

The Echo Chamber Effect in Traditional Periodicals and Their Digital Transformation: A Case Study of *Duzhe* and *Yilin*

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Abstract

This paper examines the "echo chamber" effect within traditional Chinese literary periodicals, using the highly influential magazines *Duzhe* and *Yilin* as case studies. It analyzes how editorial selection, homogenous reader groups, social currency functions, authority endorsements, and intergenerational transmission collectively constructed a powerful value-based echo chamber in the pre-digital era. The study further investigates the evolution of this phenomenon during the digital transformation of these periodicals, identifying new challenges such as the emergence of algorithmic echo chambers, pseudo-interaction phenomena, and a growing generational divide that threatens their continued relevance. By analyzing the dual impact of these echo chambers, both their positive contributions to cultural identity formation and their negative effects on critical thinking and exposure to diverse perspectives, the paper provides strategic recommendations for traditional media outlets seeking to break free from these self-reinforcing cycles. These recommendations include building open content ecosystems, precisely matching diverse user needs, and developing multimodal content strategies. The analysis draws upon theories of echo chambers, filter bubbles, information cocoons, group polarization, and social identity to frame the case study and its implications for the future of print media in an increasingly digital and fragmented media landscape.

Key words

Echo chamber, Traditional periodicals, Digital transformation, Media studies, Group polarization, Social identity

1. Introduction

For decades, traditional print periodicals served as primary sources of information, cultural enrichment, and value formation for millions of readers worldwide. In China, magazines like *Duzhe* (The Reader) and *Yilin* (Story Forest) achieved monumental success, shaping the values, worldview, and cultural identity of entire generations. At their peak in 2006, *Duzhe* alone boasted an annual circulation of over 10 million copies, with cumulative circulation reaching 2 billion copies over its lifetime [1]. These publications were not merely sources of content but cultural phenomena, creating a shared sense of identity and community among their readers. They became essential components of the educational ecosystem, serving as composition material libraries for students, moral guidance for parents, and teaching resources for educators.

However, this very success was predicated on a model that, in retrospect, exhibits the classic characteristics of an echo chamber—a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal [2]. The magazines cultivated a highly homogenous readership, curated content that reinforced specific value systems, and created self-reinforcing mechanisms that perpetuated their influence across generations. While this model proved extraordinarily effective in the pre-digital era, it has become a significant liability in the age of digital media, where audience fragmentation, algorithmic personalization, and generational shifts have fundamentally altered the media landscape.

This paper investigates the formation, mechanisms, and evolution of the echo chamber effect in the context of these two iconic Chinese magazines. The central research question is: How did traditional periodicals like *Duzhe* and *Yilin* create and sustain a value-based echo chamber in the pre-digital era, and what have been the consequences of this legacy on their digital transforma-

tion efforts? The significance of this research lies in its potential to illuminate the challenges faced by legacy media worldwide as they navigate the transition to a digital-first environment. By understanding the deep-seated mechanisms of these traditional echo chambers, we can better diagnose the difficulties of audience fragmentation, the failure of direct content transplantation, and the struggle to engage new, digitally-native generations.

This study will first provide a comprehensive literature review of the core theoretical concepts, including echo chambers, filter bubbles, information cocoons, group polarization, and social identity theory. It will then construct a theoretical framework to analyze the case of *Duzhe* and *Yilin*, followed by a detailed case analysis based on the content strategies, reader demographics, and transformation efforts of the magazines. The paper will discuss the dual impact of echo chambers—both positive and negative—and conclude with strategic recommendations for traditional media outlets seeking to break these echo chamber cycles and adapt to the contemporary media ecosystem.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Information Cocoons

The concept of the echo chamber has become a central theme in discussions about modern media consumption, particularly in the context of social media and digital platforms. It describes an environment where individuals are primarily exposed to information and opinions that conform to and reinforce their existing beliefs, while dissenting or alternative viewpoints are filtered out or marginalized [3]. This phenomenon is often discussed alongside two related but distinct concepts: the "filter bubble" and the "information cocoon."

