



Turun yliopisto
University of Turku

ONLINE MARKETING OF SELF-PUBLISHED E-BOOKS

A personal touch for a global audience

Master's Thesis
in International Business

Author:
Tuuli Määttä

Supervisors:
Esa Stenberg, D.Sc.
Riikka Harikkala-Laihin, M.Sc.

16.8.2018
Turku



Turun kauppakorkeakoulu • Turku School of Economics

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	7
1.1	Background of the thesis	7
1.2	Introduction to the topic	8
1.2.1	Globalization and digitalization	8
1.2.2	Fundamental changes in the book industry	9
1.2.3	A new direction for books and publishing	10
1.3	Research questions	12
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	14
2.1	The effects of digitalization on the book publishing industry	14
2.1.1	Self-publishing as an alternative to traditional publishing	14
2.1.2	E-books challenge printed books	16
2.2	Book publishing: from mainstream to niche markets	19
2.3	Peculiarities of the self-published e-book	22
2.4	An international look at the markets	24
2.5	Marketing self-published e-books	27
2.5.1	The Four Ps	27
2.5.2	Creating value through marketing	28
2.5.3	Target audiences	30
2.5.4	Authors as marketers	32
2.6	Synthesis of the theoretical framework	33
3	EMPIRICAL STUDY	36
3.1	Netnography as methodology	36
3.2	Data collection and analysis	37
3.2.1	Goodreads	42
3.2.2	Amazon	43
3.2.3	Author portraits	44
3.3	Trustworthiness of the study	45
4	RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY	47
4.1	Themes on the discussion forums	47
4.1.1	Effective marketing and promotional strategies	50
4.1.2	Product, price, and place	52
4.2	International authors on global markets	54

4.2.1	Amazon’s international discussion forums.....	54
4.2.2	International readers and authors.....	55
4.2.3	Authors’ views on the international markets.....	56
4.3	Community.....	57
4.3.1	Evidence of community on Goodreads and Amazon.....	58
4.3.2	Social media.....	58
4.3.3	Community of authors.....	59
4.4	Authors’ attitudes toward marketing.....	60
4.5	Author portrait: Marie Silk.....	63
4.6	Author portrait: Christine Roney.....	66
5	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	68
5.1	Marketing methods.....	68
5.1.1	Popular marketing methods among self-published e-book authors.....	68
5.1.2	Other marketing themes on the forums.....	69
5.2	Dialogue and online community.....	72
5.2.1	Dialogue between readers and writers.....	72
5.2.2	Different types of communities.....	73
5.3	The target audiences of self-published e-books.....	74
5.3.1	Problems with niche audiences.....	75
5.3.2	Global authors for global audiences.....	77
5.4	The current and future state of book publishing.....	78
5.5	Limitations of the study.....	79
5.6	Opportunities for further research.....	80
6	SUMMARY.....	82
	REFERENCES.....	84
	APPENDICES.....	91

Figures

Figure 1	The growth of Netflix (Business Insider 2015).....	11
Figure 2	The growth of the e-book market (Nielsen Bookscan 2016).....	12
Figure 3	The Communication Circuit (The History of Books 1982).....	19

Figure 4	Revised Communication Circuit	20
Figure 5	The Long Tail (Chris Anderson’s blog 2004)	21
Figure 6	The reality of marketing self-published e-books.....	35
Figure 7	Creswell's Data Analysis Method (Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches 2009).....	41
Figure 8	Discussion topics	47
Figure 9	Means of marketing.....	50

Tables

Table 1	Operationalization table.....	37
Table 2	Empirical sources	39
Table 3	Amazon's foreign-language discussions.....	55
Table 4	Marie Silk's book statistics	65
Table 5	Christine Roney's book statistics	67

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the thesis

Digitalization has altered the world in fascinating new ways. There is barely an industry left that remains unchanged (Viltard 2016, 383-384), and today, many of us live in a world of smart devices and incessant connection. Some of the most profoundly transformed industries are media and entertainment industries. Digitalization has had a huge impact on the way both information and entertainment are produced, transferred, and consumed (Grewiński 2017, 64). For instance, in a number of decades, we have gone from live music to a world where a consumer has easy access to a huge number of digitally distributed songs, regardless of place and time (Broich 2015, 238).

The industry of book publishing, which has through times been especially technology-averse (McIlroy 2017, 3), has also undergone great changes (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 50). However, the innovation predicted to revolutionize the industry, the e-book, has not had the impact that was expected as of yet (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555). Through technological innovation the costs of publishing and distributing a book have fallen dramatically (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 49). Hence, individual authors are now able to sidestep the traditional gatekeepers holding entry to the market by self-publishing. These self-published e-book authors can be called citizen authors, and they are right at home in an online environment that is both digital and global (Johnson 2017, 131-146). In short, anyone can now be an author.

While some research has been put into the evolving markets of self-published e-books, their place and role in the book publishing industry remain ambiguous. Furthermore, digitalization is still ongoing (Hagberg, Sundstrom & Egels-Zandén 2016, 694-695), which means that we have not yet seen the full extent of its effects. If there truly is a revolution coming in the book industry, the e-book is likely to play a major part in it (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555). Perhaps, similarly, are the self-published e-book authors, the citizen authors.

The purpose of the thesis is to offer a detailed and critical look at the marketing of self-published e-books, common methods therein, the authors' attitudes towards marketing, and the biggest issues self-published e-book authors face in the markets. And while not the primary goal, the thesis also uses this information to look at the self-published e-book market, and what this implies about the state and the future of the book industry.

For this purpose, the relevant academic literature is used to discuss previously uncovered information and build a theoretical framework. Then, the focus shifts onto an empirical study of the marketing of self-published e-books, after which discussion and conclusions are drawn from the results, in the context of the theoretical framework. In the

thesis, we look at an opportunity-filled new market that has not yet, for some reason, reached its full potential. It is a fresh market that has emerged through the rise of the internet (Grewiński 2017, 58) and technical innovation (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 49); a market that is global (Johnson 2017, 131-146), and filled with potential (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555).

1.2 Introduction to the topic

In this section, recent developments in the book publishing industry are discussed. The focus is on key concepts and the global changes that have brought the markets to where they are today. First, the newly global and digital context in which book markets of today operate is discussed. Then, the focus is on the recent innovations in the book publishing industry and how they are changing it. Finally, possible future scenarios conclude the section.

1.2.1 Globalization and digitalization

It is widely acknowledged that most, if not all, industries worldwide have been affected by globalization and digitalization. The effects of digitalization over the past two or three decades have gone beyond all imagination. Information technologies together with electronic communication systems have transformed the economy, trade, professions, and industries. The rise of the internet has helped turn our society into one that is both global and digital. (Grewiński 2017, 58.)

One of the forces driving the cultural and communicational changes brought on by the technological advancements of the last several decades is a process called digitalization. It is a process closely linked to the storing and using data and information, and it is often understood as the merging of information technology and business or physical processes (Weiss, Schade, Riedl & Matt 2016, 2). Digitalization has transformed many of the ways in which we conduct business, from new business opportunities to the electronic products that complement or even replace physical ones. The emergence of the internet as well as mobile devices have been central in promoting this change. Furthermore, it is essential to note that digitalization is a process that is still ongoing. (Hagberg, Sundstrom & Egels-Zandén 2016, 694-695.)

Prahalad (2010) and Viltard (2016, 383-384) list five forces that are driving the profound changes in the business environment.

1. Globalization: Businesses today can transcend national, economic, political, social, and cultural borders.

2. Connectivity: With the new opportunities created by technological advancements, more than three billion people are connected all around the world, forcing companies to change the ways in which they operate.
3. Digital technologies: Spurred on by the very same technological advancements, digital technologies are becoming less and less expensive. Technology is no longer a differentiator between the rich and the poor, but everyone has access to similar technology.
4. Convergence of technologies: A mobile phone is no longer just a phone, but a camera, a computer, an e-book reader, and so on.
5. Social networks: Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels have become extremely important.

Digitalization has changed the way we consume media in its many forms. The development of devices that keep us connected to the internet at all times, offering permanent access to information, has not only transformed the media itself but the opportunities of using the content as well (Grewiński 2017, 64). One industry that has undeniably been left in turmoil by the forces mentioned above is the book publishing industry.

1.2.2 Fundamental changes in the book industry

The effect of digitalization on the book industry is two-fold: Firstly, distributing books electronically reduces costs and prices, influencing the demand curve and resulting in both consumer and producer surplus. Secondly, in today's digitized world, authors and other creators are able to circumvent all the traditional gatekeepers, most notably publishing houses, and market directly to consumers. (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 50.)

Some of the most notable changes digitalization has brought to book publishing are e-books and self-publishing. These are the result of the advancement of digital technologies, as discussed by Prahalad (2010) and Viltard (2016, 383-384): they are both concepts that have been realized through or spurred on by the technological advancements of the last decades.

The meaning of an e-book has changed over the years and its definition is still often unclear. Vassiliou and Rowley (2008, 363) propose the following two-part definition:

1. An e-book is a digital object with textual and/or other content, which arises as a result of integrating the familiar concept of a book with features that can be provided in an electronic environment.
2. E-books typically have in-use features such as search and cross reference functions, hypertext links, bookmarks, annotations, highlights, multimedia objects and interactive tools.

In effect, e-books have taken the concept of a book and put it into electronic form. The most revolutionary part of this may be that in electronic format, books do not have to be printed at all but distributed online. Fundamentally, this cuts the costs of producing and distributing books to a fraction. (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 49.)

The other concept that has been pushed to new heights through the advancement of digital technologies, especially in tandem with e-books, is self-publishing. The term “self-publishing” refers, simply, to an author publishing a book using his or her own resources (Self-publish 2018). Self-published authors either collaborate with a printing house to produce copies of their book, or they may publish their works in digital, e-book, form on their own websites or through specific self-publishing platforms (Pecoskie & Hill 2014, 128). These self-published authors are often referred to, especially by themselves, as indie authors (McIlroy 2017, 7). According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, indie is defined as “one that is independent” or unaffiliated (Indie 2018).

Another profound shift in the book publishing industry, largely a consequence of the aforementioned e-books and self-publishing is circumventing the gatekeepers. One of the major advantages of self-publishing is that it allows the author to bypass the mechanism, mainly the publishing houses, that control entry to the markets (Johnson 2017, 133). A self-published author can and will publish anything he or she wants and make it available to a wide audience.

This two-fold effect of digitalization on the book publishing industry brings us to a completely new situation. A new book is published every thirty seconds, and there may be more people in the future writing books than reading them (Zaid 2010, 21). The only thing that is certain is that change is still ongoing.

1.2.3 A new direction for books and publishing

The likes of iTunes and Netflix have made it possible to purchase and play an ever-growing range of music and video, but they have done so without changing the content itself (Broich 2015, 238). That is to say that while it is now possible to buy a song online in the middle of the night and play it on one’s phone or computer, the song itself remains the same.

A clear example comes from the music industry: we have gone from having nothing but live performances to recorded albums, and on to digitally distributed songs available at any time and any place (Broich 2015, 238). In comparison, it seems clear that a similar revolution has not taken place in the book industry.

Netflix, a prime example of what digitalization has done to the television and movie industry, is still growing and its stock just recently reached a new record high (Vanian,

2018). It has enjoyed tremendous growth over the years (Here's how huge -- 2017). Figure 1 demonstrates how many million people were using it between 2007 and 2015.

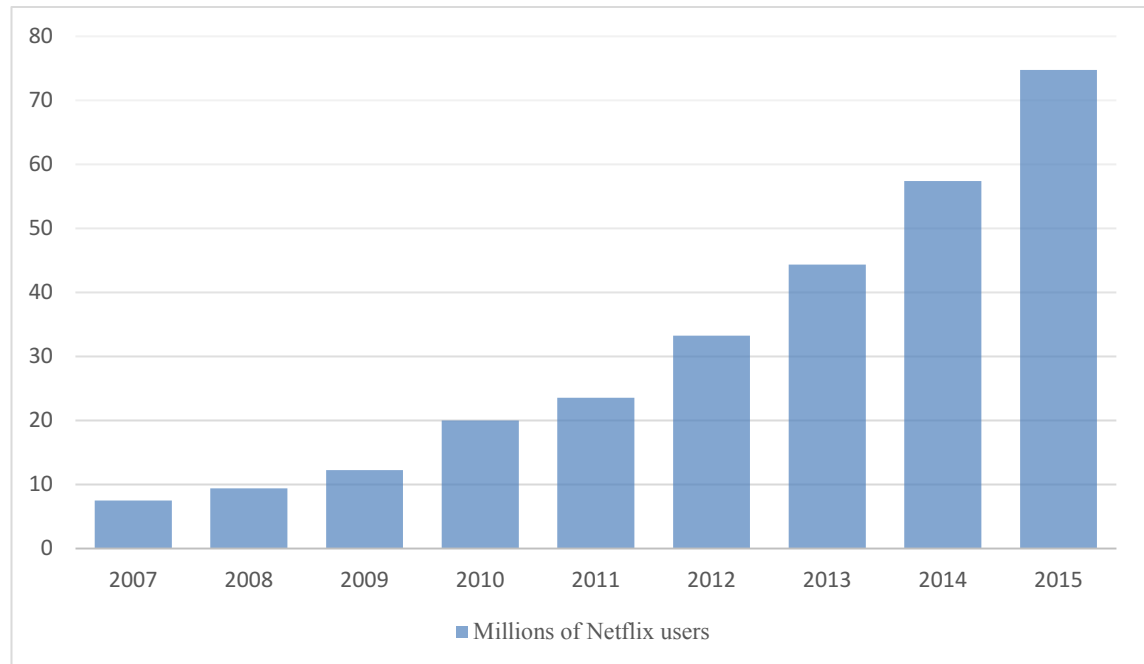


Figure 1 The growth of Netflix (Business Insider 2015)

In light of what digitalization has done to the TV and movie business through the likes of Netflix, it would be logical to think that similar leaps have been taken in the book industry that is bringing novels and textbooks available for consumption anywhere, anytime. However, change has been slower than anticipated. Those who expected the accelerating digitalization to bring about a massive revolution in the book publishing business have been disappointed. (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555.) In contrast to the clear growth of Netflix, Figure 2 demonstrates the growth of the e-book market in the US over partially the same period of time.

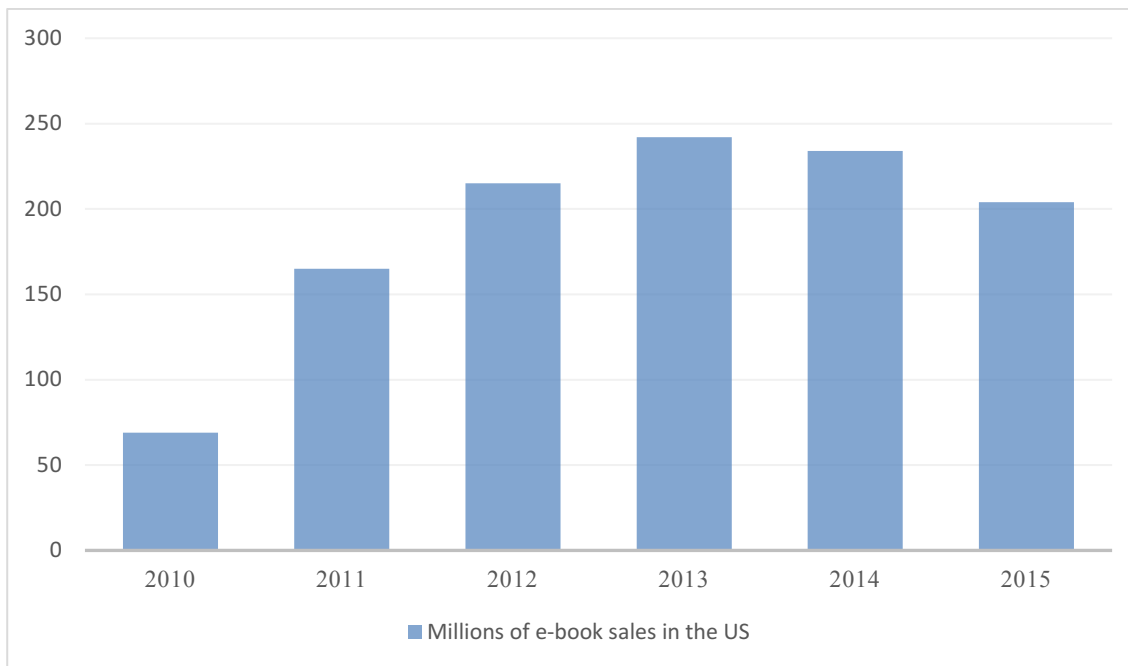


Figure 2 The growth of the e-book market (Nielsen Bookscan 2016)

Numerous studies have been conducted on the pros and cons of e-books, and numerous more on self-publishing versus traditional publishing. It remains to be seen whether the e-book will eventually break through as has been expected as devices and services develop further, lessening or erasing some of its past and current problems. Despite its issues, the e-book is still believed to be the future. (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555.)

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the e-book market has enjoyed some tremendous growth, but has also been stagnant, even diminishing. As Carolan and Evain (2013, 296) put it, “readers will continue to read, writers will continue to write, and publishers will continue to publish”. In this context, it seems inevitable that self-published e-books are playing a major part in the book markets of today and tomorrow. Whether self-published e-books will truly transform the book markets remains to be seen.

1.3 Research questions

Self-published e-books have not, or not yet, lived up to expectations. While the recent technological advancements have shaped the book industry in several ways (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 50), the e-book revolution has not yet taken place (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555). While it is possible and likely that future technological advancements bring forth even more change in the book publishing industry, it is clear that in comparison to other media, something is holding self-published e-books back (see Figures 1 and 2).

In today’s book industry, marketing is paramount (Baverstock 2008, 3). In light of this, it stands to reason that perhaps the biggest problem that the self-published e-book industry

currently faces is not a technological one but a marketing one. If the technology is already adequate, perhaps the explanation for the stagnant growth of the self-published e-book market is in, or can be found by looking at, the way they are marketed.

For this reason, the most important question this study aims to find an answer for is: *What are some of the characteristic methods of marketing self-published e-books on the internet?* Some of the methods may be similar to those of marketing traditionally published printed books, but some may be unique to the self-published e-book. However, the aim is not to draw parallels or comparisons between different types of books, but to focus on the self-published e-books and their characteristics. This main research question is the umbrella above three further questions that, in part, aim to aid in answering the main research question.

The first subquestion is: *What kind of online marketing methods do self-published e-book authors use?* This question aims to uncover some of the most common and popular marketing methods. In this study, the effectiveness of the methods is not objectively measured. The focus is on what the authors deem effective and worthwhile based on their experiences in the markets.

The second subquestion is: *How important is the online community in marketing self-published e-books?* It has been repeatedly said in the related literature that community and dialogue are important in the promotion of self-published e-books. In related academic literature, the terms community and dialogue are often used to indicate the communities that consist of a writer and readers, or dialogue between a writer and the readers (O'Leary 2014, 318). This study aims to find out how this community works and how authors use it, and whether they find it meaningful and important in terms of marketing their books.

The third and final subquestion is: *What are the target audiences of self-published e-books like?* It is common knowledge that the internet itself is global. If the majority of self-published e-books are sold over the internet, does that make them international by design? Furthermore, in academic literature, the self-published e-books are seen primarily as a way to cater to niche audiences (Carolan & Evain 2013, 288). This study aims to discover whether self-published e-books are primarily aimed at international niche audiences.

Answers to these questions should provide a clear understanding of the major themes in the marketing of self-published e-books and provide new insights into the market. However, the main focus remains on marketing methods throughout the thesis, with special attention on the surrounding community and the target audiences.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the current book publishing industry is looked at from a theoretical point of view and a framework of previous research is established in order to understand the current situation. First, the impact digitalization has had on the book publishing industry is examined and the shift in the markets, that has lead book publishing from push to pull, is discussed. Then, the focus turns to the self-published e-book in particular. In conclusion, applicable marketing theory is examined.

2.1 The effects of digitalization on the book publishing industry

As previously mentioned, the effects of digitalization on the book publishing industry are great, but so far, not as great as one might have expected. The book markets have begun to change radically, and new ways of doing business are emerging.

In this section, the focus is on the emerging trends in the book market brought on by digitalization: self-publishing, e-books, and particularly the self-published e-book. The main point of discussion is on where the self-published e-books fit in the established theoretical framework. Finally, the current online marketing and promotion of self-published e-books is discussed.

2.1.1 Self-publishing as an alternative to traditional publishing

Traditionally, publishing houses and authors enter into a contract where the publishing house buys the rights to the author's manuscript. The publishing house then prints out as many copies of the book it thinks it will sell and pays the writer in royalties. The details of these contracts vary. (Traditional Publishing 2018.)

From the perspective of the author, there are some great advantages in collaboration with a publishing house. For one, there are no upfront costs of producing a book—rather, there may even be a cash advance provided by the publisher. For another, the publishing house is made of professionals, who will help with the editorial process, the book cover, the marketing, and everything else. (Kieffer 2017.)

Traditionally, publishing books has been done by publishing houses, and the markets in the United States, where e-books have the biggest market share, have been dominated by six big publishing houses: Penguin, Macmillan, HarperCollins, Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Hachette (Deahl 2010, 21-24). With the merger of Penguin and Random House, the “Big Six” is now the “Big Five” (Howard 2013, 22). Publishing houses are

regarded as the major gatekeepers who can deny authors entry to the markets (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 50.)

Given that a market as big as the book market in the US is controlled by a handful of actors, it is clear that authors in collaboration with one of these firms have great support behind them. The Big Five companies can offer their authors not only assistance in polishing the manuscript into the best possible book, but also in maximum exposure in terms of publicity and marketing.

However, there are good reasons why authors would choose to self-publish. The three main reasons are: more control over their work, faster production times, and the prospect of making more money (Why Are More Authors – – 2016). As self-publishers take both the power and the responsibility of the publishing house onto themselves, they have much more control over the end product than traditionally published authors. The more technology progresses, the easier and cheaper it becomes to self-publish, making it an even more attractive option to many authors.

