

Analysis of Editorial Planning and Insights from International Bestsellers in the Age of Intelligence

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Abstract: In the era of intelligence, the book publishing industry is experiencing new vitality but is also facing challenges such as severe homogenization and increasing competition. Taking the British bestseller *The Thursday Murder Club* as a case study, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the book series' publishing timing, editorial planning, and marketing strategies. Through this case study, the paper summarizes successful experiences and insights into creating professional bestsellers, offering references and suggestions for the publishing industry to address market challenges and launch bestsellers. The study points out that the publishing industry should pay attention to trends and changes, accurately grasp market demand, adjust marketing strategies promptly, and emphasize collaboration and joint promotion.

Keywords: Bestseller, Book Planning, Book Marketing, Insights.

1. Introduction

The Thursday Murder Club series, written by Richard Thomas Osman at the age of fifty, is his debut work. This series represents a new style of "Cozy Mystery" and has released four books so far: *The Thursday Murder Club* (published in 2020), *The Man Who Died Twice* (published in 2021), *The Bullet That Missed* (published in 2022), and *The Last Devil to Die* (published in 2023). Upon its release in September 2020, the first book of the series consistently held the top position on the UK Amazon book charts, ultimately becoming the best-selling new book in the UK for 2020 after just three months of sales. It surpassed even Barack Hussein Obama's highly anticipated memoir *A Promised Land* and remained at the top of The Sunday Times bestseller list for sixty weeks (twenty-nine weeks for the hardcover edition and thirty-one weeks for the paperback edition)[1]. This series became the fastest-selling crime fiction debut in history. The series set a record for being the fastest to reach one million copies sold in the UK, with global sales exceeding eight million copies. Not only in the UK but also in Japan, a country recognized as a stronghold of mystery fiction, the Thursday Murder Club series was selected for the overseas mystery novel rankings for two consecutive years. Renowned game designer Hideo Kojima also mentioned the Thursday Murder Club series on social platforms and in his annual book recommendations[2]. According to the UK Official Top Book Rankings, the fourth book in the series, *The Last Devil to Die*, sold 64,526 copies in its first week, and its sales exceeded 200,000 copies within two weeks. Osman's series has topped the UK Official Top Book Rankings for original fiction fifty-eight times[3]. Currently, the film rights for The

Thursday Murder Club were auctioned by 14 film companies, with Amblin Entertainment ultimately securing the rights. Amblin is co-led by world-renowned director Steven Allan Spielberg and is also a flagship production company with Alibaba Pictures as a shareholder[1]. The series has been sold to 43 countries and regions and has received numerous major awards, including the British National Book Award for Best Author of 2021, the Nielsen Platinum Sales Award, the 2021 Edgar Award for Best Novel, and the 2021 Left Coast Crime Award for Best Debut.

The *Thursday Murder Club* series gained widespread popularity among readers worldwide immediately after its release. Its success can be attributed to the "cozy mystery" writing style, the detailed and nuanced character development, the cleverly crafted plot, and the vivid and elegant language. Additionally, the author's professional background, extensive promotional activities, and the evolving reading habits of the audience played key roles in its success. These combined factors made the series a work that is both entertaining and artistic, earning the approval of a large readership. This paper will focus on analyzing the strategies employed in the timing of publication, editorial planning, and marketing promotion of the *Thursday Murder Club* series to provide valuable insights for publishers aiming to create bestsellers.

2. Timing of Publication: Offering Comfort Through "Cozy Mystery" During the Pandemic

Although the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on society, the restrictions and reduced social activities caused by the pandemic led people to seek entertainment and escape through reading. Consumers tended to engage more in reading during the pandemic[4]. Fiction, in particular, saw a rise in readership. According to a Nielsen Book survey, people read more "crime/thriller/adventure books" during the pandemic, driven primarily by the desire for entertainment and an escape from reality[4]. With this increased interest in reading, the Thursday Murder Club series was released at just the right time. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, when people were generally in need of comfort and emotional relief, the author stood out by adopting a "cozy mystery" style that was different from traditional suspense and crime novels. The mystery genre was no longer solely about elaborate crime plots; it could also convey warmth. This unique blend of surface-level "coziness" with "hardcore" mystery elements gave the novel a distinct charm.

