

# Role Transition Study of Publisher Under the Dilemma of Self-publishing

Na Ta

School of Literature, Journalism and Communication  
Inner Mongolia University  
Hohhot, China 010010

**Abstract**—Self-publishing got a lot of attention for introducing a new form into the publishing industry. However, it didn't get the expected prosperity in Chinese publishing environment and exposed a lot of difficulties. The problems faced by self-publishing mainly derived from the limitation of the self-publishing authors' quality controlling, operation qualification and marketing ability. In view of these problems, the publishers could provide the corresponding service as the main professional body of the publishing industry, changed into the multiple service providers from the single publisher. They would provide effective guidance for self-publishing on quality controlling, copyright operation and marketing promotion. Thus, the publishers would expand the economic chain and promote the leading role of the publishing industry.

**Keywords**—self-publishing; publisher; role transition

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2008, Bowker Company of the United States released information about its own development, and in 2011, Amazon launched the Kindle Direct Publishing business. In 2013, Time Publishing Media Company launched the 'Times and Shadows' self-publishing social platform, the concept of 'self-publishing' has entered the Publishing industry for ten years. For the past decade, the industry has always had differences on the attitude of self-publishing development and influence: on the one hand, it is believed that self-publishing has weakened the dominant position of publishing house, and will subvert the traditional publishing industry form and become a breakthrough in industrial upgrading; on the other hand, it is considered that the self-publishing does not overlap with traditional publishing fields, and it is only in the marginal and non-mainstream position, so it is difficult to have a prosperous scene in China. The research field of this new publishing form mainly focuses on self-publishing practices, models, platforms, norms, etc., and the impact of new scales and changes introduced by new forms on the main publishing houses of traditional publishing and the response of publishing houses should also become a new direction of research.

Due to the restriction of the book number, China's self-publishing is closer to the author's self-publishing form with the help of network platform, and it increasingly exposes difficulties, such as platform operation difficulties, great pressure on authors, limited circulation scope, and high marketing costs. Therefore, the publishing house, which is the

main body of the publishing industry, should give full play to its professional strengths, actively change its role, objectively treat the development of self-publishing forms, and continue to play its main body and leading function for the renewal and upgrading of the publishing industry.

## II. RESHAPING THE ROLE OF "GATEKEEPER"

In the digital era, the openness of the network platform has created the "communication-network platform-audience" model. The author can use the network platform and publish book independently without the publisher to form the "author-network platform-reader" model. Under this mode, although the author has more autonomy in publishing, all the pressure and risks in the publishing process are also transferred to the author. This kind of phenomena, such as the randomness and follow-up of the topic selection, rough and vulgar quality of the manuscript, is increasingly prominent. To this end, the publishing house can reshape the role of "gatekeepers" and provide authors with topic selection guidance and quality control services.

### A. Checking the Direction of Topic Selection

The topic of self-publishing is excessively concentrated in the field of online literature, while other publications, such as academics and education, are relatively few; and there is a concentrated type of trend in the network literature.

At present, the main field of self-publishing in China is network literature, in which the genre takes the novels as the absolute main body, while the content focuses on several basic types, such as romance, chivalry and suspense. This concentrated content publishing phenomenon is indeed influenced by readers' reading preferences, the "16th National Reading Survey Report" shows: More than 40.2% of adult mobile phone readers use mobile phones to read novels, and reading content preferences are ranked as urban romance(23.5%), literary classics(17.2%), historical military(15.4%), life social sciences(15.1%), martial arts and chivalry(14.8%), suspense and reasoning(13%), fantasy(12.4%); on the network platform, the author's independent writing and publishing mechanism makes it attractive for popular topic selection, and loses the judgment on the saturation and accessibility of the topic market, which simply caters to the audience's preferences and also causes homogenization of the content of works.

In this regard, the publishing house can provide paid topic selection and consulting services at the request of the author. Topic selection is the product of cultural industry under the operation of market economy, and it also loaded with cultural and market characteristics, and the judgment of market sensitivity is usually timely and proper, and these attributes should be based on a systematic and comprehensive grasp of publishing market information. The publishing house can provide its own grasp of the book market, the market cognition of single-category books, and the content form judgment of specific topics to the authors who conceive the works, which not only guarantees the author's autonomy in writing and publishing activities, avoiding the author's topic selection lag caused by incomplete access to published information, but also considers the cultural accumulation of self-published content, to bring the guiding role of the publishing house in publishing activities into play.

### B. *Checking the Quality of the Manuscript*

Due to the lack of professional editorial review, the self-published author has checked the content of the manuscript, which will inevitably cause some omissions; in addition, some authors utilitarianly pursue short-term market benefits, blindly speed up the content update and release, resulting in content focusing on sensory stimulation, genre singleness, repeated themes, lax logic, and lengthy delays.

