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From Hardback to Software:

How the Publishing Industry is Coping with Convergence

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MSc in Global Media and Communications

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From Hardback to Software:

How the Publishing Industry is Coping with Convergence

Lauren Christina Sozio

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between eBook technologies and the strategic motivations of different actors operating within the publishing industry. By employing innovation and convergence theory, I examine the evolution of a former linear publishing paradigm toward an interactive version that best serves the digital information economy. Though sixteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews, it became clear that the digital format was setting unprecedented standards for the industry, but it remains to be seen whether traditional houses will continue dominating the industry or whether digital platforms will usurp this revered position. No matter who governs the field, one thing is clear: professionalism cannot be swapped for efficiency. Each actor maintained that quality of text, whether in “enhanced” form or flat, whether curated by editors or fostered by virtual communities, was paramount in the industry and critical to the preservation of books. In order to achieve this, the top-down publisher-writer-reader model must be dismantled in favor of a networked collaboration amongst users and firms. Adapting to eBook innovation depends on convergence on macro, structural levels (collaboration between traditional and digital actors) and on micro, contextual levels (the absorption of hardback into digital device, the integration of hyperlinked and plain text). It also means the acceptance of a “remixable” (Lessig, 2008) culture, one in which text imitates software, subject to frequent upgrades, and Intellectual Property laws in turn adapt to serve this fluctuating economy. This transition is no easy feat, as it contends with the central tension that emerged in each interview: the desire to preserve the integrity of the old structure while embracing innovations that challenge the very essence of reading. This investigation is not meant to be conclusive, but merely a small step toward illuminating some of the key actors and issues in a field facing major disruption, and will hopefully inspire similar studies, as the publishing industry’s polished product merges with developers’ innovative devices.

INTRODUCTION

Gatekeeper 2.0

“The stable hierarchies of the printed page—one of the defining norms of the world—are being superseded by the rush of impulses through freshly minted circuits” (Birkerts, 1994: 3).

Over fifteen years ago, literary critic Sven Birkerts (1994) grimly forecast the “Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age”. His nostalgic nod to an orderly past echoes the sentiments of many publishers faced with the transition from bricks-and-mortar to virtual cloud. Because books embody cultural tradition on so many levels beyond mere literacy—with implications of class, erudition, curiosity and imagination—textual digitization has struck a nerve and elicited passionate debate. Amazon’s pioneer, Jeff Bezos, who flipped the publishing paradigm on its head by turning it into a “consumer-centric” structure that operates “backward from customers” (Mangdalindan, 2010: para. 25), made it perfectly clear that this format had become not only culturally but economically unignorable. By late July 2010, Kindle formatted books had surpassed hardcover sales (see Amazon Press Release, 2010).

In the wake of digital reading, there is a new interactivity with books that challenges the traditional model where roles are distinct: a writer produces, the publisher refines, the retailer packages and a reader absorbs. An industry that has modeled profit on this top-down paradigm is now forced to adapt to a new, networked society where the interchange of ideas is no longer linear. As new platforms appear and tantalize text in multi-media directions, ownership is destabilized and rights become contested. Addressing the contradiction inherent in innovation, Henry Jenkins (2004) asks: “[does] transmedia storytelling enrich popular culture or make it more formulaic?” (40).

Confronting this precarious balance between “knowledge and efficiency” and “information overload”, William Melody (2003: 420) transports his readers back to an age when knowledge was scarce and monks “exercised a high degree of monopoly” over the written word as the sole guardians of books. For these visionary guides, information was cultural capital, a powerful asset that could either enlighten or alienate, and had the potential to create an “information class system” (Melody, 2003: 420). Who are the “gatekeepers” (Melody, 2003: 420) of today and how do they operate in the digital era where knowledge is abundant and can be easily accessed through portable portals?

This new information economy, a contested term in and of itself¹, is rife with contradictions. Do media operate vertically or across platforms? Is data exchange more or less efficient? Is market strength more unified or further fragmented? And are the primary actors conglomerate or community, government or grassroots? Underlying these complexities is the contest between the convergence (see Jenkins 2004, 2006) of media: will new media replace the old or will the old simply evolve and adapt? Economist Joseph Schumpeter suggests that innovations are disruptions to “equilibrium” (1989: xvi), as he implies that all will eventually return to a static level. But perhaps this is not a contradictory but a dialogical process of conversations to be had, irresolute ideological dilemmas that, as Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983) suggests, may never stabilize.

It remains to be seen whether immaterial but more interactive formats and eReader devices are game-changers or over-hyped inventions that will fade with the technology that aspired to support the endeavor. Innovation, in particular the convergence of old and new technology and business models, breeds contradiction due to its unstable nature. Networks clash, information flows from the periphery to the center and back again, transactions are facilitated in some capacities but complicated in others, alternative collides with commercial while users collaborate and at other times compete with firms. All the while, the actors involved in this volatile interplay shift strategies to stay atop their game, power travelling as swiftly as wireless signals, sometimes becoming intercepted and blocked along the way.

In the following section, I establish a conceptual framework and elucidate the key voices of innovation and convergence theory, in particular those which take a political-economic approach to the process by addressing the structural constraints on and strategic motivations of the actors involved. I recognize that these are broad concepts and, due to limited scope, have attempted to narrow the material in keeping with my subject: the relationship between technology and the publishing industry.

I examine the transition from an industrial to an information economy, as linear structures are obscured by chaotic networks, the tangible becomes intangible, hierarchical firms are dissolved into multi-nodal, consumer-centric structures, and proprietary formats open up to peers. In spite of the promises of this new digital era, it remains to be seen whether the same powerful conglomerates that ran the industrial society will remain at the helm, whether a

¹ Melody (2003: 2) argues that “an expansion of information” does not necessarily “lead to an expansion of knowledge”. Also see Potts and Mandeville (2007).

new order of team players will effectively restructure organizations in their favor (see Castells, 2007), or whether the two will converge in hybrid harmony (see Jenkins, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation in Context

The age-old relationship between man and machine is a volatile dialogue, contested, embraced and eventually naturalized, in turn, with each innovation. The following academics acknowledge this complex and interdependent interchange between technology, individuals and community, a multilayered discourse that is the foundation for my study.

Digital idealist Yochai Benkler (2006: 18) is often criticized for being a technological determinist; however, he illuminates technology's ephemeral, contextually dependent nature as he proclaims, "neither deterministic nor wholly malleable, technology sets some parameters of individual and social action", as it both clarifies and obscures, defines and is defined by the individuals who employ it. He marvels at technology's unique utility, reliant upon environment as "different patterns of adoption can result in very different social relations" (Benkler, 2006: 19).

Media historian Lisa Gitelman (2006) agrees that innovation is not a technologically driven process, but defined by the complexities of cultural engagement. Gitelman (2006) explains that media histories "must be social and cultural, not the stories of how one technology leads to another, or of isolated geniuses working their magic on the world" (7). Just because Steve Jobs has become synonymous with innovation does not mean that he or his prolific, ever-upgrading devices are alone responsible for change in this convergent information economy where user integration becomes as integral to innovation as the production of new technology itself. According to Gitelman (2006: 7), media is a multi-layered process, functioning to facilitate communication and as a "set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices" that enable its very existence.

Nicola Cavalli (2007) similarly argues the importance of context, as she distinguishes innovation, which, unlike invention, warrants not simply technological development but social adaptation. Henry Jenkins (2004: 36) further develops this notion, as he prescribes a merging of the fields of political economy and audience research in order to best account for technological changes. While the political-economic approach allows for insight into the structural mechanisms that drive production, audience research allows for an in-depth

analysis of consumption patterns. This integration of both perspectives allows for the co-existence of industry and culture, and consequently of the material and the symbolic. Like Jenkins, I favor a more robust, interdisciplinary approach to addressing the tension between old and new media, and like Benkler, Gitelman and Cavalli, I seek to examine technology in conjunction with community.

