

## **Does the Book Have a Future?**

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Old media don't die; they just have to grow old gracefully.

(Douglas Adams 2001)

From the beginnings of the digital revolution, commentators have examined the prospects for the book and wondered whether it can survive alongside new technologies. In an age when text can be accessed all over the world through a variety of devices, and when the book competes with many other forms of entertainment, does it seem a dated and outmoded technology or a reliable and robust companion? What sort of future can we see for the book?

If the book has had its day, what would be the test? When readers are avid followers of fiction on their mobile phones? When children study using tablet computers and are leaving behind the use of print resources? When only 5 per cent of people named the book when asked which single media device they would miss the most if it was to be taken away? When only half of all adults in the world's largest economy read literature? When travellers shun print guidebooks and

choose to consult user-generated content on websites for information and advice?

This is the world now, and if some of these trends continue, the future of the book in its traditional sense is certainly under question. Yet if we apply other tests – for example, the number of books published each year or the success of individual writers such as George R. R. Martin or J. K. Rowling – the book remains resilient in the face of changes in technology, culture, and society. Indeed the world going digital is helping to keep the book alive, with books now available to download in a few seconds, anywhere in the world.

### **Gone digital**

If we examine the production of books, the *process* of publishing books has gone thoroughly digital – from the delivery of the text from authors by email through to page design on computer and the electronic delivery of files to the printer. The concept of ‘create once/publish many’ has led to print being only one of the formats employed by publishers, alongside web, audio and ebook. Educational, reference, and professional publishing have adopted digital publishing as a central part of their activities, and the arrival of ebooks has transformed the world of fiction sales. For those keen to declutter their

house, they can hold all their music on their computer, watch films on demand rather on DVD, and abandon their print collection of books in favour of a digital library.

In scholarly publishing, online access is the dominant mode of delivery for journals. There is also a trend toward the digital publication of academic monographs. Oxford Scholarship Online, launched in 2003, is a service for delivering monographs to libraries, using titles published by Oxford University Press. The average print run of research monographs has continued to decline, and it is likely that their publication will be switched over to primarily digital editions.

Educational publishing in many parts of the world is moving further toward the development of digital resources. For example, the aim of the Fatih project in Turkey is to provide all school students in the country with tablet computers alongside the provision of digital texts and interactive whiteboards in the classroom. (Akkoyunlu and Baskan 2015)

Two decades ago, the novelist E. Annie Proulx said that the information highway was meant for 'bulletin boards on esoteric subjects, reference works, lists and news – timely, utilitarian information, efficiently pulled through the wires. Nobody is going to sit

down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever.’ (*New York Times*, 26 May 1994) Today ebooks of novels are available to read on dedicated readers and mobile devices, and both classic novels and self-published works can be downloaded for free. Many readers are comfortable reading in both print and digital formats. By 2014 in the USA, the percentage of adults who had read an ebook had risen to ‘28%, up from 23% at the end of 2012. At the same time, about seven in ten Americans reported reading a book in print, up four percentage points after a slight dip in 2012, and 14% of adults listened to an audiobook.’ (Pew Research Center, 16 January 2014)

Dedicated electronic devices – ebook readers specifically designed to store books and display them with the clarity of the printed page – have become commonplace in the book markets of the USA and the UK. In 2006, Sony launched a lightweight reader with a memory that could support up to eighty titles. The arrival of the Kindle device from Amazon, which launched in the USA in 2007, going into several generations of development, created a mass market for e-reading, in particular of genre fiction.

The British writer Fay Weldon believes that authors should adjust their style to meet the needs of a digital audience. Literary authors should

consider writing two versions of the same book: one longer, more contemplative, suitable for reading in print; the other shorter, plot-heavy and character rich – perfect to be read quickly in electronic form. ‘Short, in this the day of the galloping e-reader, is best. Writers need to envisage readers not turning the page as the maid draws the curtains and brings a glass of wine, but on the train or bus on the way to work, eating a sandwich, or standing in the queue for coffee.’ (Weldon 2014)

Reading of fiction on mobile phones, originally popular in Japan (the *keitai shosetsu*, or cell-phone novel), is now widespread in China, where new forms of genre fiction have developed online such as time travel and grave robbery. ‘The prices may be low but the potential readership for this kind of writing is huge. There are 100m active users of Reading Base, the mobile platform run by China Mobile. For authors the rewards from the mobile phone audience may be greater than from conventional publishing. For example, whereas a print book has a limited number of pages, an online or mobile novel can carry on in the manner of a soap opera. A reader may end up paying 350 yuan (£35) for a large number of chapters – around 10 times the price of a print book. Whilst they are paying by the chapter, they are not as sensitive to the overall price.’ (Phillips 2014: 14)

The linking of mobile and GPS (global positioning system) technologies offers further opportunities for the book: for example, to revolutionize travel publishing. As the cost of using mobile data whilst travelling reduces to an acceptable level, a range of possibilities open up.

