

Postprint: A Study on the Transformation Path of University Campus Newspapers from the Perspective of Media Convergence

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Abstract

After more than a century of development, university campus newspapers currently face severe challenges in the broader context of new media's rise and print media's decline. To better shoulder their cultural education mission, campus newspapers must undergo transformation through media convergence. In this convergence process, they should emphasize their strengths and avoid weaknesses, uphold their position, leverage their advantages, and pursue a path of differentiated convergence. Simultaneously, they should absorb the advantages of new media, break through the limitations of "print media," integrate and interact with new media, attain a fully integrated development outcome, fully exert the publicity role of campus mainstream media, and fulfill their educational function.

Full Text

Preamble

Research on the Transformation Path of University Campus Newspapers from the Perspective of Media Convergence

Abstract: After more than a century of development, university campus newspapers now face severe challenges amid the rise of new media and the decline of print media. To better fulfill their cultural education mission, campus newspapers must undergo transformation through media convergence. In this process, they should leverage their strengths while avoiding weaknesses, maintain their stance, and pursue a differentiated convergence path. Simultaneously, they should absorb the advantages of new media, break through the limitations of print, and achieve integrated development through interactive fusion with new media. This will enable them to fully exert their role as mainstream campus media and realize their educational function.

Keywords: convergence; campus newspaper; transformation

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China's earliest campus newspaper is identified by some as the *Xiangxue Xinbao* founded in 1897[1], and by others as the *Beiyang University Journal* of Tianjin's Beiyang University founded in 1895[2]. Since their emergence in the late 19th century, university campus newspapers have undergone a century-long development process, becoming an important platform for ideological guidance and campus culture display. Currently, the China University Campus Newspaper Display Platform developed by Beijing Huawen Network Newspaper Software Development Co., Ltd. includes over 1,600 university newspapers (including internal publications), demonstrating the prosperous development of campus newspapers. However, with the rapid development of internet technology and new media, campus newspapers also face development dilemmas, gradually shifting from prosperity to neglect, with some universities even discontinuing their publication. President Xi Jinping once pointed out that propaganda and ideological work requires the awareness that "the wise adapt to the times, and the knowledgeable change with circumstances." To continue upholding their cultural education mission, campus newspapers must adapt to new circumstances and fully integrate with various new media to win discourse power in the future.

1.1 The Impact of the Traditional Print Media Development Dilemma

Since the launch of new media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, traditional print media have faced enormous impact. In recent years, numerous established print newspapers, including *Beijing Times*, *Shanghai Weekly*, *The Bund*, and *Oriental Morning Post*, have ceased publication, fueling the narrative of "print media extinction." Campus newspapers face the same challenges as external print media, lagging behind new media in terms of news timeliness, interactivity, visual and content appeal, while operating within a relatively more closed communication scope. Today's youth students, known as "digital natives" and the "vertical-screen generation," are more accustomed to obtaining resources through online media. The print format, somewhat serious language style, and "news broadcast"-type content of campus newspapers no longer meet their needs.

1.2 The Squeeze on Campus Newspaper Resources by the Rise of University New Media

Unlike the simplicity and speed of new media publishing, campus newspaper production involves a complex process requiring significant human resources and time, with printing incurring additional financial costs. However, the output

effect is unsatisfactory compared to this investment. Compared to university official websites and WeChat accounts, campus newspapers clearly lag behind in communication effectiveness, speed, and reach. Some universities consider campus newspaper construction to have low cost-effectiveness, gradually extending publication cycles or simply discontinuing them. Many universities prefer to invest human resources, policies, and funding into their official Weibo and WeChat platforms. Consequently, campus newspapers receive fewer resources and face an increasingly evident trend of marginalization.

2. Analysis of the Transformation Direction for Campus Newspapers

When discussing the “print media extinction” narrative, campus newspaper editors often contemplate the future development of campus newspapers, questioning whether they are necessary and whether they will also become extinct. The author argues that as non-commercial newspapers, campus newspapers share common characteristics with commercial print media but also possess unique features that will serve as growth points for future development. In the process of converging with other media, campus newspapers should leverage their strengths while avoiding weaknesses, better exerting their irreplaceability to become an indispensable part of integrated media.

2.1 The Irreplaceable Authority and Historical Value of Campus Newspapers

The strict content review process and the seriousness of print publication give campus newspapers significantly higher information authority than new media like Weibo and WeChat, which can be modified or deleted at any time. Additionally, campus newspapers have a very important and stable readership among retired and elderly faculty members who remain accustomed to reading newspapers and are loyal supporters. Moreover, many universities have their own archives and history museums, and campus newspapers, as carriers recording institutional development, serve as the best physical evidence of school history with high historical preservation value. The print format also facilitates archiving and retrieval. Many universities publish special editions in campus newspapers for important celebrations such as anniversaries, which hold precious collectible significance for faculty, students, and alumni. This archival convenience and historical value are incomparable to Weibo or WeChat.

2.2 The Irreplaceable Role of Deep Reading Over Fragmented Reading

The rise of Weibo and WeChat has accelerated the trend of fragmented reading, which provides a fast-food-style reading experience and yields only superficial knowledge. As highly educated groups, university faculty and students are more accustomed to in-depth, systematic information acquisition compared to the

general public. The rapid information flow brought by new media cannot completely replace the deep reading experience of print carriers. This also indicates future development space and transformation direction for campus newspapers: to attract the highly educated readership, they must pursue a differentiated path from new media, focusing on enhancing deep reading experiences and strengthening their specialized core competitiveness.

