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**Analysing the Impact of Social Media on the Publishing Industry:
The Disruption of Darnton's Model of the Communications Circuit of the Book**

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Abstract

The publishing chain has remained relatively the same since the invention of the printing press. Robert Darnton's model of the communications circuit of the book, which tracks how intellectual property circulates, has been a largely accurate representation of the publishing chain until the late twentieth century. Then, the digital revolution started convulsing the publishing industry. The changes brought by the new digital technologies were further enhanced by the development of social media in the twenty-first century. This study investigates the disruption and disintermediation of Darnton's model, particularly looking at the shifts in the publishing chain's traditional roles, as a result of the deployment of social media into the publishing environment.

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Introduction

This study aims to analyse the significant impact social media currently have on the publishing industry. Said analysis will be grounded in Robert Darnton's model of the communications circuit of the book, by now outdated, which traced how intellectual property circulated in the XVIII century France. Investigating Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires's study, which already sought to update Darnton's model, I intend to further update Darnton's circuit taking into account the powerful changes brought by the introduction and implementation of social media in the publishing environment. In particular, I seek to uncover how the introduction of social media in the business changed and expanded the publishing chain's traditional roles defined by Darnton in his model.

In Chapter 1, I will historically investigate the birth and evolution of social media, which is one of the most recent developments of the digital revolution. The digital revolution, unfolded in the XX twentieth century, already had a considerable impact on the publishing industry, especially concerning, as noted by Thompson, four levels: operating systems, content management and digital workflow, content delivery, sales and marketing. The commercialization of the World Wide Web at the end of the XX century, then, marked the beginning of the digital revolution's second major wave of changes, which takes the name of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 refers to the most significant shift in the use of the internet: formerly designed for consumption, the then-emerging online technologies, that included social media, marked the democratization of the internet. In particular, the surge of participatory culture enhanced by social media blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers, between professionals and amateurs, reshaping the traditional roles of the publishing chain, especially for what concerns publisher, author and reader.

The growing importance and deployment of social media soon evolved into a business phenomenon. In Chapter 2, I will analyse the emergence of social media marketing as a distinct subfield of marketing. The subsequent rise of data analytics, which enables to collect social media targeted data, then, established social media marketing as the backbone of contemporary marketing practice. For what concerns the publishing industry, taking ownership of readers' data has become increasingly important to publishers. In fact, the analysis of readers' data, generated from targeted social media platforms, highlights emerging trends, which are, then, taken into consideration during the acquisition and selection process. I will, thus, argue that this new customer-focused approach implemented through the analysis of analytic data shifted the traditional role of publishers as arbiters of literary taste. I will also argue that the implementation

of social media, and, subsequently social media marketing, in the publishing industry created new positions not included in Darnton's, currently outdated, model. To do so, I will present two case studies from my own experience serving as intern, first at the scientific publishing corporation Elsevier and, then, at the trade publishing press Amsterdam Publishers.

In Chapter 3, I will explore how the digital democratization of practices such as curation and content creation, operated by social media, eventually, turned the process of literary promotion and production on its head. I will argue that the lowering barrier of participation into such processes reshaped the traditional roles of the figures that sit at the opposite ends of Darnton's communications circuit: author and reader. To demonstrate the new roles taken up by authors and readers as active co-promoters and co-producers of literature, I will investigate J. K. Rowling and Rupi Kaur's experiences as case studies.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