Although guidebooks are available as apps or ebooks, they are not yet easily linked to the user's location, offering local cultural or restaurant tips. There is the potential to offer a range of novels or travel literature suitable to the reader's destination: for example, the tourist in Paris could have a downloadable copy of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, or Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, with the relevant text highlighted.

### **Society and Culture**

The book competes with a variety of other entertainments, and most people are now accustomed to alternative ways of acquiring information. The newspaper industry has had to adapt to competition from television and the web. In 2004 the *Times* of London went tabloid. The editor, Robert Thomson, quoted the web as an influence on the paper's new design: 'The traditional broadsheet involves what you might call scanning skills, but for an increasing number of people, especially young people who are used to internet presentation, they have developed scrolling skills. Interestingly enough, those scrolling

skills work a lot better in the compact format than they do in a broadsheet.’ (Greenslade 2004)

The primacy of print has been challenged, undermined by the ease of access to the internet and a new generation brought up without the same unequivocal respect for the book. For those who have ready access to a mobile device, Google is the first port of call in the search for information, replacing the reference shelf by the desk.

Schoolchildren are encouraged by their teachers to surf for background information for their homework rather than use an encyclopedia.

Universities struggle to teach the virtues of citing a range of sources, and students see little wrong in adapting the words of others or relying on web resources.

For adults, reading for pleasure has to be fitted into busy lifestyles. In Ian McEwan’s novel *Saturday*, Henry Perowne, a busy and highly intelligent neurosurgeon, persists with fiction recommended by his daughter, but remains cautious of this other world:

‘Henry never imagined he would end up living in the sort of house that had a library. It’s an ambition of his to spend whole weekends in there, stretched out on one of the Knole sofas, pot

of coffee at his side, reading some world-rank masterpiece or other, perhaps in translation ... But his free time is always fragmented, not only by errands and family obligations and sports, but by the restlessness that comes with these weekly islands of freedom. He doesn't want to spend his days off lying, or even sitting, down.' (McEwan 2005: 66)

We could never catch up with our reading in any case. The Mexican writer Gabriel Zaid, in his playful treatise on reading, *So Many Books*, points out that a new book is published every thirty seconds: 'Books are published at such a rapid rate that they make us exponentially more ignorant. If a person read a book every day, he would be neglecting to read four thousand others, published the same day.' (Zaid 2003: 22)

In England in 2010/11 the most commonly reported free time activity was watching TV (88 per cent of adults aged 16 and over), followed by spending time with friends or family (84 per cent) and listening to music (74 per cent); reading scored high as well with 65 per cent. (Seddon 2012: 22) Yet time-use data reveals a large gulf in the time spent on reading compared to our TV and internet usage. In 2014 UK adults watched an average of 2 hours and 59 minutes of live TV each

day, with a further 40 minutes spent looking at recorded programmes, and an additional 37 minutes devoted to DVDs and on-demand viewing. (Ofcom 2014) Between 2005 and 2014, the amount of time UK adults spent online each week doubled, rising from nearly 10 hours (9 hours and 54 minutes) in 2005 to over 20 hours and 30 minutes in 2014. (Ofcom 2015) Many people are also active on mobile devices at the same time as watching TV, the practice of media meshing.

