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Beyond traditional publishing models

An examination of the relationships between authors, readers, and publishers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the state of contemporary publishing, specifically the realms of fanfiction and self-publishing, for the ways in which readership is represented in conjunction with authors and publishers within the publication process. The structure of this process is then compared with Robert Darnton's communications circuit in order to propose a new model for the publication. As the publication process has a profound impact on the teaching and practice of collection development and reader studies in LIS, the discipline must be aware of any changes to the publication process.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the case study approach, this research examines the cultural product, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (*FSOG*). Evidence included fanfiction and self-published manuscripts, reader reception of these texts, and a timeline of how the texts developed.

Findings – Evidence gathered from the case study illustrate a variety of players and infrastructure present in the development and trajectory of *FSOG*. Throughout the entire development of the cultural product, readers were found to be active agents in the publication process promoting strong connections between reader and author. Findings focus on the themes of textual development and their publicity.

Originality/value – Proposes a new model for the publication process that includes fanfiction and self-publishing.

Keywords Communications circuit, Cultural products, Fanfiction, Publication process, Reader reception, Self-publishing

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Library and information science (LIS), through its involvement in teaching in LIS programs and through the practice in information agencies, including libraries, has a vested interest in understanding and communicating how information and texts become recorded and made available to the public. An understanding of how traditional publication processes work permeates the field's conceptualization of collection development, readers' advisory, and other interrelated areas. And because of this entrenched nature of these themes to the discipline, those involved in LIS studies must also be aware of any changes to the publication process.



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As the publishing industry is examined, certain and specific practices that allow for publication become clear. Traditional publishing can be generally characterized as a “top-down” process where industry controls what is made widely and publicly available, and this includes the publicity surrounding any particular text. Robert Darnton’s (1982) model of the communications circuit (fully discussed below) examines the social roles of all involved actors and illustrates this top-down approach. It explores the literary publication process from creators, being the author and publisher, through various agents toward the receiver or the public readership of the cultural product. While Darnton’s (1982) model is based from a case study of publication in eighteenth Century France, this example is still central and relevant not only to the field of book history, but also of information as it acts as a documentation source recording what is known and understood and is the pivot point for this research.

Paul Duguid (1996) notes, “[b]ooks are part of a social system that includes authors, readers, publishers, booksellers, libraries, and so forth” (p. 79). This idea from Duguid suggests that the system surrounding the reading experience is complicated and includes multiple and diverse ties. Indeed, books and reading culture has historically been acknowledged as having social aspects (see Finkelstein and McCleery, 2005; Manguel, 1996 for historical reviews). In Darnton’s (1982) model, specifically, readers are positioned at the end of the model and cycle back into authors. What is not made clear is the extent of the impact that the reader has on the author and the publication process itself, before, during, and after the cultural product is produced. Those complicated ties as expressed by Duguid (1996) suggest there are explicit connections formed between authors and readers that may extend throughout the creative and production processes.

Recent events in publishing do not appear to fit within this traditional “top-down” approach. Some newer bestsellers do not appear to have followed the traditional trajectory for publication. In fact, these works seem to be disruptive of the current standards as it appears that the reader may, in fact, play a much more prominent role and have an extensive impact on the creation process.

Research questions

This research questions the position that readership holds as the publishing circuit is assessed through a contemporary lens. It investigates the state of contemporary publishing, especially for the ways readership is represented within the publication process against Darnton’s (1982) model which is generally accepted as representative of the publication process. By focussing on the cultural product *Fifty Shades of Grey* (FSOG; James, 2012a, b, c), as a case study, this work seeks to revise and rebuild aspects of the model of the communications circuit, with particular focus on the relationship between the reader and the creators (author and publisher). FSOG provides an interesting case as the work was originally fanfiction based on Stephanie Meyer’s (2005) *Twilight* trilogy. It then shifted to become an original self-published work that was later picked up by a traditional publisher.

The research questions, which drive this work, are as follows:

- RQ1. In what ways does Darnton’s model account for the publishing phenomenon of FSOG with its origins in fanfiction and self-publishing?
- RQ2. If the initiatives from reading-focussed user communities and self-publishing infrastructures are effecting change, then in what ways does the model need to be altered?

Definitions

This research examines three connected areas that require further definition. The boundaries around self-publishing and fanfiction need to be articulated and an overview of fanfiction communities is necessary for context.

Also known as independent, “indie,” direct publishing or, pejoratively, as vanity presses, self-publishing is loosely defined as all works produced for public consumption that have not gone through a traditional publisher. While Thompson (2012) and Camacho (2013) provide commerce-oriented definitions of self-publishing, here we use self-publishing as an umbrella concept that encompasses multiple phenomena. This definition includes works freely distributed as well as those sold and includes original works as well as fanfiction.

