How to Utilize Big Data to Guide Post-Print Decision-Making in Book Publishing

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Abstract

Traditional book publishers produce and distribute books to corresponding retailers for profit. As society develops, the selling prices of legitimate print books continue to rise due to various internal and external factors, rendering them unaffordable and deterring some readers from purchasing. Moreover, the emergence of online novels, e-books, and mobile reading devices has further contributed to the pessimistic sales outlook for traditional print books. Additionally, influenced by multiculturalism and new media, an increasing number of new-generation readers gravitate toward fragmented reading and online novels, continuously eroding the market share of print books and traditional literature. The predictive capabilities demonstrated in the big data era enable traditional book publishers to leverage big data to anticipate market demand, thereby enabling targeted publishing strategies that ensure sales volumes. This study examines the current state of the book consumption market in the big data era and proposes corresponding measures for guiding traditional book publishers in book distribution through big data, with the aim of providing actionable recommendations for the industry.

Full Text

How to Use Big Data to Guide the Direction of Book Publishing

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Abstract: Traditional book publishers produce and distribute books to retailers for profit. However, rising prices of legitimate physical books due to various internal and external factors have made book consumption increasingly unaffordable for some readers. The emergence of online novels, e-books, and mobile reading devices has further dampened physical book sales. Additionally, influenced by multiculturalism and new media, younger generations increasingly prefer fragmented reading and online novels, shrinking the market share of physical books and traditional literature. The predictive nature of the big data era enables traditional publishing to anticipate market demand and publish targeted books to ensure sales. This paper examines the current state of book consumption markets in the big data era and proposes measures for using big data to guide traditional publishers, aiming to provide practical guidance for the industry.

Keywords: Big data; Book publishing; Guidance; Direction

As is widely recognized, the core value of big data lies in its predictive capability. More accurate predictions enable organizations to plan proactively, seize opportunities, and develop targeted business strategies. The information age has caused traditional industries to lose market share imperceptibly. The book publishing industry, impacted by online novels, television media, and emerging media, has experienced declining physical book sales. In response, some traditional publishers have begun collaborating with e-commerce platforms and online reading platforms to sell electronic books through various partnership models. In today's era of information explosion, the proliferation of online novels, WeChat articles, and blog posts has created a surplus of literary content. Simultaneously, media influence has led younger generations to favor fragmented reading and genres such as "xianxia" (fantasy martial arts), "wealthy family dramas," and romance novels. Consequently, contemporary traditional literary works remain untouched on bookstore shelves, creating numerous negative impacts on publishers. Leveraging big data to understand contemporary trends while maintaining the publishing industry's responsibility to promote excellent literature can help publishers explore new directions in this new era.

1. Analysis of Publishing Industry Status in the Big Data Era

1.1 Lack of Precise Market Understanding and Blind Expansion of Publishing Varieties

According to the "Basic Situation of National Press and Publication Industry" for 2015 released by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television at the end of 2016, the number of book titles published annually in China has shown steady growth. In 2015, a total of 475,768 book titles were published nationwide, with total printed copies reaching 8.662 billion and total printed sheets amounting to 74.319 billion. Book titles increased by 6.1% year-over-year, total printed copies grew by 5.84%, and total printed sheets rose by 5.53%. Behind these growing publication figures, on one hand, the industry has provided readers with broader choices; on the other hand, it reveals severe overcapacity. For a long time, traditional book publishing has suffered from backward supply chains and information opacity, resulting in low precision in grasping market demand. Unable to accurately understand market needs, publishers have resorted to horizontal expansion—increasing the variety of published titles to carpet-bomb consumer demand. This approach has led to massive inventory backlogs, short book life cycles, and irrational business cycles, causing substantial resource waste in the publishing industry [1].

