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What Readers Want: Motivation, Interaction, and Value as Key Factors
Influencing the Future of Book Publishing

by

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to develop a theoretical understanding of the factors that influence readers' feelings about e-books, using a grounded theory approach. Because e-books are the most publically visible representation of the changes in the publishing industry brought about by the digital revolution, understanding readers' feelings toward them is key to determining what the future holds for publishers and books. I began my research by conducting a critical literature review to acquire background information on the publishing industry, research current industry trends, and determine what will drive the future of the book publishing industry. For this literature review I examined a variety of informational sources including academic and trade journals, publishers' websites and social media outlets, online articles from major news outlets, and blogs about publishing and digital media. I then conducted in-depth interviews with ten readers with varying reading intensities and attitudes toward technology. Through the analysis of these interviews, I identified motivation, interaction, and value as interrelated factors that determine the way readers feel about electronic books. These factors offer insight into what readers look for in books—valuable information for an industry whose fate will largely be determined by consumer demand.

Introduction

“The book publisher is a vehicle to allow the dissemination of ideas or thoughts or stories—anything. That’s all we are—we’re a vehicle.”¹

If book publishers are vehicles, those vehicles have changed from horse-drawn carriages to sports cars over the past 30 years, and they are quickly moving toward becoming spaceships. Digital technologies have swept through the publishing industry, leaving practically no sector untouched. From obvious changes in production and distribution to less evident ones in editorial and marketing departments, the book publishing process is radically different from what it was even a decade ago. This paper will focus on the challenges facing book publishers in a digital age and what the industry can learn from other types of entertainment media, especially as it pertains to getting books into the hands of a new generation of readers. Specifically I will look at readers’ current behavior and the opportunities new technologies provide to make books dynamic, social objects.

To learn more about readers’ behaviors and what they mean for the future of publishing, I interviewed ten readers with varying reading habits and views on technology. Using a grounded theory approach, I analyzed these interviews to determine the key factors that influence readers’ feelings about electronic reading devices. These feelings—brought about by a combination of motivations to read, social interactions involving books, and the value that books themselves hold—are what will ultimately determine the fate of an industry undergoing a radical transformation.

¹ Cass Canfield, Jr. interview (Silverman, 2008, p. 231)

Literature Review

A Brief History of Mass Publishing Since World War II

“There was truly a blast of fresh air sweeping through America, giving books room to emerge with cultural primacy in the country.”²

The publishing industry as we know it began with the paperback revolution in the mid-20th century. In fact, several former publishing professionals cite the two decades following World War II as the “golden age” of publishing. Al Silverman demonstrates the increased importance and availability of education at this time in his 2008 book, *The Time of Their Lives*:

The U.S. government was making it easy for veterans to go to college almost for free under the G.I. Bill. It was an exhilarating time for those of the middle class to position themselves, if they wanted to, among the new educated public (p. 5)

New opportunities for education, however, were not the only force at work in this golden age. Allen Lane’s mass market paperback had been growing in popularity since he first launched Penguin Books in 1935, and this development coincided perfectly with postwar optimism to “democratize” the book (Eliot, 2003). In fact, we see the most impactful changes throughout publishing’s history when ideas about technology meld with new cultural movements in literacy and education to bring books front and center in society.

For example, though books had been an important cultural force for much longer, Gutenberg’s invention of the movable type printing press in the mid 15th century³ transformed the written word into the first modern form of mass communication (Füssel, 2001). According to Füssel (2001), the enormous impact of Gutenberg’s press stemmed not only from the increased productivity the machine offered, but the Humanist movement that had been sweeping across Europe throughout the 14th century.

² (Silverman, 2008, p. 5)

³ Though movable type technology existed in Asia several centuries before, a combination of intellectual and political changes throughout Europe at this time made Gutenberg’s press all the more revolutionary.

The two decades following Silverman's golden age saw a massive change in the composition of the industry. By the 1990s, corporate takeovers and mergers left four⁴ powerful players in the US publishing industry: Random House, Penguin, HarperCollins, and Simon & Schuster. Together these four publishing corporations accounted for a little under half (40.6%) of all US trade sales in 2004. Additionally, these four powerhouses combined with the other eight largest publishers accounted for just under 64 percent of US sales, leaving the other 62,815 small and medium sized publishers with an approximate 36 percent share of the trade market (Thompson, 2010). The 1980s and 1990s also ushered in the era of chain retailers such as Borders and Barnes & Noble, which cannibalized independent bookstores, changing the book-buying experience and shaking up the way publishers marketed their books.

