Book Publishing Steps into Blockchain: The Promotion of Cultural Industry Digitization by Digital Collectibles

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Abstract

Digital collectibles are one of the crucial application areas in cultural digitization. The healthy development of digital collectibles is conducive to promoting the digital integration of the publishing industry and, at the same time, driving the national cultural digitization transformation. However, as a nascent phenomenon, digital book tickets, while enjoying high popularity, also face numerous security risks that urgently need solutions. This article analyzes the development model of digital book tickets using the VRIO model and, based on the analysis results, provides recommendations for the publishing industry to leverage digital book tickets for digital transformation. It aims to offer new dimensions for expanding the content value of publications and preparing for the "golden period" of digital book ticket development.

Keywords

Digital Bookplates, VRIO Framework, Cultural Digitization, Publishing

1. Introduction

A bookplate is an artistic work affixed to the book cover or front page, primarily serving the purpose of indicating ownership of the book. In 1470, German Johannes Gutenberg designed the first known bookplate, featuring a hedgehog carrying wildflowers and stepping on fallen leaves. [1] In the late 19th to early 20th century, bookplates entered China with missionaries and foreign scholars visiting the country. With the widespread dissemination of printing technology and the increased circulation of books, the use and collection of bookplates gradually became popular across various social classes. The number of creators and enthusiasts continued to grow, and a passion for collecting emerged. Originally emphasizing functionality, bookplates shifted towards the artistic realm, with personalized and diverse artistic characteristics earning them the titles of "print pearls" and "paper gems".

In the information age, the application of digital technology has significantly propelled the development of culture, making culture one of the most crucial domains for the application of digital technology. [2] The rise of blockchain technology has provided a unique authentication identifier for digital works, strengthening the protection of intellectual property rights and copyrights for digital assets and publications. Digital collections, such as "Zhandui" by Xinhua Wenxuan Sichuan Digital Publishing Media, "Mashitu Southwest United University Oracle Bone Inscription Notes" by Sichuan People's Publishing House, "Wang Jiangnan" by Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, and works like "Liu Yong Takes You to See Song Paintings" and "From

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the Beginning of the Qin Dynasty to the End of the Qing Dynasty: Great Qin Wind and Clouds," successively emerged and gained popularity.

Bookplates possess extremely high collectible value and have become one of the main types of digital collections. Digital bookplates are cultural products based on digital technology, typically composed of a physical design and digital assets. They are presented in virtual form and utilize blockchain for management, transactions, and protection, featuring technical characteristics of non-fungibility, tamper resistance, and indivisibility. The physical design often showcases meticulously crafted patterns or the insignia of cultural institutions, while the digital assets record all information related to the corresponding material, embodying high artistic and collectible value. In the process of issuing and circulating digital bookplates, the transaction involves not only the "work" itself but also the digital assets, serving as a tangible manifestation of cultural digitization. Therefore, the development of digital bookplates is an active exploration for the publishing industry to enter the realm of digital assets and venture into blockchain digital copyrights. This article analyzes the development model of digital bookplates using the VRIO model. Based on the analysis results, it provides recommendations for the publishing industry in the process of leveraging digital bookplates for digital transformation, offering new avenues for expanding the value of published content.

2. Current Development Status of Digital Bookplates

The issuance of digital bookplates is usually linked to physical books, driving sales and promotion through methods such as free giveaways. On May 27, 2022, Chengdu Times Publishing Group and Xinhua Wenxuan jointly launched the digital bookplate "Listening to the Whisper of Rare Plants," selling and auctioning the bookplates as products, accompanied by the same-named physical book given as a complimentary gift. On May 30, Zhejiang University Press released the "Zhejiang University 125th Anniversary Celebration" series of digital bookplates and digital bookplate tickets on the Alibaba auction platform [2]. On February 25, 2023, Sichuan Digital Publishing Media and Beijing Changjiang New Century collaborated to launch six "Year Ring Heritage • Digital Bookplates," as shown in Figure 1. Collecting all the bookplate designs unlocks a showcase of the series covers[3]. By innovating sales formats, these initiatives aim to satisfy users' emotional values, adding rich additional value to digital bookplates.