The Shifting Context: From Industrial to Information Economy

In his essay devoted to “internalizing” tacit knowledge in order to facilitate production, Ikujiro Nonanta (2007) explains, “the essence of innovation is to re-create the world according to a particular vision or ideal” (164). How does the world need to be reshaped in order for this dream to become reality? Jason Potts and Tom Mandeville (2007) explore the evolution from industrial to digital economy or, more specifically, from manufacturing to service industry, a model that allows for “intangible flows of knowledge” (155). Benkler (2006: 10) describes the conversion from an industrial, material-centric era to a “networked information economy” that enables consumers to make personal choices unencumbered by commercial media. Melody (2003: 413) tracks the transition from an agricultural to a digital economy, where the prized asset evolves from land to product to information or from tangible to immaterial. This unquantifiable asset, subsequently “commodified” as the “stock of knowledge in society”, becomes the most valuable resource (Melody, 2003: 415). Unlike exhaustible resources, “stocks” of information are essentially limitless. Sarah Coleman and Nick Dyer-Witthford (2007) identify this free-flowing knowledge as the “digital commons” that normatively cannot be bound or depleted; nonetheless, they forecast “a tragedy of commons”,² as “rejectionists” (see Sampling Strategy) attempt to make the abundant scarce.

Several theorists argue that this networked era breeds creativity in ways that the industrial economy could not fathom. Departing from the hierarchical rigidity of the past, these newly collaborative ventures, that Benkler (2006) praises, cultivate “experimental behaviour, diverse viewpoints and an understanding of the value of failure” (Potts & Mandeville, 2007: 155). Tech entrepreneur, Tim O’Reilly (2005) prescribes thinking outside-the-box, as value can be created “by simply assembling [these components] in novel or effective ways” (17). Nonanta (2007) similarly insists on a diversity of perspectives, “open-ended” dialogue (171) and internal redundancy where professional roles overlap in order to stimulate creative solutions (168). Each analyst views alternative thought as an opportunity for growth, as,

² A predicament originally discussed by Garrett Hardin (1968) in reference to the depletion of a common resource by individuals motivated by short term self-interest.

according to Nonanta, “new knowledge is born in chaos” (2007: 170). But their optimism is dependent on adaptable business models and flexible actors that are poised to seize the opportunity of such disruption. Melody (2003), although acknowledging ICTs’ potential, remains skeptical and theorizes that they could either “serve to improve the efficiency and equity” or “create market imperfections, inefficiencies and equity distortions” (422). The “serendipitous” nature of innovation that Nonanta applauds (2007: 164) could alternatively wreak havoc on the orderly assembly lines of industry.

As these two eras collide, a new language has to be devised in order to encapsulate this volatile digital age. This destructive process of “breaking down boundaries of formerly separate activities” (Potts and Mandeville, 2007: 150) is convergence, a term employed by many and understood by few. In most cases convergence is an overused, misconstrued term that is tossed around to assuage fears sprouting in the face of new media. But few articulate it as well as Henry Jenkins.

Coping with Convergence

The term ‘convergence’ emerges in social scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool’s seminal text, *Technologies of Freedom* (1983), which addresses the interaction between technology and free speech—a concern over restrictive regulation that remains relevant (see Lessig’s *raison d’être*). Pool (1983) observes a “convergence of modes”, where media platforms no longer offer distinct services but many simultaneously, as he forecast that “the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding” (23). Pool’s (1983: 23-24) recognition of the “blurring of lines” between various media complicates Marshall McLuhan’s (2001) influential hypothesis that “the medium is the message”³. Unlike McLuhan who placed great emphasis on the portals of transmission, Pool underscored their ephemeral nature, and as Jenkins (2006) notes, “delivery technologies become obsolete” while media “evolve” (2006: 13). In essence, the mode becomes irrelevant while the message is simply adapted to new hardware.

Jenkins catapults Pool’s “convergence of modes” (1983) from the electronic to the digital era, as he expounds on Pool’s notion that the “transformation of the media occurs not in a vacuum but in a specific historical and legal context” (2004: 6). Jenkins infers that

³ In 1964, McLuhan introduced an alternative communication theory that challenged content-focused analysis, as he presented the medium as the prime analytical unit. He emphasized that the mode of transmission was more influential than the significance of its contents. The theorist interprets the audience as passive receptors, and warns of the media’s power over “the unwary” (2001:16).

convergence involves not simply the erosion of the medium but of community, as he expands, “the new knowledge culture has arisen as our ties to older forms of social community are breaking down” (35). Emphasizing the social and cultural aspects—as comprised by content, ideas and relationships—in addition to its technological components, Jenkins (2007) is able to illuminate convergence in a humanist light, not simply bundled with wire and hooked to modems. He underscores the contradictions inherent in the consolidation process as he identifies the collision of creative commons and conglomerations, professional and amateur culture, mass and independent networks, and “commercial media” and “collective intelligence” (Jenkins, 2004, 35). This process is paradoxically controlled yet chaotic, facilitating yet complicating, homogenizing yet diversifying and expanding yet fragmenting culture (Jenkins, 2004: 35-37). He evokes these binary groups in order to illustrate the flux of relationships and stress the necessity of negotiation that occurs at the juncture of production and consumption (Jenkins, 2004).

Although Jenkins (2004: 34) observes critically that “few media critics seem capable of keeping both sides of this equation in mind at the same time”, Curtin and Streeter (2001, 228) argue that simply criticizing the industry is a futile defence when it would be far more productive “to understand the logic of media production, regulation, and reception” in order to pave the way for alternative media models. It would be remiss to focus solely on production when “collaboration”, as Potts and Mandeville (2007: 155) emphasize, is the “defining feature” of the info society. The once hierarchical firm becomes a hybrid network (Potts & Mandeville, 2007: 153), and a “multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous” (Castells, 2007: 246). In this offbeat but dynamic interface, a major deviation from the linear transmission model (see Carey, 1992), it is helpful to keep in mind Pool’s proclamation (1983) that “the relationship between technology and institutions is not simple or unidirectional” (5), and Jenkins’ wisdom (2004) that convergence is a “process”, not a resolute “end point” (34).

It is this fluctuation that is understood to be inherent in convergence that makes it both fascinating and frustrating to use as an analytical model. The strengths of working with this networked model are also its weaknesses. Because convergence encapsulates many processes, from technological to cultural to economic (see Jenkins, 2006), its scope is wide-reaching, its actors diverse and its power dynamics are in constant flux. It is no longer tenable to analyze communication, or production for that matter, as straightforward linear processes. But by sacrificing this model we become subject to an unstable, random order that becomes more difficult to define in terms of dichotomies when all is chaos. There is a concern that any findings generated through this study will be subsequently undermined by

the ecology in flux—whether that is the next new eReader or the return of the brick-and-mortar bookstore. But these are the difficulties that innovators contend with on a daily basis when their ingenuity is superseded by an upgrade.

I focus on this fluctuation within the production process itself as the consumers' feedback becomes just as essential to sustainability as the developers themselves. This collaboration is framed and facilitated by the digital ecology, enabling business-to-business, peer-to-peer and business-to-peer integration unparalleled in the past.

Bottoms-up! Peer Based Networks Shaping the Creative Industry

“One of the key lessons of 2.0: users add value” (O’Reilly, 2005: 10).

If the hierarchical organizations of the past built their strength on coercion, the networks of the present thrive on cohesion (Potts & Mandeville, 2007: 152); hence a mutual trust and understanding between firms and users has to be established in order to encourage a robust and productive ecology. In this decentralized structure, the source of innovation has shifted from the center to the periphery, emerging from Jenkins' “fringes” (2004: 35), Sapsed's “external partners” (2008: 12), Anderson's “Long Tail”⁴ (2006), Shirky's “edges of the internet” (2000), and Hiller's “emerging media ecosystem” (2002)⁵, all eventually consolidating “in the mainstream” (Jenkins, 2004: 35). Benkler (2000), like Jenkins, emphasizes fluidity—not finality—in the convergence process, where producer and consumers' “acts of reception are dialogic in the sense that they can easily be mapped as moves in a conversation rather than as endpoints for the delivery of a product” (564). O’Reilly (2005: 6) describes this open source model as the “architecture of participation”, where word-of-mouth becomes the primary mode of dissemination.