Fanfiction, then, is a subset of self-publishing. Fanfiction is diverse, but does have some general characteristics. Fanfiction is generally based on a root, or beginning, text from which fanfiction authors base their own texts (see Hellekson and Busse, 2006 for a full treatment of definitions; also Jenkins, 1988, 1992, 2006). The guiding focus for fanfiction is on these root-texts, as much contemporary fanfiction is organized on fanfiction web sites according to the root-text. Movies, books, plays, television shows, cartoons, games, and comics are only a few of the genres that have inspired fanfiction writers. Authors post their stories to fanfiction web sites, sometimes in whole and sometimes in parts, and solicit feedback from readers.

Fanfiction has deep historical roots. Derecho (2006) and Coppa (2006) provide historical overviews of the development of fanfiction from its use by fans of Jane Austen and Sherlock Holmes in the 1920s and its more modern incarnation that developed in the science fiction genre in the 1960s. In a similar vein, Jamison (2013) offers a look back at the social nature of writing and connects this to fanfiction.

For the purposes of this research, the focus is on contemporary fanfiction, produced through online fanfiction communities or fanfiction web sites. Throughout most of modern fanfiction history such communities existed loosely through the publication of zines, but the shift to online publishing created large communities through such sites as Livejournal.com and fanfiction.net (ff.net) (Derecho, 2006). While these fandoms may be seen and defined as communities or collectives, they may not be cohesive. Nonetheless, Hellekson and Busse (2006) offer a definition which can help us understand the work that occurs in these communities: “community-centered creation of artistic fannish expressions such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan vids [...] with constant manipulation, renegotiation, commenting, and revising, all done electronically” (p. 6). Through such sites as ff.net and other online fora, fanfiction communities create a complex discourse through comments, messages, and author editorials:

Fanfiction is what literature might look like if it were reinvented from scratch after a nuclear apocalypse by a band of brilliant pop-culture junkies trapped in a sealed bunker.

They don't do it for money. That's not what it's about. The writers write it and put it up online just for the satisfaction. They're fans, but they're not silent, couchbound consumers of media. The culture talks to them, and they talk back to the culture in its own language (Grossman, 2011).

Literature review

There are two distinct areas of study that help to explain this research. The first focusses on examining the various publishing models that have been proposed. The second, examines the broad publishing realm and examines three subsets: first,

how traditional publishing perceives self-publishing; second, perspectives on self-publishing beyond the publishing literature; and third, fanfiction studies.

Publishing models

Darnton's (1982) communication circuit is a seminal example of a publishing model and is central to this research, but other models exist which explore the publication process and these must be acknowledged. Adams and Barker's (2001) model builds from Darnton's (1982), although it focusses on the publication processes (not the roles of those involved at each stage) in which texts undergo and the influences that direct these processes. Mann (1982) offers his chain of communication where the author is the initiator of content and this content progresses to reach the reader. Here, the author communicates to another via the medium of the books (Mann, 1982, p. 30). Thompson (2012) discusses the related book supply chain process and Hillesund (2005, 2007) offers models that focus on digital text production.

Further to these models, Murray and Squires (2013) do appropriately note the critical need for an update that explores the communications circuit within digital publishing. They offer a series of models using Darnton's (1982) as a starting point. These models include: late twentieth-century print publishing; self-publishing; digital publishing; and readers in digital publishing. However, gaps exist in their models. First, they do offer a model that focusses on self-publishing, yet they explain that they draw on "industry developments and a series of cases studies of small- to mid-sized UK-based independent publishing companies" (Murray and Squires, 2013, p. 4). They clearly do not provide overt evidence from self-publishers, only independents and this is a distinct difference. Also, the models themselves are not explained in any concrete detail; for example, Murray and Squires (2013) write, "Social media [...] allow authors to communicate directly and immediately with their readers, solidifying the dotted line drawn from reader to author in the communications circuit" (p. 5), yet not one of their developed models indicate a solid line from reader to author or vice versa. These models, then, are not clearly presented and tested and remain as hypothetical representations of the communications circuit for digital publishing. These are useful, though, as the authors recognize and use Darnton (1982) as the original inspiration for this necessary development, which reflects contemporary publishing.

Questions regarding the role and impact of the reader on creators remain in all of the models, as the models reviewed here do not clearly explain the connection of the readership proper to the creators, the author and publisher, nor do they consider the influence of user-mediated readerships. Instead, these models often focus on the expertise of publication, a role assumed by the traditional publisher as mediator. In particular, this work focusses on the reader and aims to explain the role readership has in contemporary publication.

The broader publishing realm

Traditional publishing has tended to look unfavorably on self-publishing, if it addresses it at all. The focus is often on print or print-on-demand models, deemed a predatory practice (Haugland, 2006). More recent research has focussed solely on the print model for independent presses (Tian and Martin, 2011). Focus on small print-on-demand and ebook-only options has vastly expanded knowledge of independently published works in the public's mind (e.g. the success of independent author Hugh Howey) with concerns as to how these digital-only works may be preserved by national libraries (Brantley, 2012). Godine (2011) notes that the fastest-growing segment of the

publishing and printing industry is now in books that are self-published and questions the future of “the publisher.”