Figure 1. Year Ring Heritage • Digital Bookplates

Some digital bookplates are condensed from significant and commemorative moments that hold both practical and memorial meanings. They are not merely digital accessories to books but also embodiments of historical and cultural values. For example, the National Library introduced the 113th Anniversary Celebration digital bookplate, 'Century of the National Library - National Library's 113th Anniversary Celebration Digital Bookplate.' Through the form of digital bookplates, it extracts four representations of the National Library's architectural exteriors to showcase its century-long transformation [4], as shown in Figure 2. Additionally, there are digital bookplates launched from the perspective of the publishing house's developmental journey. An example is the 'Sanlian Life Weekly Bookplate Series' released by Sanlian Life Weekly, composed of covers from the most era-defining years since its founding ninety years ago. This series commemorates scholars who have been active in the academic and cultural fields throughout the ages.

The development of the publishing industry is historical, accumulating a vast user base in the process. Digital bookplates present these glorious histories, serving as a concise and inheritable representation of the spirit of publishing.



Figure 2. The digital collection 'Century of the National Library - National Library's 113th Anniversary

Celebration Digital Bookplate

3. Current Development Status of Digital Bookplates

3.1. VRIO Framework

The VRIO framework, proposed by American scholar Jay B. Barney, starts from the perspective of competitiveness within the industry. It assumes specificity and immobility as prerequisites and, based on the elements of Value, Rareness, Imitability, and Organization, assesses the relationship between a company's advantages and disadvantages in industry competition. It serves as an analytical framework for evaluating the competitive resources and capabilities within a company. The VRIO model assumes that a company's strategic resources are heterogeneous, meaning the resources and capabilities possessed by a company are different from those of others. Additionally, these resources are not fully transferable between companies, indicating a long-term existence of heterogeneity [5]. Firstly, within each publishing unit, copyright resources, organizational scale, and digital foundations vary, exhibiting heterogeneity. Secondly, based on entrenched factors such as the specialization in the field of book publishing and management structures, these differences are not easily transformed in the short term.

Among the VRIO framework elements, "Value" is the primary indicator, representing resources and capabilities within the industry that can help a company achieve its goals and maintain sustained competitive advantage. "Rareness" refers to the fact that in business competition, valuable resources owned by a small number

of companies can generate a competitive advantage. "Imitability" indicates the ease with which other companies can replicate or imitate resources, emphasizing the maintenance of the irreplaceability and exclusivity of resources or capabilities. Even if resources or capabilities are rare, if competitors can easily imitate them, long-term competitive advantage cannot be maintained. The "Organization" element reflects the ability to reasonably develop and utilize industry resources. These elements form the basis of the VRIO framework, as shown in Table 1. If resources meet certain criteria within the VRIO model [6], the organization may obtain sustained competitive advantage, reap economic benefits, and thereby promote industry development."

Whether a resource or capability?					
Value	Rare	Imitable	Organized	Competitive Relations	Economic Benefits
No	-	-	No •	Competitive disadvan- tage	Below-average returns
Yes	No	-		Competitive parity	Average returns
Yes	Yes	No		Temporary competitive advantage	Above-average returns
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable competitive advantage	Above-average returns

Table 1. VRIO Frame

At present, digital bookplates are in the preliminary exploration stage of the traditional publishing industry's digital transformation. The VRIO model can provide an effective analytical framework by comprehensively evaluating factors related to internal competitiveness within the publishing industry, indirectly reflecting industry competitiveness. This article analyzes, from the aspects of value, rarity, imitability, and organizational support, to assess the competitiveness of the publishing industry in digital bookplates and the sustainability of this competitiveness. It aims to discover and leverage industry-specific resources and capabilities to create lasting competitive advantages.

3.2. Analysis of the VRIO Model for Digital Bookplates

3.2.1. Value

The value factor is the most fundamental and core element in the VRIO model. The traditional SWOT model suggests that a company can improve performance only when seizing opportunities or mitigating threats. As an extension of the SWOT model, the VRIO model indicates that only the value factor can directly serve as a source of sustained competitive advantage in the industry, without relying on crisis management to address threats.