Diary studies suggest the mean time spent each day reading books varies between countries, but in Europe the top countries (Estonia and Finland) only average 16 and 12 minutes respectively. (Harmonised European Time Use Survey 2007) When UK adults were asked which single media device they would least like to lose, only 5 per cent chose the book (the same proportion opted for the radio), most opting for the television (37 per cent), mobile phone (32 per cent), or computer (13 per cent). (Ofcom 2015) Between 2003-4 and 2013-4, the number of books borrowed from UK libraries declined by 27 per cent and the active lending stock fell by 20 per cent; the number of active borrowers fell from 14.8m to 9.8m. (LISU 2015)

In the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts has been producing regular reports into reading. Closely monitored has been the

proportion of the US adult population reading literature (novels, short stories, plays, and poetry). Whilst a long-term decline seemed to have been halted - from 1982 to 2002 the figure had fallen by 10 percentage points - by 2008 the proportion was still only 50 per cent. The proportion reading any kind of book continued to decline by 2008, down from 57 per cent in 2002 to 54 per cent. While 58 per cent of women read literature, the figure for men was significantly lower at 42 per cent. (National Endowment for the Arts 2009)

To those horrified by these statistics, it is important to consider what went before. As Umberto Eco wrote, 'We can complain that a lot of people spend their day watching TV and never read a book or a newspaper, and this is certainly a social and educational problem, but frequently we forget that the same people, a few centuries ago, were watching at most a few standard images and were totally illiterate.'  
(Eco 1996: 297)

At one point the argument about book reading went that our society would become highly dependent on visual cues and information, leaving text behind. Yet the internet has in fact given text a central place in our lives:

'It seems to me that we currently live in a culture that is more heavily text based than any other time in history. People read all day long. Google, Twitter, and Facebook deliver words. People can't peel their eyes from the smartphone - essentially a text and information distribution mechanism. We actually have trouble NOT reading. Folks are always checking their email and their text messages. Sometimes it is hard to pull away from this matrix of letters.' (Shapiro 2014)

Facing competition from all directions, the book industry is likely to continue to see erosion of their base readership. In highly developed nations, as more television is watched, as social media is browsed for news and gossip, or for updates on friends and family, is there not an inevitability about the decline in time spent reading books?

How can the publishing industry reach out to a new audience? What kind of titles do light-buyers and non-buyers of books want? Boyd Tonkin wrote: 'The book market certainly needs to expand. What it requires is creative innovation, not mad downmarket plunges. For a start, publishers have to think harder about how to reach the hordes of critical consumers of film, TV, internet and pop culture who should be

reading books as sharp and savvy as all the shows, sites and bands they adore.’ (Tonkin 2005)

Does it in the end matter what type of books people read? The arrival of the ebook may have led to surging sales not of literary fiction but of romantic novels and self-published works, but if people are reading books surely that is a good thing? The debate echoes concerns from an earlier age, as Edward Tenner notes: ‘Even in the golden age of print culture from the 1880s to the 1930s, literary men and women were appalled by most Americans’ indifference to book buying and by what they saw as the masses’ preference for trashy and sensational reading.’ (Tenner 2004)

Aside from the Harry Potter phenomenon, a great stimulus to sales of books has been connections with other media. Sales of the *Hunger Games*, the dystopian trilogy by Suzanne Collins, received a massive boost from the film adaptations; ‘the importance of movies to teen book-buying habits cannot be overstated. Teens reported that among the most important factors that made them aware of particular titles involved either seeing a movie based on a book or having seen a book trailer at a movie theater.’ (Milliot 2014)

To stimulate a wider sector of the population to read, is it possible for the publishing industry to be less elitist in its approach and more imaginative in its workings with other media? Publishing recruits the same personnel as make up its readership, as has been repeatedly highlighted: 'Publishers love to hype ethnic minority writers such as Zadie Smith and Monica Ali. But, behind the scenes, publishing offices are overwhelmingly white, middle class and, in the top jobs, male dominated.' (*Guardian*, 12 March 2004) Could representatives of a wider cross-section of the population produce books that more people want to read, with content more appropriate to their interests? The success of *manga* (Japanese comic books) is an example of more visual material that can encourage reading amongst young people who are attracted to online entertainment and games rather than books.

The concentration of production in the publishing industry looks certain to continue, as seen most recently in the 2014 merger of Penguin and Random House. (Clark and Phillips, 2014) The larger publishing houses strive to maintain branding and innovation by keeping smaller imprints alive within the larger business, but there are questions over the diversity of publishing if the industry is dominated by the larger players in both publishing and bookselling.

How would a reader find new authors and titles? The dominant internet retailer, Amazon, has an amazing range of titles on offer but only a few on their front page. Smaller bookshops have given up trying to compete against the discounting of the chains, the internet and the supermarkets, either ceasing to trade or becoming more specialist in the type of stock they offer. The shrinkage amongst bricks and mortar stores offers the challenge of discoverability for publishers and readers alike. If books are less visible on the high street, the presence of authors and books on the web and social media is ever more important.

