

Research on the Development Status and Strategies of Print Books in the New Media Era — Based on SWOT Analysis (Postprint)

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Abstract

In the era of new media, “content entrepreneurship and knowledge monetization” represents a topic of paramount concern for major platforms, with new media operations having created a viable niche for e-books. The sales of paper books have been impacted by e-books, and the question of whether paper books will be supplanted by e-books has become a critical issue for publishers. Both paper books and e-books possess inherent advantages and disadvantages; they should not be framed as mutually exclusive alternatives but should instead pursue a path of mutual integration and collaborative development. This study utilizes SWOT analysis to deconstruct the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats confronting paper books, thereby exploring strategies for their future development.

Full Text

Research on the Development Status and Strategies of Print Books in the New Media Era — Based on SWOT Analysis

Abstract: In the new media era, “content entrepreneurship and knowledge monetization” have become the most discussed topics across major platforms, and new media operations have created a niche for e-books. As e-book sales impact print book markets, whether print books will be replaced by e-books has become a critical concern for publishers. Both print and e-books possess distinct advantages and disadvantages; rather than positioning them as opposing forces, we should seek pathways for mutual integration and collaborative development. This paper employs SWOT analysis to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing print books, and explores future development strategies for the medium.

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We have now entered a new era—the new media era. The concept of new media is defined relative to traditional media, utilizing digital technology, network technology, and mobile technology to deliver information and entertainment through channels such as the internet, wireless communication networks, and wired networks, via terminals including computers, mobile phones, and digital televisions. E-books, with their portability, searchability, and affordable pricing, have gained increasing popularity among readers. This paper uses SWOT analysis to examine the competitive advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats facing print books in the current market, aiming to develop a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of their development and propose future directions for the publishing industry.

1. Strengths (S)

As a long-standing carrier of knowledge and culture, print books offer numerous advantages that e-books cannot match.

1.1 Sense of Form and Enjoyability

Print books embody more than mere information, knowledge, and culture—they represent the spiritual crystallization of authors, editors, designers, and other contributors. Distinctive design and high-quality production not only showcase an author's work but also reflect scientific marketing strategies. The “Most Beautiful Books” award, for instance, specifically recognizes excellence in print book design. Winning titles feature meticulous design, artistic aesthetics, rich expressive forms, and engaging presentation. Such books can stimulate readers' interest and curiosity, activating sensory experiences.

1.3 Systematicity and Completeness

Reading print books facilitates the classification, organization, and research of massive information content, helping readers summarize and extract effective information. The integration of traditional print media with new media has expanded the influence of the publishing industry, providing print readers with value-added services such as e-books and retrieval functions. While e-book devices offer features like tagging and annotation, these remain two-dimensional, unlike the three-dimensional presentation of print books, making notes less intuitive and harder to navigate.

1.4 Interactivity

In the new media era, the spirit of innovation serves as a powerful driver for print book development. Editors play an extremely important role in the actual book publishing process: they first print manuscripts for proofreading, editing, and processing—this constitutes the traditional workflow for print book publishing. Through content arrangement, paper selection, and cover and layout design, editors and designers enrich the connotation of these spiritual products. While e-books primarily use electronic devices (mobile phones, e-readers, tablets) as media, with their most important function being simple, intuitive information dissemination aimed at making information transfer faster and more convenient, print books allow readers to physically touch and experience the spirit that authors, designers, and editors seek to convey.

2. Weaknesses (W)

Although print books possess numerous advantages, they naturally reveal certain weaknesses in the new media era that extensively utilizes digital, network, and mobile technologies. From the completion of editorial processing to printing, through to when readers finally obtain the book, a print book must undergo numerous stages—including printing, marketing, shipping, distribution, and retail—involving multiple departments across publishers, printing houses, and bookstores.