(1) Digital bookplates have rich cultural value. The circulation of bookplates reflects different artistic styles and cultural backgrounds from different periods, allowing more people to understand and appreciate various ethnic cultures, demonstrating the inheritance and evolution of historical culture. Culture is a long-term mission to counteract the natural decay and human forgetfulness that cannot be changed, turning the transient into the eternal [7], and it is one of the technical means to transmit and store certain information. Therefore, bookplates carrying culture are not subject to biological restrictions and can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission. Blockchain technology provides technical support for the permanent certification of digital bookplates, allowing them to be stored in the cloud as carriers of cultural memory. They not only preserve

and inherit historical and cultural heritage but also convey the private emotions of the holders. In addition, digital bookplates are a digitized presentation under technological activation, and blockchain technology further expands the depth and breadth of the circulation and dissemination of bookplates. Online sharing allows digital bookplates to break free from spatial limitations, and the pre-publicity by publishing houses further expands the circulation and dissemination of digital bookplates, to some extent breaking the relatively fixed audience circle of bookplates and widening the scope of social connections, also attracting more readers for publishing houses.

(2) Digital bookplates have rich commercial value. In the current era where everything can be digitized, digital bookplates combine digital assets with physical books. They can meet the demands of consumers and the market and are linked with physical books to stimulate the development of physical books and physical bookplate exhibitions in an integrated online and offline manner. Therefore, digital bookplates can serve as a differentiated value-added service for publishing enterprises, enhancing brand value and competitiveness, effectively increasing the utilization rate of resources within the publishing industry, empowering tangible value through digital bookplates, and promoting industry development. From an economic perspective, digital bookplates are rooted in a virtual environment, using digital capabilities to empower physical entities and drive the development of the physical book sales market. Scholars believe that the existence of the internet enables virtual space to replace physical space, providing conditions for memory to transcend domains and making the on-site experience no longer the only authority [8]. The digital characteristics provide content development space for the publishing industry, and the introduction of digital bookplates can further enrich the added value of publications, attracting audiences, enhancing reader loyalty, and driving growth in book sales. While achieving the refinement of publishing products, business value is also innovatively realized.

Additionally, digital bookplates can promote communication between different countries, regions, and cultures, expanding the international influence of publishing houses. Through digital means, publishing houses can disseminate the content of digital bookplates globally, enhancing the intensity of cultural exchange and dissemination, thereby bringing more business opportunities and economic benefits to publishing houses.

3.3.2. Rareness

Digital collections, whether in terms of content or distribution quantity, exhibit rarity [9]. Especially in the early stages of digital bookplate development, units with access to these resources will be able to gain a competitive advantage.

Each publishing house possesses abundant copyright resources, and the introduction of digital bookplates requires publishers to explore their cultural resources. Different publishing houses cannot casually use copyrights owned by other publishing houses, fundamentally demonstrating the rarity of digital bookplate content. China's emphasis on copyright protection and severe penalties for infringement provide strong safeguards for this. Additionally, bookplates are typically used to indicate that a book is part of someone's collection or an institution library's holdings, making them unique, limited, and precious. Digital bookplates also have uniqueness and irreplaceability, produced through specific design and issuance procedures, with specific numbering and limited availability. This scarcity makes digital bookplates valuable collectibles, with extremely high collectible value for bookplate enthusiasts.

From a technical perspective, the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) further reinforces the rarity of digital bookplates. Blockchain provides natural data security for digital bookplates; each one is a mapping of different digital resources, corresponding to a unique digital ID. This effectively protects the copyright and ownership information of digital bookplates, preventing the adverse effects of rampant piracy. At the same time, blockchain technology enables decentralized transactions and ownership transfers, making the buying, selling, and transfer of digital bookplates more secure and transparent, ensuring the traceability and irreversibility of transactions. The initiative on preventing financial risks related to NFTs issued by relevant industry associations in China explicitly requires avoiding weakening the non-fungible characteristics of NFTs by splitting ownership; each non-fungible token is unique and indivisible [10]. The technical features of non-fungibility, tamper resistance, and indivisibility collectively provide long-term security and credibility for the rarity of digital bookplates, ensuring their unique collectible value and growth potential."