We broach a significant shift in power dynamics as Lessig (2008: 57-68) describes the emergence of blogs as an empowering interface for readers to “talk back” through “remixed text”, syntax implying the malleability of the net, a medium that can be manipulated by users. Sapsed (2008: 15) discusses the “emergence of communities of digitally literate consumers which comment, discuss, interpret and provide feedback about cultural goods”, an interchange dependent on skilled, engaged participants. All of this excitement about these “voluntary, temporary, tactical” (Jenkins, 2004: 35) communities simply acknowledges their

⁴Loosely interpreted, niche sources (the tail) add the bulk of revenue, e.g. in Amazon's case (Lessig, 2008: 127).

⁵Hiller's diagram (2002) exhibits a networked convergence of sources in participatory journalism.

existence instead of reflecting upon their critical role, but can this productive ecology be sustained?

It is imperative to dig beneath the hype surrounding this dialogical relationship. Hearn, Roodhouse and Blakely (2007: p 2-4) elevate this collaborative structure to the next level, coining the term ‘value ecology’, an adaptation of the supply chain where consumers become co-producers, networks displace products and competition yields to “co-option”. The novelty is not so much that the user is engaging in a dialogue, but that s/he is generating content (Sapsed, 2008: 12). Users’ contributions become commodified as a means to economic gain. In order to achieve competitive advantage through an alternative, consumer-led production, O’Reilly (2005: 21) advises extracting the “richness” from “shared data”. According to O’Reilly (2005: 2), DoubleClick’s⁶ “limited” business model “brought into the '90s the notion that the web was about publishing, not participation; that advertisers, not consumers, ought to call the shots”. Sapsed (2008: 11) notes that, as an alternative to this top-down model, Voss and Zomerdijk (2007) offer “experiential services” (Sapsed, 2008: 11) where firms prioritize participation over publishing. Sapsed (2008: 5) prescribes a marriage between traditional practices and innovative devices, an augmentation instead of obliteration of the old.

As convergence disturbs the old order, perhaps these proclamations of an emancipated consumer are premature. These theorists place a substantial amount of responsibility on the shoulders of citizens. Sapsed (2008) identifies their media literacy, Benkler (2006) their virtuosity, and Lessig (2009) their dedication to reshaping text. But, as old barriers are crossed, new walls are being erected to attempt stability. As new networks appear to give users more power, existing regimes are busy developing their own platforms to maintain control and, in effect, to counter user dynamism. Castells (2007) identifies the “contradictory process” of media conglomerates “strategically positioning themselves” alongside these new peer-based sites in what will ultimately play out in a “power struggle” (248). The following section identifies such structural constraints.

⁶ An Internet company providing ad services—since acquired by Google (<http://www.doubleclick.com>).

Power to the People or Firewalling?

“What’s at stake is not simply the question of whether big corporations are getting bigger, but whether they are supporting or constraining the flow of ideas” (Curtin and Streeter, 2001: 244).

In order to fully describe this “transformation of power relations”, Castells (2007) urges an analysis of the “interaction between political actors, social actors and media business in both mass and networked media” (252). It is “a battle” between industry incumbents and “cooperative nonmarket” actors (Benkler, 2006: 2) that I am most interested in exploring, as it runs throughout my text from literature review to empirical discussion. Although acknowledging the potential of these new orbits of peer-to-peer interchange, many theorists (see Castells, 2007; Lessig, 2008; Pool, 1983) remain skeptical and contend that the former powers still reign in this yet uncontested frontier.

Jenkins (2006) addresses consumers “not just as symbol makers, but as political and legal actors” (36), as peer-to-peer communities “challenge old systems” and provide alternatives to the establishment. Benkler (2006: 2) similarly introduces his readers to an evolutionary public sphere, as he envisions this networked platform as a “new freedom” where individuals are not only independent but equipped with access to commons-based networks that make it simple to congregate. This emergent economy, framed by nonproprietary, nonmarket decentralization, has reorganized the way we “make and exchange information, knowledge and culture” (Benkler, 2006: 2). He endows the individual with agency to challenge industrial structures and has much faith in virtuosity and cooperation. Ultimately, for Benkler and Jenkins (2004: 34), the new convergent economy is about the hopeful reshuffling of “the balance of power within” this new media ecology. Whilst individual potential and communal benevolence are clearly important, I also recognize that strategic motivations and manipulation are at play. While these writers identify the importance of user dynamics, they do not specifically address how to apply and sustain such engagement. It is essential to evaluate their weaknesses as they assume the citizen will remain engaged and empowered.

Pool (1983) remains reserved, as he recognizes that “change occurs, but the established institutions holding it in place are a constraint on its direction and pace” (6). Some incumbents refuse to lower the bar and instead attempt to harness creative control by asserting intellectual property rights. Curtin and Streeter (2001: 228) refer to this change in tactic as a transition from “hardware to software”, as conglomerates shift their gaze from structural to symbolic, from media portal to ownership of idea. Mansell and Steinmueller (2000) provide the example of large publishing companies who have “achieved a significant

incumbent position through a long history of building market reputation and controlling intellectual property rights to their stock of titles" (27). Lessig (2008: 28-36) elaborates on digitally embedded control mechanisms such as 'Read/Write' and 'Read Only', where, in the latter, consumption trumps collaboration. William Urrichio (2004: 89) is critical of the contradictory relationships between culture, commodity and intellectual production, and argues that the "coupling of the words 'creative' and 'industries' is highly loaded" (Urrichio, 2004: 88), as creativity is no longer a "romantic pursuit", but something enmeshed in what Lessig (2009) might call the "obsessive permission culture", which hampers innovation as developers increasingly fear trespassing on intellectual property.

But in spite of this pessimism of gatekeepers, it is important to recognize, as Castells (2007: 253) points out, that mainstream, independent firms and users do not have to be in contention, but can actually more effectively cooperate and reinforce each other's platforms. In the following section, I revisit the main theoretical arguments in an attempt to elucidate my own stand.

The Convergent Divide: Analyzing the Dialogue

I draw on the perspective of the aforementioned academics to balance structural constraint with the aspirations of an alternative community. Cultural convergence can be considered empowering as it has argued that it eliminates entry barriers (see Jenkins, 2004; Benkler, 2006), but institutional convergence can also thwart diversity and restrict individual choice (see Lessig, 2008; Castells, 2007). The consumer is often idealized as an active, virtuous agent. From the encumbered perspective, the industry is unshakable and the consumer is unable to assert his or her preferences beyond a prescribed role. In the end, however, individual agency depends on context. Prescriptive measures, it is suggested, can be taken to ensure a balance, some of which Jenkins (2004) maps out in his examination of the relationship between producer and consumer.

The academics' perspectives fluctuate between an individualistic and an industry perspective, as they view the Internet as a forum for democratic participation or as a digital fortress with impenetrable walls. They become trapped in the gray area between freedom and submission, as they accentuate the power of consumer feedback, but fail to acknowledge its limitations on both the micro and macro levels; or alternatively as they focus on structural limitations while undermining the efficacy of individual contribution. It is the marriage of both perspectives that arguably allows for the most comprehensive, even-handed analysis. In this study I work with Jenkins' suggestion (2004: 36) of fusing political economy with audience in order to

investigate the reciprocal relationship between technology and motivations in the publishing industry, in particular focusing on the specific strategies publishers are implementing in order to foster the critical relationship of bottom-up interaction.

