

An Exploration of Development Strategies for Print Media in the Digital New Media Environment (Postprint)

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Abstract

In the digital era, print media has encountered certain impacts on its development, which is already an irreversible reality. However, the content value of print media and the appeal of quality communication will never be diminished. Within the context of new media's explosive development, if print media can demonstrate a differentiated development trajectory and thoroughly explore the advantages and intrinsic value of self-media, it can also secure vast opportunities for growth.

Full Text

Exploring Development Strategies for Print Media in the Digital New Media Environment

Abstract: In the digital era, print media has experienced certain impacts—an irreversible reality. Nevertheless, the intrinsic value of print media content and the appeal of quality communication remain undiminished. Amidst the “explosive” development of new media, if print media can adopt a differentiated development approach and thoroughly explore its inherent advantages and value, it can still achieve broad prospects for growth.

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In the information age, electronic devices such as tablets and smartphones have gained widespread application, catering to the fast-paced lifestyle demands of modern society. The widespread application of digital new media inevitably impacts traditional print media like newspapers, magazines, and books. To prevent the extinction of print media as a traditional medium, exploring pathways for “revival” in the new media environment becomes particularly necessary [1]. Based on this, this paper conducts in-depth research on the correct development direction and strategies for print media in the digital new media environment, providing a detailed exposition [2].

1. Overview of Gaps Between Print Media and Digital New Media

1.1 Lag in Production Methods

This is specifically manifested in the substantial consumption of timber and water resources during print media production, accompanied by large volumes of wastewater and exhaust emissions, which cause severe damage to soil, water, and air quality, thereby hindering sustainable social development.

1.2 Imperfect Business Models and Profit Mechanisms in China’s Newspaper Industry

To date, China’s newspaper industry has yet to establish a mature industrial chain and remains far from becoming a true market entity. Market performance has long remained sluggish, with weak competitiveness and a singular profit model. According to relevant data, during the previous decade, China already had 20 daily newspapers ranked among the world’s top 100 in circulation, tying with Japan for first place. However, these 20 newspapers accounted for less than 25% of total national daily circulation, representing a significant gap compared to developed countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom. This demonstrates that China’s newspaper industry still has a long way to go [3].

1.3 Systemic Defects

In the process of economic market reform and development, domestic newspapers have secured a place in the market. However, inert mechanisms have permeated the reform process, giving rise to numerous problems, most notably the lack of clear property rights and reward-punishment systems that exist only on paper. In summary, these systemic defects have constrained the transformation and development of print media in the digital new media environment.

2. Development Strategies

2.1 Differentiation Trend

The theory of “survival of the fittest” contains profound wisdom. For print media to achieve sustainable development, it must calmly and comprehensively examine the new media environment and, in accordance with market economy principles, identify a development path that matches its own circumstances, viability, competitive strength, and resource capacity. Some scholars have proposed that “the future development trend for print media is not convergence, but differentiation.” This paper offers an in-depth examination of this viewpoint.

First, assuming print media were to converge with new media platforms such as tablets, iPads, and smartphones, both traditional and new media would need to make certain “concessions” during the integration process, inevitably weakening the distinctive features and advantages of print media. Therefore, pursuing a convergent development path in the digital new media environment is inadvisable. Second, as social structures continue to evolve, print media may struggle to meet readers’ subjective needs and the developmental requirements of the era. However, if it adopts a differentiation development model, certain evolved branches stand a strong chance of survival and growth, even flourishing. For example, the distribution of free newspapers highlights their unique advantages and represents an application of market segmentation principles—a rule applicable to all media types [4]. Finally, differentiation in print media is not merely reflected in content but can also be implemented in media form, information transmission channels, and profit models. By adopting a differentiated development approach in the new media environment, print media can fully demonstrate its inherent advantages, aligning with the developmental needs of different market segments. The differentiation process itself represents a strengthening of print media’s capabilities. Differentiation can be regarded as a special form of print media’s transformation toward new media, replacing the “broad and extensive” approach with a “segmentation-based strategy” to achieve lean and focused operations, improve the utilization efficiency of limited resources, and enable resource sharing and coordination. Ultimately, this enhances both the operational efficiency and competitive strength of print media in the digital new media environment.

