

Reasons for the Hiatus of the Chinese Life Magazine City Pictorial

Longjiaxiu Xu^{1, a, *}

¹Department of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou City University of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 518000, China

a. longxiaofeng@sinosafe.com.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: *City Pictorial* is a lifestyle magazine in China. It was published in 1999 and officially announced its closure in January 2023. Its sudden closure caused the attention and discussion of the industry. Although it was once glorious, it is difficult to face the reality of the heavy. The author searches the comments of users on *City Pictorial* in different periods on social network pages and summarizes them. The author finds that *City Pictorial* is lacking in the establishment of links with readers, the novelty of the magazine and the operation mode of publicity. In other words, although *City Pictorial* is changing, its mode of thinking has not fundamentally abandoned the methods of the paper media period. The reform of *City Pictorial* was only based on the form, which did not fundamentally satisfy readers' reading psychology, nor did it continuously guarantee the quality of the paper magazine. Finally, the loss of readers led to the closure of the magazine.

Keywords: life magazine, paper media transformation, new media

1. Introduction

City Pictorial was published in 1999, a company called Nanfang Daily Media Group is its competent organization, and *City Pictorial* is the host unit. The main content of *City Pictorial* reflects the modern urban young people's lifestyle and lifestyle. The pictorial predecessor is Guangzhou Pictorial which has been published for 41 years. The early Guangzhou Pictorial has the nature of official publicity and is responsible for introducing the local customs of Guangzhou. With the steady increase in sales, Guangzhou Pictorial officially changed its name to *City Pictorial* in October 1999, and its content positioning also moved from Guangzhou to the whole country. This movement was also far ahead of other companies in the industry at that time. It quickly came into the public eye, which was widely known in the era of print media as the medium of communication.

Because of the reader orientation, *City Pictorial*'s market is mainly for people aged 20-40. The audience group includes the literary and artistic youth and the Petty-Bourgeoisie explicitly. The masses of this class are generally young adults in the 1970s and 1980s. The magazine was issued in the late 1990s when China was in the booming period of reform and opening up [1]. All kinds of information are coming in from all over the world, making the information available to this generation fresh and comprehensive. Young Chinese in this era are more open-minded, and they are more receptive and tolerant to information. Many minority cultures and ideas come into their view at this time. As a result of this, *City Pictorial* takes "young," "minority," and "literature" as its own label to

create spiritual food for readers. This is due to the trend of China's reform and opening up as well as the age advantage of the audience. Undeniably, *City Pictorial's* public influence is at the front end of the industry, and insiders have recognized its professional degree. As the most authoritative award in the China Pictorial industry, Jinqing Award has a great voice in the industry. *City Pictorial* has won various awards in the seventh and eighth sessions of the Jinqing Award, such as writing awards, the China Pictorial Annual Best Integrated Media Integration Award, and the first Social Media Communication prize, and so on. The number of pictorial publications, its number in the early and middle periods has been considerable. Many young people and companies of that era subscribed to *City Pictorial*. Many writers, musicians, and others are also willing to contribute to express their views and raise awareness. *City Pictorial* has always had a place in people's hearts, a generation's memory.

In addition, in order to meet the needs of the market, the editorial team of *City Pictorial* has set up a new team specializing in new media since 2010. As one of the first pictorial magazines to develop new media electronic journals and public accounts in China, *City Pictorial* undoubtedly became a leader in the new media industry [2]. It can be seen that to avoid being eliminated by the times and the market, *City Pictorial* has been expanding its development field rather than being limited to paper media.

But objectively, with the development of the times, new media breaks into people's vision, and the fragmented explosion of information browsing experience challenges the position of traditional paper media. Although many print media began to transform, they still needed to catch up with the pace of the market and were eventually eliminated. *City Pictorial* is one of them. More recently, in January 2023, *City Pictorial* officially ceased publication. The memories of a generation came to an abrupt end. What is truly sad is that *City Pictorial* did not decline because it refused to reform and innovate, let alone because it needed to grasp the pace of the times timely and ended its publication. On the contrary, it dared to innovate and even became an industry success story because of its reform. The author will explore the reasons for this in the following paper.

2. Literature Review

The transformation of traditional pictorial magazines and the impact of new media on paper media have always been the direction that scholars scramble to study. They hope to find out a way of "extract its essence and discard its dross." in the exploration. *City Pictorial's* readership is very precise. As one of the pioneers, they did a good job of opening the market of the petty bourgeoisie. On the one hand, it makes readers of petty bourgeoisie cultural preference step into the market, on the other hand, it gives many people enlightenment: It starts to pay attention to the trend of media stratification in the country [1]. Liang Yufeng focused his attention on the transformation and adjustment of *City Pictorial* around 2008. The author believes that the reason why *City Pictorial* maintains up to now depends on its core positioning "life" the theme of adherence, marketing strategy and sales method progress. During this time, the prospects of *City Pictorial* remained considerable [3]. Zhang Zhian and Liu Jianeng also focused on the marketing strategy of *City Pictorial* and made a deeper discussion. *City Pictorial's* early marketing was actually based on Coca-Cola's ideas. Editor Li Disheng put "happiness" into the pictorial concept of putting the needs and interests of readers first, building brand effect and distributing nationwide [4].