1. The Digital Revolution

As stated by Bhaskar, “the written word is seeing the greatest transformation since Gutenberg [...] Not only are books and publishing experiencing the most profound transition since the dawn of the press but our entire communications paradigm is witnessing arguably the greatest change in history” (41). Bhaskar is clearly referring to the digital revolution that, since the 1960s, is convulsing the publishing industry, just as it is affecting many other sectors, along with our everyday life. Although common people believe that the publishing industry is a rather traditional institution, Bhaskar affirms that publishing has always been engaging with technology and innovation: “technology shapes and drives publishing in a complex interplay of possibility and reactions” (43). For instance, printing, that has always been essential for publishing, made a long way since its invention in the XV century with the implementation, mostly from the XIX century on, of new updated technologies which perfected and advanced the process and the productivity. However, starting from the 1940s, an ensemble of new technologies soon disrupted the reign of the press. Modern computing and digital technologies were developed mainly during the Second World War conflict. Many personalities, such as Alan Turing, designed complex machines, which potentially, besides the military application, would be powerful. The subsequently refinement of such technologies led to a panoply of electronic and digital tools we are so used to nowadays. From the 1960s on, computers were introduced in the lives of more and more people. Starting with businesses, government agencies and universities, computers slowly built their way up the food chain to finally be made available and affordable to the masses. The launch of Apple in the 1970s ensured digital technologies to become mainstream. Meanwhile, a parallel series of developments had been occurring, namely the internet. Born and nurtured by specialists, it was offered to the public only with the creation of the World Wide Web in 1990. The development and employment of these advanced technologies gave birth to what is currently known as the digital revolution, an ongoing transformation that is challenging and changing all levels of existence.

1.1 The Digital Revolution in the Publishing Industry

The impact of the digital revolution has been felt across all sectors and publishing is no exception. Indeed, the digital revolution affected the publishing industry from the very beginning: the first electronic publications, any type of text which is only available digitally and lack a printed format, date back to the 1960s. As noted by Clarke in his study, then, “the era of electronic publication as the *primary* mode of dissemination began in the mid-1990s and coincided with the rise of the World Wide Web” (80). In *Merchants of Culture*, Thompson agrees with Clark, stating that “[The Digital Revolution] became a source of increasing speculation and concern from the early 1990s on [...] The rapid growth of the internet from the mid-1990s on served only to heighten speculation” (157). With the implementation of these new technologies came the conviction that the publishing industry was on the edge of fundamental change: many publishers invested in electronic publishing projects of various kinds, such as e-book and e-readers. However, e-books are just the tip of the iceberg. They are part of a much deeper transformations that affected the very heart of the publishing business. These transformations are what Thompsons calls “the hidden revolution”: “this is not so much a revolution in the product but rather a revolution in the process. Regardless of what the final product looks like, the process by which it is produced is completely different” (162).

Indeed, starting in the 1980s, publishing houses, as many other industries, developed IT systems to computerize and digitize their offices, operating systems and supply chains. The inner change in the system led to “the progressive application of the digital revolution to the various stages of the production process, leading to the gradual rise of what we could call ‘the digital workflow’” (Thompson 163). Nevertheless, the implementation of the digital workflow didn’t take place effortlessly, especially in areas such as editing and printing. For instance, editors traditionally used to work on printed manuscripts rather than on screen and the shift put many of them in difficulties. Furthermore, the shift from paper to electronic files produced numerous detailed errors and inconsistencies, that, at least in the first stages of the transition, slowed and compromised this changing workflow. Meanwhile, the advent of digital printing,

especially from the 1990s on, lowered the costs of printing. Thus, many books that were previously left to die because they didn't sell enough, were brought back to life: "it is one of the ironies of the digital revolution that, so far from ushering in the death of the book, one of its most important consequences has been to give the printed book a new lease of life, allowing it to live well beyond the age at which it would have died in the pre-digital world and, indeed, rendering it potentially immortal" (Thompson 165).

Although the new boost in printing, another consequence brought by the digital revolution has been the shift in the content delivery. As Umberto Eco once stated, "the book has been thoroughly tested, and it's very hard to see how it could be improved on for its current purposes. Perhaps it will evolve in terms of components; perhaps the pages will no longer be made of paper. But it will still be the same thing" (Eco in Gradinaru 39). Indeed, one of the core characteristics of the book, shared by many other products of the creative industries, is that the content is separable from the form. However, at least at the beginning, many sceptics in the industry advocated that the print-on-paper book has certain qualities that would have been lost. Ultimately, the digitization of the content enabled the book to dissociate from its traditional codex form and gave it the flexibility to be realized in a multiplicity of other forms. Delivering content in an electronic format, rather than let it be bound and limited by its physical form, has transformed the supply chain and ultimately has turned the traditional financial model of book publishing on its head.