The numbers of self-publishing are rising, making it an interesting growing market. According to the US ISBN (International Standard Book Number) agency, Bowker (2016), the number of self-publications is still on the rise. For example, between 2014 and 2015 the growth rate was 21% (Bowker 2016). Over the years, ISBN registrations for self-published titles have multiplied, from over 150,000 in 2010 to over 720,000 in 2015. McIlroy (2017, 4) estimates that there are over 500,000 active self-published authors in the US alone.

In the past, self-publishing has often been seen as inferior to traditional publishing and self-published books have even been called “vanity books”, and the idea that self-publishing books is hollow ego-tripping is still abundant (Crump 2010). Self-published print books are not usually of interest to people outside of the writer’s immediate family, and they can rarely be found in physical libraries or bookstores (Dawson 2008, 44-45).

In recent years, self-publishing has shed some of the negative image that once surrounded it. It has become a valid alternative to traditional publishing, as evidenced by the rising numbers. More and more people are self-publishing, and more and more people are succeeding through it. The self-publishing business is, today, a business of \$500 million dollars in consumer spending in the US. Fiction e-books represent the vast majority therein. (McIlroy 2017, 4.)

That does not, however, mean that self-publishing is self-explanatorily a huge leap forward in the book publishing industry. One of the biggest pitfalls of self-publishing is the lack of professional editing that is often essential to writing and publishing a successful book. The editorial process is generally handled by the publisher, and the idea is that an outsider is required to polish the book, decipher the author’s meanings, and make sure that the book is understandable to the intended audience. (Carolan & Evain 2012, 292.) Without this kind of outsider involved in the editing process, the quality of

the book will never reach its full potential. Thomlison and Bélanger (2015, 311) continue in the same vein and claim that the publisher logo on the cover of a book is a stamp of approval, as if it were a symbol to show that the book has passed the editorial screening test.

In light of this it is reasonable to say that if the lack of gatekeepers is a strength of self-publishing, it is also one of its weaknesses. Self-publishers lack the support, skills, and experience of a publishing house, which is something that traditionally published authors have. More importantly, self-published authors lack the marketing skills and opportunities that are available through publishing houses.

A common idea in today's market is that self-publishing and self-promotion are entryways to traditional publishing (Carolan & Evain 2013, 291). It is possible for indie authors to be picked up by large publishing houses (Malone Kircher 2015). Whether this is a significant motivation behind self-publishing remains unclear.

On the internet, the lines of publishing are becoming increasingly blurred. In 2015, Anna Todd became famous for selling her story *After* not only to a major publisher but also to a movie studio (Malone Kircher, 2015). The site where she first published her manuscript, Wattpad, is a free-to-use online platform for writers and readers with over 45 million users (About Wattpad, 2017). Using platforms like Wattpad to reach a readership is a form of self-publishing, but it is not usually what is meant by self-publishing in the academia, where self-publishing generally means publishing through a media house such as Amazon. In the thesis, it is important to keep in mind that the lines between all types of publishing and self-publishing are, in today's digital world, becoming increasingly blurred.

An interesting fact about Wattpad is that its readers and users are young, often teenagers, who are very invested in the Wattpad community (Silverberg 2015, 14). It is plausible that this is the next generation of readers, the digital natives who will have no problem navigating the shifting landscapes of books and publishing in the upcoming decades. Perhaps Wattpad is showing us what the future of book publishing looks like. It has already been said that what was the Big Six may one day dwindle down to the Big Three—or even the Big One (Davidson 2012).

2.1.2 *E-books challenge printed books*

As previously stated, digitalization has changed the way we consume information and entertainment, and books are a big part of that. Just like music and movies, books have now taken the form of e-books. In this section, the focus is on what e-books are and what their impact on the markets has been so far.

Books can be written to exist solely as e-books. If we look at the definition by Vassiliou and Rowley (2008, 363) the e-book is not tied to a traditional book at all, merely the concept of a book. Thus, the e-book is not just an electronic version of a printed book, but can exist on its own without there ever being a physical copy. Other research also reinforces the idea that e-books are tied more to the concept of a book than a physical copy of a book. In fact, users are less likely to accept e-books unless the reading experience of an e-book resembles the reading experience of a printed book. To e-book users, this compatibility was even more important than convenience of use or the number of available e-books. (Jung-Yu & Chih-Yen 2011, 571-572.)

E-books hold several advantages over printed books. As previously mentioned, they have far lower costs of manufacturing and distribution (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 49). Furthermore, readers find value in e-books' mobility and ease of storage. The electronic media in today's world is replacing traditional printed media, and e-books are likely to become more and more mainstream in the future. (McKinnon 2015, 202.) These lower costs are one of the factors that draws self-publishers to the e-book market. With few or no physical copies ever being produced, the costs of publishing a book plummet dramatically. For self-publishers operating without the resources of a publishing house, publishing their work in electronic format can sometime be the only affordable option.

Vassiliou and Rowley's (2008, 363) definition also calls for additional features and interactive tools. As technology progresses further, we are likely to see more and more additional interactive features within an e-book. The extent of the development and change remains to be seen. It is probable that we have not yet seen the last evolution of the e-book.

Of course, there are issues with e-books as well. In 2009, Soules noted that "to date, e-books have not taken off in the ways some people expected" (Soules 2009, 10), and that the development of e-books had remained stagnant for more than a decade (Soules 2009, 7-21). Some of the main issues associated with e-books include difficulty of reading and eye-strain, but also importantly, lack of awareness of their existence plays a major part (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 553-555). Given the speed at which technology continues to go forward, it is likely that issues having to do with difficulty of reading and eye strain will eventually be fixed, possibly in the forms of new reading devices.

A transforming force in the early stages of the ongoing e-book revolution has been Amazon, the US book and retail giant that started out selling nothing but books. The release of Amazon's Kindle, an electronic device designed solely for the reading of e-books, was a giant step towards a future where e-books rule over their printed cousins. (Treanor 2010, 120-126.)

Amazon's success story, however, remains one of a kind. Von Rimscha and Putzig (2013, 318) point out that the book is the last mass media technology to fully go through a digitization process. McIlroy (2017, 3) mentions that book publishing has historically

been notoriously technology-averse. Considering this, it is reasonable to assume that the book is somehow different from the movie or the music: the revolution that has changed the core of other mass medias and given birth to the likes of Netflix and Spotify, simply has not happened to the book industry yet.

This slow growth in the e-book market can also explain why the economic analysis remains in its infancy. Research has been carried out into different aspects of the e-book market, but the big picture has yet to emerge fully. What is known is that so far, the growth provided by digitalization has yet to compensate for the losses sustained by the traditional publishing markets, as they move from traditional books to e-books. (Benhamou 2015, 124-125.)

This may also help explain why lack of awareness is still an issue for e-books. Traditional publishing houses, which still hold incredible resources for raising awareness, benefit more from printed books than e-books. There is little incentive for them to push for an e-book revolution.

One field that has been turning to e-books enthusiastically from the start is education. Some top business schools, including MIT, Duke University, and Stanford Business School, offered their students e-book access already in 2001 (Business Wire 2001, 1). However, progress has been slow there, too. For instance, a decade later, only 18% of textbooks were available on Rental, a service for Amazon's e-book reader Kindle (Business Wire 2011).

A deeper look at e-books in education may also reveal a reason why e-books in general have been slower to take off than other technologically advanced means of media, such as Spotify and Netflix. The core problem in education is not that too few textbooks are available in e-book format, but that the new technology and e-books do not offer a superior learning experience (Broich 2015, 239-240). Spotify and Netflix, in contrast, offer their users features that have not been seen before, such as streaming entire seasons of a TV show in one sitting. The e-book may be revolutionary, but until we find ways to take the reading experience onto the next level, it will never be revolutionary enough.

In the future, as collaborative measures develop further, it is possible that we will see big changes in how e-books operate. There may be an increase in non-interactive media (such as digital videos incorporated into the pages) or interactive media (such as video games) (Grover 2016, 183). Another vision points to e-books filled with tagging, an interactive practice of linking, for instance, a word to its definition. Tagging is common today's social media. (Yoo & Kim 2016, 12795-12813.) It seems plausible that these different future features are related to different types of e-books, such as video game components for science fiction e-books, and social tagging for educational e-books.

2.2 Book publishing: from mainstream to niche markets

The publishing of books has deep roots and historically, it has been important to the economy and thus widely researched. In this section, we look at the book publishing markets and how they have evolved especially in recent decades. We also discuss what kind of market gap the self-published books fill.

Darnton's (1982, 65-83) work has been the cornerstone of book and publication research for decades. Approaching the history of books from multiple angles, Darnton presented the Communication Circuit (Figure 3), which is supposed to apply to all periods in the history of printed books with only small adjustments.

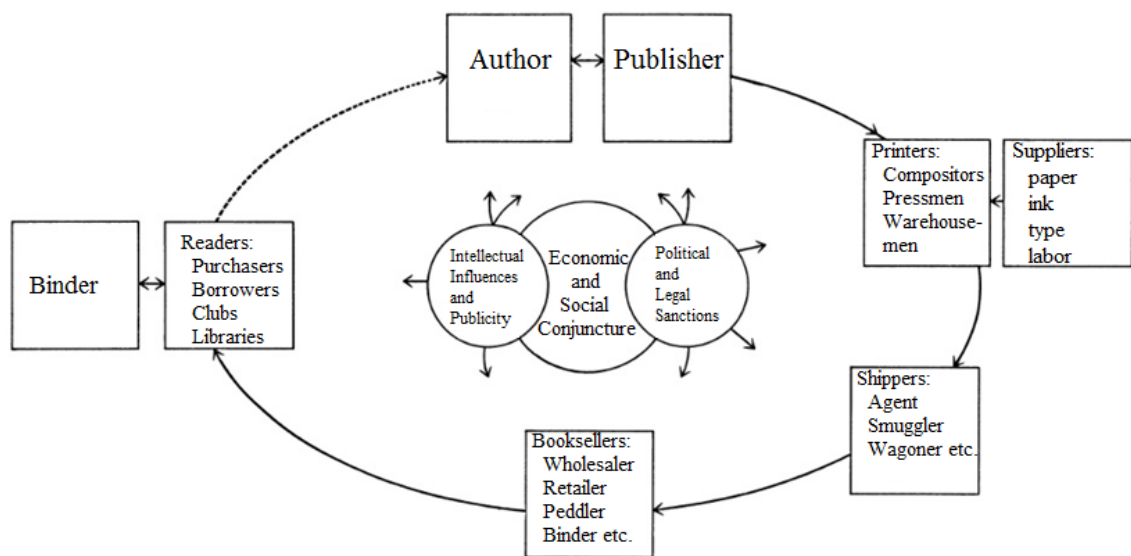


Figure 3 The Communication Circuit (The History of Books 1982)

The Circuit includes the author and the publisher in close co-operation, and the direction of communication is from publisher to printers, to shippers, to sellers, and, finally, to readers—who then give something back to the author in terms of communication.

However, today's digitalized world, where e-books and self-publishing are no longer mere oddities, alters the Communication Circuit in staggering ways. If we cut out everything that is no longer absolutely necessary in the book-publishing process, we are left with nothing but the author and the reader, and the world that influences them. It is safe to say that digitalization has transformed the opportunities that are available to both authors and readers in today's age.

If the Communication Circuit has been applicable to all periods in history with only minor adjustments, it looks radically different today. In the world of self-published e-books, the circuit becomes only a quarter-circle:

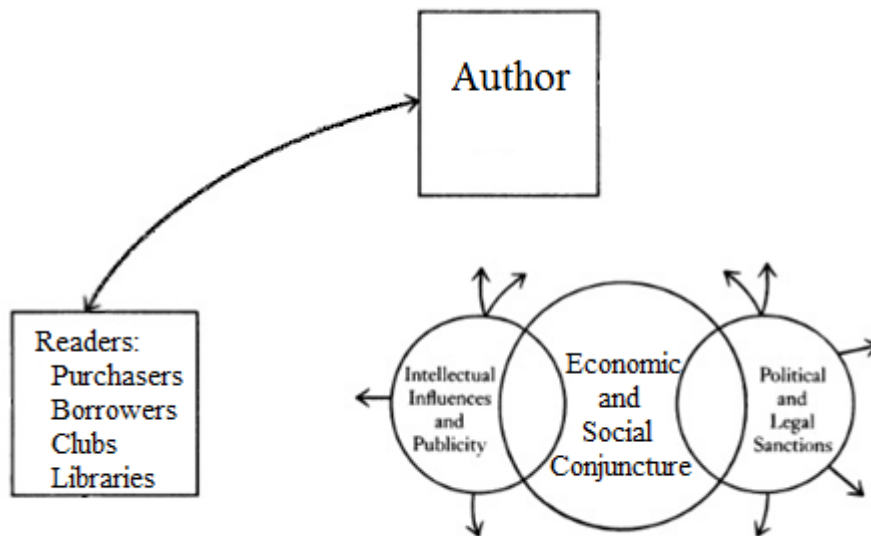


Figure 4 Revised Communication Circuit

The gatekeepers have gone and so have the middlemen. While traditional publishing still plays a great role, as discussed earlier, more and more voices are now heard through self-publishing and e-books. A book no longer needs to appeal to publishing houses to be put on the market.

There is another notable difference in the revised Communication Circuit of today. If the book-publishing world only includes, at minimum, the author and the reader, it is between them that all the interaction takes place. The question then becomes: how reciprocal is this interaction?

A telling comment about publishing in the 21st century is that “today’s publishing industry is driven by marketing” (Baverstock 2008, 3), meaning that publishers are not looking for material that is of high quality per se, but for material that will sell. Quality and marketability are not the same thing anymore, if they ever were, and readers’ voices have become more and more valuable to publishing houses.

In total, media consumption is changing from push to pull, which means that the distributors of media are forced to pay more and more attention to customer demands (Simon 2016, 7). In today’s market, readers—or publishing houses’ perspectives on reader desires—hold considerable power over what gets published and what does not.

The disparity between what publishing houses sell and what readers want is evident. Studying the professional and customer reviews of Kiran Desai’s book *The Inheritance of Loss*, Allington (2016, 267-272) found that there were many differences between the two reviewing groups. The most prominent one was that while 94% of professional reviews were positive overall, the same was true for only 58% of customer reviews. This is likely due to the fact that publishing houses aim to please a large number of people, but the masses have their differing niche tastes.

But if publishers are no longer the gatekeepers of what gets published, marketability plays a smaller role. Self-published e-book writers do not need to appeal to a wide enough audience to be accepted by a publishing house, which means that they can cater to specific niche markets.

There are many ways of looking at mainstream and niche markets, and some of the dominating theories come from the world of entertainment. A classic way of examining media and other markets is Rosen's (1981, 845-847) work describing a world of Superstars, the few people who dominated their field and earned enormous amounts of money. He used examples from arts, sports, music, show business, and other fields to demonstrate how markets are skewed to benefit the most talented individuals already at the top. This has since been coined the winner-takes-all theory.

In contrast to Rosen's winner-takes-all theory, Anderson (2004) created the Long Tail theory (Figure 5). According to the Long Tail theory, our culture and economy are shifting more and more away from the mainstream hits in the head of the curve and towards an enormous number of hits in the niches of the tail. For instance, we have moved on from the era during which only the few musicians with recording contracts got to put their music out there for the consumption of the masses, and today anyone can distribute their own music through various channels.

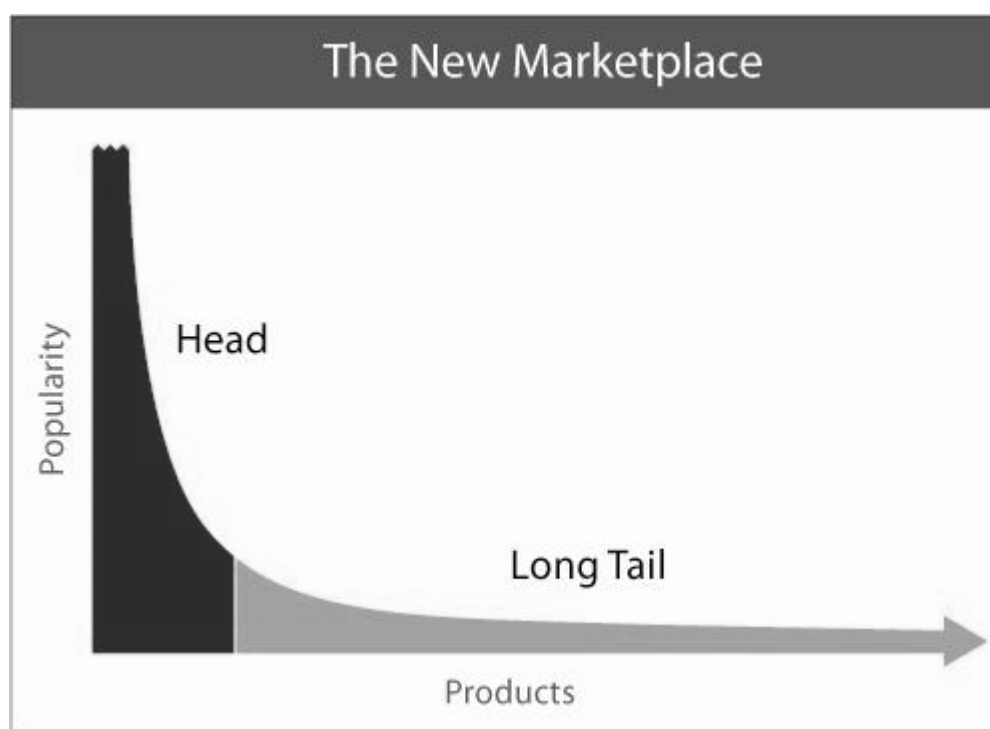


Figure 5 The Long Tail (Chris Anderson's blog 2004)

Anderson (2004) goes on to argue, with the help of several examples, that neither services offering only mainstream hits nor those catering solely to long tail audiences will

be successful in today's world. The success of Netflix, Amazon, and other similar service providers is best explained by the fact that they offer both the commercial mainstream hits as well as niche products.

Research suggests that the Long Tail theory is also applicable to the e-book market. Not only do e-books cater to the niches of today, they also provide reading for the audiences of tomorrow. In digital form, mainstream books that have fallen into obscurity, or books that were obscure to begin with, may enjoy a rise in popularity decades or even centuries after their initial publication. (McKinnon 2015, 212.)

Especially in media markets, the costs of products and services have fallen due to, among other things, new distribution channels. Thus, the price of reaching the niche markets is no longer an insurmountable obstacle. (Rieple & Pisano 2015, 85-86). This reinforces the idea that that self-published e-books in particular can offer niche markets what traditional publishing houses cannot.

2.3 Peculiarities of the self-published e-book

As indicated above, self-publishing e-books is an inexpensive way for authors to enter the book markets in the modern age, which means that the threshold for publishing books is low. These self-published e-books can target niche audiences that traditionally publishing houses cannot or will not cater to. In this section, we look at what self-published e-books are like and what kind of characteristics they have.

While self-publishing e-books in the modern world is easy, inexpensive, and sidesteps the gatekeepers entirely, not everyone sees this as a positive development. As there is very little capital risk involved in self-publishing e-books with no publisher's editorial process standing in the way, generally speaking: anyone can publish anything. Publishing bad books is easier in self-published e-book format, which brings the average quality down. Due to this, some authors refuse to self-publish their material in e-book format entirely. (Thomlison & Bélanger 2015, 312.)

Amidst the traditionally published authors has now emerged a new type of author that Johnson (2017, 131-146) calls the citizen author. This type of author takes advantage of the opportunities provided by the global village. Sidestepping the gatekeepers by self-publishing is important to the citizen author, because the author then has complete control over the work and its distribution. However, even more important to the citizen author is engaging in a new type of dialogue with the readers through various (online) channels.

Johnson is not alone in stressing the importance of communication between the author and the reader. According to O'Leary (2014, 314, 317-318), there are new, alternative ways in which readers can be engaged, and the successful e-book writer should, among other things, open a dialogue with his or her readers. As mentioned earlier, the Revised

Communication Circuit (Figure 4) shows that any communication in the self-published e-book market is between the author and the reader. However, the question of how much communication exists or how it manifests has been left unanswered.

Pecoskie and Hill (2015, 620-621) agree that in today's age, "the connection between reader and author is explicit and embedded throughout the entire creative and publishing process" and that the reader holds power and influence. This blurs the line between the author and the reader, as the reader is now also a creator of the book. It is possible that this kind of co-authorship is the future of book publishing (Pecoskie & Hill 2015, 620-621).

As discussed earlier, it would make sense that if anything meets the needs of a niche audience, it would be the self-published e-book. The lack of gatekeepers and the highly competitive market should drive the authors to publish books aimed at very selected audiences, such as minority groups whose voices are more rarely heard in mainstream media. Wattpad is a popular platform for writers and readers to meet online, and it is often a stepping stone on the way to a self-published or even traditionally published literature (Malone Kicher 2015). It takes the niche approach into account in its own marketing, claiming in their motto: "Whatever you're into, it's all free on Wattpad". (Wattpad 2017).

An example of a successful niche-targeted self-published book is James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, which sold almost a hundred thousand copies before being adopted by a major publishing house. The book, a philosophical look on new age spirituality, had a very specific niche market. (Carolan & Evain 2013, 288.)

Nevertheless, there is also some evidence to the contrary. Somewhat surprisingly, a 2016 study concluded that self-published e-books were not "a rich source of the literature on underrepresented LGBT identities" and that they did not "fill the already known gaps left by traditional publishing" (Moulaison Sandy, Brendler & Kohn 2017, 445).

There is a new online presence whose importance to the e-book market cannot be overstated, namely Amazon. The US-based commerce giant that started out selling books and is now operating in several fields, such as e-commerce and logistics (Gershgorin, Grisworld, Murphy, Coren & Kessler 2017). Books, however, are still one of its priorities—and e-books are becoming more and more important. Currently, Amazon is the world's leading e-book seller with an approximate 70% market share in the US in the first quarter of 2012, followed by Barnes & Noble (about 20%) and Apple (about 10%) through Apple iBookstore (Gilbert 2015, 166).

A major factor in Amazon's huge market share is that it sells its own electronic device designed solely for the reading of e-books, named the Kindle. The release of the Kindle was a giant step towards a future where e-books rule over their printed cousins. (Treanor 2010, 120, 125-126.)