Now a new age of publishing is upon us, and the publishing industry is changing more rapidly than ever before. We live in the information age, and technology is not just supplementing an individualized quest for knowledge—it is the driving force for this cultural trend. E-retailers such as Amazon.com have proven that customers are comfortable purchasing physical books online, and though an all-digital future for books is far from certain, e-books are finally gaining significant traction. Some researchers estimate that consumers spent approximately \$1 billion on e-books in 2010 (Milliot, 2010). Random House, the largest US trade publisher reported seeing e-books accounting for up to half of the first week sales for selected titles in the fall of 2010 (“Random on Track,” 2010). By January 2011, the third-generation Kindle became Amazon's all-time bestselling item, surpassing the online retailer's record previously held by the sensational worldwide bestseller, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Bilton, 2010). The growing market for e-readers is not limited to entertainment or

⁴ Though these four are the largest publishing corporations, Hachette Book Group and Macmillan join them to form today's “Big 6” in publishing (Shatzkin, 2011).

leisure reading, however. State education officials in Florida recently proposed a plan to make all classroom materials digital by 2015, and one high school has already issued Kindles to its students instead of physical textbooks (Sokol & Solochek, 2011). Outside of dedicated e-readers, general mobilization trends are still playing an enormous role in the way print media are evolving. By the end of 2011, consumers will purchase a predicted 330 million smartphones and 42 million tablet computers worldwide (Lohr, 2010), and by 2013 these devices will overtake PCs as the most common way to access the Internet (Gartner, 2010). This proliferation of digital devices has not caused the catastrophic damage to literacy that newspaper headlines and books such as *The Gutenberg Elegies* once predicted:

Language will grow increasingly impoverished through a series of vicious cycles... We can expect that curricula will be further streamlined, and difficult texts in the humanities will be pruned and glossed... Fewer and fewer people will be able to contend with the so-called masterworks of literature or ideas. Joyce, Woolf, Soyinka, not to mention the masters who preceded them, will go unread, and the civilizing energies of their prose will circulate aimlessly between closed covers. (Birkerts, 2006, pg. 129)

In fact, instead of destroying literature as we know it, new technologies are making it easier than ever for readers to obtain books and other print media. E-readers and cloud computing eliminate the idea of an “out-of-print” book because concerns about physical space have all but disappeared. Furthermore, e-books have the opportunity to bring back the social aspect of reading that was lost during the paperback revolution as more affordable books made reading less of a group activity and more of a personal one.

Reading as a Social Phenomenon

“What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though.”⁵

⁵ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

All forms of media are a component of our shared culture. Works of fiction have been credited with the establishment of Britain as an empire in the 18th and 19th centuries by promoting a shared racial identity and a sense of nationalism (Murphy, 2009). Books are inherently social items. Writing in itself is a form of speaking, and reading is how we listen and learn. Outside of the actual reading experience, books become even more social. We form clubs to discuss them. We borrow them from and lend them to our friends. We display them on shelves in our homes and offices. Even the destruction of books holds a particular social significance. No one burns a book alone. Book burnings happen as groups gather together in protest of their social realities, and are not always necessarily negative events. Literary works have even acknowledged the importance of book burnings to society. According to Anesko (2009), “[Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*] continually parodies the relationship between literature and fire by ironically testing the notion that book burning could have a positive effect on a moribund society.”

Today digital technologies present an opportunity to make books even more social. Now more than ever, people are using social networking websites to connect instantaneously and continuously to one another. Facebook’s more than 500 million active users spend over 700 billion minutes on the website every month (Press Room--Statistics, 2011). Twitter’s 175 million users tweet 95 million times a day (About, 2011). Entertainment-specific networks have even begun to emerge with websites such as GetGlue and GoodReads allowing users to share information about what they’ve read, give recommendations, and connect to people with similar interests. These types of networks help publishers in that they counter the loss of the book itself as an advertisement. With the increasing prevalence of e-readers, readers are displaying their book selections less and less. Instead, nearby readers who may have seen someone with the latest Steig Larsson book now only see someone reading a Kindle.

If publishing companies do not capitalize on social and mobile opportunities quickly, they may see outside companies gaining more and more power in the book industry. However, major US publishing companies are showing that they do not plan to sit back and wait for the digital revolution to run its course. They are getting their hands dirty by conversing directly with readers through outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, creating more and more digital-specific positions within their offices, experimenting with e-book features and apps, and attending conferences dedicated entirely to digitization.

Lessons from the Music Industry

“...as an industry we’d kind of been smoking crack.”⁶

The digital revolution has impacted all facets of the entertainment industry. Luckily for them the publishing industry has the shoulders of the music industry to stand on. According to Rethink Books, a publishing-focused technology company, the publishing industry is entering its “Napster moment” (Rueff, 2011). In fact, the reactions of book lovers to e-readers today closely mirrors that of those who were so fond of records as digitization was sweeping across the music industry. Knopper (2009) mentions that even today some miss the “rich, warm analog sound” (p. 31) delivered by LPs. Similarly, some readers aren’t ready to let go of their beloved physical products, “but you can’t hear the rustle of pages with a kindle,” one reader commented, “I need paper in order to enjoy reading. Call me a ludite [sic], but I have no interest in those e-readers” (Newton, 2011). By looking at the mistakes the music industry made during its digital revolution, the publishing industry can save itself time, money, and potentially embarrassing lawsuits whilst undergoing its own.

⁶ Barney Wragg (Knopper, 2009, p. 230)

The transition from analog to digital technologies in the music industry all but tore the entire music world apart. Technology companies, record labels, musicians, retailers, and fans were all caught up in a time of absolute chaos. Major labels' old business models and reluctance to change—or, in some cases, disagreement as to how change should take place—put the fate of the music industry in the hands of other players, most notably Napster's Shawn Fanning and Apple's Steve Jobs (Knopper, 2009). Outside sources were able to tap into what consumers actually wanted out of the music industry and simply provided it to them.