In the late new media operation of *City Pictorial*, Wechat is actually the main platform. They use Wechat public accounts to attract more customers and create customer engagement. In order to make the content of the official account more attractive, *City Pictorial* has planned many interesting topics. It is worth mentioning that a special topic of Wechat auction product called "Crazy Auction at lunch Break" broke the previous bundling marketing of advertising revenue. The newspaper office was reintegrated and realized while users gained a sense of participation [5]. Although many people

subconsciously think that the reason for the discontinuation of *City Pictorial* is the withdrawal of paper media from the historical stage, it may not be the case. The positive reform and efforts made by *City Pictorial* in the new media era cannot be ignored. The root cause of its suspension is not a single, but caused by various factors, still need to be explored and dug [2].

The closure has become an established fact, so it is worth thinking about the first is the current challenges facing the paper media. Wang Huihui discusses from three aspects: information dissemination requirements, physical objective needs and institutional dividends. The author hits the nail on the head by pointing out that the study need to confront these problems [6]. In order to solve these problems, there are many cases on the Internet that the author can learn from. It is not difficult to find from some successful cases of magazine and pictorial transformation that the entry of paper media into new media is a necessary means for its development, and the reason for successful transformation depends more on 1) the change of thinking mode and content 2) the improvement of network technology [7].

In addition, people can not completely deny the influence of print media. In fact, print media and new media are still in the stage of interaction. New media's content and editing style come from paper media, which also relies on digital media to spread information. Only by moving forward can any party be able to break through the siege, while if it stagnates, it will lag behind [8, 9]. On the other hand, people can think about it another way. The success of magazine distribution and sales is a game with readers' needs. Price, speed of publication, content, purchasing strategies, and so on all influence whether readers decide to buy or subscribe to the magazine [10].

The Transformation of cultural magazines under the New Media Environment -- Sanlian Life Weekly, written by Li Jianqing, provides readers with new ideas. His point about the need to transform magazines into "free content on the Internet" has attracted attention. Then he also mentioned that Sanlian Life Weekly adopts the mode of combining online with offline in terms of organization and operation. Offline links provide Sanlian readers with in-depth interaction and interesting life experience. This mode of operation is worth learning from [11]. In her paper Brief Discussion on the Challenges and Development Prospects of Traditional Magazines in the New Media Era, Wang Sijia pointed out that the information in the Internet is huge and miscellaneous, and people sometimes have doubts about the information involuntarily, which is also the advantage of traditional paper media. Taking advantage of this advantage, paper media can report and spread with strong authenticity of text and text, and their position will be stable and solid [12]. Yu Xin also stressed the importance of brand influence in his book *How Traditional Print Media Cope with the Rapid Development of New Media -- The Way of Magazine Media Integration in The Life of the Party (Heilongjiang)*. It is precisely because of this idea that the magazine "Party Life" has successfully transformed itself by updating its ideas while mining its own influence and finally realizing the group effect [13].

The above research has given sufficient background and data, but the reasons for the suspension are still blank. No matter the magazines on new media or physical publications, the study should focus on the readers themselves. Otherwise, it is easy to neglect one thing and lose the other, and eventually go downhill. The following research will return to the basics and use qualitative research methods to discuss the reasons for the closure of the *City Pictorial* from consumers' perspective. This will help many magazines see the market needs and consumer attitudes.

3. Methodology

The method of directed research was adopted. The author searched relevant news in the past ten years through Baidu, Zhihu, Douban, Weibo, and other media and the evaluation information of *City Pictorial* customers. The author summarized and concluded these effective information, and explored the rules of failure and success in the development of magazines, so as to provide suggestions and references for more life magazines in the transition period.

4. Results

Gradually deviating from the original positioning of the magazine, losing a large number of readers and failing to grasp a stable group. Many readers said that *City Pictorial* has gradually become more commercial in terms of typesetting and content, and lacked literary flavor compared with before. In addition, the operation mechanism of new media is not mature. Although in groping, but *City Pictorial* did not find a long-term can go on the right way. In the operation of new media, they only put a lot of energy into the production of WeChat public accounts, ignoring the publicity and investment of other platforms. On the other hand, *City Pictorial* stuck in their own small circle, few break the circle into the public view of the good work. Compared with People's Daily, National Geographic and other magazines lacked exposure and popularity, and did not expose more excellent works to the public. Last but not least, the magazine's content is not downward compatible and grounded enough to attract new readers after the 2000s. The readers of *City Pictorial* still buy from the 1970s to the 1990s.