3. Opportunities (O)

Many have asserted that with societal progress and technological development, digital reading will become increasingly popular, inevitably leading to the demise of print books as e-books replace them. Indeed, many people now carry Kindle devices or have reading apps on their phones, while others listen to audio books, with various modern reading methods impacting print book development. However, much data indicates that print books are not declining. The 14th National Reading Survey revealed that 51.6% of adult nationals prefer “reading a print book.” In an era of highly developed digital reading, print books still enjoy the preference of more than half of readers. Regarding this phenomenon, Xu Shengguo, Director of the National Reading Research and Promotion Center, believes this demonstrates that traditional print books still possess vitality. “The return to print books is a global trend. Similar patterns have emerged in the United States, United Kingdom, and France, where e-book sales have slowed while print book sales have steadily increased. The same is true in China. While digital reading offers speed and convenience, it is only suitable for fast, fragmented shallow reading. Traditional print reading is better suited for systematic, structured deep reading. Readers’ demand for deep reading will not disappear, and therefore print books will not disappear. For a considerable period, traditional print books and digital reading methods will coexist.” [1]

A Nielsen Book Research report shows that in 2016, total UK book sales (including e-books and print books) reached 360 million copies, with print book sales increasing by 6% while e-book sales declined by 4%. Similar results appeared in reports from the UK's five major publishers—Penguin Random House, Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster—whose combined e-book sales dropped by 2.4%. A US research center's 2016 book reading report released last September indicated that approximately 73% of Americans had read at least one print book in the past year, a figure that has remained essentially stable over the past four years. Research from a UK institution shows that among British youth aged 16 to 24, 62% prefer print books over e-books despite the greater convenience of the latter [2]. These survey results demonstrate that print books remain beloved by many readers, who generally believe they offer incomparable advantages over e-books.

4. Threats (T)

While we should be confident about the development of print books, the market dominance of e-books due to their technological and functional advantages also raises concerns about the future of print media. First, e-books are portable and have large capacity, enabling instant interaction among readers through terminal devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and e-readers, including online communication and discussion. Second, e-book retrieval systems are relatively easy to use, allowing users to search for relevant information through keyword-based queries. Third, e-books are unrestricted by time and space, using the internet to transmit desired information anytime, enabling readers to acquire new knowledge and content within limited timeframes and achieving information sharing. Finally, e-book prices are obviously more affordable than print books, with convenient and fast purchase channels.

5. Future Development Strategies for Print Book Publishing

There is no doubt that print books will not disappear and still have a broad market. The key question is how to use internet technology and tools to develop and innovate in the information age.

First, leverage the advantages of print books. One of the most important goals of print books is to allow readers to truly experience the joy of reading. Culture should be presented in a three-dimensional, rich, and multi-dimensional way. E-book reading remains at the level of fast-food reading—shallow reading. Print books, with their novel designs and rich content, offer more than just content presentation; they can evoke special reading experiences and emotional responses, even serving as symbols of identity and taste. Therefore, future print books should pursue classical quality, utilize their many advantages, continuously innovate, and focus on binding and design to engage readers' emotions, stimulate sensory enjoyment, and create empathy. Once reading is no longer

just about obtaining information and increasing knowledge volume, the competitiveness of e-books diminishes and the advantages of print books become obvious.

Second, capitalize on market opportunities. Some readers have already shifted back from e-books to print books, as e-books' simple information presentation can no longer satisfy readers' needs. Instead, they seek quieter, more independent, and more relaxing reading experiences. Obtaining information from print books leaves deeper impressions than from e-books. Independent bookstores have also created broader markets for print books by providing real social spaces that shorten distances between readers and authors and among readers themselves, enhancing interactive communication. These stores serve as excellent places for people to find independent and pure reading spaces in an environment filled with convenient networks and various electronic devices.

Third, advance hand-in-hand with e-books. Print books and e-books are not completely opposing species; each has its own strengths. E-books will not replace print books and cause their extinction, nor should print book development constrain e-book growth. The emergence of e-books satisfies the reading needs of certain populations and provides excellent tools for lifelong learning. Print books and e-books should leverage their respective advantages, identify target audiences, advance together, transform each other, integrate, and develop collectively to provide high-quality and convenient reading resources for readers, promote the dissemination of knowledge and culture, improve people's spiritual quality of life, and drive harmonious social development.

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[Figure 1: see original paper] SWOT Analysis Model for Print Book Development

[Figure 2: see original paper] SWOT Matrix Analysis for Print Book Development

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

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