

## The Impact of E-books on Print Books in the New Media Era and Publishers' Response Strategies: Postprint

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### Abstract

Compared to paper books, e-books exhibit several distinct advantages: abundant content, massive storage capacity, ease of preservation, and long-term durability; they help prevent books from going out of print while enabling continuous content updates; their production process is environmentally friendly, conserving substantial resources; e-book readers are highly portable, allowing readers to engage in reading at any time; they possess powerful functionalities that can provide readers with an enhanced reading experience and greater benefits; production and distribution costs are reduced, and sales methods are flexible, making them suitable for high-volume, low-margin sales. Based on these advantages, e-books have segmented the readership of paper books, encroached upon the market space of paper books, and resulted in readers having higher expectations and demands for paper books. Publishers of paper books should correctly comprehend the relationship and current state between e-books and paper books, update their publishing philosophy, and actively explore differentiated publishing strategies for e-books and paper books; they should leverage the advantages of e-books to create paper books that are more marketable and better aligned with consumer needs.

### Full Text

## The Impact of E-books on Print Books and Publishers' Responses in the New Media Era

**Abstract:** Compared with print books, e-books offer several distinct advantages: rich content, massive storage capacity, easy preservation, and long-term storage; they help prevent books from going out of print and enable continuous content updates; their production process is environmentally friendly and conserves substantial resources; e-book readers are portable, allowing readers to

access content anytime; they offer powerful features that provide better reading experiences and greater benefits; and they have lower production and distribution costs with flexible sales models suitable for small profits but quick turnover. Based on these advantages, e-books have fragmented the print book readership, encroached on print book market space, and led readers to hold higher expectations and demands for print books. Print book publishers should correctly understand the relationship and current situation between e-books and print books, update their publishing philosophy, actively explore categorized publishing for e-books and print books, and draw on the advantages of e-books to create more marketable print books.

**Keywords:** e-book; print book; new media era; book publisher; publishing format

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## 1. Advantages of E-books

**1.1 Rich Content, Easy Preservation, and Large, Long-Term Storage Capacity** E-books can incorporate not only text and images but also sound and video into their content, enriching the reading experience and enabling readers to access information through multiple sensory channels. With continuous improvements in e-reader technology, storage capacity has expanded significantly. For instance, the Kindle Paperwhite 4 currently on the market offers up to 32GB of storage space, capable of holding thousands of e-books—essentially a portable mini-library. Unlike print books, which require considerable physical space and human and material resources for preservation, e-books can be easily stored on electronic devices without occupying physical space and can be preserved indefinitely without degrading quality.

**1.2 Prevention of Out-of-Print Status and Continuous Content Updates** Print books frequently go out of print due to poor sales. In contrast, once produced, e-books can be sold indefinitely online with long-term preservation, thus avoiding the out-of-print problem. E-books provide a new method for preserving important historical texts, works by renowned artists, and scholarly works with small readerships but high academic and cultural value. After publication, authors and editors can revise e-book content at any time based on reader feedback and the author's latest research.

**1.3 Environmentally Friendly Production and Resource Conservation** Print book production relies on paper, which consumes substantial timber and electricity resources, while the processes of paper manufacturing, book printing and binding, transportation, and disposal cause environmental damage and pollution. Although e-books also involve pollution from electronic device production and disposal, their environmental advantages remain significant. Compared with print book production, e-book creation requires no paper, benefiting the environment while conserving considerable natural and social resources.

**1.4 Portability and Convenient Access to Reading** Electronic devices such as iPads, Kindles, and iPhones that store e-books are small, lightweight, and highly portable, enabling readers to carry them easily when traveling and access reading material anytime. Print books, by contrast, are often bulky and less convenient to carry and read while on the go.

**1.5 Powerful Features for Enhanced Reading Experience and Greater Benefits** E-books offer features that print books lack or cannot match as effectively: (1) Readers can adjust font size and color, change background colors, or replace backgrounds with personalized images. (2) E-books provide powerful search capabilities that print books cannot offer, allowing readers to conduct full-text searches, Boolean logic searches, and searches based on various external document features, helping them accurately locate desired content. (3) E-books offer functions for managing reading progress and promoting in-depth study. For example, certain e-readers enable rapid, page-by-page, or chapter-by-chapter browsing with real-time progress saving, annotation adding, and note sharing, while also providing vocabulary prompts for foreign words, translation of words or passages, and pronunciation guides for Chinese characters. (4) Readers can not only “read” text but also “view” images, videos, and 3D graphics, and “listen” to audio recordings of the content.