Table 1. Theoretical Conceptions Enlisted

Concept	Proposer/Time	Core Mechanism	Main Application Scenario	Key Distinction
Echo Chamber	Communication Theory	Group internal viewpoint reinforcement through social interaction	Social media, online communities, traditional media with homogenous audiences	Emphasizes social dynamics and group interaction
Filter Bubble	Eli Pariser (2011) [4]	Algorithmic filtering of user-preferred content by platforms	Search engines, recommendation systems, personalized news feeds	Emphasizes technological mediation and algorithmic curation
Information Cocoon	Cass Sunstein (2006) [5]	Individual filtering of information through selective exposure and cognitive biases	Personalized media consumption, self-curated information environments	Emphasizes individual agency and psychological factors

While these terms are often used interchangeably in public discourse, they have distinct theoretical underpinnings that are important for understanding the mechanisms at work. The echo chamber emphasizes the role of social interaction and group dynamics in reinforcing beliefs [6]. Within an echo chamber, individuals not only consume similar content but also interact with like-minded others, creating a feedback loop where shared beliefs are continuously validated and amplified. The filter bubble, as coined by internet activist Eli Pariser, points to the role of opaque algorithms in personalizing content, potentially isolating users from diverse perspectives without their explicit consent or awareness [4]. The information cocoon, proposed by legal scholar Cass Sunstein, focuses on the active role of the individual in curating their information environment through selective exposure—the tendency to seek out information that confirms existing beliefs and avoid information that challenges them [5].

2.2 Empirical Evidence on Echo Chambers

Research on the prevalence and impact of echo chambers has produced a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. A comprehensive literature review by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that echo chambers are much less widespread than commonly assumed in public discourse [2]. Studies in the United Kingdom estimate that between six and eight percent of the public inhabit politically partisan online news echo chambers. More generally, studies both in

the UK and several other countries, including the highly polarized United States, have found that most people have relatively diverse media diets, that those who rely on only one source typically converge on widely used sources with politically diverse audiences (such as commercial or public service broadcasters), and that only small minorities, often only a few percent, exclusively get news from partisan sources [2].

However, other research has documented the existence and effects of echo chambers in specific contexts. Bakshy et al. [7] found that on Facebook, people are more likely to connect with those who share similar political orientations, with liberals having a 24% and conservatives a 35% possibility of cross-ideological interaction. Cinelli et al. [3] demonstrated that echo chambers can act as mechanisms to reinforce existing opinions within groups and move entire groups toward more extreme positions, consistent with group polarization theory.

Importantly, research suggests that self-selection, rather than algorithmic filtering, is the primary driver of echo chamber formation [2] [8]. Studies have shown that the forms of algorithmic selection offered by search engines, social media, and other digital platforms generally lead to slightly more diverse news use—the opposite of what the "filter bubble" hypothesis posits—but that self-selection, primarily among a small minority of highly partisan individuals, can lead people to opt in to echo chambers, even as the vast majority do not [2].

2.3 Group Polarization and Social Identity Theory

The echo chamber effect is closely related to the phenomenon of group polarization, which refers to the tendency for group deliberation to move members toward a more extreme position in the direction of their initial inclinations [9]. Sunstein [9] explains that when like-minded people deliberate, they typically end up adopting a more extreme version of the views with which they began. This occurs through two primary mechanisms: social comparison (individuals adjust their views to align with perceived group norms) and persuasive arguments (exposure to a preponderance of arguments supporting one side of an issue) [10].

Social Identity Theory provides another crucial lens for understanding echo chambers [11]. This theory posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. Consuming media that aligns with a group's values can be a way of performing and reinforcing that social identity [12]. This creates a powerful incentive to remain within the informational confines of the group, as challenging the group's narrative can feel like a threat to one's own identity. The theory helps explain why echo chambers are not merely about information exposure but about identity maintenance and group belonging.