Outside traditional publishing, research focussing on the self-publishing industry is limited but growing in breadth. Hayward (1992) explored the rationale for self-publishing for authors, including the benefits and drawbacks, while also exploring implications for libraries. This theme of working to understand how self-publishing affects libraries re-emerges in current publications (Dilevko and Dali, 2006; Dawson, 2008; Glantz, 2013; Hadro, 2013; Pacer, 2013). Researchers shift focus from the library to those authors who are self-publishing. Laquintano (2010) investigates the writing practices that support the production, distribution, and sanctioning of ebooks self-published by online poker players. Similarly, Baverstock (2012) and Baverstock and Steinitz (2013) work to understand the motivations, demographics, processes, and outcomes for those authors who choose to self-publish. Further, in working to understand the self-publishing field, a research team led by Jana Bradley explored non-traditional book publishing for its impact on readers (Bradley *et al.*, 2011) and offer a complete snapshot of the industry in 2008 “when it was still small enough to study overall” (Bradley *et al.*, 2012, p. 107).

Fanfiction research often focusses on the activity of fanfiction itself (Thomas, 2011 provides a comprehensive review of the fanfiction literature], but offers limited focus on how this culture is affecting the publishing industry. Jenkins (2006) provides an ethnographic explanation of how fanfiction culture works and the necessity of fans to the production of fanfiction culture. In addition, case study and ethnographic studies have been used to examine particular titles, for instance some of Jane Austen’s work (Steenhuysen, 2011) and those within the Star Trek franchise (Jenkins, 1992).

Other contemporary fanfiction-related research themes include the ethical issues of the labor practices and leisure conditions of fanfiction communities (Karpovich, 2006; Driscoll and Gregg, 2011), policy issues including copyright (Jenkins, 1988; Koulikov, 2012) and issues of newness and idea ownership (Stein and Busse, 2009), the effect of fanfiction for English-as-second-language education (Black, 2009; Li, 2012), and identity studies within fan communities, including gender and sexuality themes (Scodari, 2003; Leavenworth, 2009).

Studies of the publishing industry and those of fanfiction and self-publishing rarely intersect. Most likely because fanfiction or self-publishing have, until recently, not been considered marketable genres. But with the publication of *FSOG* and other works like it and Amazon’s development of a fanfiction market through its Kindle Worlds program, publishing can no longer ignore these realms. Through explanations of the publication process and studies of fanfiction and self-publishing, an area of focus that is lacking is on the explicit role and impact of the reader. This study aims to fill this gap.

Conceptual framing

Multiple, interrelated conceptual works frame this research. First, this research explores the social world and structures related to the production and consumption of published literary works, which is framed by Bourdieu’s (1993) field of cultural production and further explained in his text, *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu explores how culture, including art, culture, and writing, influences and is influenced by society. In this system, accepted forms of art originate through

acceptable or dominant channels, whereas a newcomer to the artistic world must cause change to enter this field of culture production:

On one side are the dominant figures, who want continuity, identity, reproduction; on the other, the newcomers, who seek discontinuity, rupture, difference, revolution. To “make” one’s name means making one’s mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one’s difference from other producers [...] it means creating a new position beyond the positions presently occupied, ahead of them (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 106).

Second, while the realm of cultural production does represent literary works and the process of publishing written texts, within the realm of cultural production it can be said that the communications circuit for traditionally published literary works exists as a dominant force, as first posited by Darnton (1982). Of the reader Darnton (1982) writes, “The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition” (p. 67). And he goes on to characterize authors as:

[...] readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affects their texts, whether they are composing Shakespearean sonnets or directions for assembling radio kits. A writer may respond in his writing to criticisms of his previous work or anticipate reactions that his text will elicit. He addresses implicit readers and hears from explicit reviewers. So the circuit runs full cycle. It transmits messages, transforming them en route, as they pass from thought to writing to printed characters and back to thought again (Darnton, 1982, p. 67).

Here, Darnton is stating that the reader affects the author and the author is influenced by implicit readers before publication but hears from explicit reviewers after publication. Yet, the roles of the reader are unclear in this cycle as there is no indication that other actors in the circuit can access the reader’s message (such as the publisher), or that reader’s influence the author during composition. Further to this point, visually the model positions the publisher as equal to the author and on the summit of the circuit, with distinct communication channels present in their relationship that drives the publication process through various elements, including printers, suppliers, shippers, booksellers, to readers. The link between readers and authors is presented as an unclear connection through the use of a dotted line from readers to authors only, as all of the other links are visualized as a solid line (Darnton, 1982, p. 68). What is not clear and needs to be explicit are the channels of communication and relationship between the reading public, broadly defined, and the author and publisher, those forces dominating the circuit and being the driving forces in the realm of cultural production.