In this respect, the various sectors of the publishing industry were affected differently. Indeed, different publishing fields engage with different types of content and target different audiences: the digitization suited some contents better than others and some specific audiences appreciated the electronic shift while others didn't. For instance, scientific and scholarly journal publishing shifted decisively from print to online delivery between the 1990s and the 2000s. Big companies, such as Elsevier and Springer, invested heavily in the development of online platforms and fully fledged digital workflows. Ultimately, their transition to online delivery was a success for a number of reasons. Firstly, these journals were not bought by individuals but by institutional gatekeepers, librarians, who particularly valued the new opportunities for the aggregation of content offered by the online environment.

Furthermore, journal articles are usually quite short, making it easy for users to read it online or to print it out without difficulties. The end users of such journals, then, are mostly scientists and academics who were already used to work electronically. Referencing publishing profited as well from a resolute transition to online dissemination. Comprehensive encyclopaedias and dictionaries were among the first contents to migrate to online environments, mostly because of the increasing competition with electronic encyclopaedias born in the 1990s. Furthermore, the online versions offered a faster source capacity while cutting the costs of printing: encyclopaedias and dictionaries are generally large books that need to be regularly updated, thus, regularly reprinted (Thompson 172).

Although the shift to the electronic format was ultimately embraced by the publishing industry, in some areas more decisively and successfully than in others, those who were sceptic towards digitization weren't completely wrong. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, many publishers poured millions in e-books related projects following reports which forecasted the e-book as the only possible future for the publishing industry. Nevertheless, history proved these reports to be overly optimistic. In the 2000s, the sales of e-books, although not completely disastrous, were nowhere near where the enthusiastic reports predicted. What hadn't worked, then? First and foremost, it was a problem of hardware: the early electronic reading devices were expensive, small and the resolution was poor. The e-books format, then, was not made to be exchanged across different devices and, as Thompson notes, a book is a social object: "it can be shared with others, borrowed and returned, added to a collection, displayed on a shelf, cherished as something valued by its owner and taken as a sign of who they are and what matters to them, a token of their identity" (158). E-books didn't really live up to this description. Finally, the beginning of the 2010s saw a decisive increase in the e-books sales: starting from the US, soon the whole industry was positively affected. The development of better reading devices, such as the kindle, and the lowering of the prices, compared to the printing books, finally boosted the sales. However, keeping in mind Thompson's definition, e-books are still widely considered no match for printed books but rather an inferior version.

1.2 Changing Roles

In the 1980s, Robert Darnton traced how intellectual property circulated in the XVIII century France conceiving the model of the communications circuit of the book (Fig. 1, 2).