**1.6 Reduced Production and Distribution Costs with Flexible Sales Models Suitable for Small Profits but Quick Turnover** E-book publishing is paperless, significantly reducing production costs, and its sales follow a B2C e-commerce model that eliminates expenses associated with print book distribution, transportation, and inventory. E-books can achieve “zero inventory.” Consequently, e-book prices are generally much lower than their print counterparts, typically about one-third the price of a print book. E-book sales are also highly flexible—readers can purchase by chapter or page, pay by data usage, or rent (for example, Dangdang offers rental services). These advantages enable publishers to adopt small-profit, high-volume marketing strategies to increase e-book sales and generate substantial revenue.

## 2. Impact of E-books on Print Books

**2.1 Fragmentation of Print Book Readership** The publication and distribution of e-books have fragmented print book readership. Many young people who grew up in the internet environment show great interest in new media and prefer digital products, making those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and even 2000s the primary consumers of e-books. According to the *China Book Reading Market Thematic Analysis 2018* jointly released by Analysys and Dangdang, e-book readers under 30 account for 53.4% of the total, and female readers comprise 86.7% of e-book consumers. University students have become the main force among students using e-books, while primary and secondary school students, IT professionals at the forefront of technology, entertainment industry figures, and

highly educated middle-aged and elderly intellectuals have also become important e-book user groups.

The *2018 China Children's Digital Reading Report* jointly released by the China Press and Publication Research Institute and the children's digital content platform KaDa Story shows that in 2018, the potential user base for children's digital reading reached 250 million, with a potential market size of 500 billion yuan. Chinese children's average e-book reading volume reached 40 books in 2018, far exceeding the 23 books per year reported by Scholastic, the world's largest children's book publisher, for American children.

Amazon China's *2016 National Reading Survey Report* reveals that e-book reading popularity has increased year after year. Among more than 11,000 respondents from over 500 Chinese cities, 84% had read e-books, a 6% increase from 2015. Additionally, 56% of respondents indicated that e-books increased their total reading volume, and nearly 90% planned to read more e-books in the future. These data demonstrate that e-books have significantly fragmented the potential print book readership, diverting consumers who would likely have purchased print books to e-book consumption.

**2.2 E-books Encroaching on Print Book Market Space** The most direct impact of e-books on print books is their effect on market share. In 2018, major book markets in the UK and US maintained steady growth, with e-book market shares exceeding 15% in both countries. According to the latest Nielsen monitoring data, the UK e-book market share reached 32.4% in 2018, while the US share was approximately 20%. Although China's e-book market proportion has not yet reached European and American levels, with the continuous expansion of the online reading market and significantly increased consumer willingness to pay, e-books' share in China's book market maintains a sustained upward trend.

The 16th National Reading Survey released on April 16, 2019, showed that in 2018, Chinese adults read an average of 4.67 print books and 3.32 e-books. Since July 18, 2019, Amazon China has officially ceased print book sales to focus exclusively on e-books. The *China Book Reading Market Thematic Analysis 2018* jointly released by Analysys and Dangdang shows that in 2017, Dangdang's e-book sales revenue increased by 126% year-over-year, new paying customers grew by 72%, and e-book downloads increased by 51%. These figures indicate that China's e-book market still has considerable room for growth.

**2.3 Rising Reader Expectations and Demands for Print Books** Many advantages of e-books are either unavailable in print books or represent print books' weaknesses. Before e-books emerged, readers had a special fondness for print books. However, as readers encountered and learned about e-books, they quickly recognized print books' disadvantages through comparison. This not only affects future sales of new print books but also impacts the social and economic benefits of previously bestsellers. Faced with e-books' strong offensive, many

publishers have had to repeatedly reduce print book discounts, even selling at a loss.

While experiencing e-books' powerful features and advantages, readers naturally develop higher expectations and demands for print book content, quality, pricing, and publisher services. For instance, readers hope print books can present richer, more colorful information like e-books, and they expect print book prices to be similarly reduced to about 30% of current levels. As readers become increasingly discerning and demanding, print book publishers face tremendous pressure.

### 3. Response Strategies for Book Publishers

In today's new media era, e-books as an emerging phenomenon are in the ascendant in China. The future publishing landscape will feature co-development of e-books and print books. Publishers should clearly understand the situation, actively transform their publishing philosophy, adjust their publishing strategies, combine the advantages of print and e-book publishing, and strive to find their own path in publishing.

