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## Post-Print of “New Digital Publishing” Amidst the Trends of the Times

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### Abstract

As the book market stagnates and digital publishing flourishes, exploring a novel digital publishing model featuring innovative content structures and multi-dimensional presentation forms should represent a more optimized solution for publishing houses.

### Full Text

#### Abstract

With the downturn in the book market and the vigorous development of digital publishing, exploring a new digital publishing model with entirely novel content structures and multi-dimensional presentation forms represents a more optimized solution for publishing houses.

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*By Wang Hongyu*

With the proliferation of smartphones and the advancement of multimedia and internet technologies, the digital publishing industry has maintained robust growth rates. However, most traditional publishing houses still understand digital publishing merely as the digitization of print content, with some even misunderstanding it as a destructive force undermining traditional publishing. This long-standing contradiction can only be fundamentally resolved by thoroughly integrating new technologies with traditional publishing in both content and form.

## 1. Understanding “Traditional Digital Publishing”

The year 2011 marked the beginning of China’s 12th Five-Year Plan, with total digital publishing revenues reaching 137.7 billion yuan that year. By 2015, this figure had surged to 440 billion yuan, representing an average annual growth rate of 44% during the plan period. This explosive growth demonstrates the tremendous potential of digital publishing’s future development. However, traditional digital publishing business is deemed “traditional” precisely because its content derives from print book processing—e-books are products of book digitization, and databases essentially combine e-book resources with intelligent retrieval technology. In other words, conventional digital publishing has not participated in the content editing process itself, but merely produced new-format derivatives through processing technology.

### 1.1 Categories of Traditional Digital Publishing

Currently, publishers’ digital publishing operations primarily include two aspects. First, e-book sales, which involves digitizing published or forthcoming print books into e-books licensed to major platforms for promotion and sales. “Simultaneous print and digital release” has become a normalized operational approach for many publishers and platforms. Second, systematically integrating proprietary content resources to create database products. In recent years, many publishers have completed the integration of digital content resources, either contributing them to database vendors as content providers or developing professional database products themselves for promotion and sale to university and public libraries through channel agents.

### 1.2 Significance of Traditional Digital Publishing

From the user’s perspective, e-book services provide tremendous convenience, satisfying the need for fragmented-time reading while reducing costs. They offer publishers new publishing formats, revenue streams, and marketing strategies, catalyzing a media revolution in traditional publishing. This revolution benefits from rapid developments in information and network technologies, widespread application of book digitization technologies, and the growing popularity of smartphones and e-readers. Database products aim to establish massive digital book repositories for users while providing efficient intelligent retrieval systems that improve information query efficiency. In recent years, both university and public libraries have increasingly prioritized digital library construction, with annual investments rising continuously—many libraries now spend far more on databases than on print books. From the publisher’s perspective, these operations have generated substantial profits from new technologies, products, and marketing models over recent years.

### 1.3 Traditional Digital Publishing and the Publishing Industry

As digital publishing continues expanding like a behemoth devouring traditional publishing's market share, it seems to have sounded the death knell for conventional publishing from its very emergence. Under such pressure, publishers have embarked on transformation paths to varying degrees, shifting institutional structures and business priorities toward digital publishing while increasing annual investments, which have yielded considerable economic returns. Yet several questions persistently trouble many publishing institutions: What consequences will this growing digital publishing business ultimately bring? Where will traditional publishing go under digital publishing's "squeeze"? Will this forced transformation lead to a dead end? In reality, only by breaking free from the "traditional digital publishing" mindset can these issues be truly resolved. Imagining digital publishing as a "flood or beast" will only result in being consumed by it. Only by genuinely integrating new technologies with the soul of publishing—its content—and developing new digital publishing products can the industry escape the predicament created by rapidly evolving technology, board the "high-speed railway" of technological revolution, and truly enjoy the dividends of the internet era.

## 2. New Digital Publishing

The "new" in new digital publishing primarily manifests as holistic innovation in content and form. Digital publishing technology must be integrated from the acquisition planning stage, with products achieving relative independence from being "by-products of books" in content, while leveraging new technologies' advantages to the fullest in form.

### 2.1 Content Innovation in New Digital Publishing

In terms of content, traditional digital publishing products essentially mirror print books with only minor layout differences, often considered mere "by-products" of print works. While these digital products provide user convenience, they essentially repurpose existing book content. New digital publishing products should instead feature independent content characterized by diversification and expansion, positioned from a value-added service perspective.