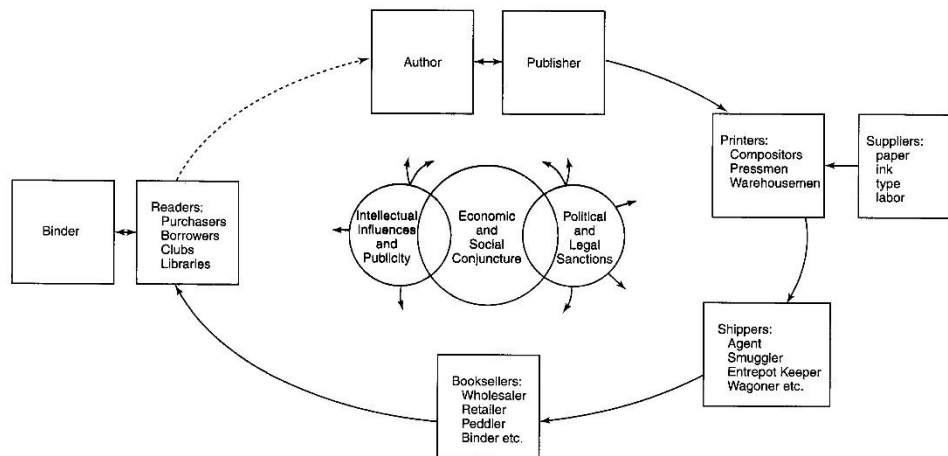
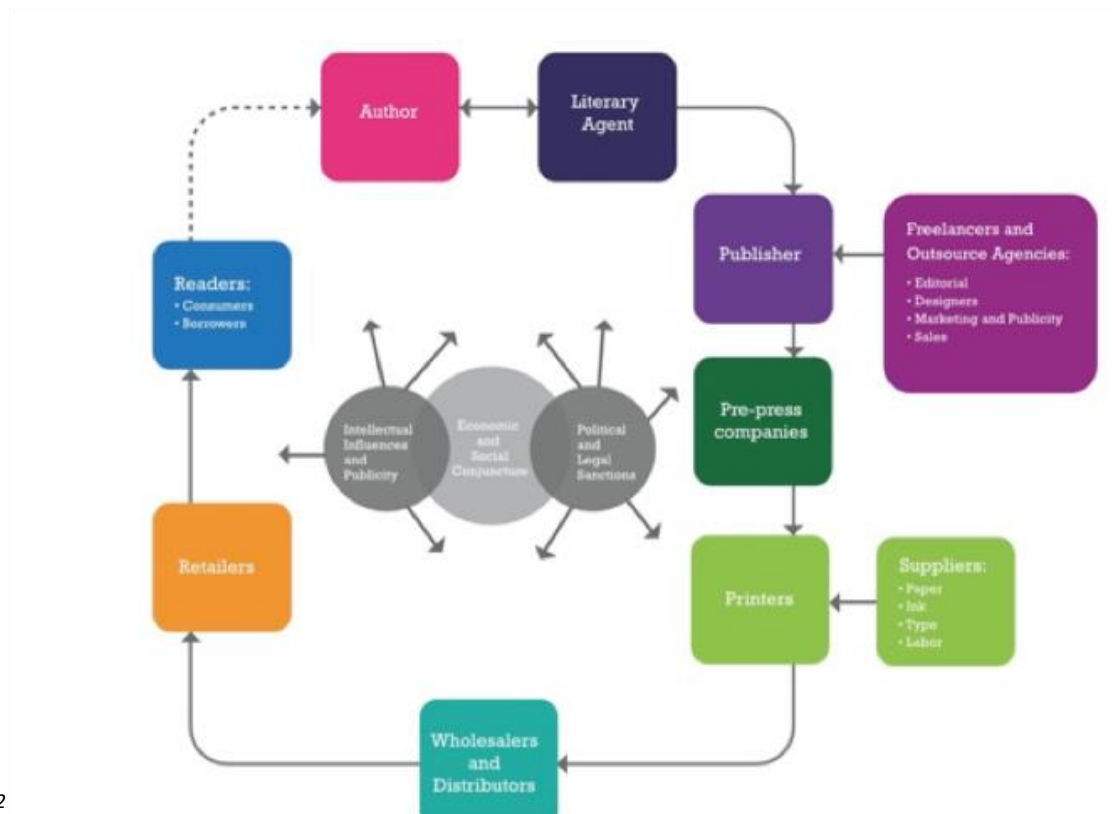


Fig. 1¹

¹ Robert Darnton's original communications circuit model.

Fig. 2²

Darnton conceived a detailed system that touches upon the roles and the businesses of, in order, the author, the publisher, the printer, the shipper/supplier, the bookseller, and, the reader. Since the invention of printing, the publishing chain has remained relatively the same and Darnton's communications circuit, although object of criticism, has been considered a valid representation of the publishing business model up to the late XX century. In their study, Squires and Murray notes how the shift from print and paper to digital ink and screen "have resulted in new business models that challenge the prevailing hierarchies of cultural gatekeeping, and have also reshaped perceptions of the book as cultural artefact" (4). Indeed, the digital revolution, outlined above, deeply affected the publishing industry producing shifts that the, by now, outdated Darnton's model fails to acknowledge. Thus, Squires' and Murray's work aims to update Darnton's communications circuit. For doing so, they designed two

² Modern adaptation of Robert Darnton's communications circuit.

revisions of his communications circuit, which correspond to the two major waves of changes the publishing industry went through since the unfolding of the digital revolution. The first revision (Fig. 3) reports the late XX century reality.

