Enhanced Fiction: A Worthwhile Endeavour?

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Abstract:

Since the iPad was released in 2010, authors and publishers have been presented with the conundrum of how best to take advantage of the enormous popularity of tablet computers and to ensure that their publications are consumed on them.

Aside from releasing standard electronic books through dedicated online stores for consumption on book-reading apps, authors and publishers have also sought to develop products that supplement core text with multimedia content, thereby utilising the multifunctional power of tablets. These products are called enhanced electronic books.

The concept of an enhanced electronic book is not new, with varying degrees of success achieved with titles released on CD-ROM in the 1990s. However, tablet computers offer levels of portability and ergonomics previously unseen in personal computing devices, such that modern enhanced books are considered a brand new proposition. And yet the majority of these books released since 2010, across all genres, have lost money, with their cost of production and distribution not being recouped in sales. This paper explores the reasons for this state of affairs, specifically with respect to enhanced works of fiction.

Chapters 1 and 2 set the scene for this discussion, introduce various terminology used throughout this paper, and describe the backdrop of innovation that has seen publishers having to react to technological developments rather than driving the market themselves. Chapter 3 explores the technological obstacles to enhanced electronic books, illustrating how the many diverse, often proprietary means to create enhanced books pose challenges to the cost of production and discoverability. The focus on fictional content begins in earnest in Chapter 4, where the apparent conceptual contradiction between reading books and consuming multimedia in the same space is addressed. Two examples of enhanced works of fiction are evaluated as case studies in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the paper by proposing a basic model for enhanced fiction that seeks to reconcile the presence of a work of fictional text and supplementary multimedia elements in the same product, with the underlying assumption that they are best consumed in isolation.