The publishing house has professional editors who can not only edit the defects in content structure, but also eliminate the errors in the text format. This professional ability can be used as a value-added service project provided by the publishing house to improve the quality of self-published content. After the completion of the editing process, the publishing house can directly generate the digital version of the manuscript, which can connect with the self-published content mainly presented in digital form in China, and to a large extent, change the phenomenon of rough and disorganized self-published content.

At the same time, with the digital transformation and upgrading of domestic publishing houses, the publication form has broken through the limitations of the digital technology due to the maturity and application of digital technology, more and more interactive books appear to meet the needs of the audience in the digital age. However, because of the professionalism and complexity of production technology, the production of interactive publications is limited to professional publishers or digital technology companies, and it is not universally available to publishers. The formal expression of publications is also an indicator of its quality dimension. At present, most self-published products with rough layout and single form need to improve the level of production and innovation of their materialized forms under the premise of ensuring the quality of content. With the development self-publishing, its content quality standard system will be gradually improved. When the content quality is generally guaranteed and improved as a whole, the competition in the field of self-publishing will be more diversified, especially in the forms of presentation, promotion marketing and etc.

### III. MINING COPYRIGHT OPERATOR FUNCTIONS

In recent years, the cultivation of copyright operation mechanism in the field of publishing has achieved initial success. The penetration of the influence of written works into other content industries not only improves the economic benefits of copyright owners and publishers, but also highlights their contribution to the extension of the publishing industry. "Today's publishers are content acquisition and risk taking organizations, oriented toward the production of certain kinds of cultural products." Copyright operations need to be productive, that is, to plan and produce what kind of publication content based on published information and experience, rather than to promote the content of general publications without any choice. This strategy needs to be based on comprehensive information, accurate judgment and advantageous resources.

At present, there are still many limitations in the development and operation of self-published content in China: on the one hand, copyright development is not enough. Some self-published authors only pursue the rapid release and update of the network platform, lacking the thinking of copyright operation, and cannot convert the audience attention of the works into commercial capital; in addition, the phenomenon of network infringement is rampant, and the economic income of copyright owners is affected. Some self-published authors will choose to publish paper books after accumulating a certain audience on the Internet. This self-publishing form only contributes to the quantity and flow of specific areas of the content industry, but it is still a simple copy of the traditional publishing industry, and does not create new profit points for the publishing industry. On the other hand, the operation mode of copyright is not innovative, and copycat development is frequent. The cases of copyright operation in the field of self-publishing mostly focus on online literature, and do not extend to other content fields. The copyright operation of online literary works has also become highly typed and modeled, that is, the development content is concentrated on the types of subjects, such as Gongdou, Xianxia and other types of themes, the development methods cover e-books, film and television dramas, game and other modes.

The main factors that restriction of self-published content to the extended exhibition is that the author's own copyright operation thinking is not strong and inexperienced, followed by the author's ability limitation. The development and operation of the author and the value of the work need to fully open all aspects of the content industry chain. This is not the work that the author can do, but the dialogue and communication between the industry entities. On December 30, 2013, online writer Tang Jianshao and Shanda Literature jointly established China's first online writer full-copyright operation studio. This indicates that the authors of the publishing network have begun to seek the operational support of professional platforms. On the one hand, they have diversified derivative copyrights on their works; on the other hand, they have upgraded their works from previous works to comprehensive planning of copyrights, maximizing the value of copyright by giving play to the synergy effects between copyrighted works and derivative works, and between derivative works.

The publishing house has an innate advantage in promoting copyright operations. It is not only the closest communicator to copyright owners, but also the main body of operations that can engage in dialogue with other industries. Therefore, the publishing houses can assume the strategic guiding function of providing copyright operation suggestions and solutions for self-published authors, which transfer from simple content communicators to compound copyright operators.

However, when publishers provide suggestions on copyright operation strategy for self-published content, they should focus on two aspects: first of all, there is a business model behind the copyright operation plan. Once the business model is successfully shaped, it will bring considerable and sustained economic benefits to copyright owners and communicators within a period of time; however, with the increase of successful cases and the deepening research on operational programs from competitors, the model strategy is easy to be imitated, which can result in the diminishing economic benefits brought by this model. For this reason, the publisher needs to improve its own copyright operation model innovation, break through existing programs, and tap new development potential; on the other hand, it is also possible to try to cultivate copyright agents based on publishing houses to alleviate the problems of incomplete authorization, unclear rights and responsibilities that often occur in copyright operations. Secondly, although the copyright operation aims at multiple economic benefits, the publishing house can also strengthen the social effect of self-published content through topic selection, marketing guidance and other means, so as to regulate the value orientation deviation of some self-published content in the copyright operation process due to excessively catering to the market and the audience.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT MARKETING PROMOTION PLATFORM

With the intensification of competition in the publishing industry, the publishing company has also increased its investment in distribution and marketing while cultivating excellent copyright works. The core competitiveness of the publishing industry is becoming more and more comprehensive and diversified, which is not only based on the content quality and circulation of distribution channels, but also greatly based on the effectiveness of marketing strategies. As a special commodity, the marketing strategy rooted in the commodity nature of publication has become the focus of work of various publishing houses.