The launch of the Kindle transformed the e-book market (Benhamou 2015, 125), but that is not all. As the Kindle is exclusive to Amazon, Kindle users are required to buy

their e-books from Amazon (Nodoushani & Yang 2011, 322). What this means for the self-published e-book author is that to tap into the vast potential of Amazon's e-book market, he or she has to be published on Amazon.

For this reason, there is Amazon has a direct-to-author service called Kindle Direct Publishing, often referred to as KDP. While being able to reach Kindle users is one of KDP's strengths, Amazon's services are considerably above other self-publishing platforms for other reasons, too. For an author on a small budget, there are incredible marketing opportunities on Amazon's website and other channels. (Treanor 2010, 126-127.) In order to secure the loyalty of not only the Kindle readers but also the Kindle publishers, Amazon offers publishing perks, such as higher royalties, to those who publish their work exclusively on Amazon (Self Publishing and KDP Select).

While this exclusiveness may be restrictive to both readers and authors, the fact remains that due to Amazon's role as the market leader, its services simply cannot be ignored by self-published e-book authors who strive to be successful. Furthermore, Kindle Direct Publishing has proven to be a way through which some authors reach huge audiences. In 2012, 25% of Amazon's Top 100 e-book sales for the year came from authors who published their books through KDP (Bury 2013).

2.4 An international look at the markets

It can be said that digitalization and globalization have made the world smaller. The list of five driving forces of change in the business environment introduced by Prahalad (2010) and Viltard (2016, 383-384) emphasize current digital technologies, their recent advancements, and social media sites. These are particularly relevant to the e-book markets, as some of the e-books' biggest strengths include portability and mobility (McKinnon 215, 202). The transference of books across national borders has never been so easy. But according to Prahalad (2010) and Viltard (2016), national borders are not the only ones being crossed in today's digitalized world. Another set of borders that are less and less restrictive in today's world are cultural ones.

This is where digitalization and globalization truly come into play for e-books. In today's market, where the internet is both global and omnipresent, both large publishing houses and individual self-publishers are dependent on international distribution. Consequently, they are forced to view the market as global from the very start. (Steiner 2017, 12.)

The size of the e-book market varies greatly between countries and between continents. The US is the frontrunner in e-book reader sales, but other countries are slowly following suit. (Anthony 2012, 273-284.) In the US, the market is booming, representing 22% of the total book market in 2012, while in the United Kingdom it was only 12%. One

reason behind the e-book boom in the US, as opposed to Europe, can be found in the American-based internet giants such as Amazon and Google. (Benhamou 2015, 125.) Amazon's e-book reader Kindle has presumably played a big part in the market growth in the US as well.

As the market leader, Amazon's operations provide an indicative insight into how widespread the e-book markets are on a global scale. Amazon has eleven country-specific websites, including the US, Mexico, France, China, and India, and buying customers in 180 countries (Global Selling Guidance). While Amazon offers its customers a wide range of services and products, it is reasonable to presume that at least in the majority of these 180 countries, Amazon also offers e-books.

Amazon is growing internationally and entering new markets, such as Korea (Big Impact Expected? 2017). Entering the Korean market means adapting to yet another language. Given that Amazon is already operating in several markets where even the notation of the language is different, one might imagine this adaptation to be relatively painless.

However, this might not be the case. Different languages and different notations are a major concern when it comes to the global e-book markets. There are other international challenges, too, and they differ from one location to another. These include, for instance, the price and availability of e-book reading devices. While in the US, the Kindle is widespread enough to be well-known amongst the target demographic groups, the same cannot be said for many other markets, where the price of the Kindle is found to be steep. (Anthony 2012, 273-284.) Internationality also brings out issues that are centered around copyrights and regional legalities (Weinstein 2010, 13).

For these reasons even the corporate giant Amazon cannot sell e-books, intangible goods as they are, globally as though the markets were as borderless as the internet itself. These issues are bound to hinder the expansion of the e-book markets. Perhaps it is no surprise, all these things considered, that the long-awaited e-book revolution has not yet occurred.

One of the countries that has a large and rapidly evolving online literature market is China. The state control has driven much of publishing away from the public eye of book stores and onto the internet (Ren & Montgomery 2012, 120). This should also hold true for other countries where there is censorship, social stigma, or other issues affecting the selection of books offered to consumers. In many ways, this is similar to niche markets: consumers want to read books that are not readily available to them in traditional bookstores.

Whether the focus is on niche audiences or other markets neglected by mainstream publishing, it seems that being able to target an international group is essential to the self-published e-book authors. If the e-book that is for sale only attracts the interest of a handful of people locally, on a global scale it will be multiplied.

A case in point would be E. L. James, who from the very beginning in 2011 took the global approach to marketing her originally self-published e-book, the famous *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Early on, when James was promoting the book, she would sometimes give e-books away. This was done internationally, which was appreciated by many readers, as they were spread out in the world across long distances. (Pecoskie & Hill, 2015 618-619.) The book was later picked up by a major publishing house, and it became not only a best-seller, but a phenomenon (Ellis-Petersen 2015).

The phenomenon is not entirely unknown to scholars. Craighill (2015, 100) argues that English language book exports, as opposed to domestic translations, are a reported issue in Sweden, France, Denmark and Germany. She states that “widespread English language capabilities, combined with the Internet as a global marketplace, create the ability and opportunity to change publishing as we know it”.

Considering Chinese demography, there are around 400 million people in China who have studied English, nearly a third of China’s 1.3 billion population (Wei & Su 2012, 11), it would seem nothing but wasteful to disregard the Chinese as a possible target audience for e-books written in English. The same thing can be said about India, where many people consider English their mother tongue (Anil 2015, 40).

It is estimated that in 2015, there were over 1.5 billion people English-speakers globally (How Many People – – 2105). As such, an e-book written in English should be sellable worldwide, especially in the US, where the e-book markets are the hottest. A case in point is that libraries outside the US are very interested in securing the rights to e-books written in English in order to offer them to their customers (Weinstein 2010, 12). This goes to show that not only is there potential for books in English across borders, but there is also demand for it.

With English as a dominant secondary language in many countries worldwide, there is diminishing need for translating books. While the majority of publishers in Sweden, Croatia and Lithuania think that self-publishing is near-irrelevant to the publishing industry (Wilson & Maceviviute 2016), they may be forgetting that their market share is threatened not only by domestic self-publishers, but by international self-publishers as well.

Furthermore, the connection goes both ways, and reading e-books can be a way for non-native speakers to learn English (Coskun 2017, 15-17). For some international readers, this may even be the driving force behind reading e-books. E-books lower the language barrier: for instance, words may be easier to look up on a thesaurus on a computer. (Sehn & Frago 2015, 409).

In light of all this, it is clear that internationality plays a huge role in the self-published e-book market. The further technology advances and the more national and cultural borders become blurred, the more opportunities the global markets offer. The

international success of Amazon is just one indication of this, and another way for the markets to expand.

More to the point, it is clear that there is no good reason for self-published e-book authors not to target a global market, especially if the book is written in English. Even small niche markets can become massive on a global scale, and the reasons for international customers to be interested in a book are varied and complex.

2.5 Marketing self-published e-books

In this section, the focus is on the self-published e-book markets from a marketing point of view. Different theories are combined with relevant research data to form an understanding of the current state of affairs. It is common knowledge that marketing, in all of its perspectives, is a widely researched topic, and innumerable studies and theories have been written. To keep the amount of information manageable, the focus is only on the most fundamental and relevant literature.

2.5.1 *The Four Ps*

A very traditional but also relevant way of looking at marketing is what is generally referred to as ‘the Marketing Mix’ or ‘the Four Ps’. While it is not entirely clear who originally came up with the concept, it is usually credited to Neil Borden, and it has been around since at least the 1950s. Over the years, it has been revised several times to fit different scenarios, but even now in the 2010s, it is still the “most fundamental concept of marketing”. (Khan 2014, 95-96.)

According to Khan (2014, 98-103), in the Marketing Mix and variations thereof, out of the Four Ps:

1. **Product** refers to not only the actual physical (or intangible) product (or service), in this case, the electronic file containing the book, but also its level of quality, a possible brand name, and any other aspects of the product that are needed to deliver the core benefits.
2. **Price** means what the customer has to pay for the product, or more specifically, to cost of the product to the customer. Price is often considered to be the most significant factor affecting the purchase decision.
3. **Promotion** is the selling technique that revolves around communication, such as advertising and public relations. This communication aims at three things: providing customers with information about the product, persuading customers of the product’s benefits, and encouraging customers to take action.

4. **Place** refers to both the distribution channels of a product as well as its availability. In this case, it is important to keep in mind that the internet itself is not a distribution channel per se, but it includes e-book distribution channels, such as Amazon and smaller online bookstores.

The **product** itself, the self-published e-book and the benefits it offers to the customer, are discussed throughout this thesis, especially in section 2.3. For the purpose of the thesis, there are two main points that are to be kept in mind when it comes to the product. Firstly, e-books hold several advantages over traditionally published printed books, such as mobility and ease of storage (McKinnon 2015, 202). Secondly, the oversaturated market is diminishing the perceived quality of e-books (Thomlison & Bélanger 2015, 313).

The **pricing** of self-published e-books is a multifaceted issue rarely discussed in academic literature. So far, the pricing of e-books has followed that of printed books, but no one really knows yet what the appropriate pricing strategy is (Westgate 2012, 401-402). Harwell's (2017) study shows that e-books in general are consistently priced lower than hardcovers or paperbacks due to the lower costs of publishing and distribution. On the other hand, the ease and inexpensiveness of publishing an e-book have led to lower and lower prices. Many self-published e-book authors sell their book for only 99 cents (in whichever currency), believing it will lead to more overall sales in the end. (Dionne 2011).

Promotion is another topic that is discussed throughout this thesis, especially in section 2.5.2. The most notable promotion channel proposed in academic literature is social media (O'Leary 2014, 314-317), combined with other interaction with readers (Carolan & Evain 2013, 289).

When it comes to **place**, the main distribution channel for many authors is through Amazon, as discussed in section 2.3. But while Amazon may be the market leader, there are many other distribution channels as well. In fact, new publishing platforms arise all the time and the nature of publishing books changes constantly, to the point where new e-books may not be available through existing distributors (Brantley 2012, 173-174).

2.5.2 *Creating value through marketing*

Carolan and Evain (2013) describe the markets as "seas of books -- pouring into the oceans of publishing past" (Carolan & Evain 2013, 286), underlining that self-published e-books are, like most things on the internet, abundant. It is increasingly difficult for all parties involved, including the customers, to decide what is worth reading. Considering the market is so saturated, any value that can be added to the self-published e-book may be a competitive advantage.

Zeithaml (1988, 13) defines customer perceived value as “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given”. In the context of e-books, the reader is not paying for the electronic file; he or she is paying for the experience of enjoying the story, or for the new information that the book provides.

Following from customer perceived value comes the idea that marketing is, in many ways, the act of adding value to the product. While the value can pertain to the physical product, it can also be symbolic, such as the maker’s brand. This value can be added to any of the Four Ps. (Gofton & Ness 1997, 3.) Hence, authors should take advantage of the small things that are available to them, such as offering the book in different formats to be opened on different programs and devices.

One of the ways to add value to a product is to enhance its brand; in this case, the author’s brand. The idea of personal branding is not new: in 1997, Peters claimed boldly that, “Starting today you are a brand” (Peters 1997). Furthermore, there is some evidence that so-called media fans, who are particularly loyal to a narrative or text, consider the brand to be highly important (Burgess & Jones, 2018, 4-9). Standing out in the saturated self-published e-book market is mandatory to those who wish to sell books in abundance. Instead of branding the book, self-published authors should perhaps work harder on branding themselves.

Furthermore, as the author promotes his or her book or engages in dialogue with the readers using the channels of social media, whether inadvertently or on purpose, they create their own personal brand (Makkai 2016, 102-103). Thus, many authors have their own personal brand already, whether or not they are aware of it. The way in which the author connects with the readers may well become a part of this brand. Perhaps the author is witty or chatty, or perhaps he or she posts certain types of pictures on social media. There is some evidence that this type of blending of professional and personal identities can serve as a powerful marketing tool (Sihi & Lawson, 2018, 52).

Connecting with the readers is important for other reasons as well. O’Leary (2014, 314-317) lists important aspects of contemporary and future publishing and book promotion, and most of them are related to community. Many platforms on which today’s writers and readers are active, such as Wattpad or Goodreads, are communal in nature, meaning that readers can recommend books and stories to one another and help promote them.

If the resources of community are harnessed to help in marketing and promoting books, the obvious place to start is social media. Many self-published authors who have enjoyed success are masters of calculating views and hits for maximum exposure and efficiency to make their content go viral (Gallo 2013, 80). This is also another aspect of the new relationship between content generators and users—in this case, writers and readers.

Carolan and Evain (2013, 289) also mention blogging and social networking as ways in which successful self-published authors build their profile and attract readers. According to them, if managed correctly, social media can be an effective way of building a fan base and creating reader loyalty. They give special mention to blogging, even mentioning that writing a successful blog can be a self-published author's way to being picked up by a publishing house.

John Grisham is often cited as a self-published author who became a traditionally published author of world-renowned best-sellers. While that may not be technically true as his first novel was published by a small publishing house in a small initial edition, the way he personally handled the promotion of the novel raised him from obscurity to best-selling status. He went on a book tour across the United States and focused on building a network, and his second novel attracted Hollywood interest and was later published by a major publishing house. (Carolan & Evain 2013, 286-287.) As many self-published e-book authors do not have the resources to go on book tours, it is likely they should focus on building their network from the very beginning.

2.5.3 Target audiences

In general, the marketing of self-published e-books should most likely be targeted at consumers. In 2009, Vasileiou, Hartley and Rowley (2009, 187) noted that academic and public libraries were the principal market for e-book distributors, and that individuals came second. However, for the self-published author, who wants to cater to a specific niche, marketing to individuals may be necessary. Considering Anderson's (2004) Long Tail Theory, the keys to success in tomorrow's book markets may very well lie in digital distribution to individuals interested in niche products.

Because of the digital nature of e-books, it makes sense to turn to the markets that exist on the internet. Laing and Royle (2013, 117) have researched the behaviour of book buyers and discovered that in an online environment, nearly 82% of consumers were looking for a specific book. In contrast, in traditional bookstores, only 40% were doing the same. Equally interestingly, in traditional stores up to 76% of consumers were browsing, with or without the intention of purchase, while in online stores, only 51% were looking for something new. The probability of making impulse purchases online was dramatically lower than in traditional book stores. (Laing & Royle 2013, 117-118.)

This shift in customer behaviour indicates that in order to sell books online, authors and publishing houses must make themselves known to customers through other channels and draw them into the bookstore. This supports the idea that books, like all other media in today's age, are shifting from push to pull, as suggested by Anderson (2004).

Furthermore, it highlights the importance of knowing one's target audience and how to reach it.

Very little research has been conducted on the demographics of e-book readers. There is evidence that while young people generally embrace technology faster, e-book usage levels may even be higher in the older age groups. This may be due to factors such as a bigger font available in e-book reading devices and the fact that older people read more in general. (Hage 2006, 59-60.) Thus, it is important to take older age groups into consideration as possible target audiences for self-published e-books.

Due to lack of data on e-book readers, the only reliable research has been done on the readers of traditional books. This research indicates that for instance, women are much more likely to buy romance novels than men. In general, reading preferences vary greatly according to age and gender. (Dortch 1998, 9-12). Thus, an all-encompassing target audience for self-published e-book readers cannot be determined. The target group depends on several book-specific issues, such as its genre.

From the point of view of an individual author, knowing his or her target audience is of utmost importance, yet very little reliable data exists. This issue becomes even more emphasised if we consider the idea that self-published e-books cater to international niche markets. It is almost as though to be effective in marketing, the author must reach an audience without knowing who or what kind of people they are.

Finally, while the marketing emphasis should be elsewhere, such as on building the author's brand, impulse buyers should not be ignored as a target audience, either. Even though impulse purchases are more common in traditional bookstores, 26% of responders reported doing unplanned purchases online. 62% of these reported the author being a key influence on making the impulse purchase decision, nearly 38% said they were influenced by the blurb, while less than 5% said they were influenced in the book's placement within the top ten. (Laing & Royle 2013, 118.)

There is yet another issue with target audiences regarding self-published e-books. Vasileiou and Rowley (2011, 630-631) studied the promotion of e-books in academic libraries and discovered that the majority did not have a long-term marketing strategy for their e-resources. Some interviewees even mentioned that such a marketing strategy was not needed because their users were already aware of the e-books and other electronic resources at their disposal. In light of this, it is reasonable to presume that there is a disparity in the e-book market. First, there are those for whom e-books are everyday and commonplace, and they believe the same to be true for other people as well. Secondly, there are those—possibly a very large number of people—who may be aware that e-books exist but have never even thought of buying one. Considering this, there is yet another difficult target audience self-published e-book authors should be trying to reach: those who are currently unaware of the e-book markets.

2.5.4 *Authors as marketers*

Baverstock and Steinitz discovered in their study (2013, 218) that while for the most part, self-published authors were realistic about the time and monetary investments, they often underestimated the marketing effort involved. It stands to reason that while the markets have shifted from push to pull, the indie authors are unaware of this change and what it means. They may be under the impression that getting the book self-published is enough to make it sell.

Furthermore, it is notable that while self-publishing leaves authors free of the constraints of a publishing house, it also makes them increasingly dependent on big media companies as a means of both publishing and marketing (Steiner 2017, 8). Amazon, with a lion's share of the market, is a prime example of this; Amazon has such an influence over the readers of self-published e-books that in order to be successful, an indie author often has no choice but to co-operate with Amazon's terms of service. Similarly, several of the concepts mentioned in this thesis, such as e-book reader availability and embedded future video content, cannot be affected by an individual author (Grover 2016, 183). Like mentioned above, one of the motivations that drives authors to self-publishing e-books is a lack of financial resources, as self-publishing fiction or non-fiction in electronic form is inexpensive in today's world. If, in the future, the norm for e-books will be interspersed with videos and other possibly expensive content, self-published e-book authors may find themselves in trouble yet again.

Nevertheless, the written word has been around for millennia and text publications for centuries (Darnton 1982, 65). While much more effective means of storing and spreading information have emerged, especially in the recent decades, the written word is still going strong. Whether the writing is on paper or on screen, there is clearly still demand for both fiction and non-fiction. As technology processes even further, it is likely that instead of disappearing entirely, publishing houses and self-publishers will find new means of spreading their books—or perhaps new ways of combining their efforts.

If we briefly consider what kind of action indie authors could take to market their books to those who are currently unaware of the e-book market, spreading the word about the advantages of e-books might be a useful starting point. Marketers should emphasize not only the availability of e-books, but their mobility as well, as smartphones and internet access are commonplace in today's society. This makes reading on the go, for instance during the commute, possible. (Huang, Shiau & Lin 2017, 577.) Another significant factor that has a positive effect on reader experience, especially on a continuous basis, is the trialability of e-books (Chen 2015, 211-212). E-books can often be previewed online much like physical books can be browsed in a store. Perhaps this is something not all potential customers know, as well as something that could easily be emphasized through various online marketing channels.

2.6 Synthesis of the theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical framework and the most relevant academic literature, for the purposes of the thesis, are summarized. The aim is to build a brief but thorough framework for the thesis.

Digitalization has transformed media markets (see, for example, Broich 2015, 238), and the book market has begun to change in unforeseen ways. E-books have cut the production and distribution costs of book publishing to a fraction (Waldfogel & Reimers 2015, 49), which enables the authors to sidestep the traditional gatekeepers, the publishing houses, entirely by self-publishing (Johnson, 2017, 131-146). Digitalization has also made the book industry inherently global (Steiner 2017, 12). Even so, it appears that self-published e-books have not reached their full potential.

Books (see, for example, Darnton, 1982, 65-83), publishing (see, for example, Howard 2013, 22), and especially marketing (see, for example, Khan 2014, 98-103) have been explored widely in the past. However, the deeper we look into the topic self-published e-books, the scarcer studies become. Few studies have been conducted on the topic of online marketing of self-published e-books, and they mostly focus on the dialogue between the author and the reader (see, for example, O'Leary 2014, 314, 317-318).

The lack of previous research suggests that there is much to be learned. Perhaps the reasons for the stagnant state of the self-published e-book markets are not technological so much as they are marketing-related. For this reason, it is important to look at different aspects of marketing when it comes to self-published e-books in particular. In the related literature, there were two themes above others, namely community and target audience.

In terms of community, the dialogue between authors and publishers is more important than ever. Darnton's (1982, 65-83) Communication Circuit (Figure 3), which has demonstrated the book industry for centuries, has recently been transformed to hold only the author, the reader, and the surrounding world (Figure 4). On the other hand, leaving out the publishing house makes the self-published e-book author increasingly dependent on large media companies to reach the readers (Steiner, 2017, 8). The most notable of these media companies is the world's leading e-book seller, Amazon (Gilbert 2015, 66). Amazon not only has a lion's share of the market, but it also sells its own exclusive e-book reader, the Kindle (Benhamou 2015, 125).

When it comes to the target audience of self-published e-books, digitalization has changed the way media is provided and consumed, and catering to niche markets is more important than ever (Anderson 2004). This is seen as one of the strengths of self-published e-books. In addition to sidestepping the gatekeepers, self-publishing books in electronic format makes it possible to cater to niche audiences (Carolan & Evain 2013, 288).

In the related literature, the importance of marketing books was seen as paramount. As Baverstock (2008, 3) put it, "today's publishing industry is driven by marketing". The

idea is that not every book is sellable, and quality is not the same as marketability. Marketing is more important to the book industry, including the self-published e-book market, than it ever was.

However, while the importance of marketing was often mentioned or even researched in the related academic literature, there was little to no substance in terms of theory application. Specific things about the industry were researched and specific questions answered, but there were no studies about the overall state of self-published e-book marketing. Aspects such as community and targeting the right audience were mentioned, but there was little if any suggestions on how to actually capitalize on this information.