Finally, this research is based on elements of publishing research that explains what Thompson (2012) discusses as the web of collective belief. This is defined as a set of tacit rules or constraints applied by publishers as they look to value the “valueless” which is described as that next successful publication: “[...] it is a specific combination of judgements and opinions, of who thinks what and what they think about it, that determines whether a house will buy a book and, if so, how much they will pay for it. This is the web of collective belief” (Thompson, 2012, p. 205). Thompson describes this web as constructed of the editor, publisher, and agent as these players are the ones who advocate for and judge the text as a possible success. Under the constraints of the web, this work considers inside experts only, those named editors, publishers, and agents and outsiders to the industry are not used and frowned upon. As Thompson (2012) notes: “[...] rarely does an editor at an imprint in the large publishing corporations consult someone outside of the house. [...] ‘It’s considered bad form’” (p. 208).

This conceptual frame, combining Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) field of cultural production with Darnton (1982), and Thompson's (2012) respective explanations on the functioning of the traditional publishing field provides focus here. Bourdieu articulates the power structures at play in the creation of cultural products; Darnton notes the roles of each actor within the traditional publication process, while Thompson shows the power within publishing as it is traditionally understood.

Method

In this research *FSOG* is used as a case study (Yin, 2013). By piecing together the text's path through the communications circuit (Darnton, 1982), that is, the development of the work from its beginnings as *Twilight* fanfiction to its eventual status as a bestselling novel with a traditional publisher, we elaborate on a small section of Darnton's (1982) communications circuit, that of the relationship between the author, publisher, and reader. We investigate these connections from three connected angles. The first area of focus was a search for artifacts of the original manuscripts of *FSOG* and its fanfiction predecessor titled *Master of the Universe (MotU)*. The second was an examination of the early reader reception of these texts. Third, we looked for evidence of a timeline of how the texts developed, including the points at which a traditional publisher took interest in the work and when a publishing contract was signed.

Similar searching strategies were employed for each of these three areas and included searching the web, news databases, and the Wayback Machine from the Internet Archive (IA). Initial searches focussed on terms related to *Fifty Shades* and *Master of the Universe*, but then broadened to include insider terminology (e.g. *MotU*; "Snowqueens Icedragon"; "SQID").

Artifacts of the original manuscripts were located through searches of the internet, including using the Wayback Machine. Of specific focus were fanfiction readership communities as well as reader-created blogs. These communities provided the original "home" for the developing manuscripts as well as provided early feedback and reception. Searches became increasingly complex because after *FSOG* received a traditional publishing contract, copies of the early versions, including the fanfiction original, *MotU*, were removed from the web. This included copies that had been posted to the author's web site, those with the original self-publisher The Writer's Coffee Shop, copies on fanfiction sites, and even archived versions of sites on the IA (Boog, 2012). While no copies of the self-published version of *FSOG* were located, versions of *MotU* were found through links posted from varied blogs. Because *MotU* was serially published some archived links directed to only parts of reader-uploaded copies, while others provided access to the complete product.

Similarly, as early interest in *FSOG* and its predecessor, *MotU*, grew from reader communities interested in fanfiction and self-published materials, early reader reception could only be gauged by examination of the archives of fanfiction communities and readers' blogs. With the ever-evolving nature of the web, these sources were examined through archived copies of the sites available through the Wayback Machine. Of focus here was not only the blog posts themselves, but also the comments attached to those posts that provided a more robust understanding of the reception of the work.

To complete the data set, a timeline of general public interest and traditional publisher interest was shaped from the two areas of research above as well as additional information found in both traditional and non-traditional media outlets. Examining publishing sources such as *Publisher's Weekly* and news archives such as LexisNexis provided the final pieces that allowed a timeline of *FSOG* to become clear.

Findings

The findings illustrate a variety of players and infrastructure present in the development and trajectory of *FSOG* as the text progressed from fanfiction manuscript, to self-published text, to traditionally published text. These are explained through the following: through the initial genesis of the text and reader reception, the transition from early reader response to a more general reading audience (particularly, those who do not generally read fanfiction), and the transition to more traditional publicity and publishing channels. As much of the data are derived from varied reader-generated commentary, quotations are presented verbatim within the findings.

In order to position the findings within the context of the *FSOG* narrative itself, the following is a plot summary to aid the reader: Anastasia Steele, who meets and interviews successful entrepreneur Christian Grey for an article for her university paper. Over time the two become involved, but he is uninterested in a romantic relationship and instead desires a contractual BDSM relationship. As the pair continues to interact they come to find that they both care for each other, but Christian's dominating tendencies and two of his previous sexual partners create tension for the couple. In the end, their relationship prevails and by the conclusion of the third book, Christian and Ana are happily married and expecting their first child.

Genesis of the text and individualized reader reception

The publication trajectory of *FSOG* follows a non-mainstream approach, as the genesis of the story was through serially released fanfiction based on the story *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005). E.L. James, using the pseudonym "Snowqueens Icedragon" released the original story, then titled *MotU*, on two fanfiction communities: fanfiction.net (ff.net) and twilighted.com beginning in August 2009 (Jamison, 2012a). *MotU* was serially shared on these sites allowing readers to connect to the story as it developed. The story includes 87 chapters covering the main storyline and three "outtakes" that provide background mini-stories for certain characters.