However, though trade books and music both fit into the umbrella category of entertainment media, they are still fundamentally different. For example, one of the reasons illegal file sharing services such as Napster were so popular among music fans was the fact that they had no option of purchasing only the songs they wanted. Hit songs, though sometimes released as singles, were often offered on an album that included less popular tracks. Still, fans of the hit song were forced to pay for the entire album even if they only actually wanted one track. File sharing services—and eventually the explosion of iTunes—capitalized on providing music lovers with what they wanted without forcing them to purchase things they did not want. Books do not generally operate this way⁷. Chapters, unlike songs, cannot usually stand alone. Serialization in literary magazines is an exception to this rule, but such publications attract more editors and agents searching for new talent than the general reading public. This is the case especially in mass trade publishing, where readers are accustomed to books being final, completed products. Even works first published in multiple parts are presented together when they reach mass publication. An example of this are today's "literary classics" which we consume much differently than their original audiences, who largely read them in installments.

⁷ Books are sold as individual objects with the obvious exception of boxed sets. Even then, the contents of such a set are usually offered individually.

Another thing to consider is that a “book” is a diverse medium, containing a wide variety of content, whereas music may be split into several genres but is and was consumed the same way, albeit by different people with varied tastes and in diverse settings. On the whole, the contents of an academic text are used much differently than a popular science fiction novel or a picture book⁸. Thompson (2010) argues that some of this content is much more suited to digital delivery than other types—mostly notably scholarly or academic works and mass market books bought regularly and in high quantities such as mystery or romance novels. Scholarly journals in particular benefit greatly from digital delivery because of the ease of which they can be updated when new information becomes available and the possibility of hyper linking to outside sources to create a non-linear path to knowledge.

The Institute for the Future of the Book’s experiments with social reading and writing may suit these professional fields well. Stein’s (2011) description of his experience with reader feedback on his writing shows the power of community in refining one’s written work.

When i [sic] put the draft up in CommentPress i [sic] thought i [sic] was offering people a chance to experience "social reading." It's obvious to me now that the public comments people left are not only a permanent part of this draft -- a part of the work itself -- but also extremely helpful to me in terms of making version 2.0 stronger. this [sic] is indeed not just not just "social reading." it [sic] is also collaborative thinking and writing.

However, while constant feedback from others may constructively challenge the author of a scientific journal article, high levels of reader input for more commercial or literary publications seems to fly in the face of an author’s vision and creativity. Aside from creative concerns, increased social interaction also places a much increased demand on an author’s time. While collaboration may be an interesting artistic exploration for some types of books, the

⁸ This is not to say that there is no overlap in the ways trade and academic publications are consumed. A reader interested in a particular field may peruse an academic text for leisure and trade publications are often used in classrooms as valuable educational tools, but these uses likely represent a small percentage of the reading activity for such works.

majority of works are better suited for development by the traditional author/editor/agent combination.

Problems Facing a Digital Publishing Industry

“The danger with digital goods is the danger that happened in the music industry. Why are songs 99 cents? Because Apple said so.”⁹

Perhaps one of the most challenging issues facing publishers in an already monetarily stressful industry is the perceived worth of an e-book. One Nook user stated, “I won't pay paperback price for an e-book. And certainly won't [sic] pay over \$10. It's not like there's a printing and shipping manufacturing cost. While there is production cost to get the pdf into epub, it isn't equivalent to traditional manufacturing costs, and I don't like feeling gouged” (Friedenthal, 2011). Where did this magic \$10 benchmark come from? According to Thompson (2010), Amazon set the standard for e-book pricing in the minds of consumers when it released the original Kindle along with the first e-book editions set at a flat price; however, the \$9.99 bestseller was more of a tool to market the more expensive Kindle and Amazon actually took a loss on books at this price. Though publishing companies effectively forced Amazon to raise its e-book prices to only a few dollars below the retail price of a physical copy of the same book, the idea that e-books are “worth” \$10 has stuck with consumers. This suggests that readers place a great deal of value on the physical aspects of a book in addition to the content, while publishers argue that the inherent value of a book is the work that goes into it from the author and every department of the publishing company.

⁹ Manager in a large trade house (As quoted in Thompson, 2010), pg 362

The economics of publishing are radically changing, though perhaps not in the way customers expect. Though the physical aspects of a book do contribute to the monetary worth of the product, digital versions are not drastically cheaper for publishers to produce than physical ones. The prices consumers see when they purchase books also include price increases by retailers to ensure their own profits, insurance for the publisher against possible returns¹⁰ and pulping, and royalties to authors and their agents' commissions. (Thompson, 2010)

The decreased value of an e-book in the public's eye does present an opportunity for smaller publishers and self-published—or “indie”—authors though. Fewer players in the production process mean these authors have lower overhead costs¹¹, especially if they choose to publish exclusively electronic copies. One Kindle user stated, “I've got a Kindle and I love it, I just wish the prices for e-books weren't so high. Until the prices come down, I've been reading the indie authors, who are more reasonably priced, and I am surprised to find there a good number of quality authors out there who have chosen to venture out on their own” (Evans, 2011).