There are numerable different ways of looking at marketing. A traditional one is the four Ps: Product, Price, Production, and Place (Khan 2014, 98-103) that lists the four dimensions of marketing that every marketer should take into consideration. Another common idea about marketing is that it is about customer perceived value, meaning that the important thing to keep in mind in terms of marketing is not the product itself per se, but the utility and the value that the customer perceives to receive (Zeithaml 1988, 13). Marketing is about adding perceived value to a product, and it can be added to any of the four Ps (Gofton & Ness 1997, 3).

According to Laing and Royle's (2013, 117) study, the vast majority of the customers in online bookstores came in to find a specific book. What that means is that readers need to be reached through some promotional channel before books can be sold. However, little research has been put into the readers of self-published e-books and there is little data about their demographics. It may very well be that the target audience is unknown to the self-published e-book authors attempting to promote their own work.

The marketing of self-published e-books is evidently a complex matter. While digitalization has surely opened up new doors for authors, it has also made it important for the self-published e-book authors to reach international niche markets without the help of a professional publishing house.

Figures 3 and 4 describe past and current book publishing markets from a distant point of view. In light of related academic literature, a micro-level look offers a completely different view. Figure 6 demonstrates what the markets look like to the self-published author.

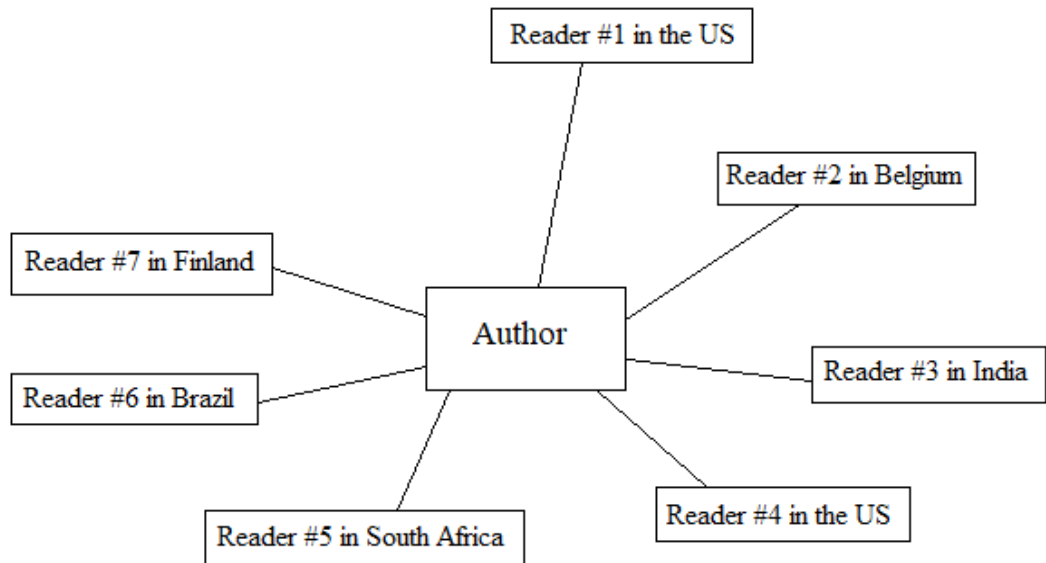


Figure 6 The reality of marketing self-published e-books

The author personally has to reach his or her niche target audience spread out across the globe. There are no middle men to assist in producing the book or marketing it. How well this truly works in practice remains to be seen.

3 EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section examines conducting the empirical research, its methodology and limitations. First, netnography as the chosen methodology is presented. Then, the ways in which data was collected and analyzed are detailed. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

3.1 Netnography as methodology

As the topic of this thesis is very closely related to the internet and today's online world, netnography was chosen as the methodology for the empirical study. A relatively new way of conducting qualitative research, netnography is a portmanteau of the words "net" and "ethnography". Ethnography is a method deriving from anthropology, a study of written culture. Netnography is an adaptation of ethnography, where the written culture being studied is online. (Kozinets 2011, streaming video 16.3.2018).

The decision to use netnography as methodology for the empirical study was two-fold. First, netnography has been shown to discover things and issues that other methodologies have been unable to reach, and it does so in a way that is highly unobtrusive and economical (Kozinets 2002, 70). Second, netnography was a natural choice based on the subject matter.

As the literature review demonstrates, the internet is essential to self-published e-books, especially if they are written and published for an audience wider than that of the author's immediate circle of family and friends. The internet is full of forums, blogs, social media sites, and other webpages dedicated to self-published e-books, in one form or another. For the netnographic research conducted for the study, Goodreads.com and Amazon.com were chosen as primary sources of data. For a fuller picture and additional information, two author portraits were also built.

Netnography attempts to understand rather than measure (Lugosi, Janta & Watson, 2012, 840), and it is an interpretive and qualitative method based on participant observation (Jeanes & Huzzard 2014, 135). The purpose of qualitative research study, in general, is to seek to understand how different phenomena impact the reality of different individuals or groups (Mills & Birks 2014, 9). Here, in broad terms, the phenomenon that is studied are self-published e-books, and the impact under scrutiny is how self-published e-book authors choose to market them. The idea is to understand the markets rather than measure them.

In order to conduct the research, the research questions have been operationalized. In the results section, the answers to the operationalized questions are not only presented but also interpreted. Interpretation is often defined as translation from one language or set of

symbols into another, and in content analysis, which is also applicable here, interpretation can be seen as translating study results into theory (Weber 1990, 78-79).

Content analysis also uses different methods not only to describe phenomena and their interrelationships, but also to make predictions about those interrelationships (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2013, 32). Qualitative analysis can, thus, be used to say what is happening right now, and also to say what is likely to happen in the future. For this reason, qualitative research methods are important to the study. The primary aim of the research is to describe the markets of self-published e-books as they are now. Additionally, the research may give additional insight into where the markets may be headed in the future.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

In order to perform the research effectively, the three research questions were divided into parts. The Operationalization table (Table 1) demonstrates the relationship between the research questions, the related literature, and the operationalized questions that were used in the analysis of data. By analyzing the collected data and answering the analysis questions, we hope to find answers to the research questions.

Table 1 Operationalization table

Main research question	Subquestions	Related literature	Data analysis themes
What are some of the characteristic methods of marketing self-published e-books on the internet?	What kind of online marketing methods do self-published e-book authors use?	Khan (2014) O'Leary (2014) Makkai (2014)	What are some of the popular marketing methods self-published e-book authors use? What types of marketing-related themes emerge in the forum discussions?
	How important is the online community in marketing self-published e-books?	Darnton (1982)	How does the dialogue between authors and readers manifest itself? What kind of community is the most important to the authors?

	What are the target audiences of self-published e-books like?	Anderson (2004)	How do authors view niches as target audiences?
		Steiner (2017)	How international are the markets?
		Rieple & Pisano (2015)	

As presumed, there was more than enough data and information available for this study. The question then became not which sites to leave out but which sites to pick in general, as the sheer volume of website, forums, and social media channels was overwhelming.

To get the best possible overall look, the decision was made to focus on the two most prominent discussion forums and two specific case studies. Amazon KDP Support and Goodreads Groups were chosen to conduct this study. Their relevance to the topic and grounds for including them in the research are discussed, as well as the sections and information used.

Initially, the study was intended to include three forums. However, in the first stages of analysis of the Amazon KDP Support and Goodreads Groups, it became clear that these were the two major community sites that housed the majority of reliable information. While Goodreads often came up on the Amazon forums, and Amazon was discussed in great detail on Goodreads, there were no other major discussion sites that were universally accepted, by the writers and readers on these two prevalent forums, as relevant to the process of writing and marketing a self-published e-book. Many other websites were mentioned, but those were usually paid-for services or the authors' individual websites, and they were never brought up continuously. The only other websites that were discussed in detail were social media sites such as Facebook, which were unsuitable to be included in the study. On the most prominent social media websites, namely Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, data is much more scattered in ways that make discovering patterns challenging. For instance, finding conversations longer than two messages on any relevant social media site proved to be very difficult. While there were large quantities of data to be collected, their use for the purposes of the study was very limited.

As there was more than enough data on these two sites, Amazon and Goodreads, already, the decision was then made to focus on them. Including any third internet forum would have been likely to skewer the results with information that was only relevant in terms of one particular niche. The approach to the communal websites (Amazon, Goodreads) was two-fold: first, an overall look at the different sections of the site, and then a specific look at the discussion forums. This was done because different sites had

different types of sections that were pertinent to the topic at hand. The most important section on all of these sites was the forum, which is why they are referred to as discussion forums, even when the data collected came from other sections on the same website. All discussion forum threads included in the study were business-oriented and focused on issues such as marketing strategies, publishing channels, and building a fanbase.

However, as social media was pertinent to the study, leaving it out of the empirical study entirely was not an option. To get an idea of how self-published e-book authors conduct their marketing across social media, two author portraits were put together. The data collected for the author portraits was not included in the primary study. Instead, it was used to make additional observations about self-published authors and their community. The different types of websites, their names, and the sections used are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Empirical sources

Type of website	Name of website	Sections of the website used
Discussion forums	Amazon	Amazon KDP Support: Forum Home
		General Questions
		Reviews
		User profiles
	Goodreads	Discussion forums
		Reviews
User profiles		
Author portrait: Marie Silk	mariesilk.com	All sections
	Facebook	MarieSilkPublishing
		JohnGrisham
	Goodreads	World, Writing, Wealth discussion
		Author profile
		Individual book pages
		Author blog
	Amazon	Author profile
Individual book pages		
	studiobopublishing.com	All sections
	roneywrites.com	All sections

Author portrait: Christine Roney	Facebook	ChristineRoneyAuthor
	Twitter	artsmithcris
	Goodreads	Support for Indie Authors discussion
		Author profile
		Individual book pages
	Amazon	Author profile
		Individual book pages
	medium.com	@artsmithcris
		About
ibpa-online.org	All sections	

While the list of sources is somewhat long, the main focus was on the 26 discussion threads retrieved from the Amazon and Goodreads discussion forums (10 and 16, respectively). See Appendix 1 for a list of the discussion threads and their titles. Data was collected between the 11th of January, 2018, and the 29th of March, 2018.

The method used to analyze the collected data in the study herein was introduced by Creswell (2009, 185). The method includes several steps that take the collected data, organize it, analyze it, and finally interpret the meaning of themes and descriptions that have emerged from the data. Figure 7 illustrates the process.

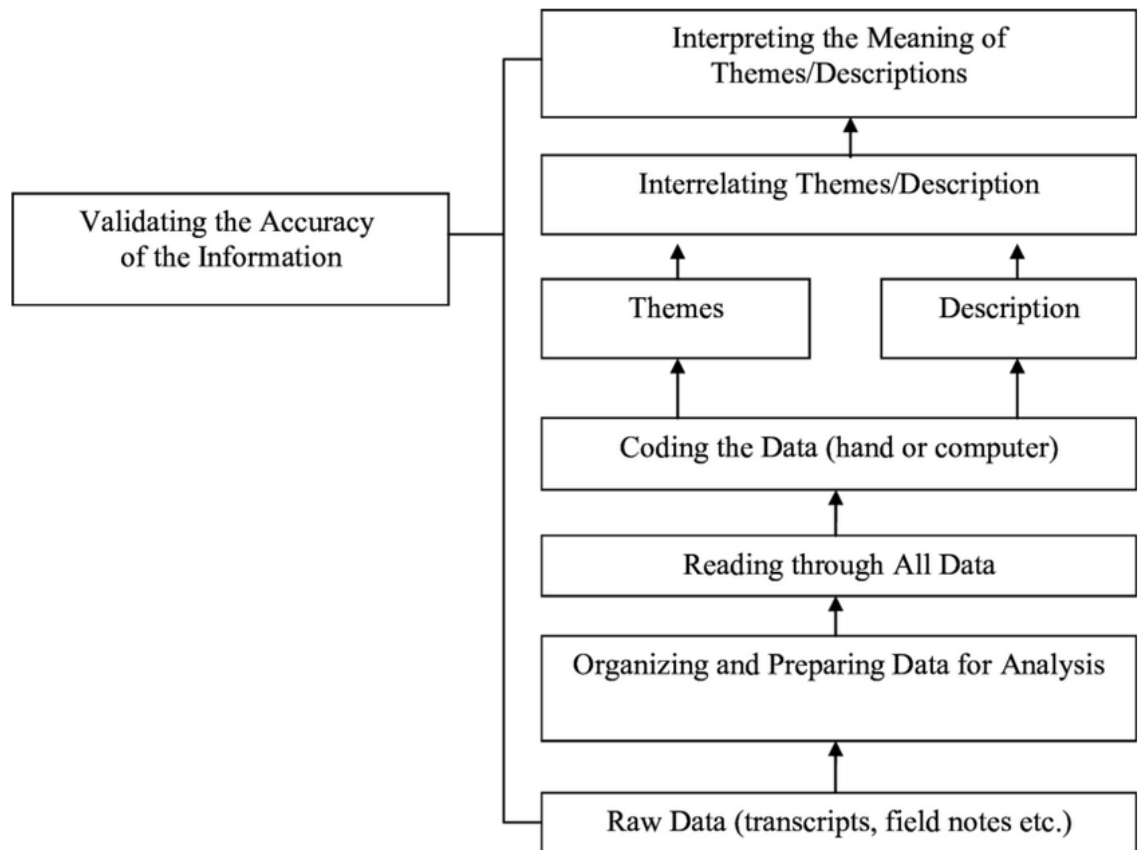


Figure 7 Creswell's Data Analysis Method (Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches 2009)

This method was chosen because it aims to interpret the meaning of the themes and descriptions that arise from the raw data that is being studied. The aim of the thesis is to uncover some of the most notable themes that are being discussed among self-published e-book readers and their readers. For this reason, Creswell's research design is not only applicable but ideal.

The two discussion forums selected, Amazon and Goodreads, were very different in tone of conversation. Amazon was much more business-oriented and to the point, while the members on Goodreads Groups were more conversational. This explains the large number of messages collected from the Goodreads Groups, as many of the comments were irrelevant in terms of the study, such as introductory messages or expressions of gratitude. Goodreads also had a high number of messages that were directed to only one person. The focus of the discussion also sometimes digressed, whereas on Amazon, the discussion followed the given topic more closely. The Goodreads discussions were sometimes heavy on self-promotion, while such behavior was not well-received on the Amazon forum.

Once the suitable discussion threads were collected, they were arranged by source and topic and then analyzed in terms of themes. Each discussion thread was numbered and

analyzed separately, and statistics about the prevalence of different topics of discussion were made. For instance, the topic “marketing strategies” was the focus of eight out of 26 conversation topics, or nearly one third. This was done in order to form a proper idea of the most common topics that were discussed on the forums. Simultaneously, individual quotes were collected to highlight different topics, ideas, and attitudes.

After the data had been collected, read through, and coded, different interrelating themes started to emerge. These themes and the interpretations made based on them are presented and discussed in later chapters.

3.2.1 Goodreads

One of the richest sources of data and information for self-published e-book authors and readers is the website Goodreads.com. It is a website dedicated to all kinds of books, and the social aspect is an important part of it. According to Goodreads itself, it is “the world’s largest site for readers and book recommendations” and its “mission is to help people find and share books they love” (About Goodreads, 2018). Its features range from the services offered to the individual user, such as the virtual bookshelf the user can utilize to keep tracks of all the books he or she has read, and author sites to discussion groups and vast genre pages providing recommendations.

The most important section on Goodreads, in terms of this study, was Groups and the Discussions therein. The Groups section includes books, discussions, photos, polls, and other things related to a certain topic. Any Goodreads member can start a Group, and they can be public or private. As mentioned before, only public groups were included in the study. These groups were a wealth of data, because they featured and active large discussion forums.

The Groups were first searched using the term “self-publishing”, which returned 325 groups. They were spread over 33 search result pages, sorted by last activity. That means that the Group featuring the word “self-publishing” in its description, key words, or elsewhere, that had been modified last was the top result. Modifying could be, for instance, a new reply to a discussion thread on a related forum. As such, among the top hits were some of the most active, and by association, the biggest, Goodreads Groups.

Including and rejecting the Groups and Discussions that were included in the study was done based on the following criteria: the Group had to be public, it had to have been active within the last 24 hours, and the majority of its Discussion thread topics had to be relevant to self-publishing. The Group had to be public for the research to be transparent and to have the participants’ implicit consent to being included. The 24-hour window was imposed to keep the number of Groups to a manageable size. And the Discussion topics had to be relevant to self-publishing, so completely unrelated groups such as Sewing

Classes in Glasgow, which turned up unexpectedly, could be discarded. Groups where the Discussion topics focused on reviews were included through the assumption that these were indie authors looking for reviewers. This search turned up eight different Groups, all active and related to the topic. After this, the tag “self-published-authors” was searched through, but no new Groups fitting the aforementioned criteria were found.

Once the Groups had been identified, it was time to look at their individual conversations. Using the same criteria as on Amazon’s discussion forums, the two most recently edited conversation threads that fit were selected for the study. This resulted in sixteen conversation threads (Appendix 1), and a total of 1015 messages.

3.2.2 *Amazon*

The one channel of self-published e-books that keeps coming up throughout the literature review is Amazon.com, the world’s busiest and most successful e-book publishing platform. Among other things, it has its own forum dedicated to self-publishing, part of the Amazon KDP Support. Given Amazon’s massive role in the self-published e-book market, this forum could not be left out of the study.

The website, titled Amazon KDP Support: Forum Home, is divided into several parts, such as Publisher Support, Ask the Community, and forums in different languages. The forums are huge in terms of volume: for instance, Publisher Support alone is divided into three parts, Account Issues, Payment Issues, and Feedback, and it is only going through those links that leads the user to the actual conversation threads, of which there were thousands per each.

In terms of this study, only a few parts of the forum were relevant. For instance, a deeper look into the Publisher Support section was not necessary, as the conversation threads therein were technical in nature. The discussions on foreign-language boards were also left out.

The Amazon KDP Support: Forum Home website as a whole was included in the study, because the different languages and the forum statistics were highly relevant to the topics of this study. In addition to the forum as a whole, there was one discussion board that included content that was both in English and applicable, and that was the General Questions board under the Ask the Community tab. Even then, several of the discussion threads were not pertinent to the study at hand, as they were focused on things such as technical issues, print books, and Amazon-related problems.

Due to the incredible number of messages on the board, 422,231 messages in 53,852 threads, it was clear from the beginning that only a fraction of the messages could be included. To find a suitable amount of data to analyze, a selection criterion was created: the discussion threads selected had to be pertinent to either marketing self-published e-

books, the international e-book markets, or the authors' social media use, and the threads had to be at least ten messages long. This was to make sure that Amazon-specific discussions centered around technical issues, very short discussions, and discussions unrelated to the self-publishing of e-books were excluded.

The only way to sort the over 50,000 discussion threads was newest first. Hence, the first or newest ten discussion threads that fit the criteria were selected for the study. While this may have skewed the results into featuring more current conversations, the data was diverse enough to work as, perhaps not a deep look into the entire forums, but a snapshot of the state of them as they were right at the time.

3.2.3 *Author portraits*

For a detailed and practical look at the marketing of self-published e-books, two case studies were conducted. These case studies were detailed looks into the books and online presence of two self-published e-book authors, including their social media accounts and readers' reviews on their books.

The authors were selected based on the following criteria: the author had to have self-published more than one e-book, he or she could not have been published by an outside professional publishing house, he or she had to have a personal website and at least one social media account, and he or she had to be active in marketing his or her books online. These criteria were selected to ensure that the case studies were conducted on authors who made an effort not only to write books but to market them, too. The authors were then selected off the Goodreads Groups message boards. The aim was to find authors who, in the discussions, demonstrated an interest in and an understanding of marketing, especially the marketing methods that featured heavily in the overall discussions, such as using social media, paid ads, and mailing lists to attract readers.

Marie Silk was selected as the first author portrait because her messages on the Goodreads forum, included in the empirical research, demonstrated a thorough understanding of marketing and trial-and-error experience therein. She had two years of experience in marketing a book series in a popular genre, Young Adult, and she went through her ever-changing marketing strategies in one long, detailed Goodreads Group conversation thread, providing a plethora of information for this study.

Christine Roney was selected as the second author portrait because she fit the criteria, she was constantly active on the Goodreads Groups, and her methods of marketing were somewhat more traditional, providing the study with a slightly different point of view and resulting in fresh insights.

The Amazon KDP Support forums were also browsed to find suitable object for the case studies, but interestingly, the top ten most active users on the site, as well as other

possible authors whose profiles were looked at, were all anonymous. While many stated in their profiles that they had written several books, the usernames were made up, and there were never any links to either Amazon books or off-site webpages that would have confirmed this or given any additional information about which books the author had written or under what name.

Initially, Ask the Author was going to be featured more heavily in this study, but this was prevented by the fact that the majority of the featured authors were not self-published. Instead, the most prominent authors were cooperating with traditional publishing houses. Due to this, Ask the Author is featured in the author portraits.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the study

The validity of data in qualitative research has been a notable issue in debates for a long time. It is much more difficult to test and prove that the data is valid in qualitative than quantitative research. Perhaps because of this, there are several different ways of assessing the validity. (Huberman & Miles 2002, 37.)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a four-fold method for assessing the trustworthiness of the study. In order to be construed as valid, data has to be credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. Credibility refers to confidence in the findings. Dependability means that the findings need to be consistent and could be repeated. Confirmability refers to suitable neutrality, so that the findings are shaped by the responders and not by researcher bias. Finally, the findings are transferable if they are applicable in other contexts.

In terms of the empirical study, netnography was selected as the research method and the collection of data was explained in detail in section 3.3 to ensure that these standards are met. Transparency and rigor are essential in promoting credible results (Salk 2010, 882). To support confirmability, the results in chapter 4 are presented as neutrally as possible, so that the results of the study and the conclusions drawn from them remain separate.

Considering Lincoln and Guba's approach to the validity of data, the biggest issue for the thesis is dependability. Due to technical reasons and the overall nature of the internet, all the data that was collected was very current. While this means that the data was fresh, it also means that the impact of any current events is disproportionately large. As a hypothetical example, if Amazon had made drastic changes to their policies within 72 hours of data collection, discussions revolving around Amazon's policies would show up in this study more often than average. Furthermore, due to the transient nature of the internet, data is lost all the time. By the time of finalizing the thesis, some of the conversation threads included in the study had already been deleted from the internet.