2.4 Selective Exposure and Confirmation Bias

The psychological mechanisms underlying echo chamber formation include selective exposure and confirmation bias. Selective exposure refers to the tendency of individuals to favor information that confirms their preexisting beliefs while avoiding information that contradicts them [13]. Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret new information in a way that confirms one's existing beliefs [14]. These cognitive biases work in tandem to create and maintain echo chambers, as individuals actively seek out confirming information and interpret ambiguous information in ways that support their existing worldview.

Research by Stroud [13] has shown that media use is strongly influenced by political predispositions, with individuals systematically selecting news sources that align with their partisan identities. Westerwick et al. [15]

found that confirmation bias is particularly strong in the context of user-generated content, where individuals show even greater preference for attitude-consistent information compared to professional news sources.

2.5 Traditional Media and Echo Chambers

While much of the recent research on echo chambers has focused on digital and social media, the phenomenon is not new to the digital age. Traditional media, including newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media, have long exhibited echo chamber characteristics, particularly in contexts where media systems are highly partisan or where audiences self-select into ideologically homogenous communities [16]. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, partisan newspapers created echo chambers by presenting news through explicitly ideological lenses [17]. Similarly, magazines targeting specific demographic or ideological groups have historically functioned as echo chambers by curating content that appeals to and reinforces the values of their target audiences [18].

2.6 Digital Transformation of Traditional Periodicals

The digital transformation of traditional periodicals has been extensively studied, with researchers identifying numerous challenges including declining print circulation, advertising revenue losses, the need to develop new digital business models, and the difficulty of engaging digitally-native audiences [19]. However, less attention has been paid to how the legacy of traditional echo chambers complicates this transformation. Zhang [1] has noted that Chinese consumer magazines face unique challenges in their digital transitions, including the need to adapt to new platforms, develop multimedia content, and engage with audiences accustomed to interactive and participatory media experiences.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study constructs an analytical framework based on the interplay of editorial strategy, reader psychology, social dynamics, and technological mediation. The core hypothesis is that traditional periodicals like

Duzhe and *Yilin* functioned as powerful, pre-digital echo chambers through a combination of six key mechanisms:

Editorial Curation as a Value Filter: The editorial teams acted as gatekeepers, selecting content that aligned with a specific set of values (e.g., humanism, inspiration, individual heroism, cultural refinement), thereby creating a consistent and homogenous ideological environment. This editorial selection process was not neutral but reflected specific cultural and political orientations that shaped the worldview of readers.

Reader Self-Selection and Homogenization: The magazines attracted a highly homogenous reader base—primarily students seeking composition materials, parents seeking moral guidance for their children, and teachers seeking educational resources. This self-selection process intensified the echo chamber by concentrating like-minded individuals who shared similar cultural tastes, educational backgrounds, and value orientations.

Social Currency and Identity Reinforcement: The content provided readers with social currency—memorable stories, quotable aphorisms, and cultural references that could be deployed in conversation, writing, and social interaction. This social currency function reinforced group identity and created a shared discourse that marked readers as members of a cultured, thoughtful community.

Authority Endorsement and Trust: Recommendations from parents, teachers, and schools positioned the magazines as "good extracurricular reading," creating a "trust echo chamber" that lowered readers' critical faculties and reinforced the perceived authority of the content [20]. This authority endorsement was particularly powerful in the context of China's educational system, where parental and institutional guidance carries significant weight.

Intergenerational Transmission: Parents who grew up reading the magazines recommended them to their children, creating a cycle of cultural inheritance that allowed the echo chamber to persist across decades. This intergenerational transmission created a sense of cultural continuity and tradition that further legitimized the magazines' content and values.

Confirmation Bias and Selective Exposure: Readers who found the magazines' content resonant with their existing values and beliefs continued to read them, while those who found the content dissonant discontinued

their subscriptions. This process of selective exposure and confirmation bias created a self-reinforcing cycle where the magazines' audience became increasingly homogenous over time.

This framework will be used to analyze the case of *Duzhe* and *Yilin*, demonstrating how these mechanisms worked in concert to create a stable and self-reinforcing echo chamber. The study will then examine how this legacy has complicated their transition to the digital realm, where user agency, algorithmic curation, and generational shifts have replaced editorial gatekeeping as the dominant forces shaping information flow.

4. Case Analysis: The Echo Chambers of *Duzhe* and *Yilin*

Founded in 1981 as *Duzhe Wenzhai* (Reader's Digest), *Duzhe* was renamed in 1993 and came to dominate the Chinese literary periodical market. The magazine was known for its humanistic and intellectual content, featuring curated articles from domestic and international sources that emphasized cultural refinement, moral education, and inspirational stories. *Yilin*, founded with the editorial philosophy "One story, change a lifetime," focused on youth-oriented inspirational content, positioning itself as a "must-read magazine for every generation of students."

Together, these magazines formed the reading habits of generations of Chinese readers. At their peak, *Duzhe* achieved an annual circulation of 10 million copies in 2006, with cumulative circulation reaching 2 billion copies [1]. The magazines' success was not merely a matter of content quality but of constructing a powerful and resonant echo chamber that aligned with the aspirations and values of their target audience—primarily students, parents, and educators in China's rapidly developing educational system.

The magazines positioned themselves with distinct but complementary labels: *Duzhe* as "高知" (highly educated/intellectual), emphasizing knowledge, diversity, and humanistic care; *Yilin* as "励志" (inspirational), emphasizing youth growth, personal development, and literary material for composition writing. These labels attracted specific reader demographics and created strong brand identities that functioned as markers of cultural taste and social status.

4.1 The Architecture of the Pre-Digital Echo Chamber

The echo chamber constructed by *Duzhe* and *Yilin* was built on multiple reinforcing pillars that worked in concert to create a stable and self-perpetuating system.

4.1.1 Editorial Selection as Value Filter

The editorial teams of both magazines acted as powerful gatekeepers, selecting content that aligned with specific value systems and cultural orientations. For *Duzhe*, this meant curating articles that promoted certain ideals: the superiority of Western cultural norms, individual heroism, spiritual inspiration, and humanistic values. The magazine frequently featured articles that compared Chinese and foreign cultures, often in ways that portrayed foreign (particularly Western and Japanese) cultures as superior in specific domains.

A famous and controversial example is the 1993 *Duzhe* article "夏令营中的较量" (A Contest in the Summer Camp), which described a summer camp attended by both Chinese and Japanese students. The article starkly contrasted the supposed resilience, self-discipline, and team spirit of Japanese children with the weakness, dependence, and lack of independence of their Chinese counterparts. The article concluded with the provocative assertion that "China's next generation is inferior to Japan's," triggering a nationwide debate about Chinese education and national character [21].

Later investigations revealed that the article con-

tained significant distortions and selective reporting: it deliberately selected extreme cases to exaggerate differences, ignored contextual factors such as differences in educational systems and cultural backgrounds, and used individual cases to make sweeping generalizations about entire generations. However, the article's impact was profound and long-lasting, strengthening stereotypical impressions of "Western/Japanese superiority over China" and influencing a generation's cognition and evaluation of Chinese education. This case exemplifies how editorial selection created a "value echo chamber" where specific narratives were amplified and alternative perspectives were marginalized.

The editorial selection process was not random but reflected a deliberate cultural stance. Articles were chosen based on their alignment with the magazines' core values: seeking commonality in differences, appreciating excellence, promoting spiritual quality improvement, and providing moral guidance. This created a consistent and homogenous ideological environment where readers were repeatedly exposed to similar messages and values.

4.1.2 Reader Self-Selection and Group Homogenization

The curated content attracted a highly homogenous reader base, creating a closed ecosystem where the magazines' values were amplified and rarely challenged. The primary audience consisted of three interconnected groups:

Table 2. Reader Group Characteristics

Dimension	Characteristic Description
Age Structure	Middle and high school students as primary readers, concentrated in 12-25 age group
Social Role	Students (seeking composition materials), parents (seeking moral guidance), teachers (seeking educational resources) forming three core groups in educational ecosystem
Cultural Quality	Pursuing "elegant," "fresh," "timeless" literary style, recognizing knowledge and cultural refinement as identity markers
Reading Needs	Composition material accumulation, life inspiration, emotional resonance, value guidance, social currency for conversation
Value Orientation	Recognizing "highly educated" label and cultural position, pursuing spiritual quality improvement and intellectual development

This demographic homogeneity was not accidental but the result of deliberate positioning and self-selection. Choosing to read *Duzhe* or *Yilin* was itself a value

expression—readers confirmed their cultural stance and identity through reading specific magazines. This selection process further strengthened group internal homo-

geneity, gathering people with similar values together and forming value consensus.

The magazines became markers of cultural taste and social aspiration. Reading *Duzhe* signaled that one was cultured, thoughtful, and intellectually curious. Reading *Yilin* signaled that one was growth-oriented, aspirational, and serious about self-improvement. These identity markers created powerful incentives for continued readership and for recommending the magazines to others who shared similar values.

4.1.3 Social Currency Function

The content of *Duzhe* and *Yilin* provided readers with valuable social currency—stories, quotes, and cultural references that could be deployed in social situations to demonstrate knowledge, cultural sophistication, and shared values. In the 1980s-2000s era, when access to external information was relatively limited, knowing certain facts or stories from these magazines became a form of cultural capital.

Readers would extract "golden sentences" from the magazines for use in daily communication and composition writing, forming a common discourse system. They would share inspirational stories in social situations, establishing topic connections and demonstrating shared values. The magazines' content became conversational touchstones that marked readers as members of a cultured, thoughtful community.

Examples of social currency from the magazines included:

- Knowing that "Japanese toilet water is drinkable" (a story about Japanese cleanliness standards)
- Knowing that "America shut down an entire city's electricity to protect sparrows" (a story about environmental protection)
- Knowing about "Germany's conscientious sewage systems" (a story about German engineering quality)

These pieces of information, whether entirely accurate or not, became proof of knowledge breadth in social situations and important capital for displaying cultural position and viewpoint. The social currency function enabled magazine content to continuously repeat and reinforce within specific circles, while dissenting viewpoints rarely appeared or were transmitted, constructing a stable echo chamber.

4.1.4 Authority Endorsement

The magazines' influence was significantly amplified by authority endorsement from parents, teachers, and schools. *Duzhe* and *Yilin* were positioned as "good extracurricular books," gaining recognition from key authority figures in students' lives. This created a "trust echo chamber" where endorsement from trusted authorities suppressed critical thinking and skepticism [20].

Parents regarded the magazines as "among the few good extracurricular books," actively purchasing and recommending them to children for reading. This formed value transmission within families, with parents passing on not just the magazines but the values they embodied.

Teachers used composition materials from the magazines in school teaching, quoting magazine content in class and strengthening the magazines' educational value and authority. The magazines became unofficial textbooks for moral education and writing instruction.

The magazines became "must-read magazines for every generation of students," with some schools listing them as recommended reading books and gaining official recognition. This institutional endorsement further legitimized the magazines and made them part of the formal educational apparatus. Under this authority guidance, readers were more inclined to accept the magazines' transmitted values without independent thinking and critical analysis. The authority endorsement reduced readers' quality suspicion and made them more easily accept the magazines' worldview. This formed a self-reinforcing transmission network where critical voices, even when present, faced the weight of consensus and were rarely expressed or transmitted effectively.

4.1.5 Intergenerational Transmission

Perhaps the most powerful mechanism for perpetuating the echo chamber was intergenerational transmission. Parents who grew up reading *Duzhe* and *Yilin* in the 1980s and 1990s recommended them to their children in the 2000s and 2010s, creating a cycle of cultural inheritance. This transmission was often accompanied by statements like "I read *Duzhe* when I was young, now you should read it too," positioning the magazines as timeless sources of wisdom and cultural value.

This intergenerational transmission created several reinforcing effects: The echo chamber extended across time dimensions, with younger generations accepting

not just the magazine content but also the value judgments and cultural positions of previous generations. This was not simple information transmission but cultural identity and identity recognition continuation. The transmission mechanism enabled the echo chamber effect to have continuity and stability across time dimensions, exceeding individual readers' lifespans and forming cultural influence spanning decades. Through intergenerational transmission, a relatively stable cultural tradition formed—pursuit of "elegant culture," recognition of "humanistic care," preference for "inspirational stories." These value views continuously strengthened across different generations, creating a sense of cultural continuity and tradition.

4.2 The Digital Transformation and the Evolution of Echo Chambers

The transition to the digital age has presented profound challenges to the traditional echo chamber model. While *Duzhe* and *Yilin* have established presence on digital platforms including Weibo, WeChat public accounts, and Douyin (Chinese TikTok), their legacy echo chamber has proven to be both an asset and a liability.

4.2.1 From Editorial Echo Chambers to Algorithmic Echo Chambers

The first major challenge is the shift from an editorial echo chamber to an algorithmic one. In the traditional model, human editors acted as gatekeepers, curating content based on explicit editorial philosophies and value systems. In the digital model, personalization algorithms create "filter bubbles" by serving users content similar to what they have previously engaged with [4].

When *Duzhe* and *Yilin* opened official accounts on platforms like Weibo and Douyin, their content became subject to platform algorithms that filter content based on user browsing history and behavioral preferences. Users are more easily exposed to content consistent with their own viewpoints, creating "filter bubbles" that further strengthen echo chamber effects. However, this represents a shift from physical space closure (limited magazine distribution, homogenous reader communities) to algorithmic space closure (personalized content feeds, recommendation systems).

The magazines now face a dual echo chamber effect: their traditional editorial curation continues to

create homogenous content, while platform algorithms further filter this content to users who are already predisposed to agree with it. This double filtering may actually intensify echo chamber effects rather than breaking them, as users receive an even more concentrated dose of attitude-consistent information.

4.2.2 Pseudo-Interaction Phenomenon

A second major challenge is the phenomenon of "pseudo-interaction." *Duzhe's* digital transformation opened discussion areas, user communities, and online/offline activities, attempting to transform unidirectional transmission into bidirectional interaction. However, research data shows that this bidirectional interaction is largely an illusion.

Data evidence of pseudo-interaction:

- 1.663 million Douyin followers, with cumulative followers reaching 7.124 million across platforms
- Average of only 15 comments per post, indicating extremely low engagement rates relative to follower counts
- Content type: Platform pushes mainly limited to advertisements, inspirational articles, and other single-direction information transmission
- Participation mechanism: Lacks effective user participation mechanisms; user feedback collection and analysis systems are incomplete

Users think they are participating in discussions, but they are actually in a unidirectional information transmission environment constructed by editors and algorithms. This "pseudo-interaction" not only fails to break echo chambers but may strengthen user closure by giving users an illusion of participation without truly changing the unidirectional nature of information flow. The magazines have failed to establish genuine user co-creation mechanisms or to stimulate meaningful user-generated content (UGC), leaving the editorial-led model largely intact despite the digital transformation.

4.2.3 Generational Divide and Aging Echo Chambers

The third and perhaps most critical challenge is the generational divide. The post-2000s generation, who grew up in the mobile internet era, are largely alienated from the traditional, didactic content of *Duzhe* and *Yilin*. Their information acquisition channels, value viewpoints, and judgment mechanisms are fundamentally

different from the post-1980s and post-1990s generations who formed the magazines' core readership.

Post-2000s generation characteristics:

- Content Preference: Short videos, bullet screen comments, secondary content, interactive media—not traditional long-form periodicals

- Value Views: More diverse, individualized, questioning of authority—not recognizing "highly educated" label as automatically conferring cultural superiority

- Attitude toward Traditional Content: Rejection of preaching and moral coercion attitudes exemplified by articles like "A Contest in the Summer Camp"

A common evaluation from post-2000s readers captures this alienation: "*Duzhe* and *Yilin* are things my mom's generation read." This statement reflects not just a generational preference but a fundamental shift in how cultural authority and identity are constructed. Reading these magazines is no longer a marker of being cultured and aspirational; it has become a marker of being nostalgic, conservative, and out of touch.

Core readers shift from youth to middle-aged groups, with new reader growth slowing significantly. The magazines increasingly depend on existing reader maintenance rather than new reader acquisition.

The cultural meaning of reading these magazines has shifted dramatically:

- 1980s-1990s: "People who read *Duzhe*" = cultured, tasteful, aspirational

- 2020s: "People who read *Duzhe*" = nostalgic, conservative, outdated

Losing younger generation readers means losing the important force to break echo chambers. Younger generations bring new perspectives and value views that can challenge existing cognitive systems. Without this generational renewal, the echo chamber becomes increasingly closed and insular.

When magazines cannot attract new generation readers, their cultural influence gradually declines, transforming from "must-read magazine for every generation" to "previous generation's memory."

4.2.4 Challenges of Digital Transformation

The magazines face three core challenges in their digital transformation efforts:

Precise User Portrait Construction: Traditional peri-

odicals relied on long-term accumulated editorial experience and market feedback to understand reader needs, lacking systematic user data collection and analysis capabilities. Digital transformation requires ability to accurately construct user portraits including age, interests, reading habits, value orientation, and other multi-dimensional information. This requires significant technology investment and data analysis capability support that the magazines have struggled to develop.

Balance of Multi-level Needs: Different user groups have vastly different needs: students need composition materials, parents care about education concepts, middle-aged readers pursue humanistic care, younger readers want interactive and multimedia content. How to satisfy multi-level needs with limited content resources, avoiding the "difficult to please everyone" dilemma, is a core difficulty of digital transformation.

Lack of User Co-creation Mechanisms: Digital era emphasizes user participation and content co-creation, but traditional periodicals' editorial-led model is difficult to adapt to this change. How to establish effective user feedback mechanisms, stimulate user-generated content (UGC), and achieve editorial and user collaboration remains an urgent problem to solve.

5. Discussion: The Dual Impact of Echo Chambers

The case of *Duzhe* and *Yilin* demonstrates that echo chambers are not uniquely digital phenomena, nor are they entirely negative. Traditional media, through deliberate editorial strategy and cultivation of homogeneous audiences, created powerful and long-lasting echo chambers with both positive and negative effects.

5.1 Positive Impacts

Through shared reading experiences, reader groups formed stable cultural identity and identity recognition. "People who read *Duzhe*" became a cultural symbol, providing readers with a sense of belonging and community. The magazines created a shared discourse and common intellectual framework that facilitated social bonding and cultural transmission.

Cross-generational continuous influence enabled humanistic care, inspirational spirit, and other positive values to be transmitted and continued across genera-

tions. Parents could share meaningful stories and values with their children through a common cultural touchstone, facilitating family communication and moral education.

Readers with similar values gathered together, forming tight social networks that provided emotional support and belonging. The magazines created communities of practice around reading, writing, and self-improvement that extended beyond the magazines themselves.

In an information-scarce era, these magazines provided readers with windows to diverse cultures and knowledge, expanding horizons and exposing readers to ideas and stories they might not otherwise encounter. For many readers in smaller cities and rural areas, the magazines were among the few sources of international and cosmopolitan content.

5.2 Negative Impacts

Information Cocoon and Limited Vision: Long-term exposure to similar viewpoints led to information source homogenization, making it difficult to access diverse voices and different values. Readers developed a narrow worldview shaped primarily by the magazines' editorial selections, with limited exposure to alternative perspectives.

Cognitive Rigidity and Lack of Critical Thinking: Under the double pressure of authority endorsement and group consensus, readers' critical thinking ability was weakened. They became accustomed to accepting information without verification or critical analysis, particularly when it came from trusted sources like *Duzhe* and *Yilin*. The "A Contest in the Summer Camp" case exemplifies how even distorted or false information could be widely accepted and have long-term cognitive impact when presented within the echo chamber.

Group Polarization: Similar viewpoints continuously strengthened within the echo chamber, potentially leading to group polarization toward extremes and forming "us versus them" binary opposition. The magazines' frequent comparisons between Chinese and foreign cultures, often portraying foreign cultures as superior, may have contributed to cultural self-deprecation and unrealistic idealization of Western societies.

Cultural Stereotypes: Foreign cultures' one-sided presentation formed unrealistic stereotypes and exces-

sive idealization. Stories about Japanese discipline, American environmental protection, and German engineering excellence, while sometimes based on real examples, created simplified and often inaccurate generalizations that shaped readers' understanding of these cultures.

5.3 Implications for Media Studies

The case highlights several important implications for media studies and communication theory:

Echo Chambers Predate Digital Media: While much contemporary concern focuses on digital echo chambers, the *Duzhe* and *Yilin* case demonstrates that echo chambers are not new phenomena. Traditional media created powerful echo chambers through editorial curation, audience cultivation, and social mechanisms long before the advent of social media and algorithmic personalization.

Self-Selection is Key: Consistent with recent research [2] [8], the case shows that self-selection rather than technological filtering is the primary driver of echo chamber formation. Readers actively chose these magazines because they aligned with their values and aspirations, and they continued reading because the content reinforced their existing beliefs.

Authority and Trust Matter: The role of authority endorsement in creating and maintaining echo chambers is often underappreciated in digital media research. The *Duzhe* and *Yilin* case shows how recommendations from parents, teachers, and institutions can create "trust echo chambers" that suppress critical thinking and amplify the impact of curated content.

Intergenerational Dynamics: The intergenerational transmission of media consumption patterns and the values they embody is a powerful mechanism for echo chamber persistence. This dynamic is often overlooked in research focused on individual media users or single generations.

Digital Transformation is Not a Panacea: Simply moving content to digital platforms does not break echo chambers and may actually intensify them through algorithmic filtering. Successful digital transformation requires fundamental changes in content strategy, audience engagement, and organizational culture.

6. Conclusion

The story of *Duzhe* and *Yilin* is a cautionary tale about the dangers of success in a closed media environment. The very factors that made them so influential in the pre-digital era—editorial curation creating consistent value messaging, homogenous reader communities providing social reinforcement, authority endorsement conferring legitimacy, and intergenerational transmission ensuring continuity—have become significant liabilities in the digital age.

The case demonstrates that echo chambers are not uniquely digital phenomena but have deep roots in traditional media practices. The mechanisms that created echo chambers in print media—editorial gatekeeping, audience self-selection, social currency functions, authority endorsement, and intergenerational transmission—continue to operate in digital environments, often amplified by algorithmic personalization and platform dynamics.

The digital transformation of these magazines has not broken the echo chamber but transformed it. The underlying logic of reinforcement remains, but the mechanism has shifted from human curation to algorithmic personalization, from physical community to virtual networks, from generational continuity to generational divide. The legacy of the traditional echo chamber has left these periodicals ill-equipped to thrive in a networked media environment that values user-generated content, authentic interaction, diverse perspectives, and constant innovation.

However, the case also suggests pathways forward. By building open content ecosystems that embrace diverse viewpoints, precisely matching the varied needs of different user segments, and developing multimodal content strategies that engage audiences across platforms and formats, traditional periodicals can break free from echo chamber cycles and create more resilient, adaptive, and inclusive media organizations.

The broader implications extend beyond these two magazines to legacy media worldwide. As traditional media outlets navigate digital transformation, they must confront the echo chamber legacies embedded in their organizational cultures, content strategies, and audience relationships. Success in the digital age requires not just technological adaptation but fundamental rethinking of the relationship between media organizations and their

audiences—moving from broadcast to dialogue, from homogeneity to diversity, from closure to openness.

By understanding the dynamics of the echo chamber effect in both traditional and digital contexts, media organizations can work to create a more open, diverse, and resilient media ecosystem that serves the public interest in an increasingly complex and fragmented information environment.

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