3.1 Differentiated Convergence: Transforming Traditional Content Production Models

As print newspapers, campus newspapers are inherently unable to match the transmission speed of internet-based new media. The emergence of emerging technologies such as news robots and algorithmic news recommendation has further accelerated new media transmission speeds and transformed traditional news production ecosystems and models. It is observed that many major news stories now originate online, spreading exponentially through social media to create powerful public opinion effects before being adopted by traditional media like television and newspapers. In the current landscape, online new media will remain the “first mover” in news reporting, and campus newspapers cannot compete with them in production speed. However, precisely because of new media’s pursuit of speed, they sometimes release information before verifying facts, leading to subsequent “reversal” news stories. The rigorous and reliable characteristics lacking in new media are exactly what campus newspapers possess.

In the campus media convergence process, different media should not simply undergo superficial integration but should leverage their respective advantages. Campus newspapers should not be abandoned media but should maintain their characteristics and pursue differentiated convergence to maximize their inherent strengths, primarily by differentiating from new media’s fragmented content. First, campus newspapers can conduct post-event integration and summarization of new media content. During major campus cultural activities such as welcome events for new students, graduation ceremonies, and sports meets, the university’s official Weibo and WeChat accounts can provide live broadcasts and dynamic information releases to create a lively atmosphere. After these events, campus newspapers can summarize and integrate the information published on these platforms to create comprehensive special reports. Second, campus newspapers can use big data to conduct targeted dissemination of popular content. New media platforms provide data on readership and forwarding volumes, enabling campus newspapers to select high-traffic information from official accounts and videos, categorize content based on reader preferences reflected in this data, and form special features such as personality profiles, behind-the-scenes stories, and 花絮 (lighthearted moments), thereby generating new popular content while “riding the wave” of existing 热度 (hot topics). Third, campus newspapers should conduct “deep cultivation” and innovation of content. Positioned at the end of the news production timeline, campus newspapers may

lose freshness but gain time for content mining and innovation. Their content should not be limited to events themselves but should adopt higher perspectives on ideological and political education, campus culture construction, and educational management for in-depth reflection and secondary innovation, enhancing the novelty of angles and depth of content layers to increase the value of campus newspaper content.

3.2 Integrated Development: Forming a Multi-Media Interactive Convergence Communication Model

Many new media platforms primarily rely on the convenience of mobile phones and network technology to break through temporal and spatial limitations, providing readers with more visual and auditory sensory enjoyment. Readers can also use fragmented time to read, save, and forward content anytime and anywhere. Media form development progresses with the times, and campus newspapers, as print media, can also break through “print” limitations and integrate into network new media. In terms of communication form, campus newspapers should seize the communication advantages of new media by developing their own electronic versions, WeChat public accounts, and Weibo accounts to disseminate content through new media. Many campus newspapers, such as *Communication University of China Newspaper*, *Beijing Institute of Technology (Zhuhai) Newspaper*, and *Shandong University of Technology Newspaper*, have launched WeChat and APP reading functions. This convergence with new media adapts to the reading habits of faculty and students in the new era and breaks through the form limitations of traditional print media. Simultaneously, campus newspapers can be embedded in other campus media for better promotion. Currently, the China University Campus Newspaper Display Platform and some university official websites have implemented electronic display of campus newspapers and provide QR codes for convenient scanning and reading. These QR codes or electronic links can be embedded in new media like Weibo and WeChat to compensate for the fragmented content of official accounts, serve as supplements for deep reading, and enhance the quality of official micro-platforms.

3.3 Reform and Persistence: Transforming Work Style and Writing Style to Strengthen Cultural Education Function

Campus newspapers should learn from new media and implement reforms. Regardless of media form and technological development, content remains the primary productive force for propaganda work and media. Campus newspapers should not view themselves as mere excerptors or echo chambers of official websites and WeChat accounts, nor should they adopt a bureaucratic newspaper management mentality. President Xi Jinping emphasized at the News and Public Opinion Work Symposium that news and public opinion workers should transform their work style and writing style, bend down and calm down to investigate actual conditions, speak truthfully, and express genuine emotions, striving to produce works with thought, warmth, and quality. Campus newspa-

pers should follow President Xi Jinping' s guidance by analyzing and learning from the content and operations of representative and successful new media accounts. In terms of content, they should be oriented toward faculty and student needs, reducing unnecessary coverage of meetings and leadership visits while increasing thematic reports on teaching, learning, job hunting, and emotional topics that are close to campus life. In writing style, they should appropriately use internet language popular among young students. In terms of reporting timing, they should seize important campus life moments such as semester beginnings, graduations, job searches, and evening events to enhance the affinity of campus newspaper content through various means.

While learning from new media advantages, campus newspapers should also avoid common new media problems. New media provides massive information to the public, but to stand out in this sea of information, some editors or administrators pursue online traffic and exposure by employing “clickbait” and sensationalist strategies to cater to vulgar tastes. Traffic-oriented online new media sometimes makes fundamental errors in orientation and values. As an important component of university propaganda positions, campus newspapers shoulder the responsibility of promoting socialist core values and assisting universities in fulfilling their mission of cultivating virtue and nurturing people through culture. They must always maintain their fundamental stance and guiding ideology during the convergence process, correctly grasp the direction of mainstream campus public opinion, and fully enhance their communication influence among faculty and students.

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

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