This style of writing fanfiction and sharing with a wider audience allowed readers to consume and respond to the text as it was being created and, through their responses and feedback, for the author to get suggestions from readers and gain a readership following. The author, James, was successful at engaging with fans, using social media to participate in virtual "book talks" and other chats with fans (Jamison, 2012b). In December 2010, the *MotU* manuscript was transferred from the fanfiction sites to James' own web site, 50shades.com. It has been suggested that this removal was due to the "racy material" contained within the story (Fleming, 2012).

While concrete statistics on the number of views and reviews for the early work are unavailable due to the original manuscript being stripped from fanfiction web sites, there is evidence that the story was especially popular with readers. Jason Boog, an editor at the book publishing news web site GalleyCat, describes *MotU* as "a huge story" and stated that *MotU* had about 37,000 reviews on the ff.net web site (Jamison, 2012a). While the number of reader comments cannot be corroborated through the original web site, a blogger writing about *MotU* indicates that as of February 19, 2010 (the date of the blog post) *MotU* had about 40,000 reviews on ff.net (Twilightcupcake, 2012). In comparison, one *Harry Potter* fanfiction (currently the most popular area on ff.net) has just over 22,000 reviews (as of October 1, 2013).

Reader appreciation of the text. Early readers comment not only on the story itself but also express excitement over a new chapter of the text being published. The following reader responses are to chapters of *MotU* posted on twilighted.com.

Readers make appreciative comments about having a new chapter to read, “This morning I opened my email and squeed [...]. an update to *MotU* [...]. Yah [...]. Thanks for making my day [...]. and another great chapter [...].” (poster: ahz 1; March 1, 2010; Ch. 72). Some go further to comment on the devices used in the construction of the text. These include indicating the readers’ own enjoyment of their reading, “Love the line about throwing toys out of the pram” (poster: middlewife; June 10, 2010; Ch. 5) and “Love the Icarus comparison and the echo’s from the original book in such a contrasted setting. I love the flow & tenor of your language, so distinctive” (poster: middlewife; June 10, 2010; Ch. 7). Interestingly, one reader followed the tone of the text itself in writing an appreciative response that requested more writing from the author:

“Nice chapter [...] although I expected a bit MORE as everyone. ok enough with the crap please please I am literally on your feet begging you mistress for MORE!!!!DON’T LEAVE ME HANGING LIKE THAT!!!! write a sequel. I really don’t care when as long as you write it. It can be two years from now [...] I really wouldn’t mind because it’s worth every second of the wait! (poster: Robin Poittier; June 18, 2010; Ch. 87).

Feedback and character construction ideas. Some readers go further than only offering appreciative comments and offer more concrete suggestions for the author to subsequently bring to the text. For example, multiple comments on chapter 72 of *MotU* offer their own impression of how the characters should be constructed, “Icy – great chapter! I was glad to see Bella be able to stand up to Edward, and tell him her feelings about him being so controlling” (poster: twsagaaddict; March 1, 2010; Ch. 72). Another reader sympathized with the author, indicating that she understands how challenging it is to write the fragile and devious character and to carefully share these details with the readers with the comment:

The weighty stuff is really well done. It has been said & I agree, it would be hard to convey a character that is clever masterful, all seeing/all knowing and to simultaneously keep his pathologically fragile/fucked up nature in our faces. I know it happens in life but there you have all the other cues to convey all these different facets at once and in writing you are restricted (I see someone like this “50” at work and for her, I feel admiration and terrible frustration all at once- I get that sense with 50- “But you don’t know me”) (EMILIE00 March 1, 2010; Ch. 72).

One reader went further than providing feedback alone and offered the author the suggestion to try another tactic with the characters, “well, well, I don’t expect that the “James problem” will go away just yet, it might even be appealing to him to try snaring something of Edward’s?” (Daylen March 1, 2010; Ch. 72).

Inasmuch as these are individualized responses to the text from the reader and directed toward the author, the data set indicates that the author consumes comments linked to the fanfiction text and that these communications between reader and author may be ongoing. This pattern of reader comment and author response is appropriate and core to the fanfiction genre. But how and to what extent these reader comments are used by the author is unclear as is noted in the following response from Icy (Snowqueens Icedragon) to a responding reader which only reflects on the personable relationship that has formed between reader and author:

Author’s Response to the post from EMILIE00 on March 01, 2010; Chapter 72:

Oh Emilie [...] so glad you found it on here bb [...] love to hear from you as always [...]

Icy xxx.

It is clear that many readers connected to the text, acted as an audience, and individually reached out to the author to offer a response to their reading. This evidence also indicates the building of the readership community, not a physical community, but a connection of mind-set where readers found a text they enjoyed and wished to share their enthusiasm and feedback with other readers and the author.