1.2 Innovative Novels Continue to Generate Heat, Extending IP Value

In recent years, collaboration between the publishing industry and film/television sectors has emerged as a new trend. As novels accumulate popularity on online reading platforms, their IP value has been discovered by film, television, and gaming industries. Adaptations of popular novels into movies, animations, and mobile games have increased continuously, generating considerable economic value. When novels are adapted into various film, television, and gaming works, sales of the original books receive a significant boost. The renowned author Yan Geling once stated in a CCTV program that after her works *The Flowers of War* and *Coming Home* were adapted into films, book sales experienced substantial short-term growth. The relationship between film/television and publishing is mutually reinforcing. For the publishing industry, extending into film and television offers more substantial profits than book sales alone, representing an excellent strategic choice. However, reducing the financial risks of investing in film and television adaptations requires big data as a decision-making reference.

1.3 Blind Trend-Following in Publishing and the Phenomenon of Bad Money Driving Out Good

The finite number of traditional excellent literary works means readers can finish reading them all during their student years. The lack of "masterpiece peaks" in contemporary literature leaves readers with little desire to read when facing a sea of mediocre works. This phenomenon causes any popular literary work to receive massive reader attention, prompting publishers to blindly follow trends. When xianxia novels become popular, publishers rush to release various xianxia titles; when *Water Boiling the Three Kingdoms* became a hit, numerous "Three Kingdoms" books flooded the market. This swarm-like publishing model leaves readers overwhelmed and unable to choose among homogeneous novels, causing truly valuable books to be buried in the vast ocean of publications. Readers spending considerable energy searching for relevant books often experience information overload and miss excellent works. This creates a vicious cycle where disappointment in book purchases reduces buying desire, indirectly causing a "bad money drives out good" phenomenon that significantly negatively impacts both the publishing industry and authors [2].

2. How Big Data Guides Traditional Book Publishers

To more accurately understand reader needs and publish books on demand according to those needs is a powerful measure to ensure orderly publishing and avoid inventory backlogs and overcapacity. Traditional book publishers can collect reader interests and opinions on specific book types through multiple channels such as WeChat public accounts, on-site questionnaires, and website survey platforms. After collecting massive reader opinions and suggestions, publishers can use big data analysis methods to categorize, organize, and analyze this information, extracting valuable insights to understand why certain books sell well while others do not. Based on this big data, publishers can adjust publishing directions promptly and publish according to market demand [3].

2.2 Using Big Data to Mine Topics and Convert Topics into Books

In this era of declining book reading and increasing fragmented reading, book publishing topics must leverage big data to identify subjects with substantial readership bases. These subjects already possess considerable audience groups, indicating they are topics of current reader interest that can stimulate reading desire. Take the book *400 Times* as an example. This book discusses female physiological cycle knowledge and, by common sense, has practical value that would attract certain readers. The book was created based on big data information from a professional community platform. First, big data from the platform showed reader demand for such information; second, the platform collected extensive professional physiological knowledge, providing massive writing materials and foundations for the book. This enabled the book to be sold on both online and offline platforms after publication. Books transformed from topics identified through big data as having substantial readership bases inherently possess significant audience foundations, directly promoting sales.

2.3 Using E-Book Sales Data to Guide Physical Book Publishing

The vast number of books and uneven work quality make it difficult for readers to accurately select excellent books that meet their needs. With continuously rising prices of physical books, purchasing them has become an economic burden for some readers. Although fragmented and electronic reading has become a trend, for book lovers, physical books offer better collection and reading value than e-books, and they remain willing to spend money on quality physical books. To ensure published physical books are well-received and avoid inventory backlogs, publishers can use e-book sales big data as a foundation for on-demand publishing of physical books. Adapting novels into film/television works or vice versa has become a new development model for the publishing industry. Publishers should promptly utilize information systems and network platforms to collect book sales data, initiate dedicated discussion forums, understand reader opinions, gauge reader enthusiasm for adapting works into film/television, and learn reader preferences for casting choices. This establishes a positive book-film/television synergy, generating film/television profits from books and driving book sales through film/television adaptations. Conversely, when adapting film/television works into novels, the same information collection and adaptation approach can ensure a baseline readership and guarantee book popularity.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the literary masterpieces accumulated in the publishing industry mainly consist of works from the Republic of China era and earlier, along with some award-winning contemporary works. The uneven quality and severe homogenization of modern works require book publishers to use big data information to guide rational publishing according to market demand. This ensures traditional book publishers can remain profitable amid modern reading habits and declining physical book purchases, guaranteeing healthy and stable development.

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