



The Coupling Mechanism of Regulation and Governance in Digital Publishing: A Nonlinear Interaction Study Based on Regulation Theory and Governance Theory

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Abstract: This study explores the interaction between regulation and governance in digital publishing, based on the theoretical frameworks of regulation theory and governance theory. It argues that regulation focuses on internal technological and procedural optimization within the industry, while governance emphasizes institutional construction and multi-stakeholder collaboration. These two processes influence and couple with each other in practice. Through analysis at micro, meso, and macro levels, and combined with platform publishing case studies, this paper preliminarily reveals the forms and operational logic of “regulation-governance coordination” in digital publishing. The study also highlights challenges between regulation and governance, such as technological iteration and security assurance, and proposes preliminary responses, including encouraging flexible norms and establishing incentive-compatible mechanisms. The goal is to provide an analytical framework for understanding the complex mechanisms underlying digital publishing development and to offer practical insights for relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: digital publishing; regulation theory in publishing; governance theory in publishing

1. Introduction

Digital publishing, as the core form of transformation in the information age, involves not only technological iteration and industrial upgrading but also the coordination of cultural dissemination, ideological security, and social benefits. In the Chinese context, digital publishing carries the mission of building a culturally strong nation while simultaneously facing challenges of marketization, globalization, and technological innovation. In recent years, regulation and governance have become key paradigms for understanding digital publishing development. Regulation emphasizes internal technological optimization and system adjustment, whereas governance highlights institutional construction and multi-stakeholder coordination. These processes are not isolated but form an interactive “regulation-governance relationship.” This relationship transcends the traditional linear logic of management followed by execution and instead manifests as a nonlinear interaction constructed dynamically in practice. This paper aims to systematically explore the intrinsic connections between regulation and governance in digital publishing at micro, meso, and macro levels, build a theoretical framework of “regulation-governance coordination,” and use platform publishing as a case to reveal the coupling logic in practice.

2. A Cross-Perspective of Regulation Theory and Governance Theory

2.1 The Evolution of Regulation Theory and Its Adaptation to Digital Publishing

Regulation theory originated from the French school of economics in the 1970s, aiming to explain how capitalist economies maintain relative stability through a series of regulatory modes that mitigate internal contradictions. The core idea is that any accumulation system requires corresponding social, political, and cultural regulatory mechanisms to ensure its reproduction [1]. Applied to digital publishing, it focuses on how the publishing industry, driven by digital technology, adjusts its internal structures and optimizes behaviors to cope with technological shocks and market fluctuations. The concept of digital publishing regulation represents an inheritance and transformation of this theoretical tradition. It is no longer limited to macroeconomic cycles but centers on the internal processes of absorbing, internalizing, and reconstructing digital technology within the publishing system. Through four supporting dimensions—project regulation, standard regulation, institutional regulation, and actor regulation—it forms a methodological system for internal operation of the digital publishing system. The aim is to optimize production processes, enhance content quality, and strengthen technological empowerment to facilitate a transition from scale expansion to connotative development.

2.2 The Sinicized Expression of Governance Theory

Governance theory emerged in the 1990s and evolved from “management” to “governance,” signaling a shift from unidirectional control to multi-stakeholder collaboration. In the Chinese context, digital publishing governance features distinctive institutional characteristics and value orientations. As an essential part of the modernization of publishing governance, it emphasizes that under the comprehensive leadership of the Party, multiple actors—including government, market, society, and citizens—participate jointly. Through institutional construction, rule-making, and behavioral guidance, high-quality digital publishing development and cultural security can be achieved simultaneously [2]. The system encompasses conventional governance such as planning, fiscal, tax, and standards, as well as innovative governance such as security, emergency, think-tank, and digital initiatives, forming an arrangement that balances stability with adaptability. Digital publishing governance not only focuses on industrial efficiency but also prioritizes ideological guidance, cultural responsibility, and social benefits, reflecting a distinctly Chinese logic of governance.