Another concern for publishers that the digital revolution has brought about within the realm of entertainment is those of intellectual property disputes. Of course, as with any other digital product, piracy is a concern, but another major ongoing struggle is that of electronic and foreign rights. As digital books continue to develop and gain momentum, online retailers will become even more important than they are today, and as these retailers become more and more pervasive so do rights issues.

¹⁰ Since World War II, major publishers have sold to retailers on consignment, allowing for full refunds on any products the retailer returns to the publisher (Greco, 1992)

¹¹ Economies of scale do give large publishing corporations an advantage in printing physical books (Thompson, 2010)

E-reading Devices

“Would you rather be handed the phone book or Google?”¹²

Evidence that publishers have learned from the mistakes of the music industry lies in the sheer number of e-reading devices available today. It seems as if every electronics manufacturer, book store, and online distributor is jumping into the e-reading game. There are two major classes of e-readers on the market today: dedicated readers such as the Kindle and Sony Reader and mobile devices such as the iPad and other tablet computers that come equipped with e-reading software or applications.

While not the first e-reading device ever created¹³, the Amazon Kindle was the first dedicated e-reader device to gain widespread popularity and media attention. The Kindle and similar dedicated reading devices use electronic ink technology developed at the MIT media lab in 1997 to create a high-contrast and low-power “electronic paper” screen. This technology allows e-readers to display texts that look identical to ink on paper to the human eye (Roush, 2009). Amazon introduced the original Kindle in November 2007 with the lofty vision of having “every book ever printed, in any language, all available in under 60 seconds” (Penenberg, 2009). The original device sold at a price of \$399 with bestsellers selling at \$9.99 and subscriptions to various newspapers and blogs costing from 99 cents to \$13.99 a month. The first-generation Kindle was followed by the second-generation Kindle and Kindle DX in 2009 (Penenberg, 2009). The Kindle, now in its third iteration, sells at a base price of \$139 with slightly higher average e-book prices brought about by pressure from publishers (Amazon, Inc., 2011). Apple’s iPad, in contrast, is a tablet computer with e-reading capabilities thanks to the iBookstore and other book apps. The iPad uses a backlit display, which is more similar to reading on a computer

¹² Steve, as quoted in (Thompson, 2010) pg. 353

¹³ E-readers in some form have been around for 20 years or longer.

screen than reading ink on paper. Apple introduced its first-generation iPad in April 2010 at a price point of \$499 for its most basic model (Apple, 2010). Each device has its own strengths and weaknesses, but both show signs of endeavoring to make reading a more social experience.

The most important thing for publishers to realize is that they are never finished adapting. The Kindle is not the ultimate answer to the future of reading, nor is the iPad. Just the same, completely counting out the physical book, which is more durable in its physical form than most of us would believe, would be equally unwise. At one point in time, microfilm was the future—the answer for libraries’ vast supplies of “crumbling” newspapers, but, as Darnton (2009) states in *The Case for Books*, “the microfilm...was never needed in the first place, because contrary to another common delusion, the papers were not disintegrating on the shelves. Despite their chemistry—acids working on wood-pulp in paper manufactured after 1870—they have held up very well” (p. 110).

We have since learned that microfilm is not invulnerable, and it is naïve to believe that the digital copies of today will survive for any substantial period of time in such a quickly changing field. Just as floppy discs are almost archaic in today’s world of USB drives and cloud computing, one day our iBooks and Kindle editions will be old technology. Files become corrupt or get lost, and new technologies render the latest and greatest ideas of today irrelevant by tomorrow. The best thing publishers can do is make it a priority to continuously update their backlists to compatibility with new technology and keep a hard copy around for insurance. Darnton makes a case for this physical book “safety net” of sorts by arguing that “paper is still the best medium of preservation, and libraries still need to fill their shelves with words printed on paper. Moreover, digitization [as performed in Google Book Search] can be every bit as faulty as microfilming was four decades ago” (p. 110).

The X-Factor

“A new generation of ‘digital natives’ is growing up with computers and iPods and mobile phones and by the time they start reading they will feel perfectly comfortable reading books on screen...They will not have the same attachment to print-on-paper books as their parents and grandparents did.”¹⁴

Just as the music industry eventually conformed to the distribution models in popular demand, when all is said and done, the future of print depends on the consumer. The CEO of a major US publishing house confidently stated in an interview that physical books will thrive as long as readers are around to buy them. “I don't worry about [a decreasing demand for physical books] as long as the baby boomers are still here,” he said, “They are, without any question, the biggest population of readers” (Lanham, 2008). This logic flies in the face of predictions that all forms of print will be dead within the next ten years. For some consumers, namely technology's early adopters, heavy travelers, and members of generation Z who grew up reading off computer screens, such a prediction may be accurate, but to imagine that baby boomers and book lovers from generation X—and even generation Y, the so-called “*Harry Potter* Generation”—will abandon their libraries so quickly is unrealistic. My research focuses on what current readers do want out of the books they consume and the companies that produce those books. Their wants will ultimately drive the direction of electronic content, whether it's today's major publishers or other companies that learn how to provide it to them.