Thus, as is the case with all ethnographic research, the very same research cannot be repeated. However, if the same research, using the same methods and criteria, was to be done again, it should yield very similar results. As such, the data is dependable enough to be valid.

To enhance the validity of data even further, triangulation was used. In qualitative research, the concept of triangulation refers to approaching data from multiple viewpoints to ensure that the phenomenon is understood as thoroughly as possible. (Given 2008, 892). For this reason, data was collected not only from forum discussions but also elsewhere on Goodreads and Amazon. The two case studies performed also support the validity of data.

Overall, the empirical research conducted for the thesis could be viewed as a window in time. Not only are the self-published e-book markets being transformed, but the data on the internet is in constant change. This study offers a valid but time-specific examination of the markets as they are right at this time.

4 RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section presents the results of the empirical study. It is built on the data analysis questions and strives to answer the research questions. The purpose of this section is to give an account of the findings as they are from a neutral perspective, so that their implications within the theoretical framework can be discussed later.

While the term “e-book” was never included when gathering data for this study on Goodreads, it became clear in the Discussion forums that the vast majority, if not all, of the participants were talking about e-books. If this was not stated outright in every message, it was at least mentioned in every discussion thread. Furthermore, those who were talking about printed copies always made that clear.

There was a sharp contrast between the messages on the Amazon KDP Support Forum and those on Goodreads Groups. On Amazon, opinions were expressed more openly and aggressively, while on Goodreads, people often made a real effort to be friendly and positive. There were also certain topics that only came up on one or the other. This is likely explained by the fact that on Amazon, the authors remained largely anonymous, while on Goodreads, people used their own names or author pseudonyms.

4.1 Themes on the discussion forums

The 26 discussion threads analyzed were focused around different marketing-related themes. Figure 8 demonstrates the topics and their prevalence.

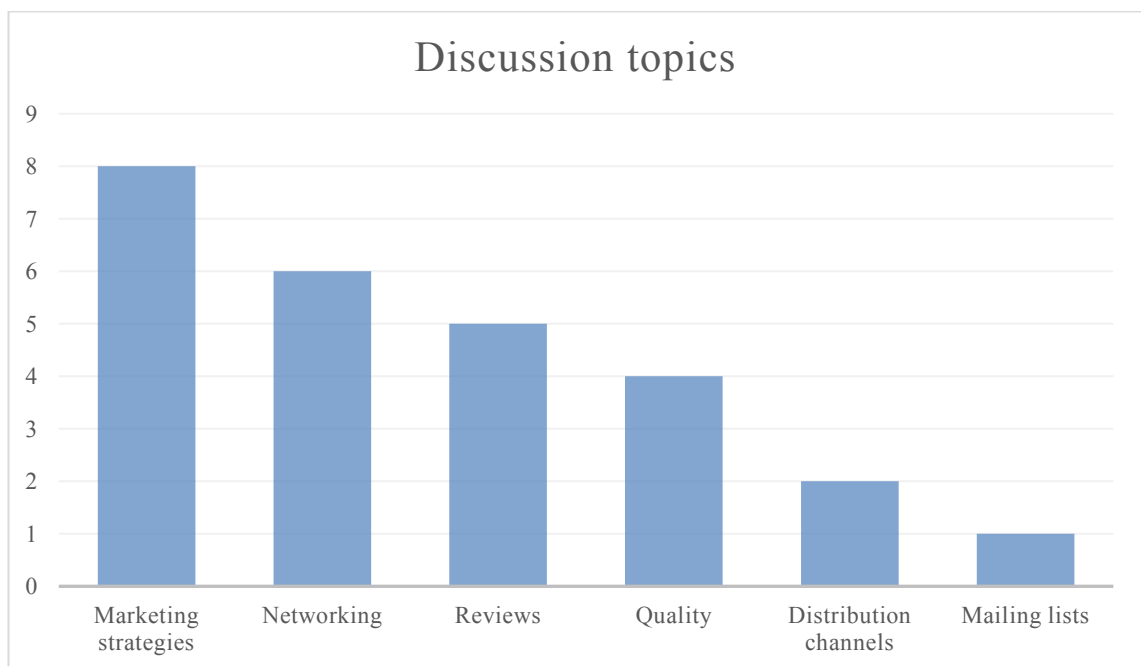


Figure 8 Discussion topics

The most frequent topic was overall marketing strategies. There were eight threads (threads 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 22), nearly a third, that were focused around people giving each other advice on how to reach their audience. In these threads, participants not only gave each other advice and tips but also their own marketing experiences. The details of these threads are laid out in section 4.1.1.

The second biggest theme with six threads (threads 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, and 25) was networking, which often bordered on self-promotion. These were often long threads of writers posting links to their own books, hoping to use the thread itself as a promotional tool. Social media was heavily present in each of these conversations, as were authors' personal websites and popular community sites. Many authors had long lists of links to their online presence, including author profiles on both Amazon and Goodreads. It was clear that at least to some indie authors, the quantity of social media accounts and other visible online tools was very important. One entire discussion thread (thread 21) revolved around Facebook as a promotional tool.

However, while social media and self-promotion were definitely dominant in these conversations, that was not all. Instead of being all about reaching the audience and engaging them in dialogue, there was a more overall theme that emerged from the conversations, namely networking with others. The participants in these threads were writers connecting with writers, bloggers, and anyone else who might be able to spread the word about a book.

Thirdly, an important topic, with five conversation threads (threads 3, 14, 19, 20, and 26), was reviews. Reviews were held in high regard, and several of the threads revolved around finding reviewers. The reason for this is not only promotional, but also technical. Every reviewer gives the book a star rating, usually out of five, and these ratings, among other factors, are then used to rank the books. Especially on Amazon, possibly the best way to gain readers is to be featured on a top-ranked list, which is why some authors spend great amounts of time and effort on doing everything they can to get Amazon's algorithms to notice them, including generating as many reviews as possible. Thus, reviews on a book are not only a sign that people are reading and enjoying a book, but they also boost sales by making the book more visible to greater audiences.

“Having that set of reviews on Amazon is really important, the number of reviews being as important as the actual star rating in the beginning.”

K.A. (thread 12)

There are entire groups and group sections on Goodreads, such as Review Group or Connecting Readers and Writers, that focus on reviewers and how to find them. In these

conversation threads, people discuss, for instance, different ways of finding readers to review self-published e-books.

It is also notable that one of the review threads (thread 3) was focused on reviews in general but also reaching one reviewer in particular. In this thread, an author wanted to reach a reader who had left a negative review or respond to the review publicly, but was strongly advised against it. Other authors claimed that responding to any reviews did nothing but weaken the author's name in the self-published e-book market.

There were also several other cases where the authors displayed a high level of awareness about marketing as well as the current state of the markets. For instance, discussing a proposed marketing tactic:

“Sounds like a recipe for receiving piles of bad reviews and tarnishing your reputation as an author, as well as potentially plunging the reputation of ebook publishing further into the depths.”

resteasy (thread 10)

Not only does resteasy show a concern for the author's brand, he or she also understands the concept of e-books' perceived value to the customer. While many people showed such understanding, the terms themselves were seldom used. In general, it seemed that the knowledge of marketing that the authors had came from experience, not out of formal training.

Four threads out of 26 were about quality, namely the quality of language and the formatting (threads 1, 7, 9, and 24). While the general consensus across the forums was that a good book was easier to market than a bad one, very little was said in detail about what constituted a good book or how to write one.

Two threads (threads 4 and 5) were focused on distribution channels. One (thread 5) was focused on Amazon and Barnes&Noble, while the other (thread 4) was focused on reaching international audiences in languages other than English.

One thread (thread 13) went into detail about how to build an author-centred e-mailing list and how to use it as a marketing tool. Interestingly, the surprisingly traditional concept of a mailing list was seen in a very positive light, almost a must-have for the successful author.

The pricing of e-books only came up in one conversation thread (thread 22). This thread was basically about the promotion of non-discounted e-books, but pricing was discussed in detail. Even though the self-published e-book authors have full autonomy over their pricing, the topic was not brought up anywhere else.

4.1.1 *Effective marketing and promotional strategies*

Eight discussion threads out of the 26 analyzed were focused exclusively on finding the most effective marketing strategies. These were different people all asking a variation of the question, “What is the best way to market a self-published e-book?” The discussion then continued, most often, as both experienced and novicing writers voiced their opinions. Figure 9 indicates, which marketing ideas and channels the writers had found to be worthwhile, and in how many threads they were brought up.

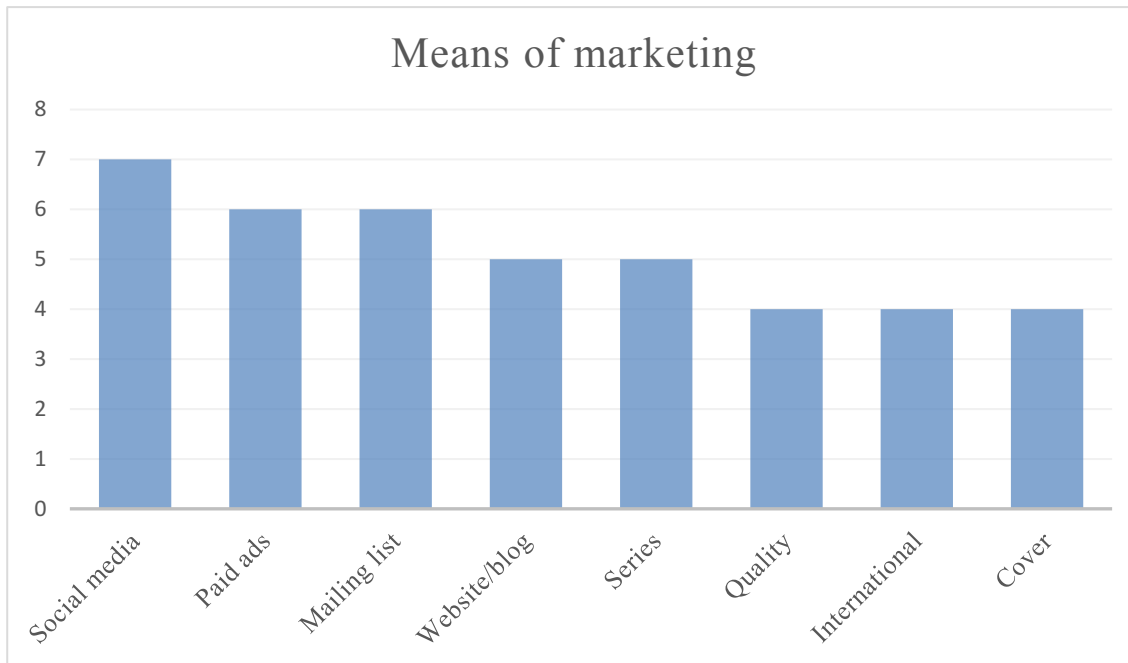


Figure 9 Means of marketing

Social media was the marketing channel that was mentioned almost universally, and often very early on in the conversation. It included the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even YouTube. When asked what the most effective strategy for selling books on Amazon was, one of the participants in the discussion thread put it very bluntly:

“The best way -- is through social media.”

Duane Dingle (thread 6)

There was not a single comment in any of the threads that would have disagreed with this outright. While some authors stated they found it to be hard work or time-consuming, no one seemed to think it was a bad idea, especially as a long-running promotional method.

Out of the eight threads focused on marketing strategies, there was only one (thread 22) where social media did not come up. In this thread, the original poster was asking

about the best promotion methods for a non-discounted book, but the conversation that followed was primarily about the pricing of e-books in different marketing scenarios.

After different social media, the second most popular methods were paid ads and mailing lists. The paid ads included advertisements through different websites, often Amazon, and other paid services, such as being featured in a popular blog.

A common piece of advice given to the more inexperienced writers was to write a series and promote it as a whole instead of having only one published book. Writing a series was seen not only as a way to gather a following but also as a pure marketing tactic. The writers had the impression that readers genuinely preferred reading serialized books, especially in popular but saturated genres such as romance or young adult.

The quality of the book was brought up in 50% of the conversation threads, usually with advice to hire a professional editor. The quality was, however, often discussed only superficially, in terms of grammar, spelling, and formatting. A more in-depth discussion of quality, including references to story arcs and characterizations, only came up once.

The internationality of the e-book markets was also recognized by the authors. Most often, it came up in terms of translating the book into another language to reach new audiences. The writers were also acutely aware of where their sales came from and might sometimes, for example, wonder why their US sales were ahead of their UK sales, and ask for advice on reaching more UK-based readers.

The cover picture, designed to draw the reader in, was a point of disagreement. While it was the first thing mentioned in every thread on the Amazon forum, it did not come up in the Goodreads Groups at all. This goes to show that on Amazon, the visual look of the book is important, but on Goodreads, the discussion was more strategic and looked at too big a picture to take the cover of the book into consideration.

A number of marketing tactics were mentioned three times: search terms, target audience, the author's brand, genre, reviews, a marketing agent, and giveaways. Some of these, such as tweaking the search terms on Amazon in order to be featured in as many result lists as possible, take a very practical approach to making a book visible. Others, on the other hand, such as awareness of the target audience and the author's perceived brand, hint at deep and educated knowledge about marketing.

Like the cover, the blurb and the genre were only discussed on Amazon's forums, where they were considered extremely important. According to the writers there, writing in a popular genre was one of the most important things one could do to generate sales. On Goodreads, no one raised the issue.

Reviews were also discussed and seen as important, especially on Amazon's forums. The discussion revolved not only around were to find reviewers but also the importance of reviews from a technical standpoint. Their aforementioned influence on Amazon's—and other platforms'—algorithms were stressed, even though no one knew exactly how

the algorithms work. According to the writers posting on the forums, it is very likely that these algorithms also change continuously, which makes influencing them even harder.

Marketing agents and giveaways, distributing books for free to gain interest, were also mentioned, but only in the Goodreads Groups. However, few had the money to pay an outsider to help them with marketing, and giveaways were also discussed in a negative light, as some authors believed giveaways were actually hurting their sales.

4.1.2 *Product, price, and place*

The majority of people discussing their own self-published e-books on various forums seemed acutely aware of how saturated the market is and that any e-book must be marketable before it can be marketed. On Amazon, quality was discussed much more frankly than on Goodreads, possibly because Amazon's discussion forum is more anonymous. In response to the question "What is the best strategy to actually sell a book on Amazon?" the answer was simple:

Write something really good.
constructivedisorder (thread 6)

Covers, blurbs, and formatting were also discussed, but for the most part, quality was seen as quality of writing. Because quality of writing is incredibly difficult to define and even more difficult to give advice on, unlike story structure, plot, opening scenes, and character development, the discussion often boiled down to the quality of spelling and grammar.

When it came to spelling and grammar, many authors were convinced that quality is not only important, but also a matter of pride. Those that published their books without taking the time and making the effort to make it the best book it could be, often irked other authors. Poor grammar and spelling were seen to cheapen the entire market, and these opinions were voiced loudly by those who believed that poorly written e-books bring down the prestige and perceived value of high-quality books as well.

"If an author wishes to be taken seriously, and wishes to rise above the criticism of 'self-published trash', then he or she needs to try and publish a book of the highest quality. I don't want to be 'okay for a self-published author'. I want my books to be considered along with trad-pubbed titles as a viable option."
brkingsolver (thread 8)

However, this was not a universal opinion. There were many of those who would defend their decision to self-published e-books when they knew there were spelling and grammar mistakes and even typos in them. Generally, there were four reasons why an author might keep the editing process brief or skip it entirely:

1. *Lack of funds.* One of the main reasons for self-publishing e-books in the first place is their low financial requirements. The authors are saving money in every way they can, including not hiring an editor.
2. *Overconfidence in their own abilities.* Some authors may think they have written the book perfectly to begin with and it does not need further work.
3. *Not thinking editing is important.* There are many readers leaving praising reviews on books with spelling or grammar issues or criticizing someone's work for these reasons but saying they loved the book anyway.
4. *Lack of time.* Especially those who write series often claim that unless they can produce new books fast enough, they will lose readers.

In addition to the quality of writing, there were also other aspects to the product that the writers were aware of. As mentioned earlier, picking a popular genre to write in was seen as a must for those who wanted to be popular. Many of the most marketing-savvy authors were determined to please a large number of readers above all else. Furthermore, writing a series of books was encouraged.

"I haven't done the series thing but I've read that it is a great marketing tool."

Christine (thread 11)

In short, from a product point of view, the focus was on grammar and spelling, but also on genre and series. Even things such as the cover picture or the blurb were discussed sparingly.

In terms of another P, price, it is clear that pricing is an issue for many indie authors. While many authors have, to date, sold their books at \$0.99 only and sworn that it is the best tactic, it seems that the trend may be turning. There are indications on the forums that readers are shying away from the cheapest books, thinking that their quality must be very low.

"I've heard both views from readers. They don't read books unless they're free to they won't read them unless they're at least 3.99 because the cheap ones are going to be rubbish."

Amy (thread 22)

A low price has been an advantage up to now, and given how unregulated the market is, it is likely that there will always be those who want to sell their books at the lowest possible price. When discussing the price, it also became clear that many authors are very aware of the perceived value of their product.

“It's exacerbating the problem of intellectual work being diminished to nothing worth paying for. -- I don't see how giving away 1000 copies of your book for free is a good thing.”

Chris (thread 22)

In general, the topic of pricing was discussed sparingly, and the final P, place, was also brought up only a few times. The consensus, however, was clear. Using Amazon as a distribution channel was seen as mandatory, while other methods of distribution were also encouraged. There was not one comment that would have spoken against using Amazon. While having Amazon as one of the communities selected for the study may have influenced this, it is still notable. The opinions on the forums were diverse and those voicing them appeared to strive to look at the big picture and give good advice; yet there was not one comment suggesting Amazon's services would not be worth using.

4.2 International authors on global markets

This section examines the empirical data from an international point of view. To get an overview of the international markets, both self-published foreign-language e-books and the international readers of those that are in English are looked at. User profiles on both Amazon and Goodreads are used to examine the locations or nationalities of the writers and readers of self-published e-books. Additionally, the collected data is analyzed to find out what e-book authors have said about their international audiences on the forums.

4.2.1 Amazon's international discussion forums

Amazon publishes e-books in dozens of languages, but most of those are only electronic versions of traditionally published books. There is no data or any clear indications on what the markets are like for self-published authors who have chosen to publish their books in a language other than English. Thus, we turn to the discussion forums to find out more about the foreign-language markets.

The Amazon KDP Support: Forum Home and its foreign-language forums were looked at to find indications of the e-book markets' international nature. In addition to

the main forum, which is in English, Amazon hosts discussion forums for publishing on Kindle in seven other languages.

Due to the many languages involved, the foreign-language forums were only looked at in terms of their numbers. The number of threads and messages published in each of the different forums are shown below (Table 3). English is included as a point of reference.

Table 3 Amazon's foreign-language discussions

Language	Threads	% of total	Messages	% of total
English	103,627	87.04	837,176	91.94
Japanese	373	0.31	1,022	0.11
German	4,462	3.75	41,462	4.55
French	3,005	2.52	8,158	0.90
Italian	2,653	2.06	5,404	0.59
Spanish	4,400	3.70	15,428	1.69
Portuguese	703	0.60	1,855	0.20
Dutch	36	0.03	107	0.01
TOTAL	119,059	100	910,612	100

While the number of conversation threads and messages in languages other than English is often small in comparison, the numbers are still notable. Thousands of threads, almost 13%, and tens of thousands of messages, almost 8%, were written in a language that was not English.

It is important to keep in mind that these forums exist primarily to give authors a place to discuss self-publishing e-books on Amazon Kindle. Even if not all the conversations are about the main topic, it still means that there must be tens of thousands of people reading and writing about self-publishing e-books in languages ranging from German to Japanese. It is also possible that some of these authors speak several languages and have published their books in English, but the fact remains that the Amazon forums give a strong indication of a truly global market.

4.2.2 *International readers and authors*

It is not uncommon for users on Goodreads and Amazon not to list their country in their profile. In fact, very few people on Amazon did so. Because of this, no mathematical statistics about the users' most common whereabouts were collected.

Out of the 26 discussion threads selected for the study, there was one in particular (thread 20) on the Goodreads Groups, focused around reviews, that was filled with participants who stated that they were enthusiastic readers of self-published e-books. While the majority of these readers, when they did have their location listed in their profile, were from the United States or other English-speaking countries such as Canada, there were also people from France, Indonesia, and India.

In the same thread there were authors introducing themselves and their books. While the majority had written their books in English and gave no indication of their location, e.g. Lancelot Cannissié was a French man writing in French, and the Indian Krishna Pareek was in the process of launching his first self-published novel in English.

In fact, despite the number of foreign-language forums on Amazon, many international authors seem to prefer to publish their books in English. For instance, on Goodreads, user M. B. Mohan is Indian and user Nataša Nuit Pantović was born in Serbia and lives in Malta. These two users have self-published a total of 15 e-books in English.

4.2.3 *Authors' views on the international markets*

Even though all the threads analyzed were written primarily in English, the international nature of the topics was often clear. For instance, in thread 22, where the pricing of e-books was discussed, there were references to different currencies. Furthermore, authors often mentioned the international markets in passing, such as comparing the numbers of books sold in the US and the books sold elsewhere in the world.

While the topic of marketing self-published e-books was multifaceted, adding an international aspect to it complicated it even further. Language barriers, market shares, and legal matters were only some of the new issues the self-published e-book authors had to pay attention to.

One of the threads analyzed was focused solely on translating self-published e-books to other languages, particularly from English to Spanish. In this thread, another theme that emerged was the profitability of paying someone else to have a self-published e-book translated. It was mentioned in the thread, several times, that most indie authors do not even want to invest in an editor, much less a translator. The conversation revolved not only around the technicalities of translating literature, but also around the market size in Spain and the acceptable per-word rate of translations.