3.2.3. Imitability

"Imitability is mainly judged based on three dimensions: the unique historical conditions of the enterprise, the ambiguity of the causal relationship between resources and advantages, and the complexity of resources in society. Resources that possess value and rarity can be a source of competitive advantage, but only when other companies cannot acquire these resources [5], can the competitive advantage be maintained in the long term.

- (1) Unique Historical Conditions. Most environmental models for the competitive advantage of enterprises are based on the assumption that "enterprise performance can be independent of specific historical and other attributes of the enterprise" [11], excluding the development process of the enterprise from the analysis factors of enterprise performance. Barney believes that "not only are enterprises essentially historical and social entities, but their ability to acquire and utilize certain resources depends on their position in time and space" [5]. A publishing house with a long history and profound cultural heritage may have advantages in terms of talents and customer resources, while a publishing house located in developed regions may have easier access to advanced technology and market information, making it more likely to occupy a dominant position in industry innovation. As an enterprise entity, a publishing house is not only constituted by its inherent resources and capabilities but also influenced by historical and social environments. Without these special historical paths and objective conditions, it cannot be imitated.
- (2) Causal Ambiguity. "When the connection between a company's resources and its sustained competitive advantage is well understood, companies trying to replicate the strategy of a successful company by imitating its resources will find it difficult to determine which resources they should imitate" [5]. Conversely, if the causal relationship for a company's success is easy to discern, it is likely to be imitated. Taking the publishing of digital bookplates as an example, the success of a bookplate may involve factors such as copyright resources, digital technology, market channels, marketing methods, and reader relationships. Due to the ambiguity of causal relationships, other companies find it difficult to determine which factors are key resources for creating sustained competitive advantages, making the success of the enterprise difficult to replicate."
- (3) Social Complexity. When competitive advantage is built on complex social phenomena beyond the control and influence of the enterprise, imitation by other companies will be greatly restricted [5]. It is worth not-

ing that the social aspect in the VRIO framework mainly manifests in social relationships such as interpersonal relationships within the enterprise, corporate culture, and external reputation, rather than technical barriers. Whether it is hardware equipment or software requirements, they can be imitated or flow in the operation of social relationships. Therefore, Barney believes that complex technological barriers are not included in imitable sources [5]. When planning digital bookplate projects, publishing houses often need to rely on external resources. High-quality social resources can ensure that publishing houses more comprehensively and efficiently utilize hardware equipment and technical talents. Therefore, if these complex social resources are not affected, the publishing house can maintain its competitive advantage in developing digital bookplates.

Currently, domestic publishing houses and libraries have two ways to issue digital bookplates: one is to use their resources to build platforms, such as the National Library's Baobao Youth Universe; the other is to collaborate with Internet technology companies, with the technology company serving as the issuer to produce digital bookplates. Among them, platform qualifications are crucial. The 'Opinions on Promoting the Implementation of the National Cultural Digitalization Strategy' also emphasizes the importance of building cultural data service platforms, highlighting legal and compliant data transactions, and promoting professional services for copyright, evaluation, matching, transactions, and distribution of cultural resources and digital content [12].

3.2.4. Organization

Almost all strategic implementations require a key corporate resource, namely management talent [13]. Traditional publishing houses, with clear identification and branding, a professional editorial team, systematic publishing and production processes, distribution channels, sales networks, brand recognition, and reputation, provide strong support within the organization for the development and promotion of digital bookplates.

