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Dilemmas and Solutions for Regional Mainstream Newspapers in the Internet Plus Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

The advent of the Internet era and the emergence of new media have exerted tremendous impact on traditional media. Faced with continuously fragmented audiences and a gradually shrinking target market, traditional regional mainstream newspapers must confront existing challenges directly and explore new avenues for sustainable development. This study examines regional mainstream newspapers as its research subject, analyzing the predicaments they face in the ‘Internet Plus’ era and identifying potential development pathways, thereby offering insights and references for the evolution of traditional newspaper media.

Full Text

“Internet Plus” Era: The Dilemma and Solutions for Regional Mainstream Newspapers

Abstract

The advent of the internet era and the emergence of new media have brought tremendous impact to traditional media. With audiences continuously being diverted and target markets gradually shrinking, traditional regional mainstream newspapers must confront these challenges directly and explore new development paths to ensure long-term survival. This article takes regional mainstream newspapers as its research subject, analyzing the dilemmas they face in the “Internet Plus” era and identifying potential solutions, with the aim of providing useful insights and references for the development of traditional newspaper media.

Keywords: Internet Plus Era; Regional Mainstream Newspapers; Dilemma; Solutions

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, technological transformations in media and the emergence of new media have triggered large-scale, comprehensive reshuffling across the media industry. Many traditional media outlets have begun transitioning toward multimedia, omnimedia, and converged media models, with media convergence becoming the dominant social form. As representatives of traditional media, many regional mainstream newspapers have fallen into developmental predicaments in the new media era due to audience fragmentation and management difficulties. Recognizing their current situation, intensifying research on convergence strategies, and achieving sustainable development through media transformation have become critical issues that regional mainstream newspapers must address.

1. The Dilemma of Regional Mainstream Newspapers in the “Internet Plus” Era

1.1 Audience Loss and Poor Performance

In the omnimedia era, traditional media faces unprecedented challenges from new media. Today, many new media platforms are experiencing severe difficulties, showing signs of decline, which is evident in their advertising operations and audience scale. People’s reading time has become highly fragmented—even for electronic editions, few have time to read an entire newspaper. Most rely on portable devices like mobile phones to obtain information in bits and pieces, seeking only superficial understanding rather than in-depth comprehension. Consequently, advertising revenues for many newspapers continue to decline year-over-year, with advertising space gradually shrinking and income dropping dramatically—a fatal problem for regional newspapers. Some excellent regional newspapers, such as *Beijing Times*, have attempted to break through due to massive market changes, but these efforts have failed, resulting in even greater losses. In contrast, many online media platforms see growing advertising revenues and expanding teams of journalists. Without accelerated innovation, the future prospects for newspapers and other traditional media appear bleak.

1.2 Poor Interactivity and Declining Appeal

New media developed on the internet foundation possesses strong interactivity and immediacy, which have transformed the composition of “audiences” by enabling many to participate in information creation and dissemination. As a result, new media user and audience numbers continue to grow. Although regional mainstream newspapers maintain strong credibility in content, they lack effectiveness in interactivity and immediacy. Many breaking news stories are released by internet media rather than newspapers—an insurmountable defect. Even though many regional newspapers have established reader hotlines, expanded their networks of part-time correspondents, and launched Weibo and WeChat official accounts, their immediacy still cannot compete with new media,

significantly reducing their appeal to both advertisers and audiences.

1.3 Declining Credibility

Although it is an undeniable fact that new media in the new media era attracts audiences without winning critical acclaim, their revenue and appeal remain strong. While traditional media such as newspapers and television still maintain influence and credibility—especially mainstream traditional media whose credibility is unquestionable—their overall position in audiences’ minds has been shaken. At the very least, amid the major reshuffling of media workforces and competitive landscapes, the influence and credibility of regional mainstream newspapers have been noticeably affected.

1.4 Lack of Commercial Practice Capability

Closure is a characteristic of systems lacking competitive mechanisms. This does not mean having no communication with the outside world, but rather limited, low-level communication. Media practitioners exhibit extremely low mobility, making it difficult to enter the media industry from other sectors. The information and judgments gathered by journalists often fail to align with industry common knowledge possessed by industry insiders. Media workers forged in such closed structures often lack fundamental commercial practice capabilities. Currently, the main forces active in media are either veteran journalists who have been in the industry for many years or recent graduates from journalism and communication schools. Due to relatively low incomes in media organizations, recruiting professional talent is difficult. For example, when financial media recruit, top talent from financial institutions will not apply, leading to insufficient professional standards. While a recent journalism graduate might handle simple human-interest stories through professional training, producing in-depth industry reports proves extremely challenging.