Some of the participants, even those who called themselves monolingual, speculated on the required quality of a translation, suggesting that translating an e-book should be easy. Those who had professional experience in translating had different views.

Another thing: not any serious translator translates to a language that it is not his native language, no matter how proof[i]cient he is in this foreign language. And less if we are talking of literature.

jimmytrueno (thread 9)

The thread was also filled with guesses and estimates, e.g. about the Kindle market share in Spain, that were not necessarily based on anything.

Furthermore, the international component raised issues that would have been very difficult for indie authors to anticipate. In one thread (thread 4), a Romanian author under the username Octavian Lupu wondered why his or her novel had been removed from the Kindle store. One possible explanation was a reverse language barrier where the problem was not that international people did not understand Amazon's English, but that Amazon did not understand other languages.

The problem is that Amazon must be able to read the book to ensure it doesn't violate copyright law or its obscenity policies. There's unlikely ever to be permanent Romanian-speaking staff in Seattle to allow that.

Notjohn (thread 4)

In the same thread, the Romanian author described another aspect of international book publishing, namely reaching a specific language group internationally. According to him or her, there were 20 million people in Romania and 10 million people outside Romania who speak the Romanian language. Thus, he or she saw great potential in trying to reach a global audience.

In general, the markets were seen as international, even global. As Liam phrased it:

A personal touch for a potentially global audience is a tricky conundrum.

Liam (thread 12)

This emphasizes that while the potential global market is huge, it is not without its challenges. Trying to reach a niche audience in a global environment, often using nothing but the internet for both promotional and distributional methods, can be tricky indeed.

4.3 Community

In this section, the communal nature of self-published e-books and the dialogue between authors and readers is looked at. First, the general trends witnessed on the discussion

forums are brought to light. Then, the focus is on social media. In conclusion, the community that authors have not with the readers but with each other is looked at.

4.3.1 Evidence of community on Goodreads and Amazon

The majority of communication that was evidenced on the forums was one-way: from author to reader. One conversation thread (thread 2) even featured the very idea in the subject line, asking what the best way to “reach a lot of readers online” was. Given that promotional methods are one of the main points of study in this thesis, this type of conversation was expected.

There were two major themes that surfaced, however, where the contribution of readers was paramount to the authors: reviews and social media. As discussed throughout this thesis, reviews are important not only because of different information technology algorithms that look for data-based ways to rank publications, but also because they give authors feedback and help them improve as writers. Social media is discussed in more detail in section 4.3.2 below.

While these cases of dialogue between authors and readers were brought up on the forum discussions, there was another clear example featured elsewhere on Goodreads: Ask the Author, a service located under the Community tag. It is dedicated to questions that readers might want to ask the authors, who then answer the questions if and when they want to.

In one long discussion thread (thread 3), more experienced self-published e-book authors told a beginner never to respond to book reviews. According to the authors, this was the best course of action because responding to reviews would only make the author look bad in the eyes of potential readers.

4.3.2 Social media

Social media is an umbrella term, and while it was often discussed in general terms on the forums, there were also several more detailed threads. While it was often agreed that social media was the best way to reach readers, as discussed in section 4.1.1, not all social media channels were equal.

The social media sites that were discussed most often were Facebook and Twitter, with Instagram in the third place. Other, more specifically targeted social media sites such as LinkedIn, were mentioned sparingly.

Many authors found Facebook and Twitter effective, even essential. Many announced immediately that they were trying to take advantage of every social media channel they

could find, because it was the easiest and cheapest way to get their message out. However, there were serious disadvantages to social media as well.

I've found Twitter moderately effective. The drawbacks: takes about a year to become useful, you have to be judicious in following, you have to find popular tweeps who love to re-tweet, you have to become an expert in hashtags, and you have to avoid multiple scams.

Levi's Companion (thread 10)

Levi's companion was only one of many who brought up the fact that social media channels, especially if an author was attempting to be active in several different ones, were time-consuming. Keeping up a presence required constant work, and authors took advantage of timed posts, where they could write their posts beforehand and have them automatically publish at a predetermined time.

While social media was the most popular promotional channel, authors did not talk about engaging in dialogue with their readers through it. When discussing reviews, authors often brought up the value of the reader and the opportunity for self-improvement, but in the case of social media, there were no such comments. Social media, while social and communal by design, was primarily seen as a one-way promotional tool, same as blogs and mailing lists.

4.3.3 *Community of authors*

Due to the fact that discussion forums, which were the primary sources of data here, are communal in nature, it is obvious that signs of community and cooperation were going to surface. Truly, tips and links were shared throughout all 26 conversation threads. However, the ways in which writers interacted with one another also gave evidence of a deeper underlying community.

Six of the conversation threads, the second most prevalent topic of conversation, were classified under networking. This included not only threads focused mainly on reaching target audiences through social media, but also on reaching other groups, such as other authors, prominent book bloggers, and serious reviewers. Authors were aware that networking had considerable advantages. For one, networking helped authors reach their respective target audiences on social media.

By liking and commenting on fellow author posts, you can help boost their messages to their followers.

Erica (thread 21)

In addition to following on social media, authors often reviewed each other's work. In addition to boosting an author's message and affecting the review algorithms, both of these efforts also made the followed and reviewed author seem more prominent and popular. Authors hoped this would make them more attractive to new audiences.

As discussed in more detail in section 4.4, the marketing of self-published e-books is much more complex than one might expect. There are issues such as old marketing channels dying out, and scammers offering non-existent services. In such cases, the community of authors becomes highly important: authors can share their experiences with different marketing tools and warn each other about services that have turned out to be scams.

To sum up, the discussion forums themselves, and each conversation thread therein, were evidence of an active community, where authors exchanged tips and experiences. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 3.3, the number of these conversations is constantly rising. Thus, this author-built community is growing and expanding continuously.

4.4 Authors' attitudes toward marketing

In general, the authors on the forums had very positive views on marketing and had reasonable expectations about their books. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the forums attract those kinds of authors. Those who have a more negative attitude towards marketing are unlikely to be spending time on the Goodreads and Amazon forums in the first place.

The authors across the forums did have differing opinions on many matters. The one thing they were relatively unanimous in was that marketing was important, and that it was the duty of the self-published author to take care of it. The authors were aware of the fact that they were not only the writers of their books, but the publishers and the marketers, too.

"You're the publisher. It's your responsibility to market your book."

Salamander Mallory (thread 2)

These opinions were sometimes expressed forcefully. New authors were not only advised on marketing issues but also pressured into doing more and more to promote their book. The opportunities for marketing and promotion seemed endless, which made it difficult for the authors to gauge which ones might be the most profitable.

But while marketing was seen as important or even mandatory, there was a problem many of the authors faced. They did not know anything about marketing. This was

reflected, for instance, in the number of threads across the forums. As mentioned before, eight out of 26 discussion threads analyzed for this study were cries for marketing help. That is nearly one third overall. One of them had the telling title: “Writing the book was the easy part.”

Furthermore, the authors were aware of their marketing-related shortcomings. This was often stated bluntly.

“Marketing is not one of my strengths.”

Samuel (thread 23)

While the advice shared by more experienced writers and promoters was often useful and to the point, there were also times when it must have been confusing to those without a background in marketing or, for instance, information technology. Very specific things, such as the technicalities of different distribution platforms, were discussed without context, or very general issues, such as setting up social media accounts, were talked about with too little information to be universally useful. For instance, most people seemed to agree that social media accounts were important to the marketing of a self-published e-book, but few had any ideas or examples of what kind of things the author should post on the social media accounts in question.

In addition to the lack of marketing skills, there were other reasons why some people chose not to promote their books. As mentioned earlier, most writers were well aware of their roles as book publishers and marketers as well, but there were also those who consciously rejected as much of these additional roles as possible.

“I want to write. I want to spend time with my family, and gardening. I have no interest in marketing and have chosen not to use my precious free time trying something I know I would find frustrating and boring. And yes, I know the price of that decision is remaining unknown, but that's my choice.”

Jay (thread 12)

Many indie authors on the forums wrote books because they enjoyed writing, and some of them were simply too busy or not interested enough to engage in promotion. Similarly, while reviews were important for many technical purposes, they also carried a more personal meaning by providing feedback. This was partially due to the fact that with a broader view of their own product, the writers could be more effective in their marketing efforts. Equally important, however, was self-improvement. Authors simply wanted to be better authors.

Five of the conversation threads analysed revolved around reviews. This proved to be the topic that inspired the conversations on writing as an art form. It brought to surface the fact that not every author, even out of those who were active on the communities, had the primary goal of selling as many books as possible. Indie e-books were sometimes not only written out of love but also published out of love, to share rather than to profit.

“As an author, I do not want people buying or reading my book who will not enjoy it. I'd rather have one-star reviews and no sales than sell the book to people who won't enjoy it.”

Jonathan (thread 14)

For some indie authors, writing was a hobby and the published book itself was the most important reward for writing it. They had no interest in engaging in any kind of book promotion. While they genuinely enjoyed being part of the author community and getting feedback from their readers, they made no effort to build a career or even gather more readers.

Even so, lack of skills or motivation to promote one's books was not the only issue hindering the marketing of indie books. Even those with remarkable motivation and means to promote their books faced problems posed by the ever-changing landscape of information technology and the big corporations that make publishing and promoting indie books possible.

In a Goodreads Groups conversation thread (thread 16), Marie Silk recapped her year in self-published e-book promotion and, more relevantly, what had changed within that year. Most interestingly, she noted the following changes:

1. Some of the promotional sites that used to exist were gone, or sites that used to be free now charged money for their services.
2. Amazon had made changes in their review policy, again.
3. Facebook had taken a firmer hand to marking promotional posts as spam and hiding them from members' newsfeeds.

Marie Silk's comment highlighted that promoting e-books was much more complex than one might think. For instance, she mentioned that she could not do the things she wanted to while she was enrolled in Kindle Select, the Amazon service aimed at self-publishers, because the exclusivity rules therein prohibited the author from making certain promotional moves.

Due to the transient and ever-changing nature of the internet, many services that had once been efficient or reliable no longer existed. In their place, new ones were appearing. Authors had no choice but to keep trying new methods.

Not only was the promotional landscape in constant motion, there were other problems as well. Due to the sheer number of active self-published authors interested in marketing

their work through various online channels, there were also different scams designed to profit from the authors' sometimes small marketing budget.

It's worthwhile pointing out that there are many ineffective or poorly run services out who are more than willing to separate authors from their hard-earned currency—not to mention the predators. The SFWA (established in 1965 and a tireless advocate for writers) has a section, appropriately titled "Writers Beware", dedicated to advising on shady practices and how to vet services.

Alex (thread 15)

In response, many authors shared their experiences in being approach by unreliable sources promising them greater sales. It seemed that these scams were not uncommon, and it stands to reason that an inexperienced marketer trying to promote his or her novel would be very vulnerable to them.

In the end, the more seasoned writers believed that the hard work would be rewarded in the long run. Some even compared the process of trial-and-error based marketing experience to paying for a college course to land a higher paying job. Marketing skills were something to be acquired and appreciated.

Above all else, the two things that experienced writers seemed to hold in the highest regard were patience and persistence.

Writing is a long game. A really, really long game. Very few make quick wins.

wordmonger (thread 6)

On Goodreads especially, the overall attitude towards marketing was a positive one, as writers encouraged each other to keep going. It stands to reason, however, that this was because those who had more negative attitudes towards marketing were either less successful or less interested in taking part in forum discussions. However, the empirical study conducted for the thesis did not reveal whether any of the suggested marketing methods were actually successful.

4.5 Author portrait: Marie Silk

In her own words, "Marie Silk is a #1 Amazon Best Selling author of clean historical fiction books." She has authored eight books, all part of a series called Davenport House, listed under the genre Teen & Young Adult and the Historical Fiction section therein. The

first book in the series, *Davenport House*, was self-published as an e-book on March 31st, 2016. The ninth and final instalment to the series was going to be published on April 24th, 2018. The books are also available in self-published hard copy format and have been made into audiobooks through the Amazon service Audible.

The first book in the series is called simply *Davenport House*, and its sequels are called *A New Chapter*, *A Mother's Love*, *Heiress Interrupted*, *For the Cause*, *House Secrets*, and *Hard Times*. Between the sixth and seventh instalment, a prequel to the series, called *Debutante*, was also published. Thus, the series actually has two points of entry where people can begin reading the series.

Silk has an author page on Goodreads and another one on Amazon. She has a website with its own domain, www.mariesilk.com, where she promotes her books as well as her other online presence. The website invites to join her mailing list and includes links to different places where her books can be bought.

While none of her social media accounts were listed on her website or her author pages, she can be found on Facebook under the username *MarieSilkPublishing*. The account is said to be a meeting place for readers and indie authors, but going back as far as one year, all the posts feature either promotional material for the *Davenport House* series or are related to writing in general. Thus, the account is, in effect, for promotional purposes only. The other two major social media sites used by authors, Twitter and Instagram, were also searched, but it appears she does not use those channels for marketing purposes.

Silk explains in one Goodreads conversation thread that she has originally been using the exclusive KDP Select, but has more recently started branching out to other distribution channels as well. The first three books in her series are available on Amazon, Barnes&Noble's Nook, Kobo, as well as Google's and Apple's online bookstores. The newest four are still under Amazon Kindle Select's exclusivity agreement and only available on Amazon. The fourth instalment was made available in other bookstores after the 10th of April, 2018, after its original Kindle Select agreement comes to an end. She talks about this process in detail, explaining that she wants to reach readers who are not on Amazon. She refers to this as "going wide."

As is often the case, the first book in the series has the most reviews on both Amazon and Goodreads. The number of reviews per book, and the accompanying average star ratings, are listed in Table 4. The star ratings, on both Goodreads and Amazon, range from one to five, with five being the best rating a book can have. The ratings are taken directly from Goodreads and Amazon, which explains the difference in the decimal points: Goodreads calculates the average with two decimal points, while Amazon only uses one.

Table 4 Marie Silk's book statistics

Name of book	Number of Goodreads reviews	Number of Amazon reviews	Stars on Goodreads	Stars on Amazon
Davenport House	168	299	3.61	3.8
A New Chapter	22	42	4.13	4.5
A Mother's Love	13	25	4.23	4.5
Heiress Interrupted	20	23	4.19	4.7
For the Cause	8	15	4.19	4.5
House Secrets	16	32	4.22	4.3
Debutante	20	22	4.01	3.8
Hard Times	4	19	4.37	4.7

It is noteworthy that the first book in the series has both the most reviews and the lowest star rating. The same trend is small but notable when it comes to the prequel book, *Debutante*, which can be considered another point of entry into reading the whole series. Silk has stated on the Goodreads Groups that she has been doing giveaways, giving the first book away for free or pricing it temporarily at \$0, to encourage people to read and review. On her Facebook page, there is also a link, now expired, to a free copy of *Debutante*.

Altogether on Amazon and Goodreads, *Davenport House*, the first book in the series, has 467 reviews. 151 of these are positive, with the majority of reviewers calling the book a great read or stating they love it. Despite giving the book a stellar rating, some of the reviewers criticize the dialogue or writing style, or call the book predictable.

There were also 46 one-star reviews. Out of these reviews, four contain only one word or a throwaway remark, but each of the other 42 reviews criticize the quality of writing: the plot is called "trite" or "hackneyed", the dialogue "awkward" and "stilted", and the writing "juvenile" and "flat". Several reviewers liken the book to a middle school project. However, any issues with spelling or grammar were never mentioned.

On Facebook, Silk's account has 318 followers, and on Goodreads, she has 365 followers. In comparison, the now-famous but once-indie author John Grisham has approximately 1.5 million Facebook followers. Furthermore, there is barely any dialogue between Marie Silk and her audience over the public aspects of Facebook. In the last year, she has made 48 Facebook posts, received seven comments, and responded to two of those comments. She has received 63 reactions (likes and other Facebook reactions) on these 48 posts altogether, ranging from zero to five per post. John Grisham's latest post alone has over 500 comments and over four thousand reactions.

Silk also has a blog on Goodreads. It has not been updated very often or very recently; altogether, there are only eight posts. These eight posts have a total of 31 comments on them, eight of which are from Marie Silk herself, responding to readers' comments.

While Silk's Goodreads author page lists her as having been born and residing in the United States, she has an international readership. For instance, Lana Kortchik, who has left very positive reviews on several of her books, was born in the Soviet Union. There are also ratings and reviews left by people from not only the English-speaking countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia, but also people from Slovenia, Mexico, and India.

On Goodreads's Ask The Author, Marie Silk has responded to eleven questions sent to her by other community members. The fundamental idea is that fans can send questions to their readers, but in Silk's case, only two of the questions were focused on her books and another two were focused on her as a person. The other seven were about promoting self-published e-books, as though Silk's role in the self-published e-book community was promotion expert rather than author.

4.6 Author portrait: Christine Roney

As previously stated, Christine Roney was selected for this study partially because of her more traditional stand on book promotion. In addition to the electronic e-book format, Roney has self-published her books in traditional paperbacks that can be ordered online or, in some cases, bought from bookstores. She has a notable online presence, but she also uses events such as book signings to gain readers.

Roney has published two books, *Beyond Stone* and *Fading Grace*, in 2016 and 2017, respectively. They are individual novels and not related to one another. The publisher's name is listed as StudioBo Publishing, but a look at the publisher's website reveals that it is a member of the Independent Book Publishers Association and that Roney is the one controlling it. StudioBo Publishing has not published any other books than the two Roney has written. Thus, in effect Christine Roney is a self-published author.

Roney has her own domain and website at www.roneywrites.com. The website is focused on her books and her writing, including a "Works in Progress" section that demonstrates that she has written 33% of her next planned book. She also has a mailing list as well as a blog, where she has posted ten times, starting in July, 2017. Altogether, her blog posts have been commented on only once, and she has not responded.

Online, her books are only available, both in e-book and paperback format, on Amazon. Neither of them has a selected genre listed, but Amazon's algorithms suggest Literary Fiction or Religion & Spirituality Books for both of them. Table 5 demonstrates the number of reviews and stars the books have received on both Amazon and Goodreads.

Table 5 Christine Roney's book statistics

Name of book	Number of Goodreads reviews	Number of Amazon reviews	Stars on Goodreads	Stars on Amazon
Beyond Stone	6	6	4.00	4.6
Fading Grace	4	5	4.50	4.6

Altogether, Roney's two books have 21 reviews. 20 of those are 4-star and 5-star reviews, and one is a 1-star review that suggests the book would have benefited from rewrites and an editor.

In addition to her own website, Roney also has a Goodreads author page, an Amazon author page, and a social media presence on Facebook (username ChristineRoneyAuthor) and on Twitter (username @artsmithcris). In the last year, she has made 59 Facebook posts that have gathered 103 reactions and 33 comments, seven of which are Roney's responses to other people's comments. She has 251 followers on Facebook. On Twitter, she has 719 followers and has since the start of the year made approximately one Tweet per week.

Another social media Roney uses is a service called Medium (www.medium.com). It advertises itself as a platform for people, quality, and fresh ideas, instead of marketing or sponsored content. On Medium, Roney has two public posts, both written within the last two weeks; it is likely that she has written more but they are for members only. Her two posts have received three comments and 780 claps (the differently-scaling Medium equivalent of Facebook likes). On the Goodreads website, she has not answered any Ask The Author questions.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, the topic is looked at from multiple approaches and the findings of the empirical study are viewed in the light of the theoretical framework. The aim is to interpret the findings of the study and draw conclusions based on the previous literature.

First, the results relating to the research questions of marketing, community and internationality are analyzed. Later, the weaknesses of current self-published e-book marketing are discussed. Finally, opportunities for further research are listed, as they have emerged from the literature reviewed and the study conducted.

5.1 Marketing methods

In this section, the marketing of self-published e-books with its strengths and weaknesses is discussed, and how the empirical study supports or disagrees with the related academic literature. Furthermore, an idea of what the markets are like at the present time and where they might be headed in the future is presented.

This section aims to answer the first research subquestion: *What kind of online marketing methods of self-published e-book authors use?* To do this, the popular marketing methods discovered in the empirical study are discussed first, and other related themes that emerged from the forums are discussed after that.

5.1.1 Popular marketing methods among self-published e-book authors

According to the empirical study, the four most important marketing methods to authors are social media, paid ads, mailing lists, and personal websites, as demonstrated in Figure 9. All of these are promotional means through which the authors can reach their readers. Paid advertisements, such as banners on different websites, are one way of attracting new readers, while mailing lists are mainly useful for reaching a pre-existing audience. Social media, the most popular promotional method of all, can at best reach both new and repeat customers.

Authors showed a high level of understanding of marketing even when they did not know the terms. However, while we may look at marketing from the perspective of the Four Ps, the authors often used the term marketing to mean promotion. When marketing strategies were discussed, it was never suggested, for instance, that an author change his or her pricing policy or branch out to new distribution channels. It is very likely that many self-published e-book authors suffer from a lack of perspective: they have experience in

hands-on promotion, but they fail to take into consideration all the factors that affect their sales.

By far, promotion was the most discussed of the four Ps (Khan 2014, 95-107), but the authors also placed value on the product itself. Christine's quote about serial writing being a great marketing tool shows not only that to some authors, the product is at the heart of marketing, but also that some authors are willing to choose what they write based on marketability. This goes to show that many self-published e-book authors are aware that before a book can be marketed, it has to be marketable (Baverstock 2008, 3).

Interestingly, reviews were not brought up in marketing threads very often, even though in other threads they were discussed thoroughly and held in high regard. Perhaps this shows that reviews and their role in affecting online algorithms were seen as a more advanced marketing tactic and not one that a novice author should be focusing on. On the other hand, it was previously discovered by Laing and Royle (2013, 118) that a book's placement within an online bookstore's the top ten was an influence in less than 5% of impulse buying. It is possible that while reviews were a popular conversation topic, they are not as effective from a marketing point of view as authors think. Furthermore, it seemed that many authors who were looking for reviews across all possible channels on the internet were not, as one might think, doing it just to gain readers and interest. Instead, the driving force behind gathering reviews, for many authors, seemed to be the opportunity for self-improvement. Reviews and their meaning are further discussed in section 5.2.2.