Firstly, "cozy mystery," as a writing style, emphasizes a gentle progression of the plot, harmonious relationships between characters, and a light, enjoyable reading experience. In *The Thursday Murder Club*, the author skillfully incorporates this style, making the story full of healing power amidst the tension and excitement of the mystery. The author not only focuses on the logic and coherence of the investigative process but also maintains tension and appeal through clever plot twists and suspense. This design satisfies readers' curiosity and desire for knowledge while allowing them to experience the warmth and positive energy conveyed by the story. This style aligns with the sense of peace and tranquility that people craved during the pandemic, which contributed to the wide appeal of the book. Furthermore, the author excels at using language to create atmosphere and evoke emotions. The prose is both concise and poetic, with a rhythmic flow that evokes the tranquility and beauty of the British countryside. The author also employs detailed psychological descriptions and lively dialogue to vividly portray the emotional changes and inner conflicts of the characters, allowing readers to deeply empathize with their joys, sorrows, and conflicts.

Secondly, the plot design of this series breaks away from the traditional framework of mystery novels, incorporating innovative elements into the foundation of British "cozy" mystery. Traditional detective novels often center on complex cases and intricate reasoning, while typical British mysteries rarely involve highly complicated cases or serial murders, as this contradicts the realistic style of British detective fiction. In *The Thursday Murder Club* series, on one hand, the protagonist group consists of retired elderly individuals—a relatively rare focus in the mystery genre. The elderly

detectives defy the stereotype of young, handsome, and intelligent sleuths, offering readers a fresh and intriguing perspective. These elderly characters come from diverse backgrounds and possess various skills, forming a rich and colorful ensemble. This diverse character setup adds depth to the story and offers more possibilities for plot development. On the other hand, the number of cases involved in the story pushes the limits of the cozy mystery genre. The cases are intertwined, and through the joint exploration of the four-member detective team, they eventually converge into a tightly woven whole, creating a plot structure more intricate than most traditional British mystery novels.

Lastly, the author presents warmth in character development. Each of the four main characters is distinct, with their personalities, experiences, and values portrayed through nuanced descriptions. These characters are not only vividly individual but are also closely bonded, with their friendships, familial ties, and shared courage in the face of adversity serving as essential driving forces for the plot. This approach to character development allows readers to delve deep into the inner worlds of the characters, fostering empathy and emotional connection. In an interview, the author mentioned, "Some famous detectives are deliberately portrayed as cold and distant, but that was never my intention with my characters. I wanted *The Thursday Murder Club* to be more relatable and charming so that readers could care about the characters just as much as they care about the mysteries themselves. Each of them has their own subplot, and I have endless fun imagining what they will do next"[5].

In summary, the success of *The Thursday Murder Club* series is largely due to its ability to precisely capture the specific needs of readers in the context of the pandemic. By breaking away from the traditional framework of mystery novels, the author skillfully combines mystery elements with themes of elderly life, friendship, and family warmth, creating a story world that is both thrilling and touching, prompting readers to reflect on life and values.

3. Editorial Planning: Close Collaboration Between Editor and Author to Refine the Plot

The success of a book is closely linked to meticulous and detailed editorial work. This involves careful collaboration between the author, the literary agent, and the editor to polish the plot, ensuring coherence and appeal. Through this editorial process, the story becomes tighter and more engaging, making it easier to capture and maintain the readers' interest.

Firstly, the deep trust and collaboration between agent Juliet Mushens and the author played a crucial role in both the creative process and subsequent publishing negotiations. Mushens not only acted as the author's literary agent but also served as his literary advisor, offering valuable suggestions and guidance. After the author completed the first draft, Mushens found the manuscript overly complex and suggested "extracting" some plot lines to "ensure readers can always solve the mysteries"[4]. Osman took this advice and reduced the manuscript by about 20,000 words. The agent also actively assisted the author in publishing negotiations, contacting various publishers to ensure the best possible promotion and distribution of the work. Additionally, the literary agency took responsibility for facilitating communication and coordination between the author, the publisher, and other stakeholders during the publishing process to ensure a smooth workflow.