2.3 Insights from Foucault’s Governmentality and Development Economics

Foucault’s concept of “governmentality,” presented in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, provides a philosophical perspective for understanding the regulation-governance relationship in digital publishing [3]. According to Foucault, modern governance is not merely repression or prohibition but a complex art of guiding behavior through knowledge production, truth regimes, and subject formation. Governmentality focuses on how governance is carried out—through which techniques, procedures, and knowledge population behaviors are regulated to achieve specific goals. In digital publishing, governance largely embodies this governmentality in practice, guiding publishing institutions, platform companies, and content creators’ production and dissemination behaviors so that they unconsciously align with national cultural strategies and mainstream social values. In this sense, regulation can be seen as a technological implementation of governmentality at the industry-operational level.

Meanwhile, discussions in development economics on “institutions and growth” provide another economic logic for the regulation-governance relationship. Coase emphasized that effective institutional arrangements are key to long-term economic growth. Institutions shape economic behavior by reducing transaction costs, providing incentives, and mitigating uncertainty [4]. In digital publishing, the governance system essentially constitutes an institutional arrangement that provides clear rules for industrial activity. Regulation represents technological and organizational innovations undertaken by industry actors within these institutional frameworks to pursue growth and efficiency [5]. The quality of governance directly constrains the depth, breadth, and effectiveness of regulation. A rigid or lagging governance system may suppress regulatory innovation, whereas a flexible and forward-looking governance system can stimulate regulatory vitality and guide the industry to higher forms of development. Therefore, the regulation-governance relationship embodies a profound logic grounded in institutional economics.

3. The Deep Coupling of Regulation and Governance

3.1 Regulation as a Technical Implementation of Governance

In practice, digital publishing regulation manifests as a collection of methodologies focused on internal system efficiency and technological optimization. However, in this unique field, purely technical logic cannot stand alone, because digital content carries ideological and cultural significance [6]. Therefore, regulation serves as a key mechanism to translate macro-governance objectives into concrete industrial practices. Regulation operationalizes governance by transforming macro narratives into meso-level industrial chain optimization plans and micro-level production guidelines, making governance goals executable. Without effective regulation, even the most sophisticated governance design may remain theoretical; conversely, regulation without governance guidance risks descending into mere market-driven approaches, undermining the cultural foundation and social responsibilities of publishing.

3.2 Governance as the Institutional Framework for Regulation

Governance constructs a comprehensive institutional system that delineates the legitimacy and rationality of all regulatory behaviors, providing direction and justification for action. Through fiscal and tax governance, it provides positive incentives for regulatory behaviors aligned with national strategic directions and negative corrections for deviations. Governance essentially defines social value hierarchies and allocates public resources, answering the questions of “why develop” and “for whom to develop” in digital publishing. Under this guidance, regulatory actions can be integrated into the broader national narrative of building a strong publishing nation and meeting the public’s spiritual and cultural needs.

3.3 Practical Manifestation of Regulation-Governance Coupling: The Case of Platform Publishing

Within the platform publishing ecosystem, regulation and governance exhibit mutually nested relationships. At the industrial structure level, platform companies' market-driven and network-effect-driven tendencies toward centralization and ecosystem development [7] quickly draw governance attention and response. Market failures and power imbalances caused by platform monopolies lead to governance interventions such as anti-monopoly investigations and data interoperability requirements [8]. These interventions, in turn, compel platforms to adjust openness strategies and investment layouts, forming an interactive loop: "market structure regulation → governance response → market structure re-regulation," vividly illustrating the dynamic balance between an effective market and an active government.

At the technological operations level, algorithms are core regulatory tools for content distribution, user management, and traffic operation. Pursuing algorithmic efficiency can trigger negative consequences such as information silos and low-quality content proliferation [9]. Governance addresses this by requiring algorithmic transparency, audits, and embedding value considerations, forcing platforms to internalize governance objectives such as mainstream value orientation into algorithmic evaluation metrics. Here, technological logic and value logic intertwine deeply at the micro level.