### **Free Culture**

Lawrence Lessig's book *Free Culture* (2004) is subtitled 'How big media uses technology and the law to lock down culture and control creativity.' Lessig argues that 'A free culture supports and protects creators and innovators. It does this directly by granting intellectual property rights. But it does so indirectly by limiting the reach of those rights, to guarantee that follow-on creators and innovators remain as free as possible from the control of the past.' (Lessig 2004: xiv)

The development of the internet has led to new ways of thinking about intellectual property and the rights of copyright holders and users. The web provides tremendous opportunities for collaborators to develop software, create multimedia projects, and write stories together. One example is *Wikipedia*, the free online encyclopedia whose entries anyone can edit. Yet the rules surrounding intellectual property remain rigid. When readers share a book – a novel passed round a family or set of friends – they are not penalized for those further uses, and copies can be bought and sold second-hand without royalties being payable to the copyright holder. By contrast, passing on the digital file of an ebook is rarely allowed by the terms of purchase (usually under a licence), and controls in the software would most likely prevent this.

If the music industry has become more relaxed about music downloads, should not the publishing industry be more open to new ways of thinking about the copyright environment? In the area of academic journal publishing, there has been debate about how the internet changes the rules. Without the costs of print, journal publishing potentially becomes more profitable. Publishers would contend that they still have the editorial and quality assurance costs (articles are normally peer reviewed), but challenges from the Open Access movement have led to many journals becoming freely available

to users. Some would also argue that publishers ought not to profit from information whose creation has been paid for by the government and research institutions. Should not critical research in medicine be available gratis to anybody? Open Access is producing a large impact on the journal industry, and its appeal to research bodies and governments has grown. If research monographs were also to migrate online, publishers would have to work ever harder to justify their existence.

Another initiative is the Creative Commons, based at Stanford Law School, which provides a set of intellectual property (IP) licences for authors to use. For example, a photographer could publish a photo on the web and allow others to use it on their websites as long as it is properly attributed. Creative Commons (CC) was founded on the notion that not everybody wants to exercise all their IP rights:

'If you want to give people the right to share, use, and even build upon a work you've created, you should consider publishing it under a Creative Commons license. CC gives you flexibility (for example, you can choose to allow only non-commercial uses) and protects the people who use your work, so they don't have

to worry about copyright infringement, as long as they abide by the conditions you have specified.’ (Creative Commons 2015)

Whilst the content found on the internet is often criticized, it is where people go to find much of their information and the expectation is that it is free. Sites such as TripAdvisor and the movie database IMDb rely on user-generated information, and their business models include revenues from advertising and sales referrals. Rather than buy a DIY or gardening manual in print, hobbyists will now play a video on YouTube which offers practical advice.

The trend towards free or inexpensive media content presents a concern for those authors who need to make a living out of their writing. They are already questioning their share of the proceeds from digital delivery. The instinct of publishers is to apply the same thinking as with print, i.e., a basic percentage of the proceeds goes to the author. As the print cost disappears, authors wonder why they cannot receive a larger share, perhaps equal to the publisher’s income.

Arguments over the share paid to the author or bookseller, over the pricing of ebooks, and the differentials around print and digital pricing have exercised the industry since the mass market for ebooks

developed. Yet as Russ Grandinetti, Senior Vice President at Amazon points out, the fundamental issue is perhaps rather different:

'The real competition here is not, in our view, between the hardcover book and the ebook. TV, movies, web browsing, video games are all competing for people's valuable time. And if the book doesn't compete we think that over time the industry will suffer. Look at the price points of digital goods in other media. I read a newspaper this morning online, and it didn't cost me anything. Look at the price of rental movies. Look at the price of music.' (Ken Auletta 2010)

### **The Book's Digital Future**

Advances in technology have produced a range of devices on which a book can be read, from an ebook reader to a tablet or phone. The same title can be read across a number of devices with great ease; and ebooks have the advantages that a reader can take a sizeable selection when travelling, read backlit text, and enlarge the type size to suit. The book exists in both printed and digital form, as pbook and ebook.