Secondly, Viking Press, the book's publisher, played an equally indispensable role by having its professional editorial team meticulously refine the work, enhancing its quality and literary value. Katy Loftus, a perceptive editor who places a strong emphasis on quality, was in charge of reviewing and editing submissions to the publisher. When the agent submitted the novel, Loftus was one of the editors who received and evaluated it. Loftus showed great interest in the novel and suggested that the author further streamline the story by removing a specific plotline. Osman accepted this editorial feedback and made revisions. Although the author's celebrity status certainly helped boost book sales, the editor remained focused on the quality of the novel itself rather than relying solely on the author's

fame. Through the detailed and careful collaboration between the editor and the author, the content quality of the book was significantly improved.

4. Celebrity Effect: The Author's Fame and Influence Boost Book Promotion

The author of *The Thursday Murder Club* series, Richard Osman, is a well-known British television presenter, producer, comedian, director, and novelist. He gained fame as the creator and co-host of the BBC television quiz show *Pointless*. In the opening of *The Thursday Murder Club*, Osman subtly references his own experience by mentioning that Joyce, one of the characters, had previously participated in a quiz game. Osman had always dreamed of becoming a writer, and in midlife, he realized this dream with the publication of his debut novel *The Thursday Murder Club*, which earned him the British Book Awards' 2021 Author of the Year. He is now one of Penguin Random House's globally featured authors, with sales comparable to Dan Brown and J.K. Rowling. With his established reputation in the UK, Osman possesses strong writing and storytelling abilities, and his celebrity status naturally boosted the promotion and marketing of his books. A *Guardian* report pointed out that in 2020, the popularity of quiz shows, including *Pointless*, rose significantly, which may have further increased public awareness of Osman during this time, indirectly contributing to the boost in book sales [4].

Firstly, the author's fame brought greater exposure to the book. Even before the release of *The Thursday Murder Club*, the media and readers were already filled with anticipation and attention toward Osman's new work. This ensured that the book received significant exposure during the promotional phase, attracting the attention of many potential readers. Moreover, there was a considerable overlap between Osman's fanbase and the potential readers of his novel. A study on the U.S. crime and mystery book market revealed that 47% of readers are aged 55 and above[4]. Similarly, the viewership of daytime television shows like *Pointless* also tends to be older; one report indicated that approximately 80% of the show's audience is aged 55 and above[4]. Therefore, the target audience for the book aligned well with the audience of Osman's show, significantly increasing the book's visibility and drawing in readers to buy and read the book. Once the book was released, the author's celebrity status made it easier for retailers and the media to spotlight the book, helping it reach bestseller lists and further enhancing its visibility and sales.

Secondly, the celebrity effect earned the book more trust and recognition. As an experienced media professional, Osman demonstrated strong professional skills and a solid foundation throughout the creative process. His years of work in the media industry provided valuable insights that aided in the writing of his debut novel. Osman employed sophisticated plotting techniques, gradually advancing the storyline, which kept readers engaged and filled with anticipation as they progressed through the book. Additionally, he excelled at character development and psychological portrayal, making the characters more three-dimensional and fully realized. Through detailed descriptions and lively dialogue, Osman infused the story with a sense of reality and vibrancy, making it feel authentic and relatable.

Osman's celebrity status also brought abundant resources to the table. During the book's publishing and promotion process, his fame opened doors to more collaborative opportunities and resource support. For instance, he gained early recognition from literary agents and several publishers, which raised public expectations for his book's sales and helped ensure the novel's smooth publication. Through his social media platforms, Osman engaged directly with readers, sharing insights into the writing process and his reflections on the book, which further strengthened his connection with readers. This engagement inspired many of his fans to purchase the book. Additionally, he invited other celebrities or experts to write endorsements or promote the book, further expanding its reach and attracting a broader audience.

5. Marketing and Promotion: Comprehensive Promotional Campaign Throughout the Book's Publication Process

In addition to the book's inherent quality, which attracted readers, the marketing team played a crucial role in its promotion. They devised detailed promotional plans and adapted strategies as needed, conducting targeted campaigns for specific audience segments. A mix of online and offline approaches was employed to increase the book's visibility. The flexible use of diverse marketing strategies greatly contributed to the book's success, yielding excellent results with relatively little effort.