5. Discussion

City Pictorial gradually deviated from the original positioning of the magazine in terms of content and composition after several subsequent revisions. Collecting information from various forums and social networking sites, the author found that many netizens said they preferred the old logo, while the new magazine always felt like a political or business magazine. A small number of netizens also mentioned that they were disappointed because they felt that the content of the revised edition was not as good as before, and that some of the cover characters they chose did not match the positioning of the magazine. A lifestyle magazine's content and artistic sense are always its core values. If this is wavering, it will be difficult to grasp a part of the audience firmly, and there will be a need for more regular readers. While developing the new media platform, *City Pictorial* neglected to ensure the quality of the original magazines. With good content, readers can be captured, and with readers, they can win the market, which is why *City Pictorial* loses many readers. With the rapid development of The Times, although *City Pictorial* can think of reforming and innovating the magazine content with The Times, it fails to retain the most authentic and attractive positioning in the positioning of *City Pictorial* and becomes the so-called "commercialized". The attraction of *City Pictorial* to some readers is weakened, and people's desire to buy it is also gradually reduced.

As a paper media, *City Pictorial* started from scratch to learn the operation mechanism of new media and was not completely familiar with it. Even though the column of *City Pictorial's* Crazy Auction at Lunch Break on the WeChat official account was once a sensation in the industry with good profits and good reputation in the industry, the success of this column alone cannot completely transform itself into a success in nature. If the transformation of paper media wants to succeed, it should grasp the essence of new media, namely the dissemination of fast information. Suppose *City Pictorial* wants to explore a long-term development path. In that case, it needs to find a proper way to integrate the sense of literature and art with fast information and derive some carrier columns. In addition, the means of network operation is also significant. A mature operation team can analyze its own strengths and weaknesses and make good plans to cater to the market. Traditional paper media, such as newspapers, simply transmit information to readers, who are responsible for screening and receiving information. However, in the era of digital media, the public can also become information producers, and the communication mode between them and digital media is two-way[8]. In such a communication background, paper media should seize this feature to improve their interaction with readers and increase their sense of participation if they want to transform. In order to achieve successful transformation and healthy sustainable development, the real integration with new media is bound to become the only way for every paper media.

City Pictorial is the leading magazine in the lifestyle category, but it is still not well-known among all magazine publications. This is not a successful project that is hailed as famous in the industry but a masterpiece that breaks the circle and enters the public eye. As a magazine, its seniority is less profound than People's Daily and has a long history, and its reputation is not as a household name as National Geographic. The best-selling magazines and newspapers should have distinctive symbols and make the best of them. In this competitive industry, if people want to be remembered by people, they should show their distinctive advantages and use an opportunity to make this feature in the public eye. Still, the *City Pictorial* newspaper often makes people feel inferior to the superior. It lacks a hot topic, a good timing. A triumphant success of a magazine can be a sharp journal topic selection, a thought-provoking article, and a column interaction leading the current events. Such a circle can be in the magazine, but also can be the new content of the magazine's new media column. With a high degree of topic discussion, the magazine can enter the field of vision of public netizens and media more quickly, bringing more opportunities and possibilities for the magazine.

The target group of *City Pictorial* magazine is unique enough, namely, the bourgeoisie readers aged 20-40, but at the same time, its target is not downward compatible. It is an objective fact that few readers born after 2000 years in China have ever read the magazine or even heard of it. Nowadays, readers are more inclined to understand some down-to-earth trend information, and it is difficult to read the content of literary bourgeois sentiment deeply. Even if they are willing to understand, they will choose to read short articles or even videos on the Internet. Ironically, after *City Pictorial* closed, readers in China in the 1970s and 1990s were mourning the golden age of *City Pictorial*. At the same time, those born after 2000 did not see the news in the headlines. Moreover, although *City Pictorial* has set up its own WeChat official account to keep up with the Internet era, the authorized account followers are still mainly readers from the 1970s to 1990s, which plays a poor role in publicity. Looking back at China's Internet bases after the 2000s, Tik Tok, XiaoHongshu, and Douban are the main ones. Therefore, expanding the downward compatibility of magazines with new media may become the top priority to attract more readers.

6. Conclusion

City Pictorial, as a life magazine, did have a brilliant life, but it did not escape the test of The Times and finally closed down. That is not an accident, but a necessity. Today, it's easy to fall into the trap of failing to recognize the complementary of print and digital media. If people gradually realize this point, it will be easier to jump out of the the cycle which is old print magazine that can not do well, also the development of new media reading is not popular with the public. With a dialectical attitude to look at how to solve the decline of paper media this problem, will give people more inspiration and thinking. In general, the decline of *City Pictorial* lies in that although it has reform and innovation, it has not gone out of its comfort zone, and its magazine positioning group and operation mode make it more difficult to attract a large number of readers. In the written world, on the other hand, content and readers are always king. The author believes that while maintaining the quality of the text, thinking about how to present such complementary patterns in a better form can produce a good link with the audience. In the competition of the industry, there are obsolete, there will be new pioneers. The demise of *City Pictorial* is a reminder that every company in the magazine industry should keep improving itself; It is also an opportunity to provide a place in the industry for latecomers. Remember every lesson and seize every opportunity, only in order to achieve great things.

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