Adopting Jenkins' prescription of merging industry with culture (2004: 36), I use insights from innovation theory, as it is employed in the convergent, information economy literature, in particular addressing the arguments that innovation is a "bottom up", collaborative, creative process, as the core for my conceptual framework for this study. I understand innovation as a non-linear, networked process reminiscent of Carey's "ritual model" (1992) of mediated communication, and contingent upon context. While I recognize that the social adoption of an e-book reader greatly depends on the efficacy of the device, I want to focus less on the technological and more on the cultural aspects, as Gitelman (2006) and Jenkins (2004) encourage in their exploration of media. This context is comprised of social, cultural and economic relationships on both macro (structural relationships framing the publishing industry) and micro levels (engagement between publisher, writer and reader). The evolution of such relationships is understood to be dependent on the strategic motivations of the actors involved (see Mansell and Steinmueller, 2000), who are embroiled in a constant power struggle fluctuating between new entrants, intermediaries and incumbents. In light of this study, innovation is not simply about the technological advances but also about the implications of adoption and adaptation; how various actors respond to and integrate such advances into their everyday lives. It is this transformational process that differentiates invention from innovation (Cavalli, 2007).

Statement of Research Question

In this interactive information economy, publishing houses are faced with the rising presence and uncertainty of digital technology, as it complicates revenue, challenges copyright, realigns traditional relationships and introduces new, often controversial ones. Within this framework, the central RQ is:

What is the reciprocal relationship between eBook technologies⁷ and the strategies of different actors operating within the industry?

⁷ By eBook technologies, I am not just referring to the digitization of text, but to all of its permutations including platforms (readers, mobile devices, personal computers), social networks, virtual bookclubs, and aesthetics ("enhanced" versions).

This question is addressed, as discussed in the next chapter, by operationalizing the core concepts of convergence and innovation, in particular the processes of “bottom-up” and collaborative innovation, and the strategic motivations behind the diffusion of innovation by the relevant actors.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Why Interviewing?

Having established the conceptual framework, I shall relate these theories to a publishing world coping with convergence. I intend to examine eBooks as the interface between market and society, define the key actors involved and examine the shifting power dynamics. The publishing industry, like most creative organizations, brims with forecasts and figures, but quantitative data does not serve my inquiry into the structural relationships within the field. My project is premised on the notion that innovation is a social process, and that data is secondary—produced by the interactions between various actors.

As my main method, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews, since verbal insight into an industry thick with narrative and rife with change allowed me to qualitatively capture attitudes towards the constantly evolving technology. I included trade publishers, self-publishers, digital developers, libraries and industry analysts from both the United States and the United Kingdom in order to investigate their approaches to new media platforms (see Sampling, section 3.4).

Design

My MC451 Methods assignment helped set the parameters for this study, as it aimed to ascertain how social media were impacting the role of publishers, agents and writers, with a particular focus on subjects affiliated with HarperCollins’ self-publishing platform, Authonomy. I treated the topic guides as pilots for my dissertation and tailored the questions to serve a wider range of subjects. From these preliminary studies, I learned that my preconceptions were strongly influencing the direction of my interviews. For the forthcoming interviews, I heeded Kvale’s (2008: 80) advice to intelligently detect which answers called for “comment” and interpretation.

I employed a semi-structured format that aimed to elicit “spontaneous, rich, and relevant answers” from respondents (Kvale, 2008: 80). This approach, while guided by a mix of “open-questions” and “theory-driven, hypotheses-directed questions” (Flick, 2009: 157), would allow for more flexibility should the subject diverge from the predetermined topic guide. I wanted to balance probing professionalism with friendly inquisitiveness, steering responses when they strayed too far, but allowing respondents to color answers with their own personality (Flick, 2009: 173).

I provided each respondent with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D) and offered to maintain anonymity, in case they compromised their position. I proposed that each interview would take approximately thirty minutes, mentioned that I might follow up with more questions via e-mail, and, in order to establish reciprocity, invited them to do the same. Finally, I attempted to record all conversations with a digital device, depending on the consent of the respondent. Skype interviews required additional consent for the conversation to be documented by an MP3 recorder.

In order to “increase the compatibility of the data” (Flick, 2009: 172), I formatted a general topic guide (see Appendix C) that I would tailor according to the individual’s area of expertise without sacrificing the main themes. I constructed my topic guides, stemming from my theoretical framework, to cover the challenges encountered in the face of innovation: the integration of social networks, the efficacy of new devices, the contextualization of new technology and the adaptation of traditional to digital content. While I recognized that the ebb and flow of the conversation would depend on the respondent, I attempted to follow this general structure in order to maintain consistency.

As Meuser and Nagel (1998, as cited in Flick, 2009) stress, topic guides are critical for conducting expert interviews, not only helping the interviewer stay on track, but also preventing him or her from appearing an “incompetent interlocutor” (167). Because my key actors were professionals, I required myself to become equally fluent in the publishing dialogue (Flick, 2009: 168). Requesting busy professionals to participate in my study was no easy task, and I offered to provide them with a compiled report at the end of the process in return for their help (see Richards on compensation, 2007: 202). I began to view myself as a media consultant who could provide a unique, uncompromised view of the changing landscape. In attempting to establish a rapport, I identified myself as a former publishing insider and channeled references from old colleagues to build my credibility (Richards, 2007: 202). My goal was to gain the trust of my respondents, which meant transcending one-

dimensional e-mail content, reaching out through a variety of modes, and disclosing information about myself and the project in hopes of reciprocity (Moon, 2000: 323–39).

Multi-Modal Interviews

All interviews were conducted between March and July 2010. Because of my geographical challenges and time constraints, I had to approach respondents through multi-modes, from face-to-face to Skype to web conferences and email. I identified the inconsistencies involved in such an approach and attempted to devise a strategy that most effectively captured the attitudes of my respondents. Most of my interactions involved e-mail contact at some stage, be it preparatory or follow-up, but I attempted to keep e-mail as the supplementary instead of primary form of contact. The quality of the response was often determined by the interviewee's personal preference, most likely dependent on what he or she deemed the most convenient and the least obtrusive (Curasi, 2001: 369).

For Skype interviews, I referred to Sturges and Hanrahan's study (2004) which established "that telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research" (107) and are especially beneficial in providing access to "hard-to-reach" groups (109). They maintain that it is still possible to hear over the phone "verbal cues" that prompt the interviewer to interject (2004: 114). I further argue that online providers like Skype, which offers virtual face-to-face communication, can be just as lucid as in-person interviews provided the Internet connection is stable and the participant comfortable with the technology.

For the few interviews I was only able to conduct via e-mail due to unforeseeable circumstances (Curasi, 2001: 372), a few factors had to be taken into account. E-mail, while liberating both parties to converse within their own time and space, has its limitations as the interviewer is unable to communicate through body language (Curasi, 2001: 368). Furthermore, email might allow the respondent more time to script answers (Flick, 2009: 268) or on the other hand, might result in more terse responses. In the later case, Curasi (2001: 372) recommends follow-up questions, which compensate for the interviewer's inability to probe as he or she might during a real-time interview.

Sampling Strategy: Actors in a Convergent Era

As convergence increasingly blurs the lines between production and consumption, it disrupts order and restructures traditional relationships. In order to most effectively describe these interchanges, many theorists have devised categories of varying permutations, identifying the key actors involved in this process. Mansell and Steinmueller (2000) and Castells (2001) argue that these categories are in constant flux as position unpredictability shifts with time and development. This can be stimulated by any of the actors, from peer-based networks to conglomerations or both simultaneously (Mansell & Steinmueller, 2000: 23-25).

In their analysis of peer participation in gaming, Coleman and Dyer-Witthford (2007, p 947-948) identify the 'rejectionists' as "major media corporations," 'reformers' as the mediators "between commons and capital" and 'radicals' as gamers knocking down proprietary walls in favor of sharing common knowledge. Castells (2001: 37) specifically defines the parties operating within the Internet ecology, namely the techno-meritocrats, the hackers, the virtual communicators and the entrepreneurs. Mansell and Steinmueller (2000) recognize three "distinct configurations of interests" shaping ICTs: the 'incumbents', who seek control over "key assets," the 'insurgents', who seek to capitalize on innovation and overthrow the incumbents, and the 'virtual communities', which are defined by a multi-nodal, networked exchange of personalized content and tend to be the "producers of a major, if not the dominant, share of information content" (22).

