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Post-print Integrated Development of Editing and Distribution in the Smart Media Era

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Abstract

With the continuous advancement of mobile internet in recent years and the widespread proliferation of smartphones, people's modalities of book reading and audio-visual consumption have begun to undergo transformation. Under such circumstances, propelling the publishing industry into the era of intelligent media represents not only an inexorable trend, but also an indispensable requirement and strategic choice for seizing dominance in public opinion and discourse power. At present, the state is providing policy and financial guarantees and support for the integrated development across all processes in the publishing industry, thereby ushering in new development opportunities for the integrated development of publishing. Consequently, it is imperative to adopt an internet-oriented mindset, forge a novel publishing workflow, transform content presentation and dissemination modalities, achieve integrated publishing, and enable the integrated development of editorial and distribution functions to adapt to the developmental demands of the era and advance into a new stage of development.

Full Text

Preamble

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Abstract: With the continuous advancement of mobile internet and widespread adoption of smartphones in recent years, people's reading and viewing habits have begun to shift. Under these circumstances, promoting the publishing industry's entry into the smart media era represents not only an inevitable trend but also an essential requirement and choice for mastering

discourse power and narrative control. Currently, the state is providing policy and financial support for integrated development across all publishing processes, ushering in new opportunities for the industry's convergence. Therefore, internet thinking must be applied to create a new publishing workflow, transform content presentation and dissemination methods, and achieve integrated publishing, enabling the integrated development of editing and distribution to meet the demands of the times and enter a new stage of development.

Keywords: smart media; new media; editing; distribution; integrated development

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1. Current Status of Integrated Development Between Traditional and Emerging Publishing

President Xi Jinping has repeatedly issued important directives regarding media convergence. Through sustained efforts, news organizations such as People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency have achieved notable success in media integration by establishing "central kitchen" style workflow transformations and omnimedia service models, built upon resource sharing, advanced technology, and institutional mechanisms. As an essential component of the national cultural industry, book and audiovisual publishing has also made active efforts to promote media convergence in recent years. However, most initiatives remain limited to superficial grafting of form and content, failing to achieve comprehensive integration with new technologies in multimedia editing, online publishing, and terminal distribution. Consequently, they have not formed a stable new industrial chain conducive to long-term publishing development.

Unlike traditional distribution, integrated publishing involves network technology throughout content editing, layout production, and terminal distribution, requiring coordination across multiple departments including editing, publishing, and distribution. Although some leaders remain unfamiliar with the business, uncertain about overall management approaches, and worried about unrecoverable investments and potential liabilities, the volatile traditional publishing market—with rising sales volumes and total listed prices but declining or even disappearing profits—has intensified operational pressures and compelled more publishers to focus on integrated development. While most publishers have established digital publishing departments, constraints such as limited internet thinking, insufficient funding, and lack of technical personnel have prevented them from formulating practical implementation strategies tailored to their specific publishing fields, directions, and characteristics.

2. Challenges in Traditional and Emerging Publishing Integration

The relationship between traditional and emerging publishing has evolved through three developmental stages. The first stage involved traditional publishers recognizing and building emerging publishing, primarily by digitizing paper books and collaborating with digital publishing companies for revenue sharing. The second stage featured interactive development, where forward-thinking publishers invested significant capital and personnel to build their own digital platforms for online-offline integration, producing e-books for distribution on their proprietary platforms. The third stage represents true integrated development, where publishers conduct in-depth analysis of digital products, explore knowledge service system construction, and distribute content across multiple platforms through functional integration and process reengineering to drive content innovation and publishing convergence.

However, several obstacles hinder genuine integrated development from the publishers' perspective:

First, insufficient leadership attention and weak internet thinking awareness persist. Unlike traditional publishing's well-established three-review and three-proofread system for paper books, integrated publishing requires achieving shared integration of product content, information technology applications, and platform terminals on networks with integrated editing and publishing functions. This enables breakthroughs in temporal, spatial, and terminal boundaries to realize converged dissemination, generate revenue during content resource marketing, and facilitate digital content re-innovation and production process reengineering to meet new market demands. This necessitates continuous exploration, such as converting new media click-through rates and dissemination power into revenue—a novel and challenging task for current management teams. Many publishers have made substantial investments in integrated development with limited returns, and none have yet achieved profits exceeding those from traditional products, thereby impeding progress.