2.2 Leveraging Strengths

In the new media environment, print media cannot compete with tablets, smartphones, and other advanced devices in terms of information volume and transmission speed. However, it demonstrates tremendous advantages in selecting and refining information, thereby providing users with the richest possible “information feast.” In today’s era, people pursue authenticity and practicality in information. In its development process, print media must not only possess the ability to accurately identify information but also have the capacity to independently provide, innovate, and create specialized content. In the new

media environment, some forward-looking print media have not encountered substantial barriers in their operation and development. The Internet can hardly fundamentally replace the distinctive characteristics of professional magazines' information resource transmission, such as aesthetic reading experience, content granularity, and value orientation. Moreover, certain magazines maintain long-term cooperative relationships with contributors who are either professionals or renowned experts in their fields, enabling these print media products to lead social thinking and public opinion trends. Compared to popular online topics, they are not “weaklings.” In the digital new media environment, print media development should focus on its own advantages, maximizing strengths while minimizing weaknesses, and avoid being distracted by external trends. While leveraging its inherent strengths, it should also incorporate the advantages of new media, explore diversified information dissemination systems, thereby expanding its coverage area, accumulating strength for breakthroughs, and building resources that highlight brand characteristics.

3. Mining Content Value

In the broader context of digital new media, the proliferation of information resources has created a “dazzling array that bewilders the eye” for audiences, dispersing their attention. What they need is to gather the most effective information in the shortest possible time within their fast-paced lifestyles—a need that has catalyzed the emergence of Google and Baidu. Because people require authoritative and credible information sources, this creates a springtime of opportunity for print media. In other words, print media can explore new value-added spaces based on its traditional form. To strengthen the productivity of print media content in the new media environment, the following two developmental directions should be pursued.

3.1 Building Credibility

This credibility may originate from authoritative content, professional analytical insights, or the compilation of valuable data and information. The most representative example is *The New York Times*, which, relying on its credibility, built and improved the knowledge-based Q&A platform About.com. With the assistance of professionals and renowned experts, it established authoritative discourse power across multiple domains, such as household management, childcare, and pet care. Simultaneously, as large numbers of users converged on the platform, targeted advertising penetrated the platform, generating greater benefits during its operation.

3.2 Differentiated Services

This paper examines *The Wall Street Journal* as a case study. As a traditional newspaper, it has carved out a unique path in the new media environment by adopting a user-paid development model. The newspaper integrates large vol-

umes of free information into its companion website, but if users wish to access more unique and valuable information, they can achieve this by paying a fee, sometimes gaining the right to purchase authoritative thematic research reports. Survey data confirms that users in certain fields do not oppose this differentiated development strategy directly linked to economic interests. Therefore, we can indirectly infer that in the digital new media environment, for print media to minimize the impact of new media and achieve the goal of moving closer to the new media sphere, adding value-added paid services on top of free offerings is an extremely viable development strategy.

4. Institutional Reform Measures

In the late 1970s, the fundamental policy of “enterprise management of public institutions” was vigorously implemented in China’s newspaper industry. Two decades later, the “group management trend” created a significant effect in China’s newspaper sector. However, these efforts failed to position newspapers as true market entities. Therefore, in an environment where new media is ubiquitous, removing the “mask” of authority and granting print media greater autonomy is essential to propel its evolution into a market entity.

A review of the operation and development of China’s newspaper industry reveals that a lack of strong competitive consciousness remains a factor hindering its effective development. Once deviations occur between expected targets and actual production, sales, or operations, the immediate reaction is to engage in “price wars” or seek protection from government agencies, neither of which helps print media become genuine market entities. Given this situation, institutional reform in the digital new media environment is imperative. This involves delegating authority and assigning responsibility to individuals—namely, implementing a leadership accountability system—to fundamentally address the problems of overlapping government and business functions, enterprise and political functions, and management and operation functions in China’s newspaper industry.

In the new media environment, print media still bears the significant responsibility of disseminating positive public opinion and safeguarding social security and stability. Therefore, during the institutional reform process in the new media environment, it must maintain high political acuity and not violate national policies and regulations. On this foundation, with news content as the core, reader resources, layout resources, and industry resources should be integrated to construct a print media industry chain. The relationships among editorial, advertising, and distribution should be effectively managed, and the practical resources contained within these three elements should be maximally exploited to create more compact integration. This allows print media to fully demonstrate its resource advantages in the digital new media environment, laying a solid foundation for healthy, effective, and innovative development.

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

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