

Can Legal New Media Disrupt Industry Rules: The Rise and Development of Legal New Media and Post-prints

Authors: Sun Huanwen, Kaibaida

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Abstract

In late 2016, a significant conference was held at Beijing's 798 Art District, where "Wusong"—a legal service platform developed by the prestigious Tian Tong Law Firm—announced the completion of its Series B financing round of 120 million RMB. This followed its Series A funding of 27 million RMB in April 2015, representing a remarkable milestone for the legal services industry gaining capital market recognition. The platform aims to connect 300,000 lawyers and facilitate communication among them...

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Preamble

Exclusive Interview: Media Technology Professionals

ChinaXiv Cooperative Journal

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By Sun Huanwen and Kai Baida

Late 2016: "Wusong" Platform

In late 2016, a significant conference was held at Beijing's 798 Art District, where "Wusong"—a legal service platform developed by the prestigious Tian Tong Law Firm—announced the completion of its Series B financing round of 120 million RMB. This followed its Series A funding of 27 million RMB in April 2015, representing a remarkable milestone for the legal services industry gaining capital market recognition. The platform aims to connect 300,000 lawyers and

facilitate communication among them through automated regional and practice-area-based networking upon registration. Having evolved from a WeChat public account incubated at Tian Tong Law Firm, Wusong now operates as an independent application serving lawyers' professional development, helping clients find well-matched attorneys, and providing enterprises with daily legal services powered by AI technology jointly developed with Alibaba. At the conference, Alibaba's Technical Committee Chairman Wang Jian remarked, "Things that previously required human expertise, machines can now do better—you must acknowledge this reality." Wusong's founder Jiang Yong added, "The first half of the internet era was about opportunities for interconnection; that phase has passed. The second half belongs to artificial intelligence."

2. Maximizing Resource Utilization Through Big Data Integration

The internet era has dismantled information asymmetry and transformed human thinking patterns. Through deconstruction, analysis, and reconstruction, seemingly massive datasets can be mined for their inherent value to achieve resource conservation and efficiency improvements. This not only enables precise personalized services but also enhances corporate competitiveness and drives economic growth. In July 2016, the Supreme People's Court approved the establishment of the nation's first "People's Court Judicial Big Data Research Base" at Southeast University, representing both an implementation of the judicial system's big data strategy and a means to 透视审判实践 (gain insights into judicial practice), resolve rule-of-law challenges, prosper legal research, and modernize the judicial system and capabilities through the full utilization of massive data resources. As of August 16, 2016, China Judgments Online had published over 20 million judicial documents, making it the world's largest platform for publicly accessible judgments and providing a foundational resource for the legal services industry.

1. Internet and New Technologies Triggering Industry-Wide Transformation

With a smartphone, users can now shop online, scan QR codes for payment, hail rides, order food, read books and news, and access social media—simple and convenient. The internet has profoundly transformed lifestyles, communication patterns, and reading habits, impacting traditional retail and basic service sectors while penetrating broader application domains. Traditional industries are undergoing unprecedented disruption at a 裂变速度 (fission-like pace), and the legal services sector is no exception. From the initial information explosion to today's exploration of integrated online services, AI development, and expansion into foundational legal services, legal professionals have been gradually discovering the proper approach to the internet era.