Transitioning reader-response to the masses

As readers connected to the author and other readers through the text, word-of-mouth publicity grew, but the texts themselves were still under development. *MotU* first started appearing online in August of 2009. By December of 2010 *MotU* was moved from fanfiction sites to the author's own web site. There is no precise date as to when the manuscript began to transition from *MotU* to *FSOG*, but the similarities between the two manuscripts indicates a short turnaround time. Textual analysis indicates the two manuscripts are 89 percent the same (Jane, 2012). On May 26, 2011, *MotU* had its final transformation into *FSOG* and the author was offering print-on-demand and ebook sales of *FSOG* with The Writer's Coffee Shop, an indie publisher that also houses fanfiction.

With the shift from freely available fanfiction to stand-alone text for sale, other social media became outlets for publicizing and discussing the text. On July 4, 2011 the first reader review was posted for *FSOG* on Goodreads, a social media site for connecting books and readers. These early reviewers were most often already familiar with the text in its original *MotU* form. Goodreads Reader Linda rated the text at 5 of 5 stars and detailed that she "read an unpublished version of this book a while ago and loved it [...] It's still just as great as it was before, even with the name changes and the smaller changes throughout the story." Goodreads offers readers a means of connecting with other readers in a digital space, offering opportunity for readers to write reviews and provide ratings of read texts. By providing that initial review for *FSOG*, this reader helped to bring the text into popular view, as fanfiction communities may still be considered fringe arenas for reading culture. Reader activity on this new platform allowed for *FSOG* to gain a wider audience and, ostensibly, create increased popularity for the text.

This form of reader publicity created new interest and popularity for *FSOG* as the book was selected for the "Goodreads Choice Awards" program. The Goodreads platform offers a series of sponsored awards, the "Goodreads Choice Awards," described as, "the only major book awards decided by readers" (Goodreads, 2013a). Jessica Donaghy, features editor at Goodreads, is quoted saying:

[*Fifty Shades of Grey's*] phenomenally high average rating earned it a nomination for the Best Romance award in the 2011 Goodreads Choice Awards [...] The nomination in early November caused a spike in interest from members and the buzz kept growing as more people read the book and shared their reviews with their friends on Goodreads (Ngak, 2012).

While the reader comments placed on this social media site originate from individuals, they communicate and drive interest to the masses, as the Goodreads site has a vast number of registered users; 20 million members at the time of writing (Goodreads, 2013b), thereby transitioning individual reader response to a more connected, community voice appraising the popularity of *FSOG* by members of the reading public to the masses.

Social emphasis: transition to traditional publicity on the path to traditional publication

With the ability to purchase *FSOG* from an independent press (The Writer's Coffee Shop) in print and ebook formats, came significant changes in publicity approaches.

The focus was two-pronged through both digital and physical interactions. First, book tour blogging was one explicitly social method used. For each of the seven blog “visits,” the blogger published a their own review of *FSOG*, and subsequently hosted the author on their site as a guest who offered additional commentary or helped with title giveaways. The author answered questions, provided ebook giveaways, and linked to and commented to readers. Connecting with the author on readers’ blogs, as well as through Twitter and Goodreads placed the emphasis on readers to comment on, engage with, and share their readings and enthusiasm with others.

Some of the blogs explicitly included international participation in the title giveaways. For example, the blog Journey with Books (<http://journeywithbooks.blogspot.com/>) included the following:

The gracious and generous publisher of “Fifty Shades of Grey” promised to give 5 Ebook copies away to 5 lucky followers of this blog! This is open INTERNATIONALLY, so everyone can have a chance! All you have to do is follow this blog publicly and give your comments with your email to contact you down below!

Two commenters to this post clearly appreciated the international inclusion for the giveaway. In a similar vein of spreading the word across long distances, another reader noted that she already read the text and sent it off to another reader in another country. These comments act as indicators of popularity that worked to push the campaign further and out to other readers.

The second initiative involved a readership based, grassroots campaign resulting in increased popularity, leading to the traditional publishing contract. This involved a mothers’ social group in New York City that aims to “get [members] together to experience sensational events, meet new friends, or catch up with old ones” (Divalysscious Moms, 2013). The group owner, Lyss Stern, used the group platform to publicize and share information about *FSOG* with group members. She and the group hosted the launch party for the third book in the series, *Fifty Shades Freed* (James, 2012b) on 19 January 2012. This was a reader-initiated event to celebrate the release of the next book in the series, which provided readers an opportunity to interact with James in person. The event led to the traditional publishing contract for author James, as one of the guests at the party was an executive at Vintage Anchor, the traditional publisher which published *FSOG* (Souccar, 2013). The release party was on January 19, 2012; Vintage Anchor set up a meeting with James for January 24, 2012 (Weinman, 2012).