These labels are merely provisional means of mapping the wilderness of the publishing landscape and each layer of distinction is not meant to be restrictive, but open to the unpredictable nature of innovation. The boundaries between each category are far from clear and, as a result of this convergent era, many partnerships are being formed that extend across all three tiers, as many different actors embark on the digital playing scene. I adapted these categories to better serve my sampling pool.

I drew my sample from both sides of the Atlantic, namely New York and London. Although I acknowledge that U.S. and U.K. publishing markets vary greatly, I was mainly interested in corraling a breadth of perspective instead of comparing attitudes. I approached the directors of digital teams of trade publishers, as well as libraries which, in line with the convergent economy, had entered into negotiations with the commercial partners in attempts to digitize their collections (see Fowler, 2010). I less successfully attempted to recruit 'insurgents', who I refer to as the Big Three, or digital interlocutors like Amazon, Apple and Google. As examples of non-traditional agencies defined by peer-participation, I recruited digital

publishers and developers, self-publishing platforms and virtual book communities which are bridging the gap between publishers and devices, and which reflect the impact that non-traditional vendors are making on the landscape. These publishing newcomers are characterized by industry analyst Jason Boog (personal interview, 2010) as “more about the interface”, in essence the next generation that is positioned to play in the traditional publishing world along with the introduction of new eReader technology (see Appendices A & B).

Analysis

I employed Flick’s thematic coding method as a means of assessing “the social distribution of perspectives on the issue under study” (Flick, 2009: 321). Taking Bauer and Gaskell’s (2000) advice that “the first stage is to produce a good quality transcript (53), I transcribed each interview myself. I attempted to go beyond “face value” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 53) and inserted notes whenever thematic connections or contradictions arose, as analysis should not be reserved until the end of research, but conducted throughout the process (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 53-56). I sorted each transcript by themes derived from my topic guide, and teased out recurrent words, phrases and sentiments, while tagging outliers or divergent observations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 54).

Implications for Future Research

My central focus was to provide a breadth of perspective from publishing insiders and to ascertain key issues in the transition from physical to digital. A further exploration of such issues is needed. As the project evolved, more actors appeared on the scene than I had anticipated; in particular, digital platforms were emerging that were challenging traditional paradigms. I found myself very interested in the virtual writer and reader communities that had congregated as a result of this hyperlinked network. Future studies might employ Yochai Benkler’s (2006) and Clay Shirky’s (2010) concepts of virtuous communities to study the integrity of such platforms and, as a method, in-depth web analysis of publishers’ websites and integrated chat forums. Other areas of exploration might include a comparison of publishers’ innovation strategies in New York and London, a study of the employment of eReader devices and reader’s preferences, the correlation between booksales and the saturation of social networks, of the integration of such devices into educational programs, and/or of the efficacy of electronic, interactive text in libraries and academia. Naturally, these are just a few topics that could evolve into PhD studies, but because of limited time and space, I had little time to explore such forums in detail.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Rewriting Text: Plain or Enhanced?

“What can you do with the digital asset? You can copy it, paste it, search it, data mine it, mash it, share it. All these things unleash interactivity.” (Simon Bell, British Library)

What is a book in the networked era? No longer as simple as a bound manuscript, a book is malleable, expandable, compatible, scrollable and, to borrow Lessig’s term (2008), “remixable”. A book adapted to a touch screen actualizes what was once a purely imaginative pursuit. But while ‘techies’ celebrate, skeptics view this transformation as a reductive interpretation of the mind. Regardless of opinion, it is clear that the concept of a book is being redefined by technology. This section, while exploring the form and functionality of the electronic text, focuses on the proposition that digitization is about reinvention: rewriting the book (both literally and conceptually) and reinterpreting the laws of ownership that govern these texts.

Pan Macmillan’s James Long (see Appendix E) described his frustration that most publishers simply replicate the reading experience in the digital environment, claiming that electronic texts “present new behaviors that are being dragged down by old metaphors. To get an interactive experience, we have to evolve the eBook so it doesn’t look like an electronic version of the physical product”. Josh Koppel, founder of mobile application site ScrollMotion, elaborated on the need to “expand the definition of a book. These aren’t enhancements—these are necessities—a greater tool set”. Koppel called ‘Kindling content’, or simply adapting content from the printed page to “high resolution with great amounts of memory”, a “reductive experience” as he warned that books are in danger of “becoming marginalized” and “losing their cultural significance” in this process. Both Koppel and Long echoed the paradoxical sentiment that the electronic version must offer something innovative, but at the same time preserve a book’s integrity.

O’Reilly Media’s Andrew Savikas spoke about capitalizing on electronic form, asking “how do you take advantage of the fact that this thing can see, hear, it’s got video, it’s got color? This thing knows where it is in the world”. He imbues a stationary object with human capabilities and self-awareness unleashed in the digitization process. In spite of his intense personification, Savikas warned of the publisher’s tendency to overhype features at the expense of legibility, asking, “how do you accomplish the same job that you could’ve done with a book?”. His comment addresses the central tension between a digital text and its

physical counterpart: is digitization supposed to enhance, reduce or simply mimic the age-old experience of cracking a spine?

Andrew Malkin presented online distributor Zinio's vision, which sought to "revolutionize reading" by providing "a reading experience that's more immersive" by "not only rendering a beautifully illustrated book in its own right but layering in additional content that is seamless and integrated", in essence fusing imagination with reality. He discussed catering to an audience that expects digital text to be stimulating and tactile, as he illustrated, "my daughter expects interactivity--she wants the chicken to cluck". Rob Fiehn of Phaidon Press similarly weighed the expectations of readers, as he prophesized that "customers would pay for digital content if it offered an added layer".

Elaborating on this multi-layered process, Travis Alber, founder of virtual book club and social reading platform BookGlutton, contested that "the fact that you can network with the rest of the Internet is a new concept—a new way to read". Alber's innovative model requires a new literacy alongside the redefinition of a book, one in which readers not only comprehend but forge connections beyond the text. Illustrating the tension between relevancy and immortality, she contended that "books are timeless", and suggested that this new format would enable the two to merge, as the book becomes a multi-faceted interface connecting readers with likeminded communities.

Surrounded by widgets, high resolution and hyperlinks, it is easy to get caught up in the hype of technological tools while sacrificing the soul of the reading process itself. Bloomsbury's Stephanie Duncan downplayed the novelty, stating that "digital editions are simply another format", a reincarnation of paperback, and consumers valued convenience over interactivity. She recalled that "in the same way Allen Lane launched Penguin paperbacks in 1935, books are now being digitally distributed to enable consumers to buy and read books with ease in whatever format and on whichever device they tend to use".

Savikas maintained that, even though O'Reilly's mission was disseminating innovation, publishers should not lose sight of the fact that text, in its simplest form, "works", and that "as much as we talk about augmented reality, YouTube, Facebook status updates, text messages and everything happening on Twitter is text. Text is a fantastic way to communicate".

The Perpetual Edit: Books as Software

As format becomes more malleable, readers are given tools that in the past were reserved for writers and editors. In this wiki-writable era, users assume the role of software developers, able to amend what was once writ in stone—or at least pressed in ink. While some view this rewritable function in a democratic, evolutionary light, others forecast that it will remove the lid from Pandora’s box or, as Fiehn grimly forecast, “it’s scary because now you can modify your content with digital publishing, but that also means the job is never done. You can constantly go back and refine it. It will just spiral out of control”.