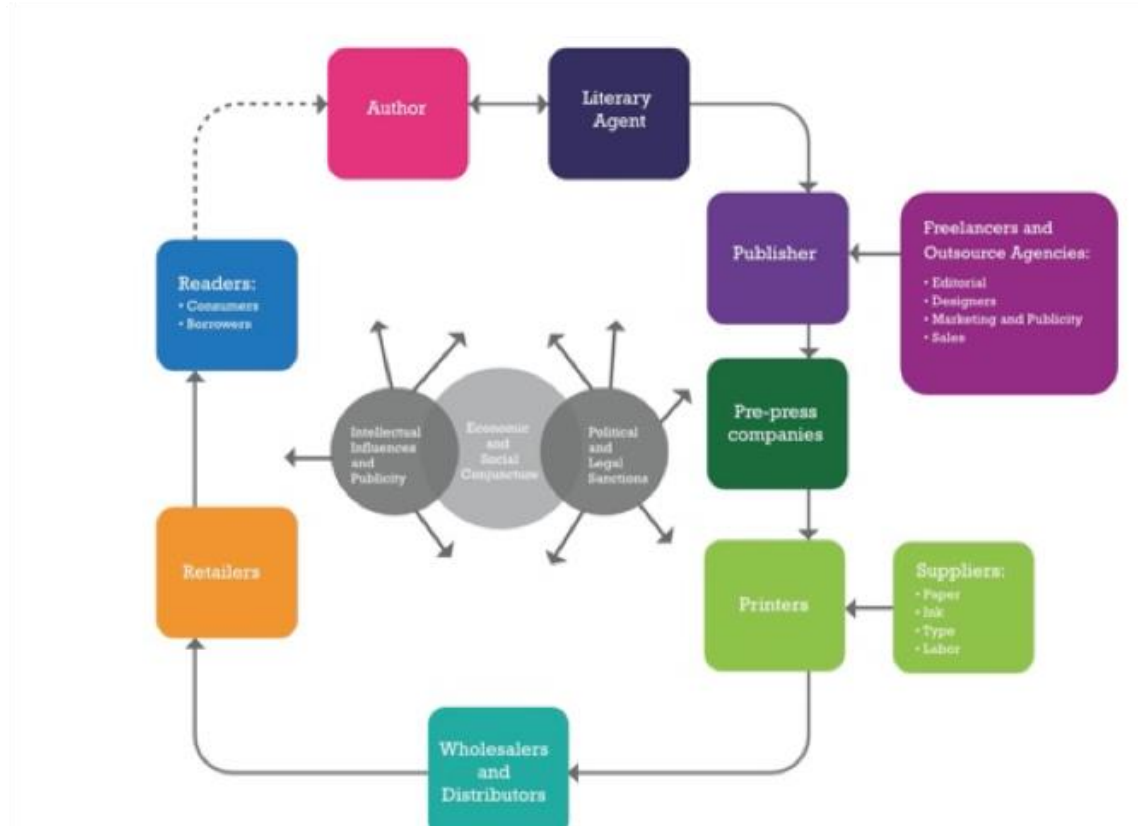


Fig. 3³

In the late twentieth-century print publishing communications circuit, Squires and Murray add a new intermediary between author and publisher: the literary agent. The literary agent acts as business manager and promoter for the author, placing himself between him and publisher. Born at the beginning of the XX century with A. P. Watt and J. B. Pinker, this new role further evolved with the conglomeration of the publishing industry but it was only in the 1990s, with characters such as Andrew Wylie, that the literary agent reached his current role in the publishing business, the role of the ‘author-promoter’. As noted by Squires and Murray, this

³ Late twentieth-century print publishing communications circuit.

upgraded role of the literary agent “arising towards the end of the twentieth century under market-oriented, conglomerate publishers, marketing their work via the media and engaged with reader via meet-the-author events in bookshops and at literary festivals is amplified by the advent of digital technologies in the twenty-first century” (Squires and Murray 5). Indeed, the XXI century, with the further evolution of digital technologies, provoked a new shift in the industry, depicted by Squires and Murray in the digital publishing communications circuit (Fig. 4).