What seems clear from the data set is that the traditional publishing industry was not aware of the title until the readership mass became critical. Messitte, the executive from Vintage Anchor, was alerted about *FSOG* from a publishing colleague in time to attend the release party, but notes that “within a day, I was socializing with some moms at my kids’ schools who were chatting about the book rather enthusiastically” (Weinman, 2012). Patricia Bostelman, vice president of marketing at Barnes & Noble has said, “We started to see activity in early January [2012]” (Schuster, 2012), which was more than a year after the book’s original release from The Writer’s Coffee Shop. Traditional media outlets were even later to realize the potential of this work; *Publisher’s Weekly* first reported on *FSOG* in January of 2012, with a discussion of the film industry’s interest in the work:

One of the things Hollywood scouts are buzzing about coming off the holidays is, surprisingly, an erotica series by a British TV executive which has garnered strong word-of-mouth via GoodReads and other fan sites. An insider said the series, called *Fifty Shades of Grey* (which is

also the title of the first book), is “being compared to *Nine and a Half Weeks*” and is making the rounds among producers in Los Angeles (Deahl, 2012a).

In January and February of 2012, very little about *FSOG* was being talked about in the traditional media. Besides two pieces in *Publisher's Weekly* (Deahl, 2012a, b), the *New York Post* had a small piece describing the *FSOG* as “an erotica trilogy dubbed ‘mommy porn’ by some, is rapidly becoming a cult hit among Manhattan women, who are exchanging well-worn paperback copies and excited whispers” (Schuster, 2012, February 18). By March 2012, publicity started filtering more strongly through traditional media outlets. The business news section of the *New York Times* described the texts as “an erotic novel by an obscure author” (Bosman, 2012, March 10). Less than two weeks later a blog at the *Wall Street Journal* stated, “everybody knows that E.L. James’s ‘Fifty Shades’ trilogy has been a hit” (Trachtenberg, 2012). By November of 2012, *Publisher's Weekly* made James its “Person of the Year” (Deahl, 2012c).

Discussion

What impact does this individual reader reception which transitions to a multi-tiered social approach, have on Darnton’s (1982) communications circuit, especially the dotted line connecting readers to authors? Analysis of this case study furthers thinking of this model and offers a theoretical iteration. While fanfiction and self-publishing may be seen as an outlier or fringe to the normative process of publication, the findings indicate a disruption and transformation in this traditional communications circuit. Piecing together the text’s path through its own communications circuit (Darnton, 1982), from its beginnings as a work of fanfiction, through self-publishing channels, and to its eventual status as a bestselling novel with a traditional publisher, we have shown that the dotted line from Darnton’s model is really something much more complex. In fact, when looking at these particular fanfiction and self-published works, they do not appear to clearly fit Darnton’s model.

What is evident from this case study of *FSOG* titles emanating from the fanfiction realm is that the connection between reader and author is explicit and embedded throughout the entire creative and publishing processes and in both digital and physical arenas. Readers and authors interact with one another throughout the creation process. Readers contribute enthusiasm, support, and feedback for the initial piece of text that influences the author to continue. Storylines and characters are developed with input from the reading community and early publicity comes from the grassroots level, through face-to-face and online communication. This illustrates, not a fleeting or one-way connection from reader to author, as readers are not passive recipients of a completed work. Instead, this case study shows they are active agents within all stages of the texts’ development and of its publicity, which occurs throughout the creation process and after.

Illustration of this relationship and its pervasive characteristic provides the opportunity to reconsider how the communications circuit works for texts conceived through alternate means. To illustrate this relationship, based from this case study, we offer this altered model that focusses on the reader, author, publisher relationship, based from elements contained within the original communications circuit (Darnton, 1982) (Figure 1).

In this model, the socialization of the text occurs over time as it moves toward traditional publication and, as such, it is situated in an environment grounded by influences from economic and social conjecture as well as political and legal sanctions.

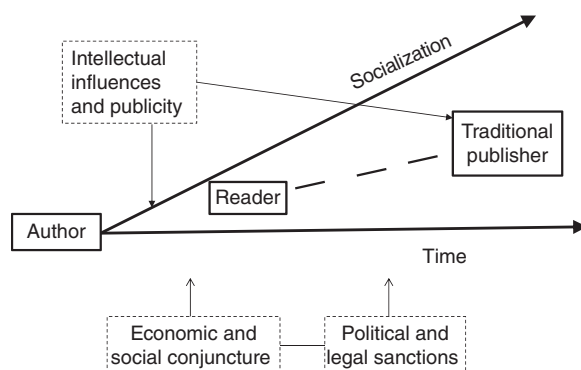


Figure 1.
The socialization
of text of time

Just as in the traditional publishing world as outlined by Bourdieu (1993, 1996) and Thompson (2012), there are tacit and explicit rules in place governing fanfiction communities and the confines of working alongside a self-publishing facilitator. This grounding also includes grassroots initiatives from reading communities and issues of intellectual property and copyright as related to writing fanfiction. These elements act as static influences in this altered model toward publication. It must be made clear that this model acknowledges the event of publication as a non-static event. Publication of these works may happen at multiple times, whether the story is published serially, as in the case of *FSOG*, or whether drafts of the story are published on the author's web site or through one of the programs above and then edited with reader feedback. Publication happens at the genesis and continues throughout the existence of a work. We differentiate this publication from that which happens with a traditional publisher which is a distinct event.