Long acknowledged that “publishers are not geared up yet for continuous production” and the newly interactive product would require updating that in the past had been put to rest as soon as the book was bumped to the backlist. In Long’s view, the publishing model was beginning to mimic software production, as “agile development” became an integral strategy, as users did not “want a big bang of lots of products and no updates”, but “to get familiar with the product and then some editions”. This building-block method came naturally to O’Reilly Media, whose foundation was not in hardbacks but software. Savikas reckoned that “when you have something electronic, there is no reason why you shouldn’t update everyday, every week, every month. And that ability to frequently update—iteration—is really important. Fundamentally this material is much more like software than it is like books”.

While books are bound in an identity crisis, honoring the past while engaging with modern technologies, the producers similarly suffer as delineated roles are disturbed and redistributed in a digitally deterministic craze.

Converging Actors

Trepidation circled the stacks as backlists collected dust in warehouses. The British Library’s Simon Bell fatalistically warned that “unless we digitize, we’re going to find ourselves irrelevant”. His concern was not one confined to the public sector, but echoed across the trade-publishing field. Whether “old-school, hardcore print people” (Alber) or wide-eyed, ambitious newcomers, all sought to establish their “place in the digital world” (Bell) and make an indelible mark on the most venerable of creative industries before digitization rendered them obsolete.

While self-publishers assert that lower entry barriers enable greater discoverability, trade publishers defend the efficacy of their profession and digital developers argue that control of

content is more important than brand name. Many prestigious institutions admit that they are lagging behind the electronic explosion, while digital natives, although boasting the most “advanced and diverse platforms in the entire space” (Koppel), still struggle with premature advancement in the marketplace, awaiting the next generation of devices and an open-minded crowd to embrace new-fangled offerings. This “crowd” emerges as one of the most important players in the field. Traditional houses appear to be devising new strategies to incorporate users, while digital developers, more on a par with the mentality of these virtual communities, view them as collaborators who can contribute to their content and eventually to revenue.

It would be remiss not to address the “Big Three” players, Amazon, Apple, and Google, who elicit doubt, fear, awe, resentment and ultimately respect. It seems that partnerships between the traditional publishers, tech savvy platforms and the Big Three is the most logical way of remedying the disparities in the field, as the weakness of trade publishers might be the strengths of digital distributors. It is just a question of who will yield first, and concessions do not come easily in a field where success is tainted with subjectivity.

The Slush Factor: in Defence of Professionalism

In an age where unfiltered content runs rampant, who will emerge to tame the unruly word, or in *Salon.com*'s Laura Miller's words, “rescue” readers from “an ocean of slush” (Miller, 2010: para. 16)? Savikas observed that the role of publisher was certainly not disappearing, “but whether existing publishers continue to play that role is up in the air”. Whether traditional publishers or digital natives are more adept at playing this role in the networked era remains to be seen, as the latter struggles to establish clout and the former to acquire technical skills. Both parties argued that although instantaneity and accessibility were critical components, professionalism could not be sacrificed in the transition to digital.

Many readers erroneously believe that digital turnover is much more rapid than physical production, when in actuality, as Simon & Schuster's Kirsty McNeil pointed out, it is a “hard slog”. She described the labor-intensive process of publishing as a “beautiful machine” which involved editing, producing and marketing manuscripts in tune with fostering a writer's career. In order to achieve this awareness, Long suggested that publishers needed to be more transparent in order to “expose the before- and the after-life of the book, so that people understand--because consumers don't see the slush piles; they don't see the difficult meetings; they don't see the revised drafts”. Savikas was confident that electronic publishing

would “only increase the importance in value of good filtering”, underscoring the fact that the fundamental rules still applied—if not more so—in this impressionable digital space.

McNeil emphasized the importance of curating not only text but relationships with writers, as personal rapport could not be “replicated” via a portal. Fiehn, maintained that “people know they can rely upon us”, as he stressed that reader loyalty was paramount. Savikas echoed the importance of trust as he claimed, “because our audience knows O’Reilly, it provides us an opportunity to sell direct,” exemplifying that familiarity with brand had the potential to translate into direct revenue.

In addition to their defence of professionalism, respondents highlighted the struggle between preserving past roles while expanding digital capability. Long admitted that “we don’t have the right technology to drive the next generation of reading experience,” and advocated “skilling up” to make sure that Macmillan could “compete in terms of [creating a] compelling digital product”. Alice Mckown of Conde Nast Digital revealed that “while staying true to the company’s best in class content and quality of editorial and photography, there is an urgency to fuse with the techworld”. She explained that their greatest challenge was reinventing themselves as digital pioneers, addressing the criticism that they were “always late to the game”, the risk of their venerable reputation stigmatizing their technological potential. Bell revealed that the British Library was “way behind the game, hampered by a number of things”.

Alber, on the other hand, surmised that digital newcomers had an advantage because they “came from a strictly web background, so avoided some of the pitfalls” that traditional publishers faced. She described BookGlutton’s flexible mentality as “let’s look at what works on the web; let’s streamline it; let’s make it lightweight; let’s make it interoperable because that’s where the future will be”.

Similarly taking advantage of this “paradigm shift in the industry”, Anthony Policastro’s self-publishing site, Outer Banks, offered another option which utilized “[fewer] resources than printed books”. With lower entry barriers, he hoped to “find more bestsellers in the slush pile of the world”. Responding to the criticism that this model dismisses proficient measures in exchange for instant exposure, Policastro highlighted the “trend” of writers hiring editors to refine their works before uploading to the side, which “has diminished the stigma associated with self-publishing”.

Although skeptical about the process, McNeil herself admitted that “self-publishing’s got its place because many authors who would never get picked up have the opportunity to get out there, and consumers who are interested in cutting-edge new authors now have the opportunity to find that content”. Although most respondents argued that professionalism could not be sacrificed for instant access, they acknowledged the importance of exposure. The ability to reach Anderson’s “tail” or the niche audience became paramount, as accessibility became the key feature of the digital publishing phenomenon.

Yet even these innovative publishers were not immune to challenges. Albers acknowledged that, while BookGlutton’s web-centric model was certainly more flexible than its traditional peers, it was difficult to establish a solid reputation in an uncertain marketplace. Policastro similarly reflected on an “outsider’s” attempt to establish worth while simultaneously setting the pace, as his “biggest challenge is to find bestsellers and build a reputation before the traditional publishers adopt our business model”.

Whether fighting to establish credibility while breaking ground or simply trying to stay in the game while improving technical skills, all respondents seemed to agree there was a fine balance to be struck, and, in the volatile economy, few had figured out the winning combination. Perhaps they should take a page from Alber’s book, as she observed that “successful web companies are trying to replicate how people do things offline because that’s how people are use to interacting”. Her assertion that digital reformatting would be most effective if it imitated real life seems an obvious prescription but sometimes even the simplest solutions are overlooked in the hype of innovation.

Community Collaboration: Employing Social Networks

“Think about Wikipedia. Everyone thought it would be complete nonsense--just jibberish--but it’s a tremendous resource curated by people that care about it. Those communities are inspiring, and are going to do some incredible things. This is where the innovation is going to happen” (Jason Boog, Mediabistro).

Publishing, an industry that evolves around collaboration and interchange of ideas from book commission to launch, seems to naturally translate to online social networks, or what Alber referred to as “virtual meeting space[s] instead of flat document[s]”. Writers and avid readers, even reduced to the one hundred and forty Twitter characters, can easily congregate in Internet book clubs in dizzying droves that enable asynchronous interaction. In this word-of-mouth, viral environment, there seems to be more speculation circulating about JK Rowling’s next move than authors producing long-form text. Malkin observed a “convergence” of consumer and technology that would provide more opportunities to reach

readers who “are more open to reading digitally, have more devices and expect more content”, which meant that a writer’s job did not end with a bound manuscript.