Firstly, thorough preparatory work was carried out for the promotion. First, focus on pre-sales. The quantity of pre-sales is critical in securing a book's place on the bestseller list and further capturing readers' attention. The marketing team adopted various methods during the preparation phase to ensure substantial pre-sale numbers for the book. They accurately timed and crafted public relations activities by arranging and optimizing key interviews in advance. For example, they scheduled interviews with media outlets like *The Sunday Times*, the BBC, and the British talk show *The One Show*, effectively increasing the book's visibility and driving reader pre-orders. The team did not only focus on traditional media such as newspapers and television interviews but also actively utilized online platforms to showcase the book's appeal and the author's charm. Second, pre-established marketing plan. The marketing team initiated promotional efforts as early as May 2019, one year prior to the book's official publication. They set detailed long-term promotional goals, including driving the novel to the top of *The Sunday Times* bestseller list for hardcover fiction and selling 100,000 copies by the end of 2020. This ensured that the promotional activities had a clear direction. Early in the campaign, the team also conducted research on public perceptions of Osman. They determined that one of the main challenges would be transitioning Osman from a television celebrity to a respected author, thereby gaining recognition for the quality of his writing. Despite the widespread lockdown in the UK in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the early start of the marketing efforts and the strong rapport established between the marketing team and the author allowed for smooth communication and timely adjustments to the marketing plan, ensuring the effectiveness of the promotional activities.

Secondly, emphasize the role of book reviews in shaping the book's reputation. Before the book's pre-sale, over a hundred employees at Viking Press had already read and discussed the manuscript's quality. Additionally, the marketing team sent numerous early printed copies to industry insiders. This meant that, beyond those involved in the early-stage rights acquisition, hundreds of people within the industry had read the book before its official publication. These individuals expressed their love for the book through social media platforms like Twitter, attracting both retailers and potential future readers, which positively impacted early book sales. Furthermore, in 2020, due to the pandemic, the public experienced heightened anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. The marketing team adapted their promotional strategy to reflect this shift in public sentiment, emphasizing themes of kindness, joy, and escapism. By adjusting the promotional message to highlight the book's positive themes and values, the team garnered numerous positive reviews. *The Daily Mail* called Osman an "exciting new talent in crime fiction," while *The Daily Express* described the book as "one of the most delightful books of the year," further boosting the book's visibility and recognition.

Finally, target key audiences and important moments for promotion. First, the marketing team focused on clearly identifying segmented audiences and applying different promotional strategies. Although the book's target audience was defined broadly as "everyone," the team divided the market into two specific segments. The first group consisted of Richard Osman's core fanbase, for whom the primary strategy was sharing book-related information through Osman's social media accounts, engaging his loyal followers. The second group comprised general crime fiction readers, who were

targeted through more traditional methods such as review articles and bookstore events. In practice, the promotional activities combined both online and offline efforts. Online events attracted various reader groups, while in-person author signings were organized in regions with many independent bookstores, allowing Osman to engage with readers face-to-face, enhancing interaction and connection. Second, the team made timely adjustments to their promotional strategy, seizing critical moments for promotion. As initial sales success was achieved, the team continuously set new goals and adapted their strategies to maintain momentum. By maintaining close communication with media outlets, they were able to sustain book sales growth. For example, they launched targeted promotions during the sales peak before Christmas, capitalizing on the key holiday period to ensure continued sales growth. Additionally, as the pandemic led many readers to purchase books locally, the marketing team provided customized promotional materials for different brick-and-mortar bookstores, including posters, bookmarks, and display stands, helping to boost in-store sales.

6. Conclusion

The marketing team for *The Thursday Murder Club* demonstrated characteristics such as precise timing, flexibility in responding to challenges, a combination of online and offline strategies, a focus on building reputation, and continuous promotion of sales, all of which laid a solid foundation for the successful promotion of the book. Osman's celebrity effect also played an important role in the success of *The Thursday Murder Club*. His fame, influence, and resource support greatly facilitated the promotion and sales of the book, providing significant advantages. These aspects offer valuable references for the publishing industry.