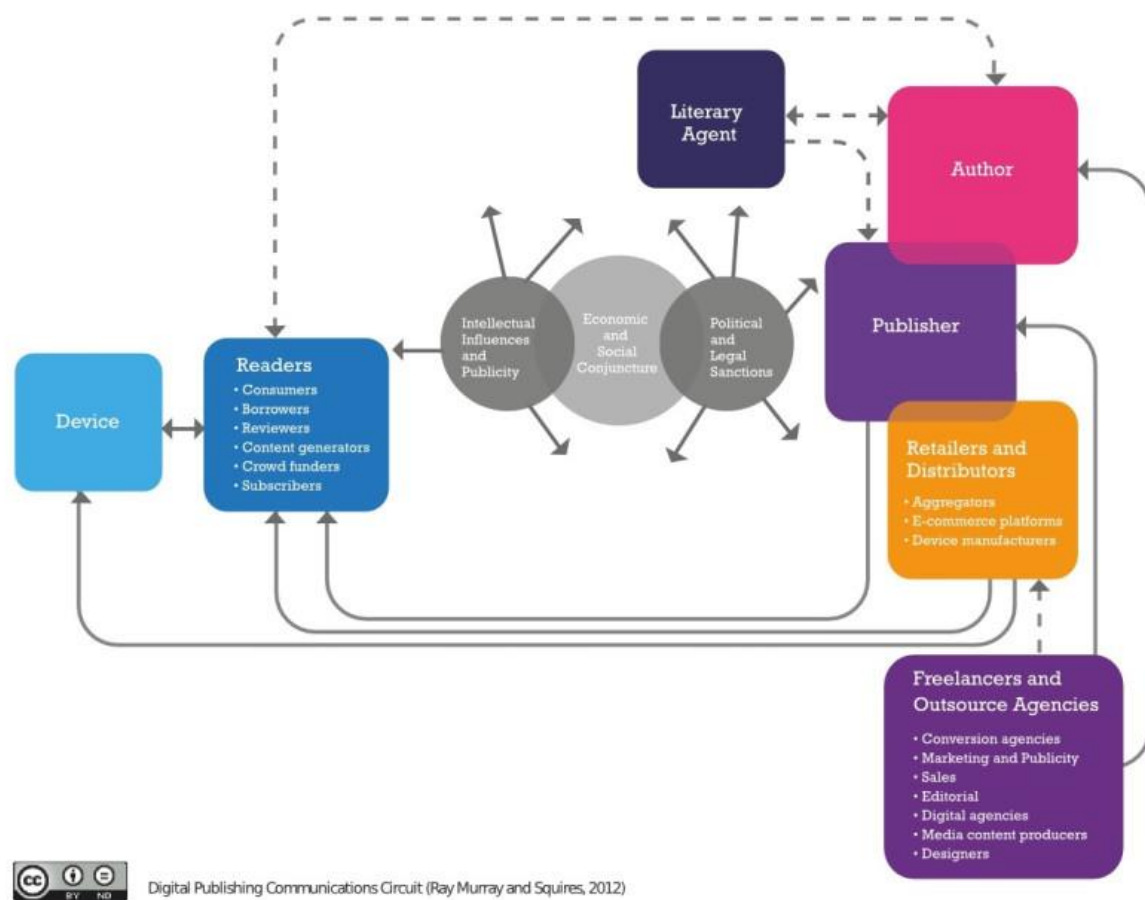


Fig. 4⁴

Already in the last decade of the XX century, the commercialization of the World Wide Web marked the beginning of the second major wave of changes brought by the digital

⁴ Squires' and Murray's digital publishing communications circuit.

revolution. The Web offered numerous opportunities to its consumers and especially the possibility for any kind of content and information to attain a worldwide reach. However, at the time, creating and sharing web content wasn't as straightforward as it is today and numerous new digital tools were designed and perfected to create web content. Among this digital tools, the development of the blog, "a type of online diary" (Golbeck 6), offered millions of people the possibility to finally create online presences. With the turn of the new millennium, while blog numbers kept growing exponentially, a new kind of digital environment started to appear: "this new breed of site allowed people to create personal pages by simply completing a form. But it went one step further: people could also find any friends who were also members of the same system and connect to them" (Golbeck 6). A manifold of this new type of web site started appearing due to the popularity of the format, which made it easier for people to put information and build relationships online. This second wave of digital technology is called Web 2.0 and "refers to then-emerging online technologies that include social media, new media crowdsourcing, and other terms for aggregating participatory audiences or otherwise utilizing the intelligence of networks" (Clarke 82). Web 2.0 also stands for the paradigm shift in people's behaviour on the web mainly caused by the introduction of social media in the everyday life. Indeed, social media "made it feasible for the first time to offer masses of Internet users access to an array of user-centric spaces they could populate with user-generated content" (Oban and Wildman 4). Social media are especially relevant in this study, as will be outlined in the next section.

