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# An Investigation into the Evolution of Digital Newspaper Practice and New Media Convergence Strategies in the Post-Print Era

**Authors:** Wang Jing

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## Abstract

“Digital newspaper industry” is an extensive project that thoroughly transforms and comprehensively upgrades the business operations, content gathering and writing, design and layout, and dissemination media of traditional newspaper industry through digitalization, integrating numerous new media expressive techniques such as video, audio, and comics into a unified dynamic new media system.

## Full Text

### Digital Newspaper: Exploring the Evolution of Digital Press Practices and Convergence Strategies with New Media

**Abstract:** “Digital newspaper” represents a comprehensive, large-scale transformation project that fundamentally upgrades traditional newspaper operations, including content gathering, editorial design, and distribution mediums, through complete digitalization. It integrates numerous new media expressive forms such as video, audio, and comics into a dynamic, emerging media system.

**Keywords:** media convergence; digital newspaper; Internet Plus; self-media; communication technology

It has been a decade since China first proposed the concept of “digital newspaper,” yet a comprehensive, accurate, and scientific definition remains elusive. What is certain, however, is that it constitutes a massive undertaking to thoroughly transform and comprehensively upgrade traditional newspaper operations—including business processes, content gathering, design layout, and distribution mediums—through digitalization, merging video, audio, comics,

and other new media into a dynamic, emerging media system also known as “new-generation newspaper” or “multi-media platform.”

Although the pace of digital transformation in China’s newspaper industry has been relatively slow over this decade, the period has nonetheless played a crucial role in advancing digital newspapers. For instance, computerizing news gathering and publishing operations can transform traditional business methods while reducing waste of human and material resources. At minimum, the convenient, fast, and simple processing capabilities of computers have significantly improved efficiency in editing, revising, and layout throughout newspaper production workflows.

The second decade (1990–2000) represents the “network digitalization decade,” or “networking decade,” characterized by newspapers going online and the rise of news websites. During this period, WEB2.0 internet technologies began reshaping newspaper publishing formats. Particularly from the mid-1990s, China’s traditional newspaper industry accelerated its digital pace, with major newspaper groups launching “electronic newspapers”—a phase some scholars term the “newspaper-network interaction” period. In October 1993, the electronic edition of *China Trade News* debuted at the Great Hall of the People, symbolizing China’s first officially internet-distributed electronic daily. Subsequently, traditional newspapers began shifting toward online electronic formats. By this period’s end, “among over 10,000 media outlets nationwide, more than 2,000 had gone online.”[3] Beyond newspaper websites, major news portals such as Sina, Sohu, and NetEase also emerged. This decade proved pivotal for China’s digital newspaper development. Although only entering the second exploratory stage, the internet’s instantaneity and massive capacity greatly enhanced news dissemination speed and quality, stimulating audience growth. Simultaneously, numerous digital auxiliary devices emerged, digitizing more newspaper business segments—requiring journalists to be equipped with personal computers, digital recorders, digital cameras, and compact video cameras for digital gathering and editing systems.

The third decade (2000–2010) constitutes the “mobile digitalization decade,” or “mobilization decade,” centered on news terminal push services. This period represented a critical decade for China’s traditional newspaper industry to achieve digital transformation. The industry primarily developed mobile websites and mobile newspapers, including instant messaging derived from news websites: blogs, podcasts, MMS, and aggregated mobile news publishing platforms. From the launch of China’s first formal mobile newspaper—*China Women’s News* (mobile edition)—to Tianjin Daily’s pioneering application of “QR code technology” in June 2006, this era truly realized the goal of readers using mobile phones as a new communication reception terminal for news and information. The year 2006 marked a historic breakthrough for traditional newspaper digital transformation. To commemorate the deceased “contemporary Bi Sheng” Wang Xuan, *Zhejiang Daily* and Zhejiang Online launched the nation’s first “digital newspaper.” This digital newspaper directly reflected print layouts, accommo-

dating existing reader habits while enabling audio, downloads, searches, and video links—meeting multiple digital requirements. Wang Xuan, the “father of digital newspapers” and academician of both the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering, described this format as his vision of the “newspaper of the future.” Notably, China’s *Jiefang Daily* (electronic edition) became the world’s first electronic newspaper, beating Belgium’s *Le Soir* by just 13 hours. In 2007, it launched the “4I Strategy”: I-NEWS (mobile newspaper), I-MOOK (digital magazine), I-PAPER (electronic newspaper), and I-STREET (public news video),<sup>[4]</sup> aiming for seamless coverage of segmented audiences through different terminal forms—representing the most comprehensive and ambitious interpretation of digital transformation by China’s traditional newspaper industry at that time.

