

# Analysis on the Current Situation and Challenges of Print Media Transformation Taking Beijing Morning Post as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

With the great changes in the ecological media environment, China's traditional newspaper groups are also facing urgent challenges. The print media face many difficulties, and many factors are compressing the living environment of the traditional print media. Through a detailed analysis of a typical case, *Beijing Morning Post*, this paper studies the causes of the print media's dilemma from the aspects of the current economic situation, commercial and social background, and the influence of relevant national strategies. Through observation, this paper studies many problems in the development of *Beijing Morning Post* and analyses the opportunities and challenges faced by the print media. Based on the experience gained from the failure of the *Beijing Morning Post*, this paper puts forward constructive strategies and suggestions for the transformation of China's traditional newspaper groups.

**Keywords:** *Print Media, Dilemma, Difficulties, Challenges, Digital, New Media.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

With the rapid development of information technology, the Internet has blossomed everywhere, and smartphones and mobile terminals have become popular in the media market. People's reading habits are also gradually changing. More and more young people are more inclined to get the freshest news information from new media platforms such as PCs, mobile phones, and tablets instead of buying newspapers and magazines. Traditional print media face the dilemma of reduced circulation, decreased communication power and influence, and a shrinking advertising business, which makes print media face unprecedented pressure to survive.

Secondly, with the popularization of the Internet, people can obtain a large amount of information for free from various news websites and search engines, which is, even more a disaster for print media.

In recent years, China's print media development has been declining, and the prospects of print media are not optimistic. It is on the decline. Since 2015, it has become a major phenomenon to stop publication on New Year's Day. Based on the data from Man Ding [1], 4 newspapers were closed in 2015, 10 in 2016, 6 in 2017, 19 in 2018, and 20 in 2019, *Beijing Morning Post* was one of them. In accordance with the National Bureau of Statistics data, the media found that the national newsprint output in September 2019 was 89000 tons, a decrease of 14.4% over the same period last year [2].

The 18th National Reading Survey indicated that [3], the reading rate of adult national newspapers in China in 2020 is 25.5%, which is 2.1 percentage points lower than the 27.6% in 2019; the periodical reading rate is 18.7%, which is 0.6% lower than 19.3% in 2019 Percentage points; the exposure rate of digital reading methods is 79.4%, an increase of 0.1 percentage points from 79.3% in 2019. It can be seen that mobile phone reading and online reading on the Internet have become the main digital reading methods for adult citizens, and

the living space of print-media reading has been increasingly compressed and eroded.

However, the new media under the banner of print media is still the main force, among the most active new media at present. The biggest advantage of print media is that its rigorous, objective, and fair reporting style. If print media can seize the opportunity, they could be able to play an irreplaceable role with their social credibility and authority.

As a result, some domestic newspapers took the initiative to adapt to and welcome the changes in readers' reading methods and reformed on the basis of their own characteristics. For example, the *Beijing News* and *NanFang Daily* are relatively successful cases.

However, as the first urban morning post and the first color-daily in Beijing, *Beijing Morning Post* is affectionately called "information breakfast" by Beijing citizens. Under the impact of the current new media, it has never transformed. On January 1, 2019, the *Beijing Morning Post* officially ceased publication. It will inevitably encounter some difficulties and challenges in resisting pressure and surviving, and various reasons caused the fact that it was suspended.

## 1.2. Literature review

As of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, the authors searched with the theme of "print media transformation" in the general library of academic documents, including 339, "newspaper transformation", 341 articles, and "*Beijing Morning Post*", and the relevant results of 0, so there is still an academic vacancy in the research on the transformation of *Beijing Morning Post*. With the theme of "the status quo and challenges of print media transformation", the relevant results can be searched for 0. Therefore, this paper will take the failed transformation of *Beijing Morning Post* as a typical example to reflect on the transformation of the traditional Chinese newspaper industry, and it is very meaningful to study this topic.

(1) Research on the Transformation of Chinese Traditional Newspapers

In the transformation of the traditional newspaper industry, the author began to explore the website. It was published mainly from 2006 to 18. In May 2014, scholar Wei He proposed that in this era of big data and media reform, the media communication power of the media industry, as the core layer, has been promoted to the pillar industry of the country [4].

(2) International Research Review

In 1983, American scholar Ithiel De Sola Poo (blackmail), as the earliest reference to the concept of "media convergence" abroad, though in his book "Free Technology" to sum up the continued development of

technological power. In recent years, the practical results and results of foreign traditional and emerging media have provided feasible suggestions and some successful experience on how to transform under the background of financial media [4].