5.1.2 *Other marketing themes on the forums*

Even though most of the writers on the forums were those who put a lot of their time and effort into writing and marketing their books, it was clear that self-published e-book authors can be roughly divided into two groups: those who take marketing seriously and those who do not. This disparity was detailed in section 4.4.

Even though the criteria based on which the conversation threads were selected was intentionally selected to favor marketing-related content, it was still remarkable that nearly every third conversation was based on the question, "What is the best way to market a self-published e-book?" Above all, it went to show not only how inexperienced the authors often were at marketing, but also how complicated the marketing of a self-published e-book could be.

One of the more complicated marketing-related subject matters that was featured in the conversation was the author's brand. As Makkai pointed out, in promotion of books or engaging in dialogue with the readers, authors create their own personal brands (Makkai 2016, 102-102). On the forums, the concept of brand was discussed, but it was

not mentioned in marketing-related conversation threads as often as one might have presumed. From the outside, it may be obvious to some that each author creates his or her own brand through their marketing actions online, whether or not they mean to do so, but it seemed that it was not clear to all the authors.

Some authors, however, were very aware of their brand. Those who ran websites, blogs, and social media channels were often more educated in the matter and had put more thought into their online image. This was seen in the conversation thread (thread 3) where an author wanted to respond to a review and received advice against it. As the other authors viewed it, answering reviews was likely to do more harm than good to the author's personal brand. Responding to a negative review may bring on an avalanche of more one-star reviews, even from people who have not read the book, just because to potential readers and ordinary internet-dwellers this response might be interpreted as defensive. This advice not to respond to reviews is, first and foremost, to protect the writer's personal brand.

Previous research shows that the editorial process is not only important to the quality of a book (Carolan & Evain 2012, 292) but also to the perceived quality of it (Thomlison & Bélanger 2015, 311). One of the problems with self-published books is this perceived lack of quality. The results of this study uncovered two types of opinions: those for whom quality was of great importance, and those who did not place so much value on it.

While the question of the quality of writing came up repeatedly, there was never any feedback asked for nor offered beyond the vague recommendations to write something good or check the grammar. Indeed, on the internet, there are other and better websites and forums for discussing things like plot structure and character development, but the utter lack of such discussions on the Goodreads and Amazon forums was still surprising.

It became evident in the study that self-published e-books do suffer from bad spelling and grammar, with many people defending their choice not to edit. Thus, even if the only measures of quality are in terms of grammar and spelling, it is clear that there are issues.

However, according to Marie Silk's book statistics in Table 4, the books she has been giving away free as samples of her series have the most reviews and the lowest star ratings. The explanation for this is that she had been giving the book away to reach new audiences and reviewers to sell more of her other books. Thus, the people who have not liked the first book have reviewed it but not bought the second book in the series, while those who have found Silk's writing enjoyable in general have gone on to buy more of her books. Still, the drop in the number of reviews from the first book to the second and third, from 168 to 22 and 13 on Goodreads and from 299 to 42 and 25 on Amazon, is huge. Considering these numbers, it is safe to say that the majority of those who read the first book did not seem to enjoy it. Yet, the readers who have received a free copy of the first book and left a review are presumably in Silk's target audience, e.g. fans of the genre.

The one thing Silk's book was criticized for in the reviews was the quality of writing; for instance, the plot, the dialogue, and the writing style. Given that in several hundred reviews, not one reviewer claimed there were issues with spelling or grammar, it is safe to assume that in these cases, the writing was more than acceptable.

This brings us to the conclusion that there are far deeper quality issues in self-published e-books than meets the eye. The fact that quality was only discussed in superficial terms on the forums is likely due to one or both of two things: either the authors are not aware of the deeper quality issues they face, or the issues are too complicated and multifaceted to be featured on these forums.

In section 4.1.2, there are four reasons mentioned that explain the lack of proper editing in self-published e-books: lack of funds, overconfidence in one's own abilities, not thinking editing is important, and lack of time. While these issues were originally discussed in the context of spelling and grammar, it is safe to assume they relate to more complicated editorial problems as well. These are all issues that the authors working with publishing houses do not have, because they have the support of professional editors and marketers (Kieffer 2017). As discussed by Carolan and Evain (2012, 292), the duty of the publisher is to polish the book and decipher the author's meaning. Without a publisher, these duties fall to the authors, who may not be up to the task.

As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, the lack of gatekeepers is considered to be one of the major strengths of self-publishing (Johnson 2017, 133). Based on the empirical study, it is also one of its major weaknesses. While it is certainly possible to write a great e-book and self-publish it, it may very well be that in order to write the best book possible, the author always needs help from other people. For this reason, the average quality of traditionally published books exceeds that of self-published e-books. Thomlison and Bélanger (2015, 311) liken the publisher logo to a symbol of passing the editorial screening test, and in light of the empirical study, it seems they are right.

If we consider the idea that the point of marketing is to add value to the product through means such as branding (Gofton & Ness 1997, 3), this symbol certainly fits the description. Self-published e-book authors do not currently possess anything that would surpass this symbol universally. However, Christine Roney, who in the author portrait was found to have taken a more traditional and possibly a more expensive publishing and marketing route, had set up her own publishing company for her own books. While this is not something every self-published e-book author can achieve, it is nevertheless a sign of the ingenuity of authors and the on-going transformation of the book industry.

5.2 Dialogue and online community

In this section, the results of the empirical study relating to the theoretical framework are discussed. The aim is to provide an answer to the second research subquestion: *How important is the online community in the marketing of self-published e-books?* First, the dialogue between the reader and the writer is looked at, and the community authors have together is discussed in conclusion.

5.2.1 Dialogue between readers and writers

If we look at Darnton's Communication Circuit (Figure 3) and the Revised Communication Circuit (Figure 4), it is clear that the communication between author and reader is what matters in the world of self-published e-books. And while this communication was evident in the authors' use of reviews and social media, there was still surprisingly little of it.

According to O'Leary (2014, 314, 317-318), and Pecoskie and Hill (2015, 620-621), dialogue between author and reader are the future of book publishing, and that the lines between author and reader are becoming blurred. However, the empirical study found very little to support these ideas in the context of self-published e-books. As discussed in section 4.3.2, social media was mainly seen as a one-way promotional tool that took a great deal of effort.

There was evidence of this in the case studies. Both Marie Silk and Christine Roney were active on Facebook, the most popular social media channel among authors, and Roney was active on Twitter as well. In the last year, Silk had made 48 Facebook posts, received seven comments, and responded to two of those comments. For Roney, the same numbers were 59 posts, 26 comments, and seven responses. While the amount of comments they have received is low to begin with, it was surprising that they responded so rarely. To engage in a genuine dialogue, one might expect long conversation between two or more people, but there was no evidence of this on Facebook. Each of the responses was short and inspired no further conversation. Notably, even on Facebook, neither author responded to every comment they received, as one might expect. Not only was there little evidence of dialogue, there was also little evidence of authors trying to build dialogue. The same trend was seen across their blogs and other social media accounts, such as Roney's Medium.

As discussed in 4.3.1, in thread 3, a beginner was advised strongly against responding to reviews. Considering how much academic weight has been placed on the interaction with readers, this seemed contrary. However, according to the discussion thread, the

author could, by responding to reviews, do damage to his or her author brand. While this supports Makkai's (2016, 102-102) idea that through an online presence, authors create their own brands, it also highlights the dilemma faced by indie authors. When they do engage in dialogue with their readers, they take the risk of damaging their brand. Therefore, it seems that the dialogue between readers and writers is not as clear-cut as academic research would suggest.

On the other hand, it is also possible that this is one of the authors' weaknesses. As surmised, the self-published e-book authors are often inexperienced and undereducated when it comes to marketing. Perhaps a stronger dialogue with their readers is what they should strive for in order to be more successful in the markets.

There were also aspects of the writer-reader dialogue that many self-published authors found important. Reviews, for instance, hold a special place in the self-published e-book market. Many writers are aware of the importance of reviews when it comes to Amazon's algorithms that decide which books to promote to the masses. Reviews were often thought to be the first thing a potential buyer will look at, after the title, the cover, and the blurb. Furthermore, and often more importantly, reviews were also viewed as feedback, praise, and a chance at self-improvement.

Considering how valuable feedback was to writers, it would stand to reason that they would put a great deal of effort into acquiring it. There was evidence of this on the forums, where there were entire Goodreads Groups focused around finding new reviewers. It is likely that while reviews do have marketing power through Amazon algorithms and making an author look popular, reviews are actually less meaningful than many authors would like to think. In fact, it is possible that the value of reviews is more personal and artistic than promotional.

5.2.2 *Different types of communities*

In the theoretical framework for this study, community refers mainly to the dialogue between the writer and the reader. Prior to the study, that was the premise. However, in the empirical research another type of community emerged that was just as important to the authors: the community they had together.

The underlying academic literature hints at opportunities and possibilities, such as value co-creation (Pecoskie and Hill 2015, 620-621), that did not materialize in the empirical research. As Christine phrased it in section 4.1.2, writing a series was a "great marketing tool", emphasizing how much work some authors were ready to invest in their writing in order to make it more marketable. However, apart from reviews, there was little communication going from readers to writers, and the writers never gave any indication of taking readers' ideas and using them in the next book. The biggest influence readers

had over the authors' writing was that feedback offered the authors opportunities for self-improvement—still far from co-authoring a book, as Pecoskie and Hill (2015, 20-621) propose.

While there are networks of authors and some characteristics of community, the fact is that the self-published e-book markets are widely scattered. The self-published e-book authors are individuals, many of whom are more apt at writing than marketing. Many of these indie authors lead full lives in different corners of the world and promote their books with little support.

It is for this reason that they come together to form platforms and groups such as Goodreads. They share the online environment with not only their readers but with other authors. Often, especially on these forums, they rely on each other, each other's tips, and each other's support. Six out of 26 conversation threads on the forums were filed under networking, which was the umbrella term for writers getting in touch with other writers, and everyone else who might be able to offer support in their marketing efforts.

As discussed in section 4.3.3, authors were also willing to support one another by following each other on social media. This, however, raises questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of social media as a marketing tool. In the case studies, both Marie Silk and Christine Roney had relatively few Facebook followers (318 for Silk, 215 for Roney), in comparison to the potential (1.5 million followers for John Grisham). If many of these few hundred followers are fellow writers and possibly other networking contacts, such as book bloggers, it stands to reason that the number of readers who follow these authors is actually quite low. This is even more surprising in the case of Marie Silk, who clearly understood marketing quite well and put a great deal of effort into it, going as far as detailing her Facebook-related marketing efforts in thread 16.

If we consider John Grisham's 1.5 million Facebook followers, it becomes clear that social media has great potential for building a following and an audience. In light of Silk and Roney's numbers, however, it becomes equally clear that many self-published e-book authors are, for one reason or another, failing to take advantage of that potential.

5.3 The target audiences of self-published e-books

The purpose of this section is to discuss indie authors' views on two different types of audiences: niche audiences and global audiences. The aim is to discuss the issues that have surfaced from different perspectives and answer the third research subquestion: *What are the target audiences of self-published e-books like?* To begin, niche audiences are looked at, and finally, the global markets are discussed.

5.3.1 *Problems with niche audiences*

On the forums, a specific target audience was only mentioned a few times and only in general terms. There was no discussion of demographics or how to reach a certain type of reader. According to Laing and Royle (2013, 117), however, over 80% of those who bought books in online bookstores came in looking for a specific book. This means that authors must reach their audiences through some other (online) channel before they can sell books. As discussed in section 2.5.3, one of the main issues is that very little reliable data exists about the demographics of e-book readers, which makes it incredibly difficult for authors to know whom their target audience consists of. It is nevertheless notable that this was largely ignored by the authors. While there were eight threads asking, “What is the best way to market a self-published e-book?” there were none asking, “What is my target audience?”

It was clear on the forums that even though authors are able to write books, some of them undoubtedly of high quality, promoting the books effectively requires an entirely different skillset. Requests for help in marketing were one of the most common topics of discussion across all forums.

Let us consider, for a moment, Anderson’s Long Tail Theory (Figure 5), according to which the demand for entertainment is going from mainstream to niche markets (Anderson, 2004). This was further supported by Simon (2016, 7), according to whom the current media markets have gone from push to pull. The costs of reaching niche markets have plummeted (Rieple & Pisano 2015, 85-86).

In light of this study, even though authors are putting out books that might cater to very particular niche audiences, they have trouble reaching those audiences.

Furthermore, considering the idea that in today’s era, marketing is paramount to the success of a book (Baverstock 2008, 3), a curious stalemate is reached. On the one hand, indie authors are able to publish books that cater to niche markets. On the other hand, they lack the skills and resources to reach those markets.

While the costs of reaching niche markets may be lower than ever (Rieple & Pisano 2015, 85-86), self-published e-book authors are dependent on big media companies to publish and promote their work (Steiner 2017, 8). Authors may be interested in catering to niche markets, but there was evidence on the forums that from the authors’ point of view, trying to attract a niche market is ineffective. As discussed in 4.1.1, one of the common tips given to new writers was that they should write in a popular genre, which is the exact opposite of catering to a niche audience.

This brings us to the conclusion that while the niche products exist and the niche markets exist, the combining force—marketing—is lacking. It seems that the biggest weakness self-published e-books have, especially if they are of high quality to begin with,

is lack of effective marketing. This concept, an inefficient use of the potential of social media, is further supported by one of the issues discussed in section 5.2.2.

As discussed in section 5.5.3, another thing hindering the growth of the e-book market is lack of awareness. According to Benhamou (2015, 124-125), publishing houses are still profiting from traditionally published books more than e-books, which is why they do not advertise e-books more. For an individual author, raising awareness of e-books in general might be a good way to promote one e-book in particular. However, here the self-published e-book author faces the same problem as with niche markets. They do not have the means and resources of marketing outside the mainstream channels.

It is safe to conclude that even though publishing a book in today's world is easy and inexpensive, marketing it is not. The cheapest ways of promotion, such as social media campaigns, are time-consuming, and the more professional ones, such as Amazon ads, can cost a great deal of money. Furthermore, other issues closely related to the marketability of the book—such as ensuring it is of the highest quality by getting the manuscript edited by several professionals—are often far from inexpensive.

Lack of skills and resources is not the only reason why some authors neglect to promote their books, however. While many authors on the forums were very passionate and professional about both writing and marketing their books, there were other types of writers, too.

The type of author that caused the most ire across the forums was the casual type, the one that placed value in getting his or her book out there as quickly as possible. Often these books were, for instance, littered with grammar and spelling mistakes. These authors were berated very publicly even to their faces, so to speak, in conversation threads they had initiated. These authors and their books were seen in a negative light because they appeared to have ruined the reputation of e-books. They had saturated the market heavily, and it was generally thought that their books were of inferior quality due to the lack of time spent on them.

Another issue these authors face has to do with motivation when it comes to marketing books. On the forums, many people expressed their desire to write books that were, by their own definition, good. Perhaps these books were very artistic or of high quality in some other way. However, many of these authors made it clear that writing good books was their main objective and marketing the book came second. Some stated out loud that they had more important things to do than spend their time online doing promotion. If we consider Anderson (2004) and Baverstock (2008, 3) once more, this is a huge missed opportunity.

5.3.2 *Global authors for global audiences*

As Steiner (2017, 12) proposed, self-publishers are forced to view the e-book market as global from the very beginning. The empirical research conducted for this thesis further supports this idea. As discussed in section 4.2.2, it is not only the readers who are international, but the authors are located globally as well. Many of these international authors select to publish their book in English, despite the fact that they are not native speakers of the language

As detailed in Table 3, Amazon offers resources for self-published e-book authors in several different languages. Furthermore, the question of language came up on the forums several times, e.g. thread 9, in terms of translating a piece of work into another language to reach other audiences. This is also likely to be the reason behind non-native speakers publishing books in English. They hope to reach bigger audiences worldwide than they would in their native language.

The Romanian author self-publishing for a Romanian-speaking audience through Amazon's services (thread 4) highlights the fact that even though he or she may appear to be operating locally, that is not the case. Whether the target audience is located in Romania is irrelevant, as publishing the book online means it can be marketed to all Romanian-speakers around the globe.

The fact is that putting a book up on Amazon instantly makes it available worldwide, no matter its language. Publishing a book through Amazon makes it instantly international. Furthermore, Amazon is currently the market leader with a lion's share of the self-publishing market. Entire discussion threads (e.g. thread 6) on the internet forums were focused on how Amazon did not need to be the only way to market an e-book, building on the premise that Amazon as a publishing and marketing channel was self-evident. Thus, it is clear that the vast majority of self-published e-book authors operate globally, whether it is their intention or not. In fact, it is nearly impossible for the self-published e-book author to stay local, e.g. in one country only, because doing so would automatically mean choosing not to use Amazon's services at all.

Internationality had other effects on the self-published e-book authors as well. It was wide-spread enough, especially on the US-based Amazon Kindle, to cause problems. Different languages, letters, and zones all cause headaches both to authors and to readers. Some languages may not be supported, or a certain book may not be downloadable in a specific country. These problems may be explained by, for instance, taxation and other country-specific issues.

Considering how difficult it is for self-published e-book authors to reach niche audiences, the landscape turns even more problematic in the international context. Reaching a small niche group, scattered globally and speaking different languages,

through the means offered online, would be a challenge to a seasoned marketing expert, and even more to an artistically inclined individual with little formal education.

5.4 The current and future state of book publishing

This section discusses the book industry as whole, and the role of self-published books therein. The markets as they are now are looked at and, based on the empirical research of this thesis, where they might be heading in the future.

As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, digitalization has transformed the ways in which media content is consumed (Grewiński 2017, 64) and e-books are likely to be the future (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555). However, the growth of Netflix over the years (Figure 1) in comparison to the development of the e-book markets (Figure 2), suggests that a revolution in the book industry is yet to come.

There is no doubt that the self-published e-book has already caused a fundamental change in the book industry. This is evident in the way Darnton's (1982, 65-83) Communication Circuit has been revised (Figures 3 & 4). However, the expected revolution has not yet come to pass.

As was discovered in the empirical study, there is a core competency issue with the quality of self-published e-books, but there may also be another equally large problem, marketing, that has held the revolution back. Based on Anderson's (2004) Long Tail theory, marketing to niche audiences is essential in the future, and as discussed before, this is exactly what the self-published e-book authors should do. However, as the empirical study discovered, reaching a global niche group, even with the help of social media and other recent advancements brought on by digitalization, is extremely difficult for self-published authors who often operate on a very limited budget.

Netflix, for instance, is today a huge company (Vanian 2018). While it certainly did not start out that way, it is safe to say that over the years, it has been able to put vast amounts of resources into marketing and reaching different types of audiences globally. Furthermore, Anderson's (2004) Long Tail theory also suggests that in order to take full advantage of the markets, offering a mix between mainstream and niche products is required. This, obviously, is something a self-published e-book author cannot do. This is what their greatest distributor, Amazon, is striving to do.

On the one hand, Amazon offers great services to authors who wish to self-publish (Treanor 2010, 126-127). On the other hand, Amazon is a corporate giant (Gilbert 2015, 166), and it is in Amazon's best interest to use self-published e-book authors for profit by, for instance, offering them deals that limit their overall marketing opportunities (Self Publishing and KDP Select). Furthermore, self-published e-book authors are increasingly dependent on these large companies when it comes to both publishing and marketing

(Steiner 2017, 8). Often, they have no choice but to agree with whatever terms of service these large companies dictate. Furthermore, large publishing houses that dominate in the markets make a larger profit from traditionally published print books than e-books (Benhamou 2015, 124-125). While they may have the resources to reach the new audiences that would make the e-book market truly established, it is not in their best interest to do so.

The problem of self-published e-book authors not being able to reach their global niche audiences, as discussed in section 5.3.1, has no easy answers. There is potential for growth, but without new innovation, the market lies stagnant.

One potential future scenario is that the answer lies in the community that authors are building together, detailed in section 5.2.2. While the authors are, for the most part, individuals struggling in a complex marketing environment without all the necessary knowledge and tools, they are also ready to take advantage of any opportunities that rise. It is certainly possible that through their community, they will eventually find new and improved ways to pool their resources and efforts for more efficient marketing. The networking they have begun may yet prove to turn over a new leaf in the book industry.

One thing the markets seem open for are services that would facilitate the marketing of self-published e-books. There is a clear need for guidance, structure, and efficiency. Based on this, it would seem that the e-book business is, despite Amazon's success story, still in its infancy

Another possibility is that in the future, Amazon or one of its competitors will find a way to tap into the somewhat unrealized potential of the self-published e-book market, and through innovation, find a solution that will make the market bloom. Given how technology-averse the industry of book publishing is (McIlroy 2017, 3) how much the publishing houses have to lose (Benhamou 2015, 124-125), and how tightly Amazon currently controls its authors (Self Publishing and KDP Select) it is quite possible that this innovation will have to come from a previously unknown source. In any case, the current state of the markets shows intriguing potential. Whether a revolution really is on the horizon remains to be seen.

5.5 Limitations of the study

As always when dealing with data on the internet, it is important to keep in mind that not all of it is necessarily true. One of both the biggest strengths and the biggest weaknesses is that anyone can write anything on blogs, forums, and other channels. Misrepresentation or even lying about one's identity is not uncommon on the internet.

However, given the vast amount of data that is available, it is safe to say that most of the emerging trends are reliable. While misrepresentation is not uncommon, there are few

reasons to do so on forums or social media sites that are built around the self-publishing of e-books. Therefore, the data should be reliable enough for the purposes of this research. The possibility of misrepresentation, however, still remains.

Another issue is that all the data used in the research is public, which means that any discussions on members-only boards or personal messages between people are not included. This means that the second research question pertaining to the dialogue between authors and readers cannot be fully answered via this method. However, there is more than enough public data to draw conclusions and answer the question in a satisfactory manner.

Those who are active online, on social media and on message boards, are usually also those who spend a lot of time and effort on marketing their book. Thus, the data collected may be skewed in that direction and leave out the authors who do not spend much time on promotion. However, as the aim of this research is to uncover functional marketing strategies for self-published e-books, the results should be reliable regardless.