This model emphasizes the prominence and influence of the reader as an explicit and active agent. The reader holds power, where that power is manifested as an influence or type of currency or capital and is realized as commentary, sharing, reviewing, and publicity that is user-born and user-mediated. Where readers were before considered an endpoint, a consumer, or a market, readers here are instead a viable and necessary agent or player in this field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1996). This influence begins as individual and follows a trajectory toward community manifestation.

But it also becomes clear that for fanfiction and self-published works both authors and readers are creators; they work as a collective to form the text. Authors and readers communicate and use the feedback from early readership communities and their reception. This communication, even at the early stages, acts as clout or publicity for the work to other readers. Even after the particular work is completed, readers continue their role providing publicity in the form of reviews on social network sites, reader-generated blogs, and in their broader social circles both physical and digital. As time passes, the social outreach expands outwards past the boundaries of the localized, potentially isolated or fringe, communities and reaches the mainstream. As this outreach from readership grows, there is increased chance to garner the attentions and interests of mainstream publishers. The actions of readers – their interest, efforts, and publicity work – highlight these works for publishers to follow up on.

It is apparent that multiple elements from Darnton's (1982) communications circuit do not exist explicitly in this model, including printers, suppliers, shippers, binders, and

booksellers. These roles exist two-ways in the model. They are implicitly included herein as an element or force existing as part of the social and economic environment as related to the self-publishing infrastructure. This infrastructure allows for authors to produce, disseminate, and/or sell their own works using channels established through such examples as fanfiction web sites and self-publishing portals, as both allow for the production and dissemination of the cultural product. Second, the author implicitly takes on and directs these roles through the fanfiction and self-publishing realms; therefore they are integrated into the authorship role.

This new model has significant implications for LIS. As these user-born and user-mediated literatures lie outside of the traditional model posited by Darnton (1982) and as these types of literature grow in popularity, both the understanding of collection development and of the agency of readers must adapt within the LIS discipline.

The ways in which cultural products come into being and how these works develop and exist explicitly relates to collection development. As these publications exist outside the traditional publishing structures, they also are not explicitly bound by traditional collection development acquisitions and procedures, therefore new ways of considering these materials must be considered. Library staff and those doing collection development work may have to broaden their use of non-traditional collection development tools to use them as alerting tools for self-published trends. Non-mainstream sources, such as reviewing publications that include self-published material or self-published e-book platforms will allow libraries to broaden the nature of what is collected to account for publishing changes, reader enthusiasm, and cultural popularity. Some of these sources are those traditionally considered authoritative, but many may fall outside of authoritative sources, instead rely on user-generated content from readers.

In the reading and the readers' advisory literature the emphasis has focussed on reader's choices, initiatives, and opinions. Individual readers make choices of what they want to read and in doing so, vet materials for themselves; they act as their own literary authority outside of those traditionally positioned as such. What this research provides is a strengthening of the idea of reader agency, not just of their reading choices, but also of readers' abilities to advocate for texts and themes they are interested in and as such they shape future texts with their interactions with the author. This research elucidates Duguid's (1996) notion of books as social systems that include multiple and diverse ties among the various players and this is a re-affirming system, as what occurs with one aspect of librarianship will affect the other. Those in LIS acknowledge the power the reader (and library users) hold and look for material that this community requests to read and, at the same time, these readers may be publishing, writing reviews in non-traditional sources, and advocating publishers to help produce work by certain authors or in particular genres.

Conclusion

This case study provides a theoretical model of the socialization of publishing over time that accounts for contemporary fanfiction, self-publishing, and the impact of the reader and furthers discussion on the impact of these changes on LIS. What remains to be done is twofold. First, more testing is needed, specifically, with other fanfiction and self-published works beyond this one, highly successful, example. Of specific interest are other examples that have spanned the fanfiction, self-publishing, and traditional publishing trajectory. There are more than 1,300 *FSOG* fanfiction stories on *ff.net*, some of which have made the transition from fanfiction to traditionally published,

stand-alone works. *The University of Edward Masen* by Sebastien Robichaud is one exemplar title to apply to this testing. Also of interest are works that did not begin as fanfiction, but were originally self-published, for example the works of author Sylvia Day. Self-publishing provides a wealth of cases for this type of research as the adoption of ebooks has provided a significantly growing market for independent authors.

Second, further investigation is needed to relate the issue of fanfiction and self-publishing to the LIS discipline. The changing publication model is not a contained system and as such may impact multiple facets of the discipline – both theoretical and practical. Further study of this potential impact on LIS curricula is warranted. Future research will continue to test this model with works originating from both of these realms.

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