Methods

Because readers will ultimately drive the future of publishing, I developed interview questions to discern readers' feelings about the changes occurring in the publishing industry. A

¹⁴ Thompson, 2010, pgs 314-15

full list of these questions is available in the interview guide in Appendix 1 at the end of this paper. I conducted these in-depth interviews with ten individuals between the ages of 21 and 59 to learn about their reading behavior, familiarity with digital technologies, and feelings about the future of publishing. I selected each of these readers using a convenience sample. However, to ensure the fullest spectrum of replies, I selected individuals I knew to have varying reading habits and differing experience with new technologies. The table in Appendix 2 presents a summary of these readers.

I transcribed each of the interviews verbatim and coded them according to the specifications of the constant comparative method of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For open coding, I examined each transcript line by line for both context and subtext to determine interviewees' reading behaviors and their attitudes toward each topic discussed. Following this initial process, I used selective coding to sort the codes into broader categories. During axial coding, I examined each of these categories in relation to the others to create a model of reading behaviors. I continued the selection, interview and coding processes until reaching theoretical saturation—the point at which the interviews produced no new information (Glaser & Strauss, 1999)

Results/Discussion

Because e-books and the e-readers that house them are the most publically visible indicators of the radical changes occurring in the publishing industry, my analysis will focus primarily on them. However, because of the social history of books I identified in my literature review, I will also touch on the readers' feelings about social interactions surrounding books and what those interactions mean for the future of publishing.

Reading Frequency and Attitude Toward Technology

Based on readers' answers to questions regarding their reading frequency, I grouped all participants into four groups: light readers, moderate readers, heavy readers, and extreme readers. I categorized participants that read one book or less per month as light readers, those who read two to five books per month as moderate readers, and those who read more than five books a month as heavy readers. Additionally, I categorized two participants who read 30 or more books a month as exhibiting extreme reading behaviors.

I also grouped participants by their attitude surrounding new technologies. I considered early adopters of technological gadgets of all sorts "technologically savvy," those who were interested in new technologies but didn't use them themselves "technologically curious," and those who showed no interest "technologically reluctant." Through the remainder of my coding process, I found that though these two factors were important, they did not necessarily have the strongest impact on readers' feelings toward e-books. In fact, they sometimes showed no correlation at all. For example, Laura, age 47, is a light reader and owns a PanDigital e-reader. She has gone from reading physical books to reading books exclusively on this device in a matter of months; however, she does not show interest in technological devices outside of e-readers. She said, "as far as having to have the latest phone and texting and all that, I'm not up to any of that. I don't like any of that...I prefer having conversations over texting."

Josh, age 21 rarely reads outside of his school assignments and does not think electronic devices of any kind would change his current reading behavior. When asked about his attitude toward technological devices he said that though he is interested in things like tablet computers,

“for reading, I prefer to have an actual piece of paper in my hand...It wouldn’t make me read more.”

Another reason readers’ attitudes toward technology play a tangential role is because, even in a digital age, they still view books as different from other types of media. Unlike music, which required an external device such as CD or record player, books never required a separate device for readers to experience them. Because of this fundamental difference, Briana, a 25-year-old technologically reluctant moderate reader, explained that she doesn’t see e-books catching on quite as quickly as the digital versions of other entertainment media:

Having a book in raw form—you can take it anywhere. Versus music and movies where you need to have some kind of electronics to play it. But a book you can just take it whenever, wherever. It doesn’t need a battery.

Other readers echoed Briana’s sentiment about the how portable books were even before e-readers hit the market. However, the readers I interviewed do not view them as superfluous gadgets, regardless of their reading frequency. Even among those who said they would never consider using an e-reader, readers’ reluctance toward the devices does not extend past where e-readers fit into their own lives. They see e-readers as perfectly acceptable tools for other people with different tastes and lifestyles. Laura, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant heavy reader, expressed this sentiment exactly:

I don’t like them for me because it’s not what I’m interested in. It’s not what I need. I think it just depends on what that person is looking for...people who are really tech savvy and really enjoy getting that new piece of technology, it might encourage them to read if they have it on a gadget, you know? And it’s also really useful for people who are traveling a lot. You can always pack multiple books.

Though reading frequency and attitude toward technology do not necessarily determine how readers feel about e-books, their ideas about physical books versus e-readers are far from random. Other interacting factors feed into their preferences to create this attitude. The three key

factors I identified as influencing readers' attitudes toward e-books are what motivates them to read, the kinds of social interactions books lead them to, and the aspects they believe add value to the books they read.

Motivation

Most interviewees identified several motivations for reading. Of these, three categories of reading motivation emerged: personal betterment, enjoyment, and aesthetic experience. Those who read for personal betterment mentioned gaining knowledge as their primary motivation for reading. Robin, a 21-year-old technologically curious moderate reader, said that her reading behavior revolves around a search for information. She said, "Now that I'm about to graduate, I'm starting to read more advertising books. Like, more books about strategy...I mainly read online to get news. I mainly read books just for learning." Those who read for enjoyment—such as Laura, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant heavy reader—mentioned that books provide both entertainment and escape: "It's my escape...Some people jog, some people do yoga, and I read. It relaxes me, and it's just a way to get something beautiful out of life."