The fourth decade (2010–2020) represents the “comprehensive digitalization decade,” or “productization decade,” centered on producing news products. This period marks the ten-year transformation from “newspaper” to “industry.” With innovative information technology development, this decade also witnessed the prevalence of self-media, unlimited communication media, and extensive news sources. Particularly with the maturation of emerging media—such as mobile apps derived from WAB and WIFI technologies, Weibo and WeChat mini-programs—the true transformation direction for traditional newspapers lies in convergent development with new media. We must operate “newspapers” for the internet era and produce “news products” for the internet age. In other words, digital newspapers are not merely about creating news websites or digital editions; they should integrate print, broadcast, internet, and emerging media to form a news industry. Through unified source integration and processing, they should derive full-media news products, then disseminate to readers by merging text, images, audio, and video. Within this process, achieving productization of premium content and professional reporting through a one-point database is particularly crucial. It must be emphasized that in this new era, we must actively embrace “Internet Plus” and operate “newspapers” for the internet era. New media development trends are increasingly clear: whoever grasps new media technology and professional news products will lead the reform frontier and become an industry pioneer.

In June 2014, *The Paper* emerged as Shanghai United Media Group’s first news product after reform—an open internet platform focusing on current affairs and ideas, featuring WAP, APP, and other new media platforms. It produces and aggregates the highest-quality Chinese-language current affairs and ideological content, with the most active political news and the calmest ideological analysis as its two wings. However, such trends and achievements remain rare domestically; only through simultaneous innovation in content and form can true digital transformation be realized. Gao Yunfei, general manager of Shanghai United Media Group, once publicly stated: “The newspaper industry must focus on utilizing its own resources and self-cultivation, aiming to migrate content and audiences to new media, and play a public opinion guidance role on internet new media.” Particularly starting from transforming content produc-

tion concepts, methods, and capabilities, newspapers should launch new project platforms and news products that conform to internet communication characteristics. Currently, many newspapers are pursuing digital paths for the new era, accelerating R&D of “news products” suitable for new media dissemination, such as *Shanghai Observer*, *The Paper*, and *Jiemian*, which are reshaping media market patterns with valuable viewpoints and knowledge products.

Finally, traditional newspaper digital transformation must proactively utilize new media convergence methods and dare to “taste fresh” new media promptly. New media clearly surpasses past communication models in timeliness, dissemination methods, and reception terminals. National Internet Information Office monitoring data shows that during the 2015 National Two Sessions period, major websites released 1.85 million Two Sessions-related text, image, video, and animation reports, with cumulative views exceeding 10 billion. Facing such fierce competition, traditional newspapers must dare to promptly “taste fresh” new media. Each year’s Two Sessions serve as a “grand parade” for new media, where traditional newspapers should actively utilize micro-sites, Weibo, WeChat, and “shake-to-view-news” features. On the day Premier Li Keqiang delivered the 2016 Government Work Report, CCTV News’ Weibo video livestream attracted 3.08 million viewers, receiving nearly 20 million likes.[6] Additionally, media platforms like WeChat and YY feature real-time audio and video broadcasting capabilities.

First, digital newspapers and traditional newspapers must integrate and develop together in the future, complementing and depending on each other. Digital newspapers depend on traditional newspapers for growth yet can develop independently; this does not mean traditional newspapers will disappear or lose value in the short term. After all, traditional newspapers have long histories, fixed readerships, and relatively stable social influence. Therefore, digital newspapers must learn to leverage these advantages rather than abandoning print newspapers. As the most popular slogan in today’s press circles goes—“integrated newspaper and network” or “newspaper-network convergence.”

In October 2012, *Southern Daily* underwent its ninth revision, focusing on all-media transformation: from establishing all-media assault teams responsible for gathering various information, to forming virtual all-media gathering and editing teams producing content including broadcast programs, to integrating the important news editorial department and new media department into an all-media editorial department, and finally promoting process reengineering and encouraging gathering and editing departments to co-build channels.[5] This revision enabled digital newspaper exploration to break away from the old “newspaper-network interaction” mindset and truly upgrade to the new realm of “newspaper-network convergence.”

Second, merely shouting slogans is insufficient—we must break the digital newspaper model that simply replicates print newspapers. Digital newspapers originate from traditional newspapers but surpass them, possessing superior advantages. According to *Media* reports, the State Administration of Press, Publi-

cation, Radio, Film and Television officially launched the “Digital Newspaper Laboratory Plan” at the third newspaper competitiveness conference. The plan aims to explore digital and networked content display technologies, information dissemination technologies, and business models suited for digital newspaper development, achieving strategic transformation from traditional paper publishing to digital network publishing and driving major changes in newspaper publishing formats.

During transformation and upgrading, traditional newspapers can gradually develop into summaries or indexes for digital newspapers. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* includes many signpost-like indicators in its daily print edition pointing to its website, making the physical newspaper more like a summary or index that guides readers into the digital newspaper to access more information resources. In this new era, we must actively embrace “Internet Plus” and operate “newspapers” for the internet era. New media development trends are increasingly clear: whoever grasps new media technology and professional news products will lead the reform frontier and become an industry pioneer.

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

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