Digital technology has revolutionized the production of printed books. Digital printing, as opposed to traditional offset printing, has changed the economics of book production, enabling genuine print on demand (single copies to order) as well as short runs (say, fifty copies). This facility has less relevance to the world of mass-market paperbacks, where large print-runs mean that the benefits of offset printing still apply, but it is of great interest to most publishers and those who want to self-publish. Publishers are no longer forced to put books that are selling only a few hundred copies a year out of print; they can build up orders and reprint, or use systems at wholesalers and the digital printers to supply copies on demand within a few days. Digital printing and ebooks have stimulated a boom in self-publishing. The author of a memoir unlikely to be taken on by a mainstream publisher can at low cost have it published by a third-party press or publish it themselves for free on Amazon.

A logical extension of print on demand at large production facilities is the development of cheap point-of-sale machines. Jason Epstein forecast a new order in which books will be printed and bound on demand by machines that 'within minutes will inexpensively make single copies that are indistinguishable from books made in factories'. (Epstein 2002: 178) These machines could be placed anywhere in the

world, in bookshops, libraries, and universities, with access to an unlimited catalogue of titles over the internet. An example of this technology is the Espresso Book Machine, which went on trial in 2006 at the World Bank's InfoShop in Washington. The machine can print and bind a 300-page paperback in three minutes. By 2015 over 60 were up and running in libraries and bookstores around the world.

What has truly revolutionized the distribution of books is the arrival of the vanilla ebook, a flowable version of the print edition. The selection of titles has expanded fast since the launch of the Kindle and many new titles are available to download in seconds at the touch of a screen. If you fancy reading the latest bestselling thriller or the sequel to the novel you have finished late at night, or want to take a handful of books with you on holiday, there is no need to venture into your local bookstore or await the delivery of a parcel through the mail. For some fiction titles the proportion of ebook sales can reach or surpass 40 per cent, although digital sales have made less of an impact in other areas such as non-fiction.

There has been experimentation around enhanced ebooks, with the addition of audio and video, and the creation of apps. But few have been successful in the marketplace – book apps are competing directly

with games, where the business model may work around a low-priced or free version. Income comes from the purchase of new versions and levels once the player is hooked.

### **The Resilience of the Book**

In the early 1990s, the book appeared to be facing a terminal crisis, viewed as 'a noble anachronism crushed between televised entertainment and burgeoning electronic information sources'. (Tenner 2004) Subsequently, it has proved to be resilient in the face of challenges from other media, confounding the predictions of those who saw its replacement. Famously Steve Jobs declared that 'It doesn't matter how good or bad the product is, the fact is that people don't read anymore.' (*New York Times*, 15 January 2008)

Meanwhile digital technology is providing mechanisms that enhance our ability to produce and distribute both pbooks and ebooks. The number of new titles published continues to grow in the larger publishing economies, reaching by 2013 a total of 444,000 titles for China, 304,000 in the USA, and 184,000 in the UK. Within the last figure one-third - 61,000 - of the titles were digital editions. An astonishing 458,000 titles were self-published in the USA in 2013.

There has been much press coverage of the growth of ebook sales, but digital remains a minority interest in many markets. Sales figures for traditionally published and self-published titles are not revealed by Amazon, the market leader, but we can see trends from the sales declared by publishers. By 2014 sales of ebooks in the USA made up 26 per cent of the total market (by volume); meanwhile in the UK digital revenues had reached 17 per cent of the total market and 37 per cent of the fiction market (*The Bookseller*, 1 June 2015; Publishers Association 2015). But these markets remain unusual: 'In all ... non-English speaking countries, the market share of ebooks within the trade segment of the book market, is below 10%, ranging from as little as 1 or 2%, to 4.3% in Germany, with growth showing signs of flattening out across the board.' (Wischenbart 2015: 23)

Some publishers have switched to other modes of delivering texts. Lexis-Nexis, part of Elsevier, sold off its print operation in the area of law, and delivers a fast and reliable service to its customers online. Large reference works such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB) have moved online, offering superior search facilities and regular updating, giving access to an evolving title rather than a static edition. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

abandoned door-to-door selling of print volumes in favour of offering a free service over the Web, trusting that advertising revenues would support its operations. This was in turn replaced by the current online subscription service.