At the rules system level, platforms maintain complex internal regulations for self-management and behavior adjustment. The effective operation of these "private rules" underpins the platform's order and vitality. Governance, however, demands compatibility and alignment with national "public rules." Platform user agreements cannot override consumers' basic legal rights, and content review standards must not fall below legal minimums. Platforms thus serve as the interface between national governance and market regulation. Internal rule-making and enforcement become micro-level embodiments of national public governance intent, organically integrating enterprise-level self-regulation into the macro framework of state governance.

4. Hierarchical System of Micro–Meso–Macro Governance and Corresponding Regulation

The regulation-governance relationship in digital publishing manifests across different levels of industrial activity, forming a coherent system spanning from micro-level production units to the macro-level institutional environment.

Table 1. Governance Levels and Corresponding Regulatory Actions

Governance Level	Governance Focus	Governance Mechanisms	Corresponding Regulation	Typical Cases
Micro-level Governance	Content production, actor behavior, technology application	Platform rules, algorithmic ethics, editorial responsibility system, digital literacy training	Optimization of production processes, enhancement of individual skills, adaptation of technological tools	Algorithm review mechanisms, editorial digital literacy systems, blockchain-based recordkeeping
Meso-level Governance	Industry chain collaboration, industry standards, market order	Industry standard setting, copyright transaction rules, platform ecosystem governance, coordination of industry alliances	Integration of the industry chain, implementation of standards, establishment of inter-actor collaboration mechanisms	Digital publishing standard systems, copyright operation platforms, anti-monopoly investigations
Macro-level Governance	Ideological security, cultural development strategy, institutional framework construction	National strategic guidance, legal and regulatory system, fiscal and tax policy regulation, security baseline setting	Construction of accumulation systems, optimization of institutional environment, calibration of development direction	"Publishing Power" strategy, digital cultural security governance system, tax incentive policies

At the micro governance level, the focus is on individual actors such as editors, creators, and technical personnel. The core governance goals at this level are to regulate behavior, ensure content security, and enhance professional competence. Governance mechanisms are highly technical: platforms implement human-machine collaborative content review, publishing organizations establish digital-era editorial responsibility systems, and industry associations conduct digital literacy training. Corresponding regulatory actions emphasize optimizing production paradigms and adapting individual skills, such as introducing collaborative editing tools, adopting AI-assisted proofreading, and establishing creator incentive mechanisms. Interaction at this level ensures that the intent of national governance permeates organizational layers and influences each specific production activity. Micro-level regulation-governance interactions ensure that macro-level governance objectives effectively reach and guide every concrete production behavior.

At the meso governance level, governance targets shift from individuals to industrial organizations, market relationships, and the industry ecosystem. The core tasks are to establish a fair market order, promote efficient industry chain collaboration, and upgrade overall industry standards. Governance at this level is more systemic and relational. Typical governance mechanisms include: industry associations or standardization organizations leading joint development of industry standards

such as Digital Publishing Product Metadata and Knowledge Service Standard Systems, providing common languages and technical benchmarks for industry collaboration; national copyright authorities establishing a “National Digital Copyright Transaction Platform” with unified registration, certification, and transaction rules to reduce transaction costs and legal risks; and market regulators investigating potential platform abuses such as data exploitation or over-collection to maintain a competitive market environment. Correspondingly, meso-level regulation primarily involves collaborative construction and systemic optimization among industry actors. Publishing groups integrate resources through mergers or strategic cooperation, forming digital publishing ecosystems; diverse enterprises form industry alliances to jointly develop new technologies and explore new markets; and enterprises internalize standards into their quality management systems. Meso-level governance provides a cooperative framework for these cross-actor regulatory actions, preventing regulation from becoming a zero-sum game and guiding collective efficiency improvements.