Different from the increasing emphasis on marketing by various publishing houses, self-published products have many restrictions in this respect: First, the distribution channel is single, and the influence is limited. Self-published products in China mainly rely on online platforms distributing, and physical bookstores generally do not provide services for selling self-published content. This means that the influence of self-published content is relatively limited, it may rapidly ferment in the online platforms and its corresponding young audiences, but it still has a certain distance from the mainstream cultural circle. Secondly, marketing promotion costs are high, and marketing methods are limited. Since self-published authors have strong independence and the

accumulation of continuous works takes a long time, thus, the marketing of self-published content cannot dilute the marketing cost through the collaborative and integrated marketing of similar publications like the publishing house. All marketing costs are borne by the authors, which is inevitably a huge pressure and risk, especially for most of the new writers who have not yet converted copyright works into asset income. Restricted by high marketing costs, self-published authors often cannot afford media layouts and program time with great social influence and good audience base, not to mention planning social event marketing with a certain scale. Self-published authors often choose 'we media' to release relevant publishing information, but the effect of this kind of marketing method is also very limited when there is no accumulated influence. Third, over-reliance on leaderboard information, attention is limited. Self-published online platforms use leaderboards to identify the popularity of content, although the platforms use different ranking methods to set leaderboards, on the one hand, it meets the needs of different audiences, on the other hand, it increases the number of exposed works, simply through leaderboard to guide downloading and reading, the effect is very limited. New Zealand researcher Steven Fisher is concerned that 'the new global marketing strategy- the maximization of bibliographic issues-has created a phenomenon that is the simplification of world literature, which has emerged in the publishing field, while the online self-publishing without corresponding planning and guidance is more prominent.

With the participation of the publishing house, the marketing method of self-published content can be enriched firstly to avoid the attention and circulation limitation caused by single marketing method. Compared with the author itself, the publishing house has more rich and accurate experience in the marketing of publications, and can sell the marketing plan to the self-published author as an independent business service. This kind of service is actually the information and channel resources stored by the publishing house for years and months. The validity of the publication marketing information depends to some extent on the diversity, effectiveness and pertinence of the information channels. Once the relationship between the communicator and the audience is established through effective information channels, the publication information mainly aimed at a specific audience group will open the audience's cognition, and then the consumption behavior of the audience can be stimulated through the guiding marketing information. At the same time, the publishing house can also integrate other self-publishing marketing businesses that the publishing house is responsible for, and combine related or mutually supportive self-publishing content and its authors to provide collaborative marketing programs, which can not only improve the marketing influence of self-publishing content, but also reduce the marketing cost of individual self-publishing content.

However, the cost calculation model of the copyright operation and marketing plan provided by the publishing house still needs to be studied and discussed. The pricing should balance the intellectual effort of the publishing house and the bearing limit of the self-publishing author, otherwise the original intention of publishing house to intervene in the

operation and marketing of self-publishing content will be lost. The low price setting will damage the enthusiasm of the publishers; the price setting is too high, and the purpose of reducing the marketing expenses of self-published works cannot be achieved. The effect evaluation mechanism is a model that can be discussed in view of this problem, that is, when the marketing plan is delivered, the self-publishing author pays a certain cost; after the marketing plan is operated, a certain proportion of compensation fees will be charged according to the market performance of the self-published works. This method is similar to the compensation mechanism of "pursuing right" in the sales of art, but the basic cost and compensation ratio still need to be further determined by the publisher and the self-published author in actual negotiations.

## V. CONCLUSION

The rise of self-publishing reflects the contribution of digital technology innovation to the multi-open reform of publishing subjects, which is not only the demand for the diversity of cultural products, but also the creation of a new business model. Throughout the development of self-publishing on China, opportunities and difficulties coexist. In the face of difficulties, the concept of self-publishing firstly should be localized. If continuing to adhere to the original self-publishing definition of "no third-party publishers involved", it is only possible to make self-publishing stay in the spontaneous form of network communication when it encounters the restriction of domestic book number. To this regard, the publishing house, as a traditional professional publishing body, should respond positively to the new changes of the industry and expand its own path of transformation and development. In China, the self-publishing "self-help" nature is greater than "autonomous", and whether this form can achieve longer-term development and establish a more stable business model depends on how much the background publishing policy and service can be provided by the entire publishing industry. In this process, the publishing house should try to change its thinking and role, break through the thought that publishing house only provides encapsulation products-publication, and change from publishing to providing multiple services; correspondingly, the role of publishing houses has changed from a single communicator to a diversified service provider, including the control of the content form of publications, the operation and development of copyright works, the marketing and promotion of content products and other services. The change of thinking and role, on the one hand, requires the publishing house to further improve the integration and application ability of publishing data and market information; on the other hand, it can extend and expand the economic chain of the publishing house and enhance its comprehensive competitiveness in terms of economic benefits and brand value.

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