In keeping with convergence theory, publishers websites are no longer dull links to their books, but feature roving Twitter-feeds, offers to “like” or even “friend” on Facebook, and invitations to online book launches. Albers described how the primary motivation for BookGlutton was “to integrate more deeply with other communities and absorb their social grasp”. The site attempts to invite visitors to “chat inside any chapter of the book” and share commentary with other readers at paragraph level, which she called “tracking location distance inside a document”. Her vision of the Internet as a traversable space, text as a map that can be navigated, defies the idea that reading is static experience, and merges the roles of writer and reader. “The ability to contextualize the experience”, or to continuously annotate text, Alber explained, allows for “asynchronous conversation that happens on a very specific level”. This elaborate model has mobilized reading with a focus on sustaining user engagement by cultivating discussion. Long elaborated on Macmillan’s similar vision of joining “the online discussion,” emphasizing that publishers should not be the definitive source but instead a part of a continuous dialogue.

Although Alber thought it “great to be a destination site”, she wisely employed the power of cross-platform promotion “to get ahead and scale”. Not only is it essential for the developers to saturate multi-platforms, but integral to the writer’s development as well. The writer is no longer just a name embossed on covers, but a talking head on YouTube, promoting books on Facebook, updating blogs with the next new idea. Long forecast that “finding your own voice and audience is the new generation’s mechanism. Writers should view it as another tool to use.” The networking may sound tiresome, but is necessary in an era where reader’s expectations have grown and one-dimensional text no longer entices.

Although doubtful about the efficacy of social networks, McNeil believed that they had “their place”, as she explained that social networking was a “good way of getting unknown names out there”. Policastro underscored the efficacy of word-of-mouth campaigns where “you can tell thousands all over the world about the great book you read” and illustrated the shifting of power from producer to consumer as “reader feedback determines if a book is a bestseller, not the publisher.” Long suggested that publishers should leverage reader’s social networks so that “the [users] become ambassadors for the book”.

Enlisting the community to work for firms, in both the development and the publicity processes, appeared to be a strategy shared by most actors in the convergent industry, a

deviation from the traditionally linear model. Belly discussed an upcoming “wiki-media type of project” that recruited a “community to correct Optimal Character Recognition” and catch production errors. Soliciting users for labor is old hat in the tech world. Savikas, whose company coined “Open Source” (see <http://oreilly.com/opensource/>), expanded on the importance of retaining a “virtuous community”, which involved trying to find ways “to interact, engage, and learn from readers”. He highlighted the productive relationship between O’Reilly and readers, noting software developers’ (their main demographic) natural ability to “write, revise, edit and collaborate on long-form complex text.”

The presence of virtual communities is undeniable, but their contributions to the publishing model remain to be seen. For writers, blogs have become secondary to writing books and, for publishers, supplementary interactive forums encouraging reader participation. Will these new networks alter the creative process or run as ancillary projects, giving an illusion of participation when they are simply functioning alongside the corporation without actually interacting inside it? Will publishers be able to draw lucratively on the “wisdom of crowds” (O’Reilly, 2005, 11, quoting James Surowiecki, 2004) by integrating such networks into their business schemes, or will blogs simply become “self-referential” “echo-chamber[s]” (O’Reilly, 2005, 11), sounding boards for readers without any hope for revenue? While Malkin recognized that adding layers was an expensive process both in terms of developing internal skill and of circumnavigating copyright, McNeil sought balance between innovation and profit in this “awkward convergent era”.

Elephants in the Room: Amazon, Apple, Google

“There are only three players: Amazon, Apple and Google” (Kirsty McNeil, Simon & Schuster).

In the publishing world, the ascent of digital actors from insurgent to incumbent positions (Mansell and Steinmueller, 2000) has been a rapid, volatile process. In the past decade, Google has corralled new publishing platforms to its advantage (i.e. Google Scholar, Books and now Editions), Amazon has rendered brick-and-mortar virtually obsolete and the Apple iPad has emerged as a game-changer, sparking a new generation of tactile reading devices.

Policastro, a former analyst for Amazon’s self-publishing platform, Lulu, described how, although Amazon was “the size of an eight-hundred pound gorilla, it moved like a puma sensing that latest trend”. He warned that “the industry will have to learn how to move fast, because it cannot compete with Amazon on price”. Mediabistro’s Jason Boog commented

that “Amazon has inspired a lot of anger for the way they have locked down distribution and prices.” Further, Google and Apple, formerly reserved to roles of content aggregator and hardware developer, upset the agency model, treading on the toes of traditional publishers. In an attempt to be “fair and agnostic,” Simon & Schuster strategically released both hardback and digital editions simultaneously and at the same price, without favoring any particular retailer. McNeil wisely advocated this synchronicity in order to avoid “cannibalizing print or giving any advantage to the digital”.

Bell had little reserve in exposing the two hurdles the British Library was contending with: money and Google. Marveling at Google’s breadth and heft in the market, he proclaimed: One company’s got deep pockets and ambitions in [the digital] direction. One can question their agenda about effectively asserting ownership of knowledge. But their terms and conditions have changed, which is why everyone is upset about Google, which is why they are so dangerous and unignorable.

Tom Blake discussed the Boston Public Library’s decision to partner with Brewster Kahle’s non-profit Internet Archive over Google Books. Even though it cost marginally more to digitize collections, the Archive allowed the library to maintain ownership of its titles, a sign that control over resources was more important than price tag.

Long, although recognizing that Google is “quite frightening,” discussed the challenges of entering into “new channels” as Macmillan, a competitive company in the UK but less so internationally, adjusted to welcoming “all three global players into the [UK] market”. Nonetheless he identified the potential for a “massive opportunity” as these new entrants to the publishing world were not threats but actually catalysts for change.

Partnerships: If You Can’t Beat ‘Em...

While esteemed institutions fear irrelevancy, digital natives appear motivated by urgency to step out from the shadow of the Big Three and make themselves indispensable. No matter the position in the marketplace, one thing is clear: partnerships--whether with the Big Three or between web savvy platforms and traditional companies--seem inevitable and much wiser than braving fierce competition. A convergence of actors would give credibility to newcomers struggling in the market, and breathe innovation into the risk-averse establishments. Finally, the merging of public and commercial sectors, although controversial, is emerging as digitization fever sweeps libraries.

Long observed that the introduction of the digital behemoths into the marketplace was a “positive thing” and would “stimulate publishers to transform their business from old print media to something newer, more digital and more agile”. He described the importance of flexibility and consumer awareness, as well as tapping into multi-platforms or, in his words, maintaining “good fields of exchange in all channels”. This collaboration was integral to business strategy as it would allow for a fusion of resources and revenue.

While digital platforms seamlessly integrated with each other (i.e., Book Glutton acquired over nine-hundred books from O’Reilly Media’s catalogue), Malkin predicted that there would be “more participation, experimentation, and consolidation in the industry” as a whole. At the time of our interview, Zinio had signed with twenty-five publishers, including Wiley, Oxford University Press and Houghton Mifflin. He identified the biggest struggle as whether publishers could “reduce their list and become more vertical”.

Koppel also spoke about scale as a primary strategy. In essence ScrollMotion had positioned itself as an indispensable asset for traditional companies, “a platform that works for textbooks, trade books, and magazines”, a forerunner in the technological field. Through their development of over twelve thousand apps, ScrollMotion was not only setting standards, but also redefining the role of a distributor. Echoing the sentiments of Amazon’s Jeff Bezos that “the book *itself* is the narrative” (Mangdalindan, 2010: para. 14), Koppel argued:

Why not just let the books be the brand? When people are looking for content they are searching for Stephanie Meyer, Seven King, John Irving, someone they know about. Why not homestead across this nascent space as opposed to building your own portal? He revealed that mining the treasure chests of his partners’ content was one way of “circumventing the establishment” (Fowler and Trachtenberg, 2010, para. 4), which itself was making revolutionary changes.