At the macro governance level, governance operates at the scale of national strategy and fundamental institutional arrangements. The core focus is to define the fundamental direction of digital publishing development. Governance at this level possesses the highest authority and stability. Key mechanisms include top-level national planning, such as the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Publishing Industry, which clarifies the mission, development goals, and priority projects of digital publishing within the construction of a culturally strong nation [10]; laws, regulations, and policy documents such as Guiding Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development of the Digital Publishing Industry, establishing a legal and policy system to support innovation; and public economic instruments such as special fiscal funds, tax incentives, and government service procurement to directly support and guide activities aligned with national strategic directions. Macro-level governance does not directly intervene in specific production operations but shapes the fundamental institutional environment for the entire digital publishing industry. Corresponding regulatory actions at the industrial level manifest as systemic responses and internalization. The digital publishing accumulation system gradually shifts from reliance on resource inputs and scale expansion to dependence on technological innovation, knowledge accumulation, and total factor productivity enhancement. Market actors proactively interpret national policy trends and incorporate national strategic objectives into their corporate strategies to varying degrees, balancing economic benefits with social impact assessment and cultural value creation.

5. Dynamic Cycle of Regulatory and Governance Collaboration

In digital publishing, regulation and governance do not constitute a simple linear relationship, nor do they follow a deterministic model in which the economic base determines the superstructure. Rather, they form a continuous, dynamic, nonlinear cycle. This cycle begins with the governance system, which, based on comprehensive assessments of socio-economic development trends, technological shifts, and cultural security conditions, provides institutional supply and outputs rules. This includes issuing new development plans, revising laws and regulations, introducing industrial policies, and establishing industry standards. These governance products often absorb lessons learned from previous stages of industrial regulation practices. The new governance framework delineates possibilities and behavioral norms for industrial activities.

Next comes the stage of regulatory practice. Various actors within the industry, operating under the new governance framework, engage in different forms of regulatory activity based on their own interests, market signals, and technological conditions. These regulatory actions are concrete yet dispersed, aiming to achieve survival and competitive advantage within the given rules. Because governance frameworks are principle-based, regulatory practice involves a process of translating governance objectives into context-specific actions. This process reflects the contextualization of governance intent.

Regulatory practice generates a series of practical outcomes and spillover effects. These effects include anticipated industrial growth, potential unintended changes in market structures, and the emergence of new social risks. Such challenges expose gaps within existing governance rules. Through multiple channels, including public opinion and academic research, these issues are fed back into the governance system. Upon receiving feedback, the governance system initiates adjustment and optimization processes based on new information. Policies are interpreted, refined, and recalibrated. This adjustment process marks the evolution of governance from a static to a dynamic learning system. By absorbing the experiences and lessons from regulation, governance can optimize its institutional design, enhancing both effectiveness and foresight.

The optimized governance system then outputs new institutional arrangements, initiating a new round of regulatory practice. This cyclical process continues, driving a spiral evolution of the entire digital publishing system. This nonlinear collaborative relationship surpasses traditional deterministic thinking, aligns with the characteristics of complex system evolution, and constitutes the intrinsic mechanism by which digital publishing achieves resilient growth and sustainable high-quality development in a rapidly changing environment.