Diversification means incorporating entirely new content requiring dedicated editorial processing, liberating digital publishing from its "content recycling" status and enabling independent innovation with broader development space. Such content not only offers users fresh experiences but also helps editors address excessive manuscript length by "transplanting" some content into digital products, thereby saving printing costs. However, this independence through diversification should not completely detach from the book content but maintain close connections. This connection essentially reflects expansion—digital publishing content aims to expand book content, presenting material that couldn't

be fully expressed due to print publishing limitations in length, format, or structure.

Moreover, digital publishing products should ultimately be positioned as value-added services, primarily manifested in two aspects: data services and social services. Data services involve collecting statistics such as average page dwell time and click-through rates to satisfy the needs of publishers, authors, and other stakeholders, providing decision-making foundations for subsequent steps. This technology has been widely applied in digital publishing, but new digital publishing—with its more diversified and expansive content—offers richer data sources and broader prospects for data services. Publishers could even pre-set content related to future acquisition directions or peripheral disciplinary developments in relevant works, using user feedback to inform subsequent publishing plans.

Social services have long occupied a marginal position in publishing activities. From early reading clubs to current online activities and comment sections, while somewhat effective, our attention to and understanding of social services remain insufficient. As society diversifies and information dissemination accelerates in both volume and speed, users' purchasing power grows continuously, gradually pushing marketing and information dissemination toward community-based development. Publishing audiences will likely follow this trend, forming social circles where like-minded individuals in the same research field gather to communicate and interact. Skilled editors with professional expertise and keen insight can discover new topics and authors from these communities, providing a media foundation for acquisition and commissioning work. When publishers conduct promotional activities for new books, directly targeting community users enables more focused dissemination with more pronounced effects. The construction of such interactive platforms, member management, and community operations will become essential competencies for future publishers.

## 2.2 Form Innovation in New Digital Publishing

How new digital publishing content presents itself to users also warrants investigation. New digital publishing forms must integrate multimedia and internet technologies to demonstrate practical value—neither can be omitted. Internet technology primarily addresses the medium issue for new digital publishing products. As previously mentioned, the content is associated with book content (similar to e-books produced from book content) but represents its divergence and expansion. Whether creating web pages for related content, generating QR codes printed in corresponding book locations, or embedding them directly as hyperlinks in e-books, all rely on internet technology to provide users with more convenient reading methods.

However, merely solving medium application cannot satisfy current user needs—multimedia technology must be introduced to comprehensively enhance digital publishing products' value and quality. Multimedia methods include, but are

not limited to, high-resolution color images, audio, and video, aiming to provide more intuitive understanding. As knowledge becomes increasingly complex, many scenarios and content cannot be accurately or completely expressed through text alone. For instance, the grandeur of the 70th anniversary parade of the Victory of the Anti-Japanese War cannot be matched by tens of thousands of words compared to the impact of a video; Van Gogh's brushwork and color composition in *The Starry Night* might be better illustrated by a high-definition image than any description; and the essence of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* cannot be fully conveyed without actual listening regardless of verbal explanation.

These materials are not disposable. Publishers can continuously accumulate high-quality resources during production, forming substantial material repositories to suit different work types. Such accumulated editorial assets will provide significant resource advantages for publishing activities. Possessing a systematically organized, categorized, and massive resource repository will become a core competitive advantage for future publishers.

### 3. Prerequisites for Engaging in New Digital Publishing

For publishing houses, launching new digital publishing operations requires two essential conditions: a positive and open professional mindset and a high-quality editorial team.

#### 3.1 Positive and Open Professional Mindset

Only those who thoroughly understand, accept, and integrate into the new era will be embraced and favored by it. Terms like “information explosion era,” “new media technology,” “Internet Plus,” “fragmented reading,” and “converged media” have emerged endlessly in recent years. Many have predicted that publishing would enter a “little ice age” or even face extinction as new technologies flourish. However, passively seeking ways to cope with new developments or stubbornly resisting emerging industry impacts cannot lead to genuine transformation. For publishing professionals, only by actively applying new technologies to leverage their advantageous resources can they find their foothold and development path in the surging tide of the future. Achieving this requires publishers to maintain a positive, open professional mindset in facing challenges—adopting proactive, upward-looking “calisthenics” that adapt to new environments rather than reactive, rigid “tai chi” that clings to old ways.

Many complain that publishing houses feel outdated and stagnant upon entering. This does not refer to the aging of publishing professionals but rather to the need to embrace Liang Qichao's spirit from *Young China*—only with youthful vitality can one avoid being eliminated in this new era.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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