforming Industry Journals into Information Service Platforms

In the all-media era, industry journals must re-examine themselves and move beyond their traditional role as information intermediaries to integrate themselves into comprehensive information service platforms. First, change traditional segmented operation mechanisms and integrate content production models. Some pioneering journals have achieved considerable success by creating a “central kitchen” based on big data and artificial intelligence, enabling one-time information collection, multiple forms of generation, and diversified dissemination.

Second, become quality information manufacturers—content is forever king. In the all-media era of information overload, finding unique, valuable, and profound quality content remains difficult. As industry journals, they must maintain sufficient focus and solid work styles in the complex market, with the courage to pursue high-quality, refined, and cutting-edge content and the commitment to being professionally authoritative and authentic. Only in this way can industry journals enhance their credibility, influence, and dissemination power. Finally, deeply advance supply-side structural reform in content production, providing personalized content based on audience reading preferences to meet diverse needs.

4.2 Creating Comprehensive Information Transmission Channels

Media convergence for industry journals must be based on but not bound by the journals themselves. Regarding information transmission channels, they should adopt the awareness that everything can serve as media and strive to construct three-dimensional information dissemination channels, ultimately forming a media matrix combining traditional and new media, including print journals, Apps, websites, WeChat, Weibo, Toutiao, Douyin, and other platforms. More platforms mean more audience contact opportunities and broader reach, resulting in greater influence. Different platforms target different audiences, have different characteristics, and present content in different forms, enabling three-dimensional information dissemination.

4.3 Constructing Intelligent Information Analysis and Distribution Systems

From “paper and pen” and “lead and fire” to “light and electricity” and “numbers and networks,” every scientific and technological advancement has brought about media form reshaping. In recent years, innovations in big data, artificial intelligence, algorithms, and cloud storage have rapidly evolved media forms and dissemination methods, providing 想象空间 (imaginative space) for constructing intelligent information analysis and distribution systems.

First, create audience profiles. Audiences are diverse. By collecting data and using intelligent information analysis to fully understand their income, consumption behavior, information needs, and interests, user profiles of target audiences can be created. This both enhances information content quality and improves user experience while enabling precise communication by finding target users based on product characteristics.

Second, intelligent information distribution. By categorizing pushed content according to disciplinary directions and relying on big data and artificial intelligence technologies to deliver different content to different audiences based on their profiles, high matching push effects can be achieved. When audiences read an article, the system automatically pushes other related articles or content by the same author, guiding readers toward in-depth reading.

Third, information mining and classification. Industry journals have numerous internal information resource storages and many cooperative associated data externally. In the past, most of this information was used only once, but relying on big data analysis allows these resources to be integrated and reformed into new product forms. First, artificial intelligence can automatically generate text works; second, different types and functional databases can be constructed; finally, related content can be integrated for secondary publication.

4.4 Shaping a Positive Information Feedback Mechanism

Enhancing industry journal information dissemination capacity also requires optimizing dissemination effectiveness and information feedback. In the past, industry journal information transmission followed a linear model that essentially ended with the audience. In the integrated development era, a complete information feedback mechanism must be established.

First, build community resources around audiences. On one hand, industry journal editors can use Apps, Weibo, WeChat official accounts, and websites to interact and communicate with readers; on the other hand, audiences can play a greater role in the information dissemination process, such as deeply participating in topic planning and content production, thereby constructing a sticky relationship between communicators and receivers.

Second, integrate online and offline resources to extend the business chain. Information is the capital of industry journals, which should expand business around information services, lengthen the business chain beyond traditional advertising, and integrate operational resources to find new profit breakthrough points. Examples include inviting industry experts to give lectures, providing professional training courses in industry fields, and cooperating with upstream and downstream enterprises to conduct activities. By forming different profit points around industry information, a solid economic foundation can be laid for the healthy development of industry journals.

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

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