**3.1 Correctly Understanding the Relationship and Current Situation Between E-books and Print Books** Although e-books offer many advantages, they also have obvious shortcomings. For example, e-book reading often involves shallow reading—while readers quickly access large amounts of information, they lack in-depth study and reflection. E-books are easier to copy and distribute, making copyright protection more difficult than for print books. Editorial quality of e-books is concerning, and prolonged e-book reading can cause visual fatigue and affect vision development.

Print books, by contrast, cause less visual fatigue, maintain higher overall quality, are convenient to browse, and facilitate in-depth learning. When reading print books, readers can smell the faint ink fragrance, feel the smooth paper, and slowly savor the intellectual nourishment—an experience that e-book reading cannot provide. Reading print books is not just about acquiring knowledge but enjoying a cultural feast. Moreover, many print books have collectible value, which e-books completely lack.

When e-books surged forward in the book market, many saw their obvious advantages and believed e-books would likely replace print books. On December 27, 2009, Amazon, the American publishing giant, announced that its e-book sales had surpassed print book sales for the first time. E-book manufacturers then vigorously proclaimed: “2018 will be the end of traditional books, and e-books will replace print books within 10 years.” Now that 2018 has passed into history, print books have not been replaced by e-books but have instead made a comeback. Statistics from the China Press and Publication Research Institute show that as of 2017, print books remained the mainstream reading method for Chinese readers, with 45.1% of respondents indicating they would

read a print book, compared to 35.1% who read on mobile phones.

Therefore, as traditional print book publishers, we should correctly understand the respective advantages and disadvantages of e-books and print books, neither worrying excessively about e-books' rapid advance nor becoming complacent about print books' comeback. E-books and print books each have distinctive features; they have a complementary, mutually reinforcing relationship rather than a replacement relationship. In reality, many readers who find e-books unsatisfying will purchase a print version for comparative study. We should adopt a dialectical approach to analyzing the relationship between e-books and print books, striving to make relative rather than absolute, comprehensive rather than one-sided judgments.

**3.2 Updating Publishing Philosophy and Actively Exploring Categorized Publishing for E-books and Print Books** Currently, publishers must accurately grasp the characteristics of the new media era, update their publishing philosophy, strive to learn and apply new media technologies and modern publishing methods, conduct thorough market research, and use big data to understand reader needs and preferences in the new media era (including print-only readers, e-book-only readers, and those who read both formats) to determine publishing themes and formats.

The 14th National Reading Survey released by the China Press and Publication Research Institute on April 18, 2017, showed that among mobile reading groups, the thirteen most popular e-book content categories (ranked by percentage from high to low) were: urban romance (23.5%), literary classics (17.2%), history and military (15.4%), lifestyle and social sciences (15.1%), martial arts and fantasy (14.8%), suspense and mystery (13.0%), fantasy and magic (12.4%), film and entertainment (11.6%), business and inspirational (10.7%), supernatural and science fiction (7.6%), youth campus (7.6%), officialdom and business warfare (7.0%), and gaming and competition (5.8%). This provides valuable reference for selecting e-book publishing themes. Additionally, important historical texts, books about to go out of print, works by renowned artists, and scholarly works with small audiences but high academic value should be considered for e-book publication. Conversely, textbooks, reference books, academic works requiring repeated study, and books worth collecting are more suitable for print publication. Publishers should also actively explore synchronized print and e-book publishing to leverage their complementary effects and generate greater profits. At the end of 2018, when Amazon China released its 2017 reading trends report, it noted that the ratio of synchronized print and e-book releases for key titles had increased by nearly 60% compared with the previous year, and sales of synchronized print-electron titles were more than three times those of non-synchronized titles. This demonstrates the substantial potential of synchronized publishing.

**3.3 Drawing on E-book Advantages to Create More Marketable Print Books** Since e-books can incorporate both static information (text and images) and dynamic information (sound and video), they effectively meet readers' needs for multi-sensory reading experiences. Print book publishers can learn from this advantage by establishing digital platforms and adding QR codes at appropriate locations in print books to link to articles, PowerPoint presentations, audio, or video related to the content. This approach both satisfies reader needs and more effectively promotes the books. Print book publishers can also learn from e-book distribution models and e-book publishers' service models to improve print book distribution and supporting services, thereby further enhancing print books' competitiveness.

In the new media era, the impact and influence of e-books on print books is long-term and profound. While many book publishers are still hesitating about whether to publish e-books, audiobooks have quietly entered the publishing field and gained popularity among readers born in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Therefore, traditional print book publishers must keep pace with the times, grasp the requirements of the new media era, and actively explore various publishing formats. Only in this way can they establish a firm foothold in the publishing field and secure their own position.

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