Print remains important, however, because there is a continuing demand from consumers and it offers a model of publishing that publishers understand and know how to make work. They are comfortable with the physical book: the sale of a physical item yields a return against a predictable cost. A digital product can be highly creative but since there are no set boundaries, there are uncertainties over the costs involved and profitability is more difficult to control. What is striking is the success of the ebook in vanilla form, whilst enhanced ebooks and apps have had mixed success in the market and have often lost money for publishing houses.

It is correct that there are anxious debates over the long-term decline in reading in many countries. How can this trend be reversed? Is it right to head downmarket? How can we encourage children to read books? Should the industry reduce the number of titles published and reduce the clutter in the consumer's mind? Yet as print runs diminish,

title output continues to rise as everybody works that bit harder in order to maintain the value of the market.

Expectations that digital content is inexpensive or free are being fuelled by developments in other media and the growth in low cost self-published titles. In turn this is having an effect on the financial returns of both authors and publishers. Books have become less visible in our lives as bookstores disappear and readers declutter their homes. A second-hand bookseller in Oxfordshire closed his physical store in 2015, ruling that 'Everyone is buying everything off the internet and our internet sales overtook the bookshop about a decade ago ... People are not creating libraries in the same way they used to ...' (*Oxford Mail*, 8 April 2015)

Does the book have a future? As a portable and durable item of technology, it remains in good shape. The printed book can be taken most places, read in bed or in the bath, and passed around friends with ease. Umberto Eco commented, 'The book is like the spoon, scissors, the hammer, the wheel. Once invented, it cannot be improved.' (Carrière and Eco 2011: 4).

The production standards of the average paperback are not high, but it can be sold at a highly competitive price. Faced with the low pricing of ebooks, there has been renewed interest in higher production values for the printed book, from quality design and typography through to a revival of the craft of letterpress printing. As a simple storage device, the pbook remains highly functional. You may not have the equipment to play a vinyl record from the 1960s or an 8-track from the 1970s, but you can still pick up Shakespeare's First Folio and read it. Print solves the archiving problem of the modern age, when formats change with great rapidity, and the pages of websites alter or disappear overnight.

For an author, appearing in print remains preferable to being published on the web. There is an affirmation of one's worth as a writer, and receiving a beautifully printed hardback of your work is an undeniable pleasure. For readers, print holds out the prospect of disappearing into another world, away from screens, into a rich landscape of discovery and imagination.

The book remains for some a status item, to be displayed prominently at home or carried around in public. The success of book clubs or reading groups reveals reading to be a social activity: we like to read,

share, and discuss. The distinction can be drawn between 'lean forward' technologies like the internet, which are becoming the primary means to access information for work and education, and the 'lean back' technology of the book, still important for enjoyment and relaxation. (Adams 2001)

The book can also work with and alongside other media; for example, through co-operation with television shows that recommend titles. In virtual reading groups and fan fiction sites, readers discuss authors and offer up new plot directions for their favourite titles. Published books may have their origins in blogs; college textbooks – many students still prefer print over digital – offer added value on associated websites; and authors offer extra content on their own websites. Readers would welcome the bundling of print with an e-version which could be accessed on the morning commute.

If the digital revolution poses challenges to the book, it also offers fresh opportunities. The choice available on Amazon dwarfs that in any terrestrial bookshop, and new features on the web enable browsing inside books as well as among the selection of titles available. The web has stimulated the second-hand market in books, and some shops that could not make a profit as physical entities have been able to find a

new lease of life online. Books no longer need to go out of print, as they can survive as an ebook or through print-on-demand. How about customization to the customer's specification? This is possible with ebooks, where you can choose your font and type size – why not in print? You could have your copy of *Pride and Prejudice* in the font, type size, or binding of your choice?

In the 1990s, Umberto Eco looked forward to a time when people could communicate directly without the intermediation of publishing houses:

'A great many people do not want to publish; they simply want to communicate with each other. The fact that in the future they will do it by E-mail or over the Internet will be a great boon for books and for the culture and the market of the book. Look at a bookstore. There are too many books. I receive too many books every week. If the computer network succeeds in reducing the quantity of published books, this would be a paramount cultural improvement.' (Eco 1996: 301)

In fact, more books are published than ever before, and there has been a boom in self-publishing. For those with a novel or memoir

bursting to be written, there is now a mechanism to help you reach an audience. As Gabriel Zaid muses, if 'our passion for writing goes unchecked, in the near future there will be more people writing books than reading them'. (Zaid 2003: 9)

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