2. Solutions for Regional Mainstream Newspapers in the “Internet Plus” Era

Interactivity represents a crucial characteristic of the internet. The most significant difference between print media and internet-based online media lies in the greater convenience of online media. Many media organizations have established their own comprehensive new media platforms. However, the “bulky” nature of regional mainstream newspapers provides them with unique value—the pleasure derived from print reading. As the renowned American communication scholar Wilbur Schramm’s “formula for the probability of message selection” states: the likelihood of a message being noticed and selected is directly proportional to the value of its content and inversely proportional to the time and effort required to obtain it [3]. For readers, obtaining content is the ultimate goal. Regardless of whether information is printed in newspapers or displayed on mobile screens, content quality must be guaranteed. Given the current complex public opinion

environment where self-media online produces mostly fake news, regional mainstream newspapers' commitment to quality journalism becomes truly valuable. The solution for regional mainstream newspapers in communication competition lies in segmenting the communication market, studying audience reception psychology, and focusing on serving audiences effectively.

2.1 Adhering to Local Development Concepts and Improving News Propaganda

China's newspaper industry market competition has long reached a white-hot stage. Adhering to local concepts and expanding market share through news localization and entertainment has become a golden rule for the newspaper industry. Compared with mainstream newspapers, regional mainstream newspapers are relatively weak in authority and content depth but possess significant advantages in local news discovery. Moreover, as local mouthpieces, regional mainstream newspapers maintain certain appeal and reputation among audiences. Therefore, they must recognize their strengths and weaknesses, avoid blind optimism, maximize advantages while minimizing disadvantages, and adhere to local development concepts to produce quality local news. Specifically, local newspapers should conduct scientific market positioning—for instance, city party newspapers should maintain authoritative positioning, while evening papers should adopt a civilian orientation. They must uphold the principle of “content is king,” approach local major news, significant issues, and human-interest stories with different attitudes, appropriately expand local news sections, add special editions for suburban or district news, focus on urban education, healthcare, and social security, actively promote positive models, and emphasize news' regional relevance, timeliness, and practicality. Simultaneously, they should respect audience needs, reasonably control the proportion of human-interest news, create human-interest programs in a conversational style, discover news selling points from new angles, and enhance dissemination effectiveness.

2.2 Emphasizing Advertising Business and Conducting Structural Adjustments

With new media's strong rise, some newspapers and magazines cease publication annually, leading many to lament that “print media is dead” [4]. In reality, this outcome merely results from homogeneous competition and elimination. This serves as a warning to other newspapers: we must respect market survival-of-the-fittest laws while striving to progress further. Advertising fundamentally determines newspaper development. Therefore, in the “Internet Plus” era, regional mainstream newspapers must attach sufficient importance to advertising business, starting with newspaper quality to enhance influence and circulation, then using brand support to develop and maintain local advertising resources. For example, they should build a high-level advertising planning team to create suitable advertising content and dissemination methods for advertisers, establish good relationships with advertisers, and maximize advertising benefits. They

should sign annual advertising contracts with major clients, conduct layout resource exchanges, and form mutually beneficial relationships. To improve resource utilization efficiency, newspaper offices must increase human capital and technological investment, strengthen news gathering and editing teams, conduct internal organizational restructuring, and intensify integration with local radio and television industries to provide suggestions for government decision-making and local economic development, thereby enhancing newspaper influence.

2.3 Taking the Path of Media Convergence Development

Media convergence has become a social development trend. Many traditional media have established their own comprehensive new media platforms. Regional mainstream newspapers must also promptly formulate omnimedia development strategies, rely on mobile phones and network media, build converged media platforms, create local newspaper omnimedia, and expand online development space. This requires regional mainstream newspapers to vigorously integrate resources, incorporate online discourse into newspaper human-interest news production, broaden development thinking, build newspaper official websites and Weibo accounts, open WeChat official accounts, produce newspaper news programs suitable for online platforms, graft newspaper programs onto the online domain, and simultaneously improve information dissemination levels and resource utilization efficiency. Furthermore, they should utilize new media to strengthen interaction with audiences, regularly organize online and offline activities to narrow the distance with audiences and discover more potential audiences.

2.4 Insisting on Comprehensive Innovation in Media Convergence

In network society, information spreads too rapidly, impacting both print media forms and their practitioners. Human resources represent the primary media resource, with young talent being the most promising and dynamic component. The media convergence era must insist on comprehensive innovation to effectively enhance regional mainstream newspapers' communication power and influence, form joint forces among regional media, and build a regional mainstream communication community. Based on "Internet Plus" era mainstream newspaper reporting, news dissemination requires not only rapid response to individual events but also maintaining strong new media sensitivity when facing changes in the entire public opinion ecology and media landscape, taking preemptive steps in understanding and layout to seize opportunities and achieve "win-win" results.

Conclusion

In summary, regional mainstream newspapers face severe development challenges in the "Internet Plus" era. Only by improving communication strategies, integrating media resources, identifying convergence points with new me-

dia, and enhancing management levels can regional mainstream newspapers achieve greater influence, improve operational efficiency, realize sustainable development, and allow correct ideological public opinion to penetrate people's hearts through media reform and innovation in news communication methods and carriers.

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