1.3 The Advent of Social Media

Before Web 2.0, the internet was primarily designed for consumption. Web 2.0, and the subsequently emergence of social media, have changed the way the web is used, making the Internet more interactive. Social media haven't just "transformed the way we communicate, do politics or do shopping, encouraging the fact that readers should become writers and most of the passive viewers should become performers" (Gradinaru 37) but also produced a new shift in the market. Indeed, after the digital revolution, and as its latest development, the shift

brought by social media has been the most significant and felt across all sector, publishing industry included.

Since the current relevance of the topic, this study aims to investigate the impact social media presently have on the publishing industry. In particular, the work analyses how the introduction of social media in the business changed and expanded the traditional roles defined by Darnton in his model. Thus, the already shifting roles outlined by Squire in Murray in their study will be analysed in the light of the emergence and the diffusion of social media. Their work will, then, be used as springboard to engage with the issue as well as theoretical framework to ground this new analysis in.

Presently, social media are a difficult concept to analyse. Firstly, even in the literature, the terminology is unclear: some studies refer to social media while others to social networks specifically. Due to the large number of social media platforms this study aims to tackle, the work will employ the terminology “social media.” Secondly, the definition of social media is also blurred: the speed at which the current technologies are evolving makes it difficult to define precise boundaries. However, this study will generally refer to social media as those online environments “designed to enable users to create, interact, collaborate and share in the process of creating as well as consuming content” (Obar and Wildman 7).

In their study, Squire and Murray analyse many of the changes occurred after the turn on the century and the emergence of Web 2.0. Their second revision of Darnton’s model addresses the current emerging and changing reality and traces a new publishing ecosystem. For instance, the digital technologies have given a new boost to self-publishing due to the development of e-books, along with specific platforms offered by retailers and distributors. Ultimately, the development of digital publishing has increased exponentially the possibilities for publishing without a publisher, thus, making traditional publishers almost superfluous. As a result of the pressures, as well as the opportunities, offered by these new technologies, publishers established new kinds of relationship with each other. For example, in 2012, Penguin and Random House merged. The updated policies and services offered by this new super-company included innovative self-publishing opportunities. Indeed, as it will be examined in the

next chapter, publishers do not act as cultural gatekeepers anymore, but rather stretch their roles according to the demands of the market.

Another role that considerably changed with the implementation of digital technologies is that of the reader. In Darnton's model, the reader sits at the end of the process. In the Digital Publishing Communications Circuit designed by Squire and Murray, instead, the reader is not just the final consumer anymore. The access and use of social media changed the role of the reader from mere consumer to participant and producer: "prosumer" is the name used for this new type of interactive reader. As noted by Squires and Murray, "social media have given readers unprecedented and direct access to authors, via authors' online pages and feeds, and the interactions and conversations they allow" (19).

Indeed, the role of the reader changed alongside that of the author. In particular, social media have allowed authors to directly engage with their audience. Many famous authors have popular social media accounts with very sizeable followings. For instance, Margaret Atwood, whose twitter account counts more than 400,000 followers, uses it "not solely to discuss and promote her writing, but also to develop a community around a set of literary, political and other interests" (Squires and Murray 5). These newly emerging interactions cast readers "not solely as consumers, or as individuals who wish to share their thoughts on books, but also as part of the marketing environment of the book. Readers are thus incorporated into the digital publishing business model as co-promoters" (Squires and Murray 17).

Indeed, social media, which mainly emerged as social environments, soon developed into a business phenomenon as well. As pointed out by Martins Gancho, "marketing and business models [...] need to shift to fully adapt to the impact and demands of social media" (2) and this is what the industries that want to keep up with the market are presently doing, and the publishing industry is no exception. Thompson, who already outlined how profoundly the digital revolution impacted the publishing business, notes that marketing is one of the areas of the industry mostly affected and especially the multiple ways in which publishers seek to generate awareness of their books among readers and consumers. According to Thompson, publishers are currently increasingly investing in the use of online spaces and platforms, thus,

social media “to build direct connections with consumers and to facilitate online interactions between writers and readers” (Thompson 166).