Relevant departments in China have taken measures for the issuance and circulation of digital collections, formulating regulations such as the 'Digital Cultural and Creative Normative Governance Ecological Matrix Convention,' 'Digital Collection Industry Self-discipline Development Initiative,' 'Digital Collection Application Reference,' and 'Trusted Digital Collection Plan Self-discipline Code.' These regulations emphasize the artistic and original attributes of digital collections, laying the foundation for the healthy development and secure transactions of digital bookplates. As regulatory measures and admission standards are gradually improving, various stakeholders, including publishing houses and distribution platforms, are continuously strengthening industry self-discipline.

In summary, in the value dimension, digital bookplates possess cultural value for preserving history and rich commercial value. Content copyright protection and blockchain technology ensure the rarity of digital bookplates. In the imitability dimension, the historical conditions of the growth of publishing houses, the fuzziness of causal relationships, and the complexity of social resources determine the differences in the ways different publishing houses develop digital bookplates. In the organizational dimension, both internal conditions within the publishing industry and the social environment can support the exploration of digital bookplates. As a cultural digital product, digital bookplates can effectively drive the digital transformation of the publishing industry.

4. Digital Bookplate Development Strategy

4.1. Exploiting Digital Assets Content to Enhance Product Value

Some scholars argue that 'The existence of the internet has replaced physical space with virtual space, providing the possibility for memory to be detached, making the scene no longer mean unique and authoritative.' [14] Currently, digital bookplates are still in their infancy, mostly sold through auctions or as gifts, and there is significant room for expanding the direction of content exploration.

Explore scarce copyrights, develop high-quality content, and enhance the cultural value of digital bookplates. Actively seek cooperation with institutions such as museums that possess a wealth of excellent cultural resources. Coordinate with historical books to digitally excavate a large number of deposited assets in the collection, digitally develop the intrinsic value of the collection, and create digital IP products with greater cultural value. These resources contain rich historical, cultural, and artistic value, making them unique and irreplaceable. Digital transformation promotes the sharing of cultural heritage resources, creating opportunities for readers not only to perceive cultural products up close but also to enhance the brand value of publishing houses, driving the sales of digital bookplates and cultural products. Seizing the opportunity for globalization, introducing Chinese stories overseas in the form of digital bookplates, promoting the sharing and dissemination of cultural resources, and allowing more readers to deeply understand and appreciate the value and significance of precious cultural heritage, thus advancing the process of cultural digitization.

Strengthen promotion to enrich the commercial value of digital bookplates. The advantage of digital bookplates lies in their form as an ultra-lightweight digital derivative product tied to physical books. Through the integrated approach of online and offline channels, it stimulates and drives the development of physical books and physical bookplate exhibitions. Mass online promotion serves as the user base for driving physical consumption. Therefore, expanding the audience for digital bookplates through promotion is crucial for enhancing their commercial value. The interactivity of new media is a prominent feature of digitization, and word-of-mouth communication among consumers should not be overlooked. The sharing and interaction on social media can rapidly increase the visibility of digital bookplates, reinforcing identity recognition among enthusiasts in the interaction. Word-of-mouth transmission, both online and offline, acts as a bonding agent, making the connections among interest groups tighter. While promoting the dissemination of digital bookplates, it also enhances group cohesion, increases the willingness to pay for digital bookplates, and leverages the empowerment of digital bookplates for tangible value. This, in turn, improves the utilization of resources within the publishing industry and propels its development."

4.2. Innovate Sales Formats to Create Product Rarity

Creating product rarity can start with innovating the form of the product, shaping a more three-dimensional digital bookplate experience for users through sound, animation, special effects, interactive actions, and other means. Currently, most digital bookplates inherit the traditional format of bookplates, primarily focusing on card designs that align with the content of the books. The differences between various bookplates are mainly reflected in this aspect. Alternatively, innovative approaches can be taken, such as using exhibition scenes as a starting point. The most common display method is the flat card users see in the program. However, Sichuan Digital Media and Beijing Changjiang New Century have innovated by creating the "Year Rings Preservation" main metaverse library scene for the "Year Rings Preservation · Digital Bookplate," enhancing the

product's interest and operability. Additionally, exploring the use of augmented reality or virtual reality devices can create "offline real-world" exhibitions for digital bookplates. This allows users to interact with digital bookplates in a tangibly, enhancing user audiovisual experiences and driving interest and sales in physical exhibitions, promoting emerging cultural consumption. Consistency can be maintained in digital bookplates through design styles, presentation methods, special markings, etc. This not only preserves independence but also provides more opportunities and resources, strengthens the accumulation of private domain traffic, and creates better development conditions.