Laura also identified reading for an aesthetic experience as one of her main motivations. This motivation appears to be most directly linked to interviewees' attitudes about e-books and e-readers. For Laura, the aesthetic experience books provide—down to the actual experience of picking out a book at a brick-and-mortar store—plays a large part in her disinterest in e-books. Laura described how important this aesthetic experience is to her:

When I decide I need a book, it's the act of going out to the store and just randomly looking around and just letting the book pick me [that is important]. It's part... it's almost like a really strict ritual, because you go to the store, you meander around, you see like a cover that's just says "okay, pick me up and see what I'm about."

Value/Economics

When asked what aspects of a book make it valuable, readers most often referenced some derivative of content or physical appearance. Overall, content was the most important aspect of a book to both those with very positive feelings toward e-readers and very negative feelings toward them. Debbie, a 52-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, recalled how the story and characters in that story make reading a book worthwhile:

I started reading it, and I read about half of it, and I handed it back to him...and I said, "I really don't care whether any of these people live or die"...And he said, "Well they're characters." And I said, "In my life they're people, and I don't like any of them and I don't really want to spend any more time with them." And so, you know, that to me is an integral part. So I guess, maybe, it is the story.

Readers also demonstrated the importance of content by showing an overall unawareness of the book publishing process. To them, authors and even book retailers are much bigger brands than publishing companies. Unsurprisingly, none of the readers I interviewed mentioned particular publishing houses contributing value to a book. However, even though they recognized more retailers than publishing houses, no interviewee mentioned that retailers add value to a book. This suggests that readers do not particularly care where their reading material comes from as long as the content is of high quality. Robin, a 21-year-old technologically curious moderate reader, voiced this idea perfectly by saying, "it can be from a publisher that nobody's ever heard of, but if it's good, it's a good book." Briana, a 25-year-old technologically reluctant moderate reader, adds on to this argument for the value of content by pointing out one of the economical advantages of e-readers—free access to books in the public domain. She said, "I also like classics, books from the canon... If they're published before a certain date, they're free."

That being said, the physical appearance of a book is still valuable to readers. A majority of interviewees place a much higher monetary value on hardcover books than they do paperback books. They considered paperback books worth more than e-books, but by a smaller margin.

However, there seems to be a consensus among readers of all frequencies and technological attitudes that e-books are only worth the convenience they provide if they cost less than a paperback version. Jacob, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, pointed out that he loves how portable his Kindle is and how simple it makes reading but also added, “I probably would not buy e-books if they were the price of paperbacks.” Debbie, a 52-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, also said that the price of e-books played into her decision to purchase a Kindle—“when you read this much it’s kind of like cocaine. It’s a very expensive habit.” She also said that with the advent of digital books, physical aspects of books hold no value.

[Physical books are worth] nothing...I don’t collect books like my husband does, so that they’re in my library. I collect them because—or when I was doing that—because I wanted to re-read it, I really liked the story, I really liked the author, I really liked the characters, and I was going to re-read it.

Laura, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant heavy reader, does not own an e-reader and holds exactly the opposite opinion. When asked what adds value to a book, she said, “I’m a sucker for the little details in books, so if it’s on nice paper or if it’s hardback and it’s got a really nice cover then that makes it more worthwhile to me.” She made it clear that the added value of physical aspects directly influences her preference for physical books over e-books:

I get attached to the physical aspect of a book, and I like to go back and hold that book and maybe lend it to someone. And it’s more valuable to me when I can actually flip through the pages and show someone a passage, [or] copy out a passage from it to show someone instead of just scrolling down through the pages.

Interaction

For the most part, the readers interviewed do not consider reading itself to be a social activity. They agree that discussion of books does make the books themselves social objects, but

the act of reading is still very personal. Jennifer, a 25-year-old technologically savvy light reader, said:

[Reading] is not social unless you're, like, in a book club. I think it's more a personal activity. Because, I mean, you don't see a whole lot of people reading aloud to each other or doing it collectively. It's more of an individual thing that you do by yourself, in my opinion.

Though Jennifer mentions book clubs as a way to make books social, only one participant had successfully participated in a book club before and none were currently members of formalized discussion groups. Instead, readers said most of the conversations they have about books take place in informal settings with family members, coworkers, and friends. This discussion centers around lending and borrowing books within groups of people with close personal relationships. Sarah, a 23-year-old technologically curious light reader, said,

If I ever read a book we'll just talk about, loosely, the topic. And someone else will suggest something like I read a similar book. So it's just informal, conversational. It's never like, let's sit down and discuss this book. It just kind of pops up if necessary.

Readers with positive feelings toward e-books talked about their habits of giving physical books away to interested friends and family members instead of loaning them out. Jacob, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, is one of these readers. When asked about the conditions under which he lends books he said:

I'm not even interested in [getting loaned books] back because I consider...I don't know. Because they're special to me, I want them to be special to other people, I guess. And knowledge in general I consider free. I think it's all about sharing it.

Because readers that lend and borrow books often showed positive feelings toward e-readers, improved models for lending and borrowing e-books are an important consideration for the future. Though features for lending books do exist, many e-book readers simply are not

aware of them or don't understand how they work. Debbie, a 52-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, highlighted the importance of these features:

I think it would be nice if you could pay, say, a reduced fee and send the book to a friend. I think it would be really cool to [be able to say] I was reading this and I thought you might enjoy it. Click. Seamlessly. That would be kind of neat.

Interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that the internet is very effective in linking people with similar tastes to one another, but the reaction was much more diverse when it involved throwing authors into the mix. Reid, a 59-year-old technologically savvy moderate reader said he thinks the internet is an effective tool for authors to provide their readers with information.

I think it's effective...Because, okay, so I like this certain author...He has five novels, and in the last three months, I've read all five of them. So I'm looking to see information on has he got something coming out soon.

While they believe that the internet offers an opportunity for authors to share information with their readers, several readers acknowledged the possibility that too much interaction could hinder an author's creative process. In a similar vein, while most believe reader contribution to works in progress is an interesting idea, readers expressed concern that widespread use of this technique would take away from the artistic value of books. Many, but not all, believed that the writing of nonfiction works would be much more suited to this method. Laura, a 47-year-old technologically reluctant light reader, said, "I think that the author has a book in mind and they should stick with it and not ask what other people's thoughts are because it kind of takes away from the purpose of writing a book."

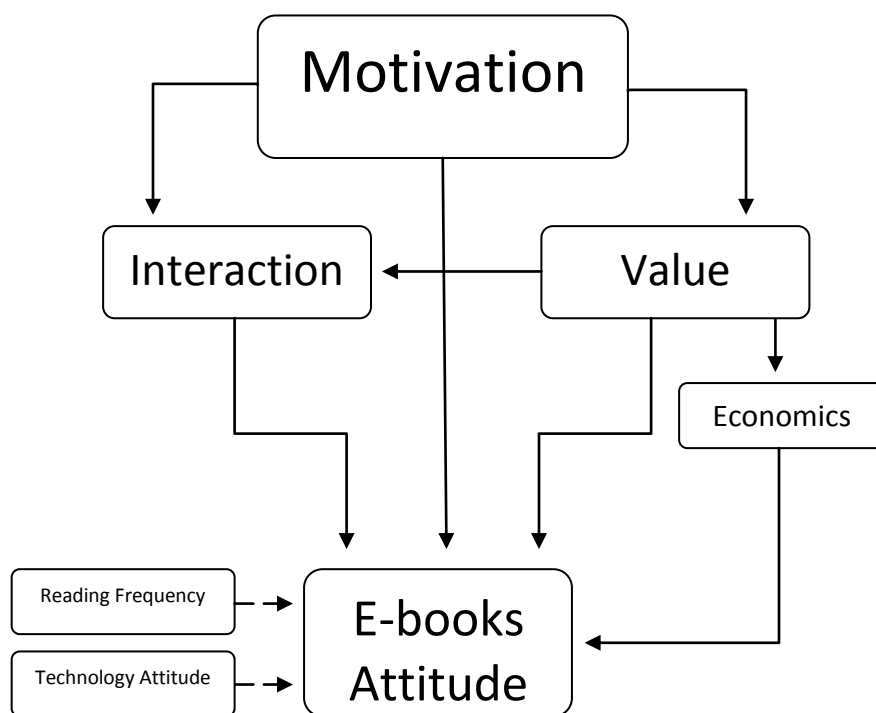
The Big Picture

Though no one of the aforementioned factors alone can determine a reader's feelings about digital books, together they provide a powerful indicator of what makes e-books relevant and useful to readers. The diagram below provides a visual representation of the ways

motivation, interaction, value (and the economic implications of value), reading frequency, and attitudes toward technology impact readers' attitudes toward e-books. As illustrated in the diagram, the factors that affect e-book attitudes are—for the large part—interrelated.

Interviewees' motivations for reading linked directly to their feelings about e-readers, but these motivations also had an indirect connection in that they influence what aspects of a book readers value and the kinds of book-related social interactions they seek.

Factors Affecting Readers' Attitudes Toward E-books



For example, those who read for the aesthetic experience books provide are not likely to view e-books favorably. However, those who read to gain knowledge (personal betterment) are more likely to seek out a specific genre of books and stand to gain from reading e-books because they are not limited in their selection by geography. These readers are also more likely to value a book's content—or the knowledge it contains—over that book's physical appearance. They are

more likely to want to engage in more involved conversations about what they have read, perhaps discussing contents and meaning with like-minded individuals instead of limiting discussion to recommending books. For example, Jacob, a 22-year-old technologically reluctant extreme reader, said he reads to “satisfy intellectual curiosity.” When asked about reading as a social activity Jacob said, “Any new way to integrate debate—discussion about things I’m reading—I’m interested in.”

The connection between motivation, interaction, and value does not exist only for readers seeking knowledge. Though some—especially those motivated to read by the escapism a book provides—view reading a book as the most solitary of acts, the written word is anything but antisocial. Readers overwhelmingly acknowledged that books become social through discussion, whether that discussion occurs in a formalized setting such as a book club or in a more informal or unstructured around-the-water-cooler setting. The more readers spoke about using books to interact socially with others, the stronger their positive feelings were toward e-readers. New technologies have the opportunity to enhance this discussion in the future and provide a new kind of value to readers.