Additionally, all the websites and forums selected for this study are in English. This means that any self-published e-book authors who publish and target an audience in a different language are likely to be excluded from the study. As has been established, however, the US is the frontrunner in the self-published e-book market, especially considering the Amazon Kindle (Benhamou, 2015, 125), and it makes sense to look at English-speaking content as the primary resource. Furthermore, if the self-published e-book markets are really as international by design as assumed, the English-speaking resources are bound to have enough material to support the hypothesis.

5.6 Opportunities for further research

Overall, it has been discovered in this thesis that the self-published e-book market is one of ongoing change, and there is definite room for both research and innovation.

One of the findings of this thesis is that the self-published e-book authors often lack the skills and resources to market their books efficiently. While the popular methods of marketing are examined in the thesis, there is no way of knowing, at this time, what the most effective ones are. Thus, more research could be conducted to discover the most efficient ways of marketing e-books.

Furthermore, self-published e-book authors are a diverse group of people residing in different parts of the world. They are scattered and often without support when it comes to both writing and marketing. There is clear demand for new ways of uniting writers and pooling their resources. Perhaps through an innovation like this, the e-book market would finally reach its full potential.

Lastly, there is a core competency issue with self-published e-books, namely their quality. While self-publishing allows an author to bypass the gatekeepers to the markets and remain in full control of his or her work, it also leaves him or her without the backing and opportunities of a publishing house. Consequently, many self-published e-books suffer from lack of editing. Finding new ways to enhance and ensure the quality of self-published e-books is topic that would benefit from additional research and innovations.

6 SUMMARY

Globalization and digitalization have transformed the way we do business (Hagberg, Sundstrom & Egels-Zandén 2016, 694-695). In the book industry, the effect has been two-fold. Firstly, the costs of producing and distributing books has fallen dramatically, which has affected the demand curve and resulted in producer surplus. Secondly, authors are now able to circumvent the traditional gatekeepers, namely publishing houses, who hold entry to the market. (Waldfoegel & Reimers 2015, 50.) This has resulted in a new type of author, the self-published e-book author (Johnson 2017, 131-146), who creates his or her books and markets them directly to consumers.

The thesis examined the online marketing of self-published e-books by first going over the related academic literature, combining it with an empirical research study, and finally seeing where the newly discovered information fit in with the previous theoretical framework.

Historically, publishing books has always required the effort of many different actors, such as the author, the publisher, printers, et cetera (Darnton 1982, 65-83). However, digitalization has had a vast impact on the industry, and in today's world, the only communication that is required is that between the author and the reader (Figure 4). Dialogue, including marketing-related efforts, between the author and the reader then becomes paramount (Johnson 2017, 131-146). Furthermore, digitalization has affected the industry in ways that have made it possible to reach niche markets (Rieple & Pisano 2015, 85-86), and reaching niche markets is what media industries need to do, in the world of today and tomorrow, to be profitable (Anderson 2004). Digitalization and globalization have also made the book publishing industry international (Steiner 2017, 12). Little research has been put into the marketing of self-published e-books, and consequently, the thesis leans on the most prominent marketing literature, such as the Four Ps (Khan 2014, 98-103) (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place), customer perceived value (Zeithaml 1988, 13), and adding value to the product through marketing (Gofton & Ness 1997, 3).

The empirical study was conducted online using netnography, studying the written word online (Kozinets 2011, streaming video 16.3.2018). Using two different websites, 26 conversation threads related to the marketing of self-published e-books were selected for the study, and they were then analyzed in detail to provide new information. Other sections of the websites were also studied to provide a more balanced outcome. For the same reason, two self-published e-book authors were looked at in detail.

The research showed that the most frequent topic on the discussion forums was overall marketing strategies, indicating that many indie authors struggle with the marketing aspect of self-publishing. Another popular topic was networking, and it could be said that authors had a community together and relied on one another's tips and opinions. Social media was seen as the primary promotional channel for self-published e-books, and

Amazon was considered to be an almost mandatory distribution channel. While the quality of the product was also discussed, the conversations were often superficial.

In the context of the theoretical framework, the empirical study discovered two issues with self-published e-books and their marketing. First, the quality of self-published e-books is often perceived as low (Thomlison & Bélanger 2015, 313), and unfortunately, this may be true. The empirical study confirmed that some self-published e-book authors are, for instance, in such a hurry to get their book published that they neglect to perform even a rudimentary spell check. Secondly, it has been stated in the related academic literature that self-published e-books should be targeted at niche groups (Carolan & Evain 2013, 288) internationally (Steiner 2017, 7). However, self-published e-book authors operating without the backing of a major publishing house (Carolan & Evain 2012, 292) do not have the resources to reach these international niche audiences, especially as they are highly dependent on the large media companies that they need to distribute and promote their books (Steiner, 2017, 8). Consequently, it can be said that the second big issue self-published e-book authors face is a straightforward marketing problem.

In the study, there was only some evidence of the author-reader dialogue that is often discussed in related academic literature (see, for example, Johnson 2017, 131-146). However, there was maybe stronger evidence of a network and community of authors, bloggers, and other people and small businesses operating within the book publishing industry. Whether the e-book revolution that has been expected and has not yet happened (Marques de Oliveira 2012, 555) ever comes to pass remains to be seen. In light of this study, however, there is potential. Perhaps this community of authors will one day find new ways of allocating their combined resources for more effective marketing.

REFERENCES

- About Goodreads (2018) Goodreads. <https://www.goodreads.com/about/us>, retrieved 22.1.2018
- About Wattpad (2017) Wattpad. <<https://www.wattpad.com/about/>>, retrieved 21.9.2017
- Akkai, Júlia Anna (2016) Personal Branding of Contemporary Novelists in the Digital Age. *Journal of Media Research*, Vol. 9 (2), 100-105.
- Allington, Daniel (2016) ‘Power to the reader’ or ‘degradation of literary taste’? Professional critics and Amazon customers as reviewers of *The Inheritance of Loss*. *Language and Literature*, Vol 25 (3), 254-278.
- Anderson, Chris. About Me. *The Long Tail*. <<http://www.longtail.com/about.html>>, retrieved 26.9.2017.
- Anderson, Chris (2004) The Long Tail. *Wired*. <<https://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail/>>, retrieved 25.9.2017.
- Anil, Beena (2015) Acquisition of English as a Second language at College Level – An empirical study. *i-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, Vol. 5 (4), 39-47).
- Anthony, Joya (2012) The Challenge of E-Book Growth in International Markets. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (4), 273-284.
- Baverstock, Allison (2008) How to Market Books. *Routledge*, New York.
- Baverstock, Allison – Steinitz, Jackie (2013) Who are the self-publishers? *Learned publishing*, Vol 26, 211-233.
- Benhamou, Françoise (2015) Fair use and fair competition for digitized cultural goods: the case of eBooks. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 39 (2), 123-131.
- Big Impact Expected? Amazon About to Land in Korean Market (2017) BusinessKorea. <<http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/english/news/industry/18824-big-impact-expected-amazon-about-land-korean-market>>, retrieved 23.1.2018
- Brantely, Peter (2012) The New Missing Books. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (3), 172-175.
- Broich, Alexander (2015) Not Like Other Media: Digital Technology and the Transformation of Educational Publishing. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol 21 (4), 127-243.
- Burgess, Jacqueline – Jones, Christian (2018) Media fans’ alignment with branding: A rich and under-explored research domain. *The Journal of New Business Ideas & Trends*, Vol 16 (1), 1-15.

- Bury, Liz (2013) Amazon reveals quarter of Kindle ebook sales in US were for indie publishers. *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/04/amazon-kindle-ebook-sales-indie-publishers>>, 31.1.2018.
- CampusBooks.com releases e-book availability report (2011) *Wireless News*. <<http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110726005187/en/CampusBooks-Finds-18-Textbooks-Amazon%E2%80%99s-Kindle-Rental>>, retrieved 20.9.2017.
- Chen, Chien-Wen (2015) The Effect of Technological and Psychological Factors on User's Intentions to Continually Read e-Books. *International Journal of Business and Economy*, Vol. 14 (2), 195-220.
- Coskun, Abdullah (2017) English as a Foreign Language Students' Opinions about the Use of English on the Internet. *i-Manager's Journal on School Educational Technology*, Vol. 12 (3), 10-21.
- Craighill, Stephanie (2015) The Problem of English Language Export Fiction in Europe. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (2), 91-101.
- Creswell, John W. (2009) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publication, USA.
- Crump, Simon (2010) Is it vanity to self-publish? *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/feb/04/vanity-self-publish>>, retrieved 21.9.2017.
- Darnton, Robert (1982) What is the History of Books? *Daedalus*, Vol. 111 (3), 65-83.
- Davidson, Adam (2012) Merging to survive in a new world. *International Herald Tribune* 17.11.2012, 12.
- Dawson, Laura (2008) The Role of Self-Publishing in Libraries. *Library Trends*, Vol. 57 (1), 43-51.
- Deahl, Rachel (2010) London Briefcase: What the Big Six Are Bringing to the Fair. *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 257 (11), 21-24.
- Dionne, Karen (2011) Why 99-Cent e-Books Are a Bad Deal – For Authors. *Huffington Post*. <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-dionne/why-99cent-ebooks-are-a-b_b_850053.html>, 1.4.2018.
- Dortch, Shannon (1998) Reader readers, reluctant readers. *American Demographics*, Vol. 20 (5), 9-12.
- Ellis-Petersen, Hannah (2015) *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/18/fifty-shades-of-grey-the-series-that-tied-publishing-up-in-knots>>, 15.3.2018
- Gallo, Christine M. (2013) *Blogs, books and bromance: How social media is changing the definition of genre, publishing, and authorship*. ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, Southern Connecticut State University.

- Gershgorn, Dave – Grisworld, Allison – Murphy, Mike – Coren, Michael J. – Kessler, Sarah (2017) What is Amazon, really? *Quartz*. <<https://qz.com/1051814/what-is-amazon-really/>>, 31.1.2018.
- Gilbert, Richard J. (2015) E-books: A Tale of Digital Disruption. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol 29 (3), 165-184.
- Given, Lisa M. (2008) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications Ltd, California.
- Global Selling Guidance. *Amazon*. <<https://services.amazon.com/global-selling/global-selling-guide.html#where>>, 1.2.2018
- Gofton, Leslie – Ness, Mitchell (1997) *Business Market Research*. Kogan Page, Great Britain.
- Grewiński, Mirosław (2017) Digitalization and Social Innovations – Prospects and Risks for the Society. *International Journal on Global Business Management & Research*, Vol 6 (2), 58-66.
- Hagberg, Johan – Sunstrom, Malin – Egels-Zandén, Niklas (2016) The digitalization of retailing: an exploratory framework. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol 44 (7). 694-712.
- Hage, Ellen V. (2006) *E-book technology: The relationship between self-efficacy and usage levels across gender and age*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Capella University.
- Harwell, Jonathan (2017) Rhyme or Reason?: Patterns in Book Pricing by Format. *The Journal of Electronic Publishing*. <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/3336451.0020.104?view=text;rgn=main>>, 1.4.2018
- Here's how huge Netflix has gotten over the years (2017) Business Insider. <<http://nordic.businessinsider.com/netflix-subscribers-chart-2017-1?r=US&IR=T>>, retrieved 27.1.2017
- How Many People In The World Speak English? (2015) St. George Institute. <<http://www.stgeorges.co.uk/blog/learn-english/how-many-people-in-the-world-speak-english>>, 15.3.2018.
- Howard, Brian (2013) THE Big Merge. *Book Business*, Vol. 16 (1), 22-24.
- Huang, Li-Chun – Shiau, Wen-Lung – Lin, Ya-Shuan (2017) What factors satisfy e-book store customers? Development of a model to evaluate e-book user behavior and satisfaction. *Internet Research*, Vol. 27 (3), 563-585.
- Huberman, A. Michael – Miles, Matthew B. (eds.) (2002) *Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd, California.
- Indie (2018) *Merriam-Webster*. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indie>>, 22.3.2018

- Jeanes, Emma – Huzzard, Tony (eds.) (2014) *Critical Netnography: Conducting Critical Research Online*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Johnson, Miriam J. (2017) The Rise of the Citizen Author: Writing Within Social Media. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (2), 131-146.
- Jung-Hu, Lai – Chih-Yen, Chang (2011) User attitudes toward dedicated e-book readers for reading. *Online Information Review*, Vol. 35 (4), 558-580.
- Khan, Muhammad Tariq (2014) The Concept of ‘Marketing Mix’ and its Elements (A Conceptual Review Paper). *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, Vol. 6 (2), 95-107.
- Kieffer, Krister (2017) The Pros and Cons of Traditional Publishing. *Well-Storied*. <<http://www.well-storied.com/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-traditional-publishing>>, 28.1.2018
- Kozinets, Robert V. (2002) The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *JMR, Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 39 (1), 61-72.
- Kozinets, Robert V. (2011) What is netnography? *SAGE Research*. <<http://methods.sagepub.com.ezproxy.utu.fi/video/what-is-netnography?fromsearch=true>>, 16.3.2018
- Laing, Audrey – Royle, Jo (2013) Bookselling Online: An Examination of Consumer Behavior Patterns. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol 29 (2), 117-119.
- Lugosi, Peter – Janta, Hania – Watson, Pamela (2012) Investigavite management and consumer research. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 24 (6), 838-854.
- Malone Kicher, Madison (2015) This woman wrote One Direction fanfic on her phone and ended up with a major book deal. *Business Insider*. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/anna-todd-earns-book-and-movie-deals-for-one-direction-fan-fiction-2015-7?r=US&IR=T&IR=T>>, 21.9.2017.
- Marques de Oliveira, Silas (2012) E-textbook usage by students at Andrews University: A study of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. *Library Management*, Vol. 33 (8/9), 536-560.
- McIlroy, Thad (2017) Startups Within the U.S. Publishing Industry. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (1) 1-9.
- McKinnon, J. Garrett (2015) Adoption of E-book Platform by Historical New York Times Best-Sellers: An Examination of the “Long Tail” Theory in Action. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol 31 (3), 201-214.
- Mills, Jane – Birks, Melanie (2014) *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Moulaison Sandy, H. – Brendler, B. M. – Kohn, K. (2017) Intersectionality in LGBT fiction. *Journal of Documentation*, Vol 73 (3), 432-450.

- Nodoushani, Omid – Yang, Chalie (2011) The E-Print Industry and Bookseller Market: A Strategic Perspective. *Competition Forum*, Vol 9 (2), 319-324.
- O’Leary, Brian F. (2014) An architecture of collaboration. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 30 (3), 313-322.
- Pecoskie, Jen – Hill, Heather (2015) Beyond traditional publishing models: And examination of the relationships between authors, readers, and publisher. *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 71 (3), 609-626.
- Pecoskie, Jen – Hill, Heather (2014) Indie media and digital community collaborations in public libraries. *Collection Building*, Vol. 33 (4), 147-131.
- Peters, Tom (1997) The Brand Called You. *Fast Company*. <<https://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you>>, 31.1.2018.
- Prahalad, C. K. (2010) The legacy of a great strategic thinker. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP8kRjyfCAw>>, retrieved 2.10.2017.
- Ren, Xiang – Montgomery, Lucy (2012) Chinese online literature: creative consumers and evolving business models. *Arts Marketing*, Vol. 2 (2), 118-130.
- Report from Bowker Shows Continuing Growth in Self-Publishing (2016) Bowker. <<http://www.bowker.com/news/2016/Report-from-Bowker-Shows-Continuing-Growth-in-Self-Publishing.html>>, retrieved 29.9.2017.
- Riffe, Daniel – Lacy, Stephen – Fico, Frederick (2013) Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research. *Routledge*, New York.
- Rieple, A. – Pisano, P. (2015) Business Models in a New Digital Culture: The Open Long Tail Model. *Symphonya*, Vol 2, 75-88.
- Rosen, Sherwin (1981) The Economics of Superstars. *The American Economic Review*, Vol 71 (5), 845-858.
- Salk, N. J. (ed.) (2010) Encyclopedia of research design. SAGE Publishing, London.
- Sehn, Thais Christina Martino – Frago, Suely (2015) The synergy between eBooks and printed books in Brazil. *Online Information Review*, Vol 39 (3), 401-415.
- Self Publishing and KDP Select. Amazon. <https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/select>, 1.2.2018.
- Self-publish (2018) *Merriam-Webster*. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-publish>>, 15.3.2018
- Sihi, Debika – Lawson, Kara (2018) MARKETING LEADER AND SOCIAL MEDIA: BLENDING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 26 (1), 38-54.
- Silverberg, David (2015) WHAT WATTPAD SAYS ABOUT WRITERS TODAY... and the writers of tomorrow. *Broken Pencil*, Vol. 69, 12-15.

- Simon, Jean Paul (2016) User generated content - users, community of users and firms: toward new sources of co-innovation? *Info: the Journal of Policy, Regulation and Strategy for Telecommunications, Information and Media*, Vol 18 (6), 4-25.
- Soules, Aline (2009) The shifting landscape of e-books. *New Library London*, Vol. 110 (1/2), 7-21.
- Steiner, Ann (2017) The Global Book: Micropublishing, Conglomerate Production, and Digital Market Structures. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Nov, 1-15.
- Thomlison, Adam – Bélanger, Pierre C. (2015) Authors' Views of e-Book Self-Publishing: The Role of Symbolic Capital Risk. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol 31 (4), 306-316.
- Top Business Schools Offer Students Anytime/Anywhere Access to Business and Professional eBook Collection; netLibrary eBooks Can Be Searched and Borrowed Over Internet (2001) *Business Wire* 25.1.2001, 1.
- Traditional Publishing (2018) *Union Square Publishing*. <<http://unionsquarepublishing.com/traditional-publishing/>>, 15.3.2018
- Treanor, Ted (2010) Amazon: Love Them? Hate Them? Let's Follow the Money. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (2), 119-128).
- Vanian, Jonathan (2018) Fortune. <<http://fortune.com/2018/03/02/netflix-stock-record-high/>>, 3.4.2018
- Vasileiou, Magdalini – Hartley, Richard – Rowley, Jennifer (2009) An overview of the e-book marketplace. *Online Information Review*, Vol 33 (1), 173-192.
- Vasileiou, Magdalini – Rowley, Jennifer (2011) Marketing and promotion of e-books in academic libraries. *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 67 (4), 624-643.
- Vasileiou, Magdalini – Rowley, Jennifer (2008) Progressing the definition of “e-book”. *Library Hi Tech*, Vol 26 (3), 355-368.
- Viltard, Leandro Adolfo (2016) UNLIMITED: BLURRED LIMITS IN A BORDERLESS WORLD. *Independent Journal of Management & Production*, Vol 7. (2), 380-412.
- Von Rimscha, M. Bjørn – Putzig, Sarah (2013) From Book Culture to Amazon Consumerism: Does the Digitization of the Book Industry Lead to Commercialization? *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol 29 (4), 318-335.
- Waldfoegel, Jowl – Reimers, Imke (2015) Storming the gatekeepers: Digital disintermediation in the market for books. *Information Economics and Policy*, Vol 31, 47-58.
- Weber, Robert (1990) Basic Content Analysis. *SAGE Publications*, Thousand Oaks, California.

- Wei, Rining – Su, Jinzhi (2012) The statistics of English in China. *English Today*, Vol. 28 (3), 10-14.
- Weinstein, Andrew (2010) A Look at Global Expansion for e-Books. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (1), 11-15.
- Weiss, Astrid – Schade, Cornelia – Riedl, Michael – Matt, Dominik (2016) Present and Future of Digitalization in South Tyrolean SMEs. *ISPIM Conference Proceedings*, 2016.
- Westgate, Hilary J. (2012) E-books: discussions of production, content, and future at the 211 Frankfurt Book Fair. *New Library World*, Vol. 113 (7/8), 400-404.
- What is digitalization? definition and meaning. *BusinessDictionary*. <<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/digitalization.html>>, retrieved 2.10.2017.
- Why Are More Authors Electing To Self-Publish Rather Than Go The Traditional Route? (2016) *PR Newswire*. <<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/why-are-more-authors-electing-to-self-publish-rather-than-go-the-traditional-route-300202849.html>>, retrieved 29.1.2018
- Wilson, T. D. – Maceviciute, Elena (2016) Publishers' responses to the e-book phenomenon: survey results from three 'small language' markets. *Information Research*. <<http://www.informationr.net/ir/21-4/paper725.html>>, retrieved 28.9.2017.
- Yoo, Hwan-soo – Kim, Seong-whan (2016) ESOTAG: E-book evolution using collaborative social tagging by readers. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, Vol. 75 (20), 12795-12183.
- Zaid, Gabriel (2010) *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance*. Paul Dry Books, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Zeithaml, Valarie A. (1988) Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality, and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Evidence. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol 52 (3), 13.

APPENDICES

List of conversation threads

Amazon:

Thread 1: How can authors overcome the typos and grammar issues in the books

Thread 2: How to advertise my book without any cost and reach a lot of readers online

Thread 3: How to give reply to reviewer and how to reach to them.. Please explain

Thread 4: When Kindle Distribution will be available in Romanian?

Thread 5: Other platforms

Thread 6: What is the best strategy for actually selling book on Amazon...or anywhere?

Thread 7: Ready to pull my hair out!!

Thread 8: Is it Still Possible to Earn a Living as a Writer without AMS?

Thread 9: ENGLISH-SPANISH E-BOOK TRANSLATION SERVICES?

Thread 10: How do you promote your book WITHOUT wasting your time?

Goodreads:

Thread 11: Book Promotion Discussion Thread

Thread 12: Writing the Book was the easy part :)

Thread 13: Mailing lists

Thread 14: Why do you make reviews?

Thread 15: How to avoid writer services scams

Thread 16: New Year, New Marketing Strategies, 2018

Thread 17: Important Info: Please Read First!

Thread 18: Mindfulness Book Promotion

Thread 19: Reviews for a dark fiction podcast (hear me out)

Thread 20: Welcome! Please Introduce Yourself!

Thread 21: Support fellow authors by following them on social media!

Thread 22: How do you promote a non-discounted \$4.99 book?

Thread 23: Author Introduction

Thread 24: Website Services for Hire

Thread 25: Submit your Indie Book to the List

Thread 26: Review blogs/web sites