Print media is not much as good as before. The traditional newspapers must use the transformation to reverse this trend and occupy the market share. This paper *Beijing Morning Post* failure transformation as the main research object, from the research literature, the author's research perspective and content research keep pace with the Times, based on fully understanding the transformation of various innovations, in-depth research on its overall development, the strategy error of new media in the background of the new era, has certain practical value and communication effect.

The collection and analysis of data to build the whole rise and fall trend of "*Beijing Morning Post* (morning news)" combine the actual research and discussion. Meanwhile, take "*Beijing News*" as a comparative case study, more in-depth and detailed analysis of its failure reasons and challenges.

This study believes that it is incomplete if only analysing the successful cases: the study finds out the problems that print media may encounter without transformation from failed cases with discussions and analyses. It is expected that through this study, people can have a deeper understanding of the transformation of print media to provide a useful reference for other print media transforming.

## 2. DISCUSSION

### 2.1. The Impact of the Products in the Digital Age

#### 2.1.1. Increased Use of Digital Products

In 2021, China gradually stepped into the 5G era, making it easier and faster to obtain online information. The 17<sup>th</sup> national reading survey report of *GuangMing Daily* announced that [5] the average daily contact time of Chinese adults with mobile phones was 100.41 minutes in 2019 (84.87 minutes in 2018). In 2019, China's adult Internet access rate was 81.1%, and nearly 80% of the citizens read news and inquired about various kinds of information through mobile phones. The results of the 18th national reading survey released by the China Press and Publication Research Institute showed [3] the per capita reading of paper-based newspapers in 2020 was 15.36 issues (copies), which was lower than that of 26.38 issues (copies) in 2018. In 2020, the average daily contact time of Chinese adults with mobile phones was 100.75 minutes. In the traditional print media, the maximum daily reading time of Chinese adults in 2020 was 20.04 minutes, and the contact time of mobile phones

was about five times as long as that of print media. As a typical paper-based media, *Beijing Morning Post* has seen a significant drop in reading.

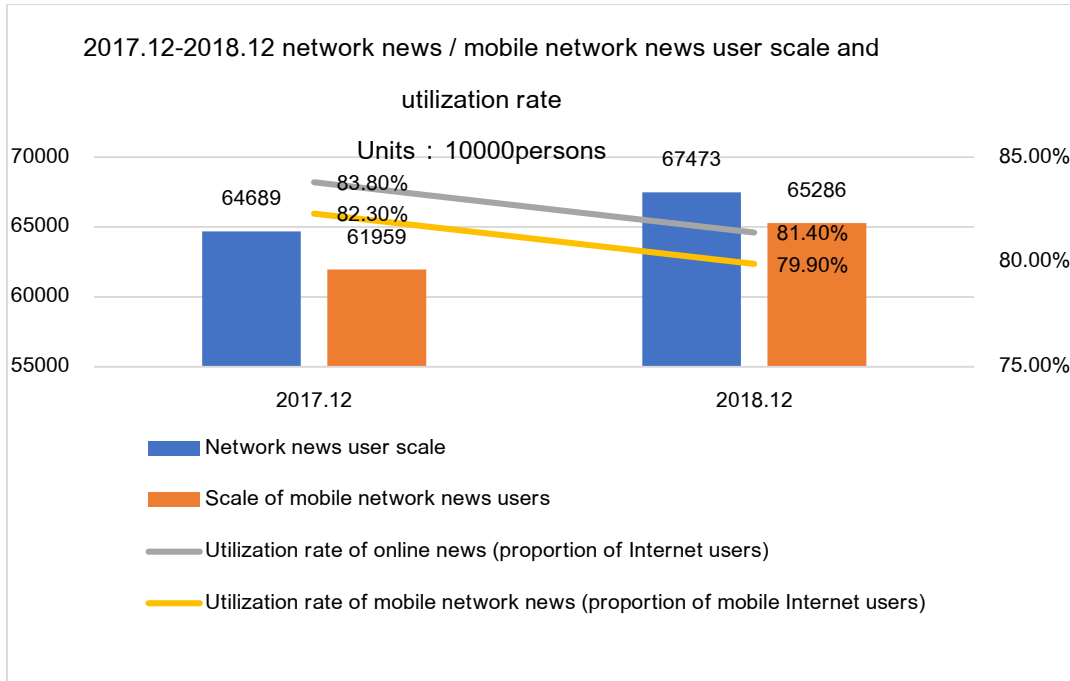


Figure 1. Statistical investigation on the development of China's internet (2018) [6]