Furthermore, creating a sense of urgency through limited releases or time-limited sales can stimulate user purchasing desires while controlling the circulation of digital bookplates in the market. Introducing special attributes during the product sales phase, such as categorizing digital bookplates into different special series or themes, can increase their collectible value and product rarity, forming a more attractive system for digital bookplates.

4.3. Enhance Copyright Protection and Regulate Third-Party Platforms

Protecting copyrights is both an expression of respecting knowledge and a necessity for safeguarding innovation. Digital bookplates, due to their potential coordination with other publications or derivative products, have a more complex copyright attribution. Although China has expressly prohibited the use of digital tokens in NFT transactions, from a regulatory perspective, despite digital bookplates' efforts to circumvent their financial attributes, the unclear definition of their value and involvement of various complex stakeholders could potentially be exploited by malicious actors, leading to a series of financial security risks if digital bookplates experience high premiums.

Additionally, the uncertainty regarding the security of issuing platforms may have adverse effects on digital bookplates. While the vast majority of digital collectibles in China only allow gifting and collecting, in unofficial secondary trading platforms, phenomena are prevalent such as promotional hype and unofficial transactions. This has resulted in wealth circulation becoming a more significant concern for buyers, deviating digital bookplates from their original intent of being collectibles. It is essential to regulate and rectify irregular platforms to prevent harm to consumer rights and ensure the health of the industry. Establishing a relatively unified issuing platform facilitates the circulation of digital bookplates, not only enhancing user experience but also bringing together the audience for digital bookplates. Moreover, large-scale, phenomenon-driven platforms tend to value their reputation, emphasizing industry self-discipline, and providing convenience for regulatory supervision and the implementation of legal provisions by relevant authorities.

4.4. Seize Policy Opportunities and Strengthen Organizational Development

Currently, regulations and supervisory measures regarding digital collectibles in China are gradually being refined. Externally, as the primary developers of digital bookplates, publishing enterprises should comprehensively understand policies related to digital collectibles, virtual currency transactions, and more to determine development directions and seize opportunities promptly. Simultaneously, these enterprises should enhance connections with digital platforms, technology suppliers, and other third-party industries, actively exploring more efficient collaboration models to break through technological barriers through cross-industry cooperation. Internally within the publishing industry, emphasis should be placed on talent management and devel-

opment, driving enterprises to adapt to the opportunities and challenges brought about by technological advancements. With a focus on "quality, copyright, and rationality," prioritize high-quality publishing, placing social benefits at the forefront. Pay attention to copyright protection, actively explore new digital publishing models and business models under technological changes, fully leverage technological innovation and digital platforms to enhance the quality and impact of digital bookplates, and jointly promote the nation's cultural digitization transformation.

5. Conclusion

Under the backdrop of the national cultural industry's digitalization strategy, the future of digital transformation will continue to deepen. As a form of digital currency with both technological and cultural attributes, the sale of digital bookplates is not only a transaction of digital currency but also the online circulation and resource sharing of traditional culture, enhancing the dissemination and influence of culture. As an innovative practice in the cultural field of the digital age, digital bookplates provide people with more ways to participate in and enjoy culture, reshaping the relationship between digital assets, physical resources, and user interaction in the publishing industry's move into the virtual environment. The promotion of digital bookplates also underscores the importance of copyright protection and authorization management in the publishing industry, fostering the healthy development of the copyright environment.

By driving cross-industry cooperation in the publishing industry to promote the sharing and interaction of digital resources, it lays the groundwork for future entry into the metaverse, constructing a digital asset ecosystem. This not only enriches publishing products and services but also promotes the integration of the publishing industry with the digital age, bringing new opportunities and challenges to industry development.

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