Second, digital publishing staff require enhanced innovation capabilities. Many current online publishing personnel have been transferred from traditional positions, acquiring their understanding of digital publishing primarily through training organized by supervisory departments and relying heavily on technology companies for implementation. Publishers lack composite talent who are familiar with traditional publishing operations while also mastering new technologies, ideas, and practices relevant to integrated development, making it impossible to proactively design feasible solutions and innovative platforms for publisher integration.

Third, difficulties in maintaining stable profits affect enthusiasm for integration. While traditional publishing possesses a mature workflow and proprietary distribution channels that ensure certain profits when planning market-appropriate books, integrated publishing demands continuous experimentation. The chal-

lence of transforming new media metrics into revenue poses significant difficulties, and the current situation where no publisher's integrated development profits exceed traditional product profits has hindered advancement.

Fourth, intellectual property protection difficulties negatively impact integration. While traditional publishing has developed experience in IP protection and anti-piracy measures, integrated publishing requires enhanced protection of copyrights and prevention of online piracy, which is easier than traditional book and audiovisual piracy. Publishers investing heavily in developing books, audiovisual products, and new media content face rapid piracy when market performance is strong, as seen with the TV series "In the Name of the People" and the film "Pirates of the Caribbean 5," which were decrypted and pirated shortly after release. This severely impacts enthusiasm for new product development, with audiovisual publishers particularly affected.

Fifth, insufficient understanding of how to integrate remains a core issue. While new media publishing far surpasses traditional publishing in dissemination timeliness, publishers worry that digital publications will severely impact traditional paper or audiovisual publications—a primary reason for hesitation. Integrated development is absolutely not merely a superposition of digital resources and network platforms but rather a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship that can promote and achieve integrated development while serving the overall situation. Establishing digital publishing departments or new media companies as integrated development platforms aims to consolidate editorial forces from traditional and emerging publishing to produce high-quality content, achieve timely release of traditional publishing, online publishing, and Weibo/WeChat/client apps, and ultimately disseminate positive energy and fulfill cultural inheritance based on national development will in the new media field.

3.1 Building a "Harmonious Win-Win" Publishing Culture and Collaborative System

Publishers must establish effective division-of-labor cooperation models with clear departmental responsibilities and rational division of labor. Cross-departmental collaboration should be implemented in both clearly defined and ambiguous boundary areas, requiring incentives for all relevant departments to actively participate in providing superior cultural content services. This creates an atmosphere where "if I can do something more conveniently and effectively than others, I should take the initiative." Leadership should actively focus on building effective division-of-labor cooperation, placing suitable people in suitable positions and providing good communication platforms between departments, such as regular coordination meetings for editing, publishing, and distribution businesses, and advancement meetings for ambiguous boundary issues, ensuring participation from all relevant personnel, particularly new employees. This guides all staff to shift from "always trying to prove others incompetent" to "striving to prove oneself capable" and even "helping others succeed to benefit the entire publishing house."

A performance-based responsibility system should be linked to employee income levels, enabling every employee to have clear expectations and understanding of their performance and compensation. Publishers should encourage employees not only to perform their own work but also to cooperate with relevant positions, focusing on handling the entire workflow connecting editing and distribution to resolve potential dissatisfaction. Effective methods and procedures for addressing these issues should be established through comprehensive institutional regulations. When formulating policies for editorial staff, attention should focus on: how to motivate editors to communicate fully with distribution before establishing publishing themes; how to enable editors to proactively introduce product characteristics and production progress to distribution staff to facilitate timely sales preparation; how editors can cooperate with distribution to provide product marketing information through physical and online stores for traditional and new media to boost later sales growth; what methods are most effective for marketing key products and activities to achieve both volume and efficiency; how editors can participate in sales activities, relevant issues requiring attention, and associated reward measures.