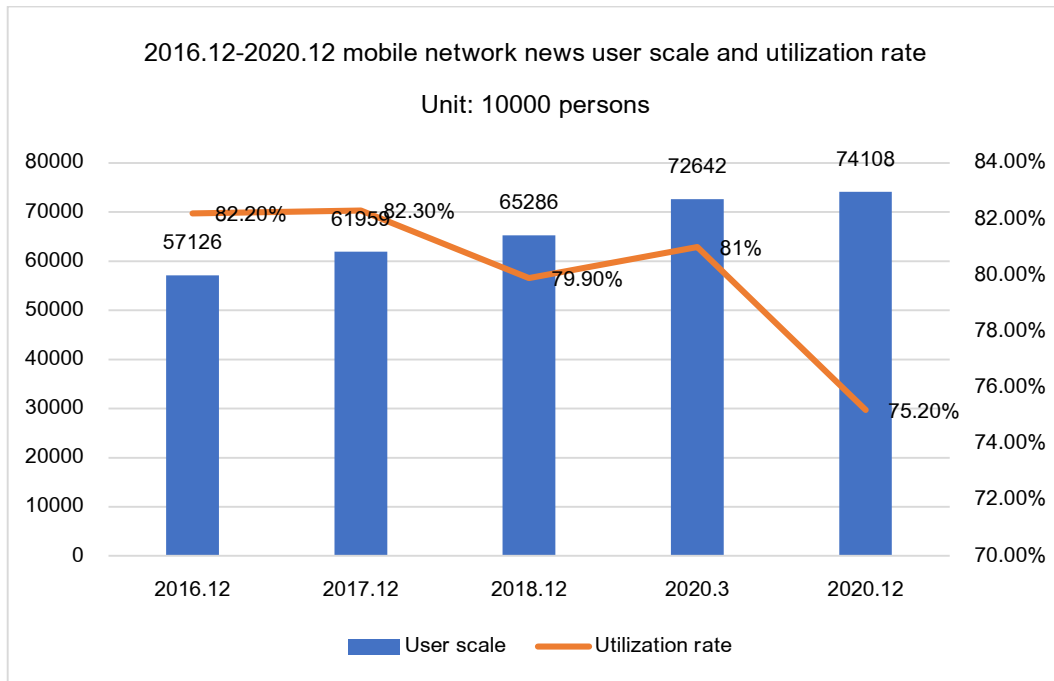


Figure 2. Statistical investigation on the development of China's internet (2020) [7]

The number of underage Internet users in China reached 183 million in 2020, and the Internet penetration rate among minors reached 94.9 percent. Among these users, 89.9 percent use the Internet to study, 62.5 percent play games, and 49.3 percent watch short videos, as claimed by the 47th China Statistical Report on Internet Development [7]. By the data mentioned above, these

minors in years later will become the main body of the network. However, the minors may not use the Internet to access news and information (they also play games, watch short videos, etc.). Meanwhile, the scale of mobile network news' users increases year by year. As a result, the number of digital media users is on the rise, while print media is just the opposite.

### 2.1.2. *Print media has weak interactivity and timeliness*

Because of media limitations, newspapers only spread simply and have little interaction with the audience, which is a unilateral mode of communication. Compared with the characteristics of digital products, such as high interactivity, fast transmission speed, and many transmission channels, this model is obviously backward.

Timeliness has always been the most sought-after quality of news, and "quickness" is the biggest determinant of the winner. In an era when everyone is a media person, and the media is overwhelming, the print media obviously has no advantage.

### 2.1.3. *High production cost*

The publishing process of newspapers is very cumbersome, which requires reporters to collect and write, relevant leaders to review, edit and make editions, proofread and check, print and distribute, etc. Each link needs to spend corresponding costs. But these do not exist for new media.

## 2.2. *Limited audience for print media*

Another major problem facing the *Beijing Morning Post* is that its target audience is restricted. Due to the limited content scale, to compete with the same type of newspapers and maintain the highest possible reading volume, the content must be locked in the interest range of mainstream users. As a result, the *Beijing Morning Post* began to classify the types very carefully, for example, the *Beijing Morning Post*, *Beijing Evening News*, *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Beijing Daily*, etc., and even divided them into gender, age, educational level, and readers' income [8].

But then came another problem. When newspapers were divided into different branches to attract readers of all ages and classes, the number of readers was also spread out, so they also faced the loss of overall reading. The new media's solution to this requires only one hyperlink. Especially in the digital age, this disadvantage becomes more obvious when compared with the new media.

### 2.3. *Talent crisis*

Although the number of talents in the media field is on the rise, the print media is facing the risk of talent shortage. From the situation of job-hopping, almost every newspaper has an average loss of 3-5 senior talents every year. The training cost of these employees is relatively high. However, due to the influence of the new media environment and the sluggish benefits of print media, they often move to the new media platform to work on

content. More and more media people choose well-known enterprises to take up jobs and engage in external publicity, public relations, and other positions favoring various industries.

## 2.4. *Financial issues*

### 2.4.1. *Channels*

*Beijing Morning Post* has a single source of funds, just a single investment from the newspaper. A query on the Chinese enterprise website found that the Daily has held 100% holdings and has never attracted any other investment in the 23 years since 1998 [9]. The inefficient and very backward financing system eventually directly led to the newspaper's financial deficit in recent years, so that it eventually went bankrupt.

In the face of the declining traditional media, *Beijing Morning Post* should establish an investment platform owing to its own resources and familiar fields, attract social capital industries through large platforms, and set up industrial funds, so that it can engage in major projects in the cultural industry and other fields to resist relevant venture investment and strategic investment costs. *Beijing Morning Post* should invest in the project and gain income to engage in the incubation and cultivation of new projects and mergers and acquisitions, showing important achievements, which can alleviate various obstacles to suffer from the capital chain in developing new media. These projects may open traditional restrictions, financial and material constraints, and communication technical barriers in the long run. Collect funds in a high income and low-cost optimized value way to expand the scale of the industry remuneration. Thus, a return on investment. There is no strategic investment in projects, and there is no industrial fund investment, we should strive to meet the standard standards of Internet entrepreneurship and open up a diversified road for the development of new media.

### 2.4.2. *Revenue from advertising*

With the continuous development of Internet technology, the global advertising industry is undergoing historic changes brought about by Internet technology, and China is no exception. In line with CCTV Market Research (CTR) media information [10], TV advertising showed its first negative growth in 2015, down 6% in the following three consecutive years; the radio advertising has slowed since 2013 to about 2%; the average decline was 24% since 2013, and the worst decline was newspaper advertising, falling sharply from 2012 to 2017, and the advertising revenue was only about a fifth in 2017. The huge impact of Internet advertising has made the decline of traditional advertising an inevitable trend, among which newspaper advertising has the largest decline.

The disadvantages of *Beijing Morning Post* advertising are obvious compared with new media advertising, mainly reflected in:

(1) Advertising attention rate is low. Usually, newspaper ads do not occupy the best layout, and readers tend to read the newspaper toward news reports and the columns they are interested in. The passive viewing rate is low, so you can only rely on active reading, and the relative effect is somewhat weak

(2) Poor timeliness. Due to the constraints of traditional typesetting, printing, logistics, sales, and other links, it cannot compete with the new media in terms of timeliness.

(3) High cost, high investment. New media advertising only needs to pay for the number of visits, using data to track ROI.

(4) Poor flexibility, inability to meet multiple goals, cannot immediately improve the change of advertising.

(5) From the form of advertising, not dynamic, small formal space, relatively rigid and limited, insufficient visual impact. In addition, advertising needs to abide by the fixed layout specifications, affected by the material and technology. The printing quality of newspapers is not as good as the effect of professional magazines, direct mail advertising, posters, and other media.

(6) It has difficulty tracking ad arrival rates and sales conversion rates.

In addition to the disadvantage of print media's own advertising, the sharp fall in newspaper advertising has much to do with China's overall sluggish economy and the transfer of advertisers to the Internet. The advertising structure is seriously unbalanced, and the newspaper's ability to resist risks is weak. Before the *Beijing Morning Post* published a large number of real estate advertising affected by the economy is very big, some other medical, medicine advertising, the *Beijing Morning Post* did not take reasonable means to deal with business structure imbalance to their serious crisis, accelerate the adjustment of advertising, to lead to some advertising problems lead to the overall decline.

In addition, in recent years, advertisers have preferred online advertising in various forms, cheap, interactive, and can achieve accurate marketing. The transformation of commercial advertising has fundamentally shaken the profit model of the traditional print media, so the print media is bound to face the situation of survival and development difficulties due to the decline of advertising income.

## **2.5. Content Thinking**

### *2.5.1. The scope of content has shrunk*

Under the impact of new media, the sales volume of

traditional newspapers has been greatly affected, and the advertising revenue is declining year by year. In addition, the transmission of print media is paper, its information capacity is limited, and its layout is limited. Due to the limitation of layout, *Beijing Morning Post* also has great limitations in publishing content. It is difficult to compare with open network information in the amount of similar information. Often, when users or readers want to know about similar information events, the related links on the website become the first choice.

### *2.5.2. The quality of in-depth reporting has declined*

The mining and application of data by *Beijing Morning Post* are still in the primary stage, and it is difficult to use data comprehensively. For example, the *Beijing Morning Post* only pays more attention to the quantity of reading and forwarding and takes the audience rating as the main goal, but lacks in-depth mining of article content and feedback of readers' interest. Data is only applied to the audience's receiving results, but it has no practical application significance for how the report attracts the audience and understanding the audience's preferences. The lack of a data department, the massive loss of excellent editors, and the lack of advanced data technology have greatly affected the in-depth reporting of news content, which is limited to the primary search. A large number of news clues and news reports are extracted from the Internet, lacking innovation and timeliness, and the content homogeneity and normalization are serious. Most print media report on the same news event and the formatting of report content becomes a normal state. Lacking major reports such as deep excavation and reporting of policies.

## **2.6. National policy system and management**

Under China's unique national conditions, a large number of the media industry are not enterprises but public institutions with Chinese characteristics. Chinese media are public institutions attached to the party and government organs. In China, national policy and regulations are particularly important for the transformation of newspapers. The existing system mode of "one yuan system and binary operation" in the Chinese newspaper industry makes media cannot fully free play when they participate in market competition. Of course, can they make full use of market resources to carry out all media transformation. By obtaining market identity and having a market access certificate, newspapers can attract capital depending on market characteristics, carry out system and mechanism reform, and form an all-media platform through merger and reorganization. At present, administrative, institutional and industrial barriers still exist. In the face of interest disputes, the lack of relevant policies has become an important factor hindering the process of all media.

Moreover, the current chaotic situation of network management in China is "adding insult to injury" to the traditional print media. Due to the lack of protection of intellectual property rights and copyright, and the very low "threshold" of network communication, numerous information is uploaded and downloaded by netizens, or even crazy reprint, the audience of network media is more accustomed to enjoying such "free lunch", rather than choosing paid information of print media.

On the other hand, when the *Beijing Morning Post* is in the critical period of transformation and adaptation to the new market, in the face of complex and diversified integrated markets, a large number of competitors make it difficult for such local newspaper institutions to survive. In the past, the competition pressure in the local newspaper industry was relatively small, and the lack of necessary competition outside the industry made the print media caught off guard against the strong attack of new media, thus losing many audiences and market share. Based on the weekly list of the "two micro ends" integrated communication list in September 2018 [11], *People's Daily* topped the list, and the new media of local newspaper organizations were generally weak. *Beijing Morning Post* ranked 17th, 15.73% different from the number 1 place in the communication index. As stated by the People's Daily Online, on the basis of the regional distribution of the top 100 newspapers, the 23 newspapers are from Beijing [12]. Except for the four provincial newspapers of *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Beijing News*, *Beijing Evening News*, and *Beijing Daily*, the rest are central-level newspapers. As a provincial newspaper, *Beijing Morning Post* should compete with the central newspapers and party newspapers and compete with the four strong provincial newspapers. The survival pressure of *Beijing Morning Post* can be imagined. Overall, the *Beijing Morning Post* is hard to survive in such a chaotic environment for news control.

### **2.7. Thoughts on the future of print media**

After losing the advantages of new media communication channels and in-depth reports, the loss of talents aggravates the plight of print media. Under the digital era, transformation is imperative, and many media keep trying. Taking the print media of *Beijing News* as a case, there are many commendable ways of transformation, but whether it can persist in the future needs deeper exploration. In addition, faced with the fierce impact of the digital age products, traditional newspapers should stick to their own strengths, carry forward their traditional advantages, make news more refined and superior, and win readers by relying on quality and hope by relying on faith. Survival of the fittest and discarding the bad are immutable laws, and we hope that newspapers will have a brighter future.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

This paper examines the difficulties and challenges that *Beijing Morning Post* faces in the digital age from the aspects of background (social and commercial), finance, content, and policy. It includes the impact of digital products, the influence of commercial finance, the shortage of its own content, and the related system and policy intervention in China. Through the in-depth analysis and research of the typical failure case *Beijing Morning Post*, this paper discusses the crisis faced by the whole Chinese print media. However, this paper still has limitations. *Beijing Morning Post* is only one member of the Chinese print media. It cannot represent the whole Chinese print media. Under more detailed conditions or situations, the difficulties and challenges faced by major print media are still different. Meanwhile, because the internal data of *Beijing Morning Post* is difficult to obtain, the analysis depth of this research is limited.

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