Partnerships between public institutions and commercial bodies emerged as a controversial but critical back-scratching exercise. Libraries lacked the funds to sustain their legacy as gatekeepers of “national memory” (Dame Lynne Brindley, Chief Executive, British Library). Commercial enterprises did not have access to the massive resources of these institutions, which have “free deposits” of every title in the marketplace (Simon Bell). Although criticized by many, including James Murdoch, who admonished the tainted convergence of public and private (Wray, 2010), this partnership could prove beneficial for both parties.

The British Library has established several commercial partnerships itself, including alliances with Microsoft, Cengage, ProQuest and its recent alliance with online publisher **brightsolid**. With **brightsolid**'s assistance, the British Library aims to digitize up to forty million pages of archived newspapers, a preservation project that will allow mass-readership access to three-centuries of broadsheets.

Duncan observed that although “publishers are concerned that libraries are going to end up being competitors in this digital age, they should recognize that libraries are an incredible means of encouraging literacy”. She in turn described Bloomsbury’s initiative, a partnership program with ExactEditions, a “content management” site that allowed libraries, schools and publishers to determine distribution through subscription (<http://www.exacteditions.com/bloomsbury>). The marriage of public and private, digital and traditional, would hopefully succeed in promoting literacy, improving access and immortalizing text; however, even partnerships could not triumph over one roadblock: Intellectual Property Rights.

Revising Laws: Climbing the IPR Wall

“We are stepping into the world of digital rights: how they are defined, how they are carved up, how royalties are paid, what constitutes different sorts of rights. We are in a world where we are actually creating products that publishers have never created before, agents and authors have never dealt with before”
(Kirsty McNeil, Simon & Schuster).

As the writing process enters an age of perpetual upgrades, intellectual property emerges as the primary barrier to digital immediacy. Behind each enhancement looms the threat of digital rights. Not only does it become necessary to redefine the meaning of a book but to rewrite laws to extend across multi-platforms. McNeil addressed what Malkin termed a “prickly” and “porous” issue, as she observed that if you “split up all the layers” of interactivity “you’ll find that many traditional components have different territorialities, rights, and royalties, so all the contracts people are trying to come to agreements without jeopardizing the product.”

Yet after interviewing sixteen professionals, it became clear that even if the product itself was not being jeopardized, the digitization process was slowing, and in turn accessibility and conservation were suffering due to rights disputes. This hindrance appeared as most prevalent in my discussions with libraries, as copyrighted--even public domain--material became stalled in the digital annals. The Boston Library had temporarily avoided this impediment, as they allowed online subscribers to “check out” or download one book in a

variety of formats—from PDF to ePub—for a fixed period before it disappeared from their database. Blake confessed that this was a “way around” the murky copyright situation, as they attempted to interpret the “gray area” before it was interpreted for them. “We think, he continued, “that we are demonstrating enough respect for the spirit of the law. If we don’t figure this out we are going to become irrelevant really quickly”.

Bell candidly surmised that “the field of IPR is an absolute minefield, completely unfit for the digital age”. So far the British Library had avoided legal risk by digitizing pre-1900 books that were out of copyright, and “exercising due diligence” or employing their best “endeavors to try and trace rights holders”. Yet Bell’s primary frustration resided in the fact that their mission—to make materials as widely accessible as possible—was being thwarted by outdated law and by rights holders who “at the end of the day” were “commercial entities” interested “in exploiting the properties they own”. Regardless of the commercial partnerships that the British Library was pursuing, public and private sectors retained markedly different agendas.

Bell and Blake, along with the trade publishers, appeared to be caught in Lessig’s (2009) “obsessive permissions culture”, but what about the digital actors? O’Reilly had wisely forecast these hurdles at the inception, as they evaded the “geographic boundaries that long defined the industry” and acquired “worldwide” rights for digital content, fostering growth of their international market. However, as Savikas noted, his company was “a bit unique”, and most digital publishers still struggled with the fact that they were premature actors in a field of archaic laws. Alber elaborated that a company like BookGlutton gives publishers “a lot of pause” because they are “not equipped to manage rights” of an “entirely web-based” company. In keeping with Policastro’s vision of Amazon’s gorilla-puma hybrid and the other elephants in the room, “Alber fittingly concluded that publishing was “a complex, multi-layered beast”, metaphorical predators that will have to team up in order to survive in the net’s wild jungle. Perhaps Bezos wasn’t so far off in naming his site after all.

CONCLUSION

My discussions with publishing professionals revolved around the functionality of digital publishing technologies and the changing roles of actors in the marketplace. As I revisited the concepts that emerged from my literature review, the shift from a linear to a networked landscape and the convergence of actors, devices and physical and hyperlinked text, it became clear that new technology was restructuring old relationships and introducing new players into a field once ruled by a rigid hierarchy.

Reasons for digitization ranged from maintaining relevance to generating revenue to immortalizing text. However, all respondents pontificated that the electronic form would provide unprecedented access; digital text is inherently rewritable, but in spite of inheriting software-like characteristics, the basic integrity of the written word, the power of content, cannot be sacrificed. Although speed is an important aspect of the digitization process, it is no substitute for professionalism, as filtering remains a key characteristic in both new media platforms as well as in established models. Although social networks are integrated into traditional business models, and bottom-up collaboration tends to build richer, more robust platforms, the infrastructure has to be well-developed in order for such communities to thrive.

The tension between preservation and reinvention of book forms, simply simulating traditional experiences in innovative devices or catapulting reading to a more stimulating, hyperlinked level emerged in each interview as the industry tried to figure out whether digital form was worth the investment or just another dot.com boom that might be recalled with the next generation iPad.

In the end, the biggest obstruction to digitization is not about software or device, nor does it depend on new entrants upending the “old school” or even upon a users’ willingness to embrace innovation and engage with text; rather it depends on archaic laws that govern moveable text. Until Intellectual Property Rights are fittingly adapted to mimic the newly networked, malleable-type, eBooks and their complementary devices will remain but futuristic visions waiting to be realized.

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Appendix A: List of Interviewees

*All interviews conducted in 2010

Company	Publishing Category	Name	Title	Type of Interview	Date of Interview
Bloomsbury UK	Trade Publisher	Stephanie Duncan	Digital Media Director	Skype/email follow-up	11-Jun*
Book Glutton	Social Platform	Travis Alber	Founder and President	Skype/email follow-up	20-Jun
Boston Public Library	Public	Tom Blake	Digital Imaging Production Manager	Semi-structured in person	28-Jun
British Library	Public	Simon Bell	Head of Strategic Partnerships and Licensing	Semi-structured in person	24-Jun
Conde Nast Digital	Magazine Publisher	Alice McKown	Executive Director, Marketing, Conde Nast Digital	Semi-structured in person	19-Jul
HarperCollins	Trade/Self Publishing	Mark Johnson	Head of Digital Communities	Semi-structured in person; e-mail follow-up	3-Mar; 23 Jul
Hyperion Books	Authonomy	Allison McGeehon	Publicity Manager	Semi-structured in person	21-Jul
Mediabistro	Industry Newsletter	Jason Boog	Analyst	Semi-structured in person	20-Jul
O'Reilly Media	Digital Publisher	Andrew Savikas	VP of Digital Initiatives	Skype/in person follow-up	8-Jun
Outer Banks Publishing	Self Publisher	Anthony Policastro	Publisher	email correspondence	21-Jun
Pan Macmillan	Trade Publisher	George Morley	Non-Fiction Editorial Director	Semi-structured in person	24-Jun
Pan Macmillan	Trade Publisher	James Long	Head of Digital Development	Semi-structured in person	24-Jun
Phaidon	Trade/Design	Rob Fiehn	Editor	Semi-structured in person	5-May
ScrollMotion	Digital Developer	Josh Koppel	Founder	web-conference/in person follow-up	9-Jul; 19-Jul
Simon & Schuster (UK)	Trade Publisher	Kirsty McNeill	Digital Publisher	Semi-structured in person	30-Jun
Zinio	Digital Developer	Andrew Malkin	Vice President, Book Content	Skype/in person follow-up	4-Apr; 20-Jul

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