When formulating policies for distribution staff, attention should focus on: how to motivate distribution to actively assist editors in theme selection planning and product cover design; how to proactively cooperate with editorial marketing plans, conduct sales preparation based on product understanding, timely convey marketing information, implement marketing solutions, and truly form editorial-distribution synergy to achieve both volume and efficiency; encouraging distribution to promptly and accurately feed market information back to editors to achieve mutual collaboration, integration, and common development. When irreconcilable conflicts arise between editors and distribution, timely supplementary regulations should be established. For instance, distribution staff are primarily evaluated on shipments and payments—normally, better products with higher value generate better sales. However, some editors with strong cultural ideals insist on key marketing for academically valuable but unmarketable products, potentially causing conflicts due to inconsistent objectives. In such cases, it becomes necessary to add evaluation of minimum distribution quantities for individual products in distribution staff assessment systems to ensure weak-market books achieve certain sales volumes, helping editors realize market value for their products, resolving conflicts, and achieving integrated progress.

3.2 Highlighting Publishing Product Features and Strengthening Product Management

The lifeline of publishing products lies in distinctive, high-quality content—a proven principle in domestic and international publishing development. To achieve business growth targets outlined in three-to-five-year development plans, most publishers have no choice but to increase new product varieties. However, significantly expanding product lines inevitably sacrifices high-quality content based on professional division of labor. For example, among over 580 publishers

nationwide, more than 530 participate in children' s book publishing, including established publishers investing substantial human, material, and financial resources. When product homogenization becomes rampant and new products underperform, editors complain that distribution has not given sufficient attention or marketing effort, resulting in poor sales.

Therefore, when planning annual new products, publishers must develop comprehensive and detailed product plans based on their professional advantages and market demand, and hold editors accountable for implementation. While ensuring stable sales growth for existing product lines, publishers should organize resources to maintain quality content for new products and coordinate with distribution for marketing and promotion. After establishing several distinctive product lines, publishers must manage them effectively to strengthen the connection between editors and distribution. Both parties should fully cooperate according to their respective responsibilities and directions to form synergy rather than remaining confused and complaining about individual book characteristics and promotion methods. The stronger the correlation between products within a product line, the more obvious the cross-selling effects.

Most editors view their products as their children, believing them excellent in every aspect. However, only when this emotion translates into easily communicable product selling points suitable for all stakeholders can it truly promote sales. Currently, most editors follow market trends but rarely participate directly, making it difficult to identify product advantages and disadvantages from a market perspective. Distribution personnel should regularly form market analysis reports based on concrete sales data and feed market information and trends back to editors through appropriate channels. Only through such effective information exchange and conversion can the connection between editors and distribution become increasingly tight, forming integrated symbiosis.

Editors generally possess stronger writing skills and deeper product understanding than distribution staff. Their participation in marketing can actively promote sales and facilitate new product planning and precise marketing strategy development. Leveraging current network development, editors and distribution should thoroughly utilize smart media tools when developing and implementing marketing plans to jointly create quality products. Understanding the differences between various sales channels, identifying market demands, and developing suitable products can overcome the one-dimensional thinking that good products automatically deserve prominent display positions. Recognizing gaps between self-perceived quality and market priorities, and understanding optimal display and promotion methods for different product characteristics, enables differentiated marketing strategies for bestsellers, steady sellers, and academic works, enhancing publisher brand image, creating editor quality labels, and improving product credibility.

3.3 Leveraging Strengths and Actively Participating in Collaborative Integration

Marketing involves producing products according to actual market demand and using sales methods to provide them to customers, thereby realizing product value. Editors' work in theme planning and product design constitutes an essential component of marketing. If editors actively participate in pre-sales, in-sales, and after-sales work such as promotion and store sales, they can better align planning and design with market demand and readership, moving beyond impulsive book selection to create more market-suitable products for optimal returns. Each publisher's sales channels represent hard-won achievements by distribution staff with unique advantages. Only through active participation in marketing and channel engagement can editors truly understand distribution work characteristics and recognize market realities and channel strengths, enabling better product planning and precise marketing strategies.

Smart media publications feature rich and diverse content forms with strong interactivity and rapid dissemination, offering broad audiences, low costs, and inventory-free advantages. These characteristics pose severe challenges to traditional publishing's editing, production, and distribution workflows, significantly impacting the social and economic benefits of traditional paper and audiovisual publishing. With continuous innovation in artificial intelligence, wearable devices, and 5G technology, accelerated mobile media development and new multimedia resource formats are changing reading habits, forcing publishers to transform their long-static publishing processes and media. Traditional and online publishing are both indispensable components of the national press and publishing industry, making their deep integration and common development an urgent task for publishers.

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

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