First, it is crucial to precisely grasp market demand. In today's era of information explosion, readers' preferences are increasingly diverse. How to accurately capture market demand and launch book products that meet readers' needs has become a major challenge for the publishing industry. The success of the *Thursday Murder Club* series is precisely due to the accurate grasp of market demand. The author and the publishing team keenly captured the readers' love for detective novels, as well as the audience's pursuit of a light, enjoyable reading experience during the pandemic. Through the unique "cozy mystery" style, the series met readers' reading needs. Therefore, when planning book products, it is necessary to conduct in-depth market research to understand readers' real needs. On this basis, attention should be paid to shaping vivid character images and the ingenuity of plot design. By creating lively characters and captivating storylines, publishers can attract readers' attention, enhance the artistic value and market competitiveness of the work, and ultimately launch works with greater market potential.

Second, it is essential to adjust marketing strategies in a timely manner. Marketing teams need to possess the flexibility to respond to challenges. During the promotion process, when faced with challenges from competitors or market changes, teams should swiftly adjust their strategies and conduct targeted promotional activities. For example, expanding influence through social media, online forums, and other channels can help establish closer connections with readers. Simultaneously, organizing offline activities such as book signings and reader meet-and-greet events can provide readers with opportunities to interact with the author in person, enhancing their sense of participation and belonging. It is also crucial to seize key promotional opportunities, such as holidays and reading festivals, by releasing relevant news and hosting celebratory events to further boost the book's visibility and attention. These efforts continuously stimulate readers' purchasing desires and ensure that the work reaches a broader audience of potential readers. Additionally, during the book's publishing and promotion phases, it is important to fully leverage the author's celebrity effect to effectively enhance the book's popularity and sales, thus contributing to the prosperous development of the book market.

Third, collaboration and joint promotion are essential. Throughout the entire publishing process of *The Thursday Murder Club*, the author worked closely with partners such as the agent, publisher, and bookstores to jointly formulate promotional strategies, achieving resource sharing and complementary advantages. First, the cooperation between the author and the agent was the cornerstone of the book's success. The author provided captivating story content and deep character development, while the agent, with their keen market insights and extensive industry experience, offered valuable advice for the book's publishing and promotion. Second, the publisher played a crucial role in the book's publishing and promotion process. In addition to handling the editing, design, and printing of the book, the publisher leveraged its professional marketing team and extensive channel resources to provide strong support for the book's promotion. They worked closely with the author and the agent to co-develop promotional strategies and carried out promotion through various channels, such as social media, online bookstores, and physical bookstores, ensuring the book reached a wider readership. Moreover, bookstores, as important sales channels, actively participated in the book's promotional activities. By hosting book signings, reader meet-and-greet events, and other activities, bookstores provided opportunities for interaction between the author and readers, further increasing readers' interest in the book and their desire to purchase it. In the process of collaboration and joint promotion, all parties fully utilized their respective strengths to achieve resource sharing and complementary advantages. The author provided high-quality content, the agent offered professional market advice, the publisher supplied strong channel support and a marketing team, and bookstores provided direct sales channels and opportunities for reader interaction. This cooperative model broke down the barriers of traditional publishing practices and promoted deeper collaboration and resource sharing among all parties. Such a model not only applies to the promotion of a single book but can also be extended to the promotion of an entire series or even the development of cross-media products.

In the future book publishing market, the publishing industry should actively learn from the successful experience of *The Thursday Murder Club* series, continuously innovate and improve its operational models and product strategies. By gaining a deeper understanding of readers' needs and preferences, publishers can release more works that meet market demands and possess artistic value. By optimizing marketing strategies and promotional channels, publishers can expand the influence and market share of their works. Through cross-industry collaboration and brand building, they can enhance the commercial value and market competitiveness of their works. Strengthening interaction and communication with readers is also essential to build closer relationships, laying a solid foundation for long-term development.

At the same time, the publishing industry should pay attention to industry trends and changes, continuously adapting to and leading market trends. With the advent of the intelligent era, readers' habits have shifted, and the publishing industry should actively explore intelligent transformation and innovative development paths. By utilizing new technologies and methods, the industry can enhance the dissemination of works and improve the reading experience.

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