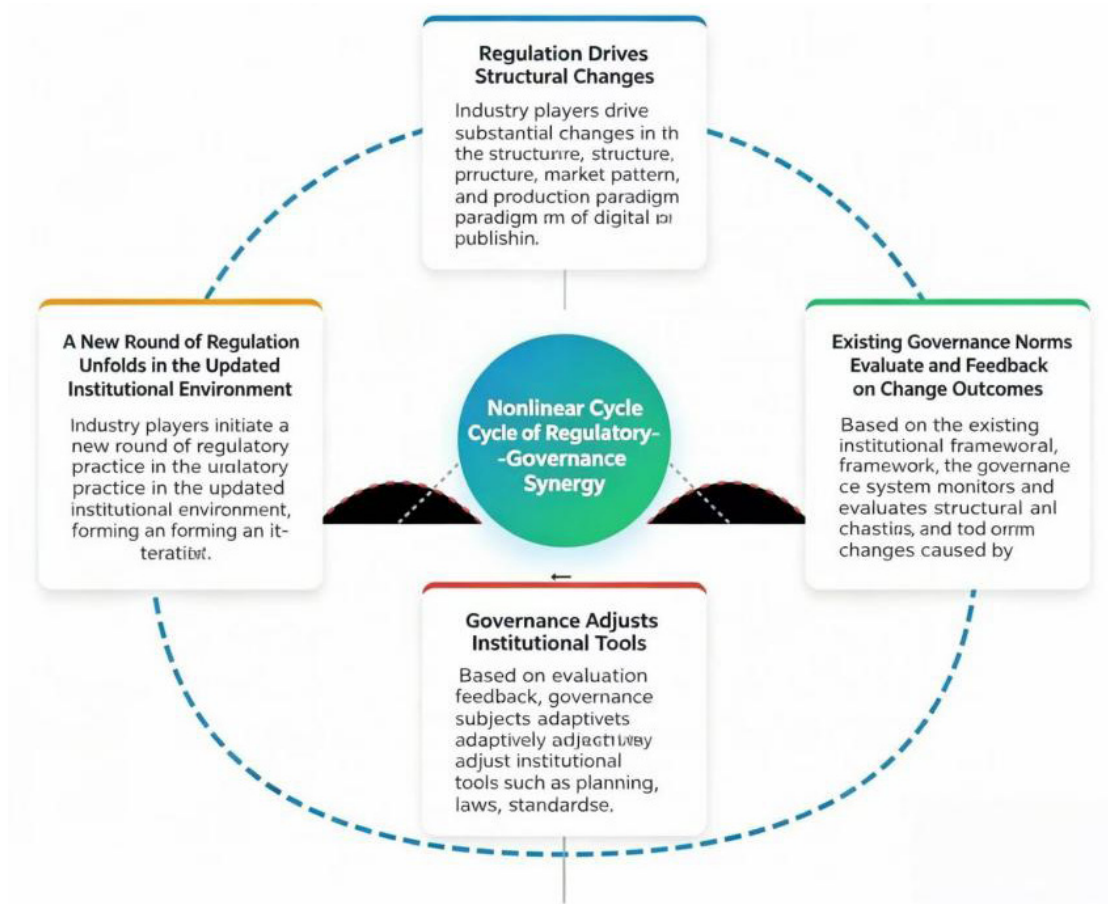


Figure 1. Nonlinear Cycle Diagram of Regulatory and Governance

6. Friction in the Regulation-Governance Relationship and China's Exploration

6.1 Main Manifestations of Friction

In the cycle of regulatory-governance collaboration in digital publishing, tension and friction are inevitable, primarily arising from the inherent differences between regulation and governance logic. First, there is a temporal conflict between technological logic and institutional logic. Regulation evolves rapidly and seeks frontier breakthroughs, while governance emphasizes stability, often requiring longer cycles for policy issuance and adjustment. This leads to a “technology waits for institutions” versus “institutions chase technology” contradiction. Second, there is a priority competition between efficiency logic and safety logic. Market actors' regulatory behaviors naturally prioritize efficiency, aiming for maximum traffic and minimal cost, whereas the governance system places safety first, sometimes sacrificing short-term efficiency to ensure security. Third, there is a challenge in balancing private and public interests. Market actors' regulation fundamentally serves their economic gains and competitive positioning, whereas governance maintains societal public interests and national cultural assets. While these objectives can often align, conflicts arise at certain critical points.

6.2 Pathways of Integration in the Chinese Context

Faced with the above frictions, China has gradually explored a distinctive pathway for integrating regulation and governance in digital publishing, with a focus on transforming tension into collaborative development through institutional innovation and mechanism design.

(1) Promoting Institutional Embedding and Reducing Governance Lag: China's governance system demonstrates strong learning capabilities. In fast-iterating technological areas, initial responses are implemented via soft norms such as industry conventions and ethical guidelines, accumulating experience for subsequent legislation. Innovative mechanisms, such as regulatory “sandboxes,” allow experimental regulatory trials within controlled scopes while governance authorities observe and test rules, achieving co-progress between governance and regulation at the frontier of innovation and shortening

the cycle from technological emergence to mature regulation.