The above mentioned case studies are just examples of how profoundly social media affected the traditional roles which constitute the publishing chain. Ultimately, this section only provides a glimpse of what will be discussed in-depth in the next chapters of this study.

2. Social Media: An Overview

In her study, Martins Gancho affirms that social media “altered the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences and therefore might be considered a paradigm shifting culture” (2). She reports the study of Li and Bernoff who categorizes six types of social media technologies based on the activity they allow users to perform.

- People creating: on platforms such as WordPress and YouTube, “people act as publishers, creating and sharing information, knowledge, opinions on other.”
- People connecting: social networks are a specific type of social media which “facilitate relationship by enabling users to add other people to their networks and giving access to each other’s profiles with personal info” (E.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).
- People reacting to each other: online environments such as Amazon and Goodreads enable users to “help each other by e.g. recommending or discouraging various items, or getting/giving help from/to other people by engaging on forums.”
- People organizing: some digital spaces help users to “classify and organise the online world; content is tagged in video and photo sharing services, blog posts, bookmarking tools” (E.g. Digg, Del.icio.us, StumbleUpon).
- Accelerating consumption: RSS and widget are digital tools that “bring content to the user rather than the user having to find” (Li and Bernoff in Martins Gancho 4).

The different services offered by these digital environments made social media increasingly relevant for what concerns brands’ communication strategies and the publishing business is no

exception. In the next sections, this work will offer an overview of the specific platforms that were regarded as the most relevant for the purposes of the intended analysis. Before doing so, this study will also offer a brief introduction of social media specific lexicon.

2.1 Vocabulary

- Post: it is the general term for something a social media user publishes online. It can be text, a link, a photo, a video, etc. Posts can have specific names based on the platform, for example, on Twitter, they are called “tweets.”

- Comment: it is a type of social interaction online. Social media users can comment on or reply to an update that someone else has posted.

- Like: it is another type of social interaction. A user can express is appreciation or agreement with something posted by another user by liking it.

- Tag: it is a label applied to online content used to make finding something easier. Users can tag places/brands/trends. Users can also “call out” other users by tagging them, using their username forerun by “@”, in posts or comments.

- Sharing: users can repost something published by another user or in general anything that has been already posted online.

2.2 WordPress

As stated earlier, Web 2.0 firstly emerged with the blog. At the beginning, having a blog required a nearly professional knowledge of the language for writing web pages (HTML), space on a server to store the web pages, and the ability to code (Golbeck). In 2003, Mike Little and Matt Mullenweg launched WordPress that, currently, “is the most popular self-hosted blogging platform in the world” (Brazell). WordPress finally gave to the mass of internet users the possibility to carve out their own personal online space without the need of any specialized knowledge, by just filling a form. WordPress software is also designed to offer internet users

the chance to reach a wide audience with their contents. Furthermore, with the emergence of the current plethora of social media, WordPress implemented the possibility to share content across platforms.

2.3 Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site born in 2004. Mark Zuckerberg and three other students designed a private space that Harvard students could use to virtually connect with each other. Due to the rapid success of the site, the new born social network was soon made available to other universities and then, to the world outside of the educational institutions (Brügger). Facebook offers its users the possibility to “share links, play games with friends, post photos and videos, share their location, and find trending news. Its usefulness goes far beyond the ability to post a simple update or maintain a profile” (Golbeck 66). The basic activities a user can perform on Facebook are adding friends, posting any kind of content, that in the case of Facebook always falls under the “status update” and it’s then visible in the user “timeline,” commenting and liking. In particular, on Facebook, liking is not only available for posts but also for specific type of pages maintained by companies, celebrities, and other public entities. By liking a page, the user ensures to be constantly updated on the new content the page shares, which, then, appears on the user’s “news feed.”

2.4 Twitter

Launched in 2006, Twitter is defined as a “microblogging” website due to its resemblance with the 90s blogs but its limit of 290 characters per post. The basic Twitter activity are posting, called tweeting, and reading what other users post. Differently from Facebook, tweets are public by default, which means that users don’t need to follow each other to see what others post. Indeