

The IP Transformation of Independent Bookstores in the New Media Environment: A Case Study of Pioneer Bookstore

Haojing Zhu¹

¹ Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication

Correspondence: Haojing Zhu, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication.

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Abstract

In an era of digital reading where the paper medium is in decline, the survival of independent bookshops is under pressure as never before. In response to the rise of digital media, some of the city's traditional bookstores are making creative digital transformations. Pioneer Bookstore is an iconic landmark in Nanjing, which is renowned for its composite marketing, audience connections, and cross-border collaboration. Using the interview method, this study found that the Pioneer Bookstore has a wide range of fragmented blind boxes, a single variety of co-branded artistic creations, weak cultural radiation, and a lack of intelligent services. In order to achieve sustainable development in the era of the visual shift, independent bookstores need to develop a creative marketing matrix and strengthen three-dimensional marketing; in addition, they should create original products that audiences will enjoy as well as focus on the quality of content; utilizing regional advantages and leveraging the city's cultural radiation capacity; utilizing the experience of other industries, maximizing intelligent services for bookstores, and actively adapting to the new media environment and completing the independent bookstore era in the new media era by utilizing intelligent services. Furthermore, the bookstore should learn from the experience of other industries and optimize its intelligent services.

Keywords: Pioneer Bookstore, digital transformation, intellectual property

1. Pioneer Bookstore's IP Transformation Characteristics

In the report released at the 2021 China Bookstore Conference, it is stated that 4,061 new physical bookstores will open nationwide in 2020 and 1,573 are expected to close, 2.6 times more than the number of new openings. A new round of bookstore transformation and upgrading is taking place in the country, with pioneering local Chinese bookstores embarking

on an IP-based transformation journey by establishing a unique bookstore identity.

1.1 Creating an Immersive Reading Experience Through Composite Marketing

A key theme of New Retail 5.0 has been to build a consumption pattern that offers diversified experiences. Pioneer Bookstore is actively expanding its service offerings by offering a "bookstore + life" service model that offers a

variety of services. In order to create an immersive reading space in terms of sensory experience, the designers have used warm and cold lighting inside the shop and provided coffee and other drinks during service. Pioneer Bookstore has applied fragrance to book marketing for the first time under its “Bookstore +” retail model. The Golden Rhythm customised fragrance can be purchased directly by consumers or participants can participate in a blind scent selection process to receive a free book by commenting on their favorite scent. Also, Pioneer Bookstore collaborated with five other independent bookstores to launch six blind book boxes, including One Way Space, 1200bookshop, Jingdian Bookstore, Xiaofeng Bookstore, and Utopia Bookstore, recommending content for consumers through vague themes, disrupting traditional book classification and fully engaging consumers’ curiosity to accomplish a “mix and match” promotion.

1.2 Build a Strong Community of Sticky Users Through Emotional Connections

“Nanjing Pioneer Bookstore Online Shop,” which has been open online for 12 years and has 230,000 subscribers, is a marketing hotspot that builds a sticky user community through its full range of all-media services. Additionally, Pioneer Bookstore maintains official accounts on mainstream platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. These accounts are updated daily in order to interact with users by publishing content such as event previews, staff routines, and cultural promotions. Furthermore, the copy conveys a subtle, straightforward message. As an example, it invites well-known authors to share their writing experiences, uses both an online and offline approach to answer readers’ questions, builds social assets for the bookstore brand, and creates social currency for positive messages pertaining to the bookstore brand. In addition, interactive content has been added to create a ‘grounded’ image on the web, with operators interacting humorously with interesting comments, breaking the stereotype of a serious bookshop and using emotion to create a ‘high-end, not highbrow’ image of a knowledge service.

1.3 Collaboration Across Borders: Creating Trendy Ips from the Past and Present

Pioneer Bookstore, as a composite bookstore, has drawn inspiration from themes such as

classic domestic and international intellectual property, Chinese Rui Beasts, and the Nanjing Republic. In order to effectively grasp the consumer’s motivation and transform their identification with traditional culture into purchasing power, ceramic crafts, assembled almanacs, and wood carvings are presented in the form of vivid images of mythical animals or ancient celebrities. The Little Goddess woodcarving series, for example, accurately depicts modern expectations of love, study, and work. It also includes desktop traditional cultural images such as the Moon God, the Bodhisattva of Manjushri and the God of Wealth. These images are in response to consumers’ expectations of a better life and recognize the change in cultural values. Furthermore, Pioneer Bookstore establishes co-branding partnerships to promote IP-based development. In addition to launching the “Stars Shine, Tribute to the Classics” blind box reading series with Yilin Publishing and Master Gao, the bookstore has also partnered with the Great Artists Art Museum to create a series of mini-hand-me-downs of world-famous paintings. Pioneer Bookshop’s Geography Perpetual Calendar features a collection of famous buildings from around the world, from an international perspective.

To summarize, personalisation is a key component of IP independent bookshops. Independent bookstores must be able to integrate organically with urban culture, continuously transform value in the process of transformation, and ultimately develop their own distinctiveness as public reading spaces.

2. A Pioneering IP Transformation in Bookstores Faces a Number of Challenges

Pioneer Bookstore’s approach to IP building provides experience for independent bookstores in China to proactively grasp the digital transformation, and it is at a stage when book events, product innovation, outlet features, and smart services still need to be strengthened. A study of Nanjing Pioneer Bookstore was conducted, which examined the Wutai Mountain headquarters, Yongfeng Poetry Club (No. 3 Zhongshanling, Nanjing) and Yihe Bookstore (No. 39 Jiangsu Road), among other shops. Using face-to-face interviews with Pioneer Bookstore owners and readers, the study examines the communication characteristics of the store as a means of exploring the challenges independent

bookstores face in transforming their IP strategy.

2.1 There Is an Excessive Amount of Blindness in the Blind Box

The Pioneer Bookshop has adapted Bubble Mart's marketing model and exploited the gambler's mentality by offering blind boxes. Blind boxes are better than nothing and worse than none. Unlike themed blind boxes, blinds, which are packaged with the bookshop's logo, do not have a fixed theme in terms of content. Readers often purchase a set and receive books from various categories, which makes them less consistent than themed blind boxes. Second, a blind box can only temporarily attract readers to buy a book. When a book has been unpacked and is no longer of interest to them, readers are less likely to return for a second purchase. The purchase of a blind box would be an additional burden for readers, even if readers could accept the results of a random selection, as storing unrelated books would take up additional space, and Pioneer Books does not have an official second-hand trading community.

2.2 Singles and Homogeneous Products

It has become apparent that artistic creativity is being homogenized by the market. Recently, as cultural tourism has become increasingly integrated into other cities in China, the "bookstore + tourism" model of operation has emerged in other cities and cultural products have tended to become homogenized. Pioneer Bookstore was an early independent bookstore focusing on cultural products in China that was a pioneer in bookstore culture and innovation. As a result of the mushrooming of creative products such as city bookmarks, geographical postcards, bespoke notebooks, and canvas bags, the original designs have gradually been overshadowed. Further, the Pioneer Bookshop did not conduct offline activities that were practical, and readers could not make a practical connection to the knowledge of the subject matter after listening to lectures delivered by literary celebrities or visiting museum exhibitions, which prevented the bookshop from maximising its practical value.

2.3 Weak Cultural Radiation and Insufficient Branch Characteristics

Pioneer Bookstore's unified visual identity system preserves the differences between its urban and rural branches. The Yongfeng Poetry Club, the Republican Bookstore in the Presidential Palace and the Literature and

History Bookstore in Meiling Palace in Nanjing City are mainly decorated in a Republican style. Designed with reference to the water towns in Jiangnan, the ancient villages in southern Anhui and the traditional She Huangtu houses, Huishan Bookstore in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, Bishan Bookstore in Yixian County, Anhui Province, and Yunxi Library in Tonglu, Zhejiang Province, Zhejiang Province. Village construction is undergoing development. Despite the regional and cultural characteristics of the branch pattern, the relationship with the Pioneer Bookshop is becoming increasingly loose, with some respondents surprised by the rural branches of the Pioneer Bookshop, saying that they had no idea they were owned by the Pioneer Bookshop.

2.4 Lack of Smart Services and Convenient Shopping

With the advent of digital services, nostalgia has taken over. Pioneer Bookshop's design incorporates classical colors, creating a nostalgic and classic reading experience. The long-term success of a bookshop rests on its content and services. A sophisticated appearance can attract traffic for a short period of time; however, long-term success lies in the store's services and content. In shops, advanced digital equipment is often used to unify the elements. Customers expressed that queuing for shopping was time-consuming and tedious, and that they would like to acquire digital checkout technology from abroad. Also, some older readers commented that the signage in the bookshop was unclear and that they "would prefer the bookshop to improve its internal facilities rather than the fancy design". A lack of intelligent cashiers and book retrieval services in all three stores visited reduced the reading experience to some extent.