Conclusion

The Future of Publishing

“Digital isn’t the future—it’s today”¹⁵

If the increasing commercialization and conglomeration of the publishing industry in the 1970s led to the end of a golden era, the increasing social aspect of the industry today may usher in a new one. The future of publishing may see the relationship between authors and publishing

¹⁵ Tom Corson, (as quoted in Thompson, 2010) pg 233

houses decrease even further as the relationship between authors and their readers increase, thanks in large part to the way the internet facilitates communication. Readers will be able to communicate directly with authors to share their thoughts and opinions on their work, and houses will rely even less on traditional media such as New York Times book reviews to measure the success or failure of a book. Instead, user reviews and star ratings may take over.

With the prevalence of digital technologies in today's world, it is ridiculous to even consider fighting e-books. Even their most staunch opposers acknowledge that electronic reading devices are a good option for some people. Publishing companies have learned this, as evidenced by the sheer amount of discussion on the topic happening in publishing circles. Though there are fundamental differences in between the music and book publishing industries, the proliferation of the iPod and the near-complete extinction of physical music products speaks to the elimination of the print book—one day. To be sure, that day will not be anytime soon. The technology to replace the codex exists, but implementations so far have proven both expensive and imperfect. As significant barriers to entry diminish, and the world begins to more widely accept the notion of an electronic book, it is important to discover what readers want and how new technologies fit into their reading behaviors. The important thing is to not get completely caught up with the technology of e-readers and to focus on where the value has always been—in the contents of the books we read and in their great contribution to society.

Limitations/Further Research

The main weaknesses of this study stem from its lack of generalizability and focus on a behavior that is difficult to categorize. All of the readers I interviewed had at least some college education, and live in the southern United States. This limits the generalizability of the study in

other regions and to readers at all education levels. Because education is so closely linked to literacy and socioeconomic status, its effect on reading behavior and the factors that affect readers' attitudes about e-readers could prove to be interesting areas of further study. Another barrier to generalizability lies in the age structure of my participants. Seven interviewees were between the ages of 21 and 25, while the remaining three were between the ages of 47 and 59. This age structure may skew the results to reflect the attitudes and habits of the younger participants. It also excludes a large chunk of the general population, which may exhibit different reading behaviors than that of 20-somethings and baby boomers.

Additionally, categorizing readers by the number of books they read per month, regardless of book length or content, does not give a complete picture of the amount they read. In particular, the enormous gap between the one "heavy" reader I interviewed (5 books per month) and the two "extreme" readers (30-35 books per month) call this method of categorization into question. Number of pages read or time spent reading may prove to be better indicators in future studies, yet neither of these measures accounts for the full spectrum of possible reading behaviors.

Another potential area for future research lies in the attitudes and behaviors of authors. While readers are an important force in the industry, digital technologies also affect how authors create content, the types of content they create, their expanding options for distribution channels, and the opportunities they have to interact with readers.

Appendix 1— Interview Guide

1. Tell me a little bit about your reading behavior.
2. Why do you read?
3. On average, about how many books do you read in a month?
4. What kinds of books do you usually read?
5. Name as many places as you can think of that you can purchase, rent, or borrow books.
6. Name as many publishing companies as you can.
7. Aside from a specific topic or genre, what attributes of a book influence your desire to read it?
8. In your opinion, what aspects of a book make it valuable? Is it the physical appearance? The content? The author? The publisher? Anything else?
9. In your opinion, how much is a newly released hardcover worth?
10. How much is that same book worth as a paperback?
11. How much is an electronic copy of that book worth?
12. Can you compare books to other types of media regarding their physical value?
13. Where do you get the majority of your reading material?
14. Under what conditions do you lend and/or borrow books?
15. Do you consider reading to be a social activity? Why or why not?
16. Describe any experiences you've had with book clubs.
17. Do you regularly discuss what you read with others outside of a book club setting? How do these conversations usually take place?

18. Can you explain any experience you have had directly communicating with an author about their work?
 - a. If no: What are the things that have kept you from this kind of communication?
19. In your opinion, how effective is the internet—including author websites, social networking websites, blogs, and online communities—in linking authors to their readers?
20. What about linking readers with similar tastes and interests to each other?
21. Do you consider yourself an early adopter of the latest technological gadgets—including smart phones, tablet computers, e-readers, etc?
22. What are your feelings about e-readers?
23. Have you ever read a digital copy of a book? How does that experience compare with reading a physical copy?
24. Some e-readers allow users to highlight and comment on parts of a book they find interesting and share these thoughts anonymously with other readers. How do you feel about a feature like this?
25. Some people have suggested that the future of books lies in social interactions between authors and their readers during the writing process. How do you feel about this collaborative take on writing?
 - a. Probe: Are there certain types of books this kind of process would work better for?

Appendix 2— Participant Summary

| Name | Age | Sex | Reading Frequency | Technology Attitude |
|-------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Jacob | 22 | Male | Extreme | Reluctant |
| Laura | 47 | Female | Low | Reluctant |
| Debbie | 52 | Female | Extreme | Reluctant |
| Laura | 21 | Female | Heavy | Reluctant |
| Reid | 59 | Male | Moderate | Tech savvy |
| Jennifer | 25 | Female | Low | Tech savvy |
| Josh | 21 | Male | Low | Tech savvy |
| Briana | 25 | Female | Moderate | Reluctant |
| Sarah | 22 | Female | Low | Curious |
| Robin | 21 | Female | Moderate | Curious |

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