(2) Establishing Incentive-Compatible Mechanisms to Reconcile Efficiency and Safety: Chinese governance practice emphasizes the design of incentive mechanisms that guide market actors to pursue efficiency while consciously fulfilling safety responsibilities. Programs such as the “Digital Publishing Excellence Recommendation Plan” recognize and promote digital publications that are both intellectually profound and well-produced, aligning social and economic benefits [11]. This effectively internalizes social impact as an asset that brings brand reputation and market advantage, incentivizing enterprises to innovate in ways that balance dual objectives.

(3) Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Co-Governance to Balance Public and Private Interests: Chinese digital publishing increasingly emphasizes collaborative governance involving government, enterprises, industry organizations, users, and third-party institutions. Governments set baseline rules and exercise final adjudication; industry associations develop detailed standards and self-regulation norms; platform enterprises assume primary responsibility and improve internal governance; third-party organizations provide auditing and certification; users participate through content reporting and rule evaluation. This multi-stakeholder model allows public interest requirements to penetrate private decision-making considerations, ensuring that private-interest-driven regulation responds to public welfare concerns and achieves a more flexible balance.

(4) Maintaining a Systemic Perspective for Dynamic Integration of Development and Safety: Chinese regulation-governance integration adheres to systemic thinking, aiming to construct an organic system where governance sets direction and regulation drives implementation. Governance is not a constraint on development but provides institutional assurance, while regulation explores efficiency optimization within governance frameworks. Both are unified under the common goal of “promoting high-quality digital publishing development and supporting the construction of a publishing powerhouse.” In practice, governance policies encourage industrial innovation, while major regulatory strategies actively align with national cultural development objectives. This systemic integration helps China’s digital publishing maintain strategic composure and developmental vitality amid intensifying global digital cultural competition and ideological contests.

7. Conclusion

The high-quality development of digital publishing is a complex systems project involving technology, economy, culture, and institutions. Relying solely on market-driven technological regulation risks cultural disorder, while relying only on administrative governance may suppress innovation. This study shows that sustainable and healthy digital publishing depends on constructing and continuously optimizing a nonlinear coupling relationship between regulation and governance.

Theoretically, this coupling connects perspectives from political economy, institutional theory, science and technology studies, and cultural studies, providing an integrative framework for understanding the unique patterns of cultural production in the digital era. Practically, it manifests as a coherent system spanning micro-level production behaviors to macro-level institutional environments, encompassing institutional supply, practical implementation, outcome feedback, and dynamic adjustment.

Looking forward, the evolution of digital publishing’s regulation-governance relationship will face deeper challenges, including disruptive transformations in content production driven by general artificial intelligence and intensified global competition over digital governance rules. To address these, we can deepen regulatory-governance collaboration in several ways: first, enhancing digital intelligence and agile responsiveness within governance systems, leveraging big data and AI for risk warning and decision support, and improving rapid iteration mechanisms for laws, regulations, and standards to create a flexible, adaptive governance framework. Second, reinforcing responsibility awareness in regulatory practice by embedding ethical considerations, social impact assessments, and cultural value guidance throughout technological R&D, product design, and business operations, making social benefit an intrinsic logic of regulation. Third, substantially enhancing the comprehensive competence of publishing professionals, particularly cross-disciplinary talents capable of understanding both market dynamics and policy frameworks. Finally, expanding the international perspective of the collaborative cycle: China’s digital publishing regulation-governance practice should actively engage in global dialogues and the establishment of digital governance rules and cultural standards, exploring solutions that safeguard national cultural sovereignty while promoting openness and cooperation. By telling the story of China’s high-quality digital publishing development and sharing its regulatory-governance experience, China can contribute wisdom to the healthy evolution of the global digital cultural ecosystem.

The future of digital publishing lies in the combined action of technological possibilities and institutional shaping. Through deep coupling and creative tension between regulation and governance, digital publishing can continually overcome development bottlenecks, uphold cultural guidance amid technological waves, and serve as a powerful force for meeting the people’s cultural needs and enhancing national cultural soft power.

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