Nanjing Pioneer Bookstore is able to take advantage of its own environment to play an innovative role in general, but the scope of blind book selection does not translate the desire to read into a realised value; head office and branch IPs are fragmented, with little cultural radiation; user orientation is replaced by environmental design and digital convenience services are lacking.

3. Suggestions for the IP Transformation of Independent Bookstores

It is noteworthy that pioneering bookstores have contributed significantly to content innovation and expression during the Internet age, and

bookstore marketing and services have been updated as a result of changes in media platforms, providing practical experience for the digital transformation of independent bookstores. This study proposes strategies and recommendations to enhance the IP transformation of our independent bookstores in three areas: marketing matrix, community content, and creative services.

3.1 Enhancing Book Utilisation and Improving the Buying Experience

While the blind box economy has paid dividends for pioneering bookshops, there is still the problem of wasted user resources. In the case of the random book selection campaign, for example, the wide range of book genres appears to expand the choice. However, the vague subject keywords limit the consumer's right to choose. Rather than influencing readers to become consumers, the actual content reduces their desire to repeat purchases due to the gambler's mentality. Moreover, Bubble Mart has refined its categorization of blind boxes, marketing them by limited themes at a time in response to the lack of official second-hand groups, resulting in a low level of blind box exchanges. To guarantee the readability and continuity of blind boxes of books, Pioneer Bookshop needs to take a look at the model of selling by label categories in order to prevent readers from avoiding consumption.

3.2 Establishing a Community Economy and Focusing on Content as the Most Critical Factor

The Pioneer Bookshop's main selling points include academic, literary, and lifestyle books, making knowledge groups its target audience. These groups have a certain cultural base and have high expectations of the bookshop's content and services. Therefore, "content is king" remains the underlying logic for the development of independent bookshops. Further, pioneering bookshops should develop niche markets at the tail end of the market by addressing the emotional needs of the fun-loving community. In the course of my research, I discovered that Pioneer Bookshop does not offer much academic content, with a significant number of its books falling into the literature and art fields. Consequently, Pioneer Bookshop needs to conduct thorough research of the cultural market, divide communities based on readers' reading preferences, establish a knowledge service system that is both online

and offline, and reap the benefits of the community economy.

3.3 Utilizing Regional Advantages to Reach Rural Areas

In order to achieve IP transformation, independent bookstores should not merely be urban landmarks; the surrounding rural areas offer a new opportunity for them. According to Qian Xiaohua, the bookstore's slogan is "a foreigner on the earth," which refers to the bookstore's dual purpose of providing quality content, and a cultural gathering place for people from different regions. The majority of Pioneer's bookstore chain is located in cities, with little coverage of towns and villages, and the themes of the shops vary from location to location. Fragmentation of urban and rural development is incompatible with the expansion of the bookstore's intellectual property, thereby defeating the original purpose for which the bookstore was established. The city plays a central role in driving the periphery of the region, and pioneering bookshops must therefore broaden their scope of influence and adapt their reading spaces to local conditions, creating a pattern of development in which 'urban and rural areas echo each other' and transmitting unique values and perspectives to consumers.

3.4 Learning from Other Industries and Optimizing Digital Services

Japan's Tsutaya bookstore has taken an innovative approach to applying smart technology to its bookstore services, by utilizing rocks from other mountains. Readers are able to make quick inquiries and purchase books on their own using radio frequency technology (RFID). As long as the positions are accurately placed on all shelves in the shop, readers should be able to locate their locations from the screen. Readers will be able to pay for their books at the POS machine without having to scan each tag individually. With this technology, readers' consumer privacy is protected, the bookstore's humanistic design is highlighted, and real-time stored user information can be used as a reference for independent bookstores to adjust shelf displays to match readers' preferences and facilitate the buying process. Furthermore, independent bookshops are equipped to adjust their shelf displays in real time in order to provide the most appropriate purchase options for their customers.

For independent bookstores in China, system planning must integrate the relationship between marketing, content, and customer service. To form a virtuous cycle of sustainability, it is necessary to improve the utilisation of blind boxes of books, focus on the innovative power of content, take into account the drive toward rural areas, and flexibly learn from the experience of other countries to continuously optimize services.

4. Conclusion

A domain cannot be planned by those who do not plan the whole picture. User thinking is increasingly the driving force behind differentiation in New Retail 5.0. In order to push the boundaries of what is possible, independent bookstores must develop their own brands, learn from their peers' successes, and make use of emerging technologies. Independent bookstores should respond to the national call for reading for all, focus on cross-border and cross-district cooperation, and promote urban and rural development through cultural dissemination to achieve the transformation of bookstore IP in the internet era.

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