In recent years, numerous legal WeChat public accounts have emerged vigor-

ously, offering increasingly substantial content, finer categorization, and more refined services. Platforms such as “Legal Database,” “HR Legal Database,” “Gaoshan LEGAL,” “Labor Law Database,” “Legal Home,” and “Tian Tong Litigation Circle” provide legal professionals with access to the latest legal information, analysis of hot cases, and shared experiences. Some accounts even offer certified lawyer registration, online consultation, teaching, and commissioning services. Leading domestic law firms have begun deploying internet strategies to maintain competitive advantages: King & Wood Mallesons launched the legal big data platform “Lima” in late 2015, which systematically mines and analyzes authoritative judicial data and industry public information, automatically classifying judgment documents, establishing indexes, and enabling cross-database searches. In July 2016, Jun He Law Offices introduced the APP product “Lüxie.” Meanwhile, researchers at Peking University’s Legal Information Network annually analyze guiding cases from the “PKU Law—Judicial Case Database” to provide valuable references for judicial application from various perspectives. The legal service process has been refined, and emerging legal technologies can now handle certain proceduralized services. As one observer noted, “Legal service productization means some legal services can be performed by non-lawyers or even AI. In the future, legal professionals may carry supercomputers with brain-like chips to receive AI assistance anytime, anywhere.”

5. Legal New Media Can Transform but Will Not Disrupt the Legal Profession

Just as robots cannot fully replicate human creativity, flexibility, emotional care, and value judgment, and therefore cannot completely replace journalists, AI will profoundly impact the legal profession in the near future and rapidly elevate the standard of basic legal services, yet it cannot fully replace lawyers and judges.

First, robot case analysis relies on legal statutes, case precedents, and other big data information processed through specific algorithms. However, legal practice is not simply about matching cases to statutes—there is no clear, stable, and predictable set of rules for robots to apply in practice. Consequently, AI cannot achieve complete accuracy in case assessment nor possess the subjective initiative of judges and lawyers.

Second, law is a discipline requiring practical experience, logical thinking, and emotional cognition. No two cases are exactly identical. Lawyers’ case analysis derives from mastery of legal rules and experience from previous cases, combined with subjective judgment. As evidence collection progresses or clients’ attitudes change, case circumstances may even reverse, requiring lawyers to adapt spontaneously. Similarly, judges’ case adjudication synthesizes understanding of legal provisions, reliance on experience, and exercise of discretionary power. For instance, while marriage law and its judicial interpretations consist of only several hundred articles, the fundamental concept of “emotional breakdown” in divorce cases encompasses complexities that current AI cannot comprehend.

Third, legal practice involves tremendous subjectivity and uncertainty. Contract negotiation in project cooperation, for example, is a continuous process of communication, consultation, and 博弈 (bargaining), requiring timely plan adjustments and compromises. This makes it highly subjective and variable—difficult to capture through objective software and standardized procedures. AI can provide appropriate contract templates but cannot reflect the final negotiated outcome.

In the foreseeable future, internet and new technology development will certainly shake the legal profession, but rather than replacing any legal occupations, it will significantly strengthen them, improve service efficiency and quality, and make law more accessible, understandable, and usable.

4. Optimistic Outlook on Legal Services in the AI Era

Rapid AI development presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges across industries. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, an AI robot developed by Toutiao Lab generated over 200 briefs and news items in six days by accessing the Olympic database in real-time. In May of this year, an intelligent robot developed by the China Earthquake Networks Center released a detailed, illustrated earthquake news report in just six seconds. While robot writers entered journalism, the legal field also began exploring AI applications.

In May 2015, the UK law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner (BLP) issued its first instruction to a contract robot for reviewing online documents—the robot submitted its initial analysis within two seconds, a task that would have taken a professional lawyer team several months. ROSS, software developed at the University of Toronto, applies IBM Watson's machine learning technology to the legal domain, capable of identifying human questions, searching vast legal and case databases for all possible answers, evaluating them, and ultimately providing solutions. ROSS's intelligence also lies in its ability to learn from user feedback, adjusting and optimizing its algorithms accordingly—much like lawyers who become more experienced with each consultation. This clearly transcends information retrieval models, significantly reducing costs for basic tasks like searching, retrieval, and research, thereby decreasing law firms' demand for support lawyers.

As Richard Susskind, author of *Tomorrow's Lawyers*, observes, the integration of AI will not only fail to replace legal professionals but will substantially enhance the profession, elevating service efficiency and standards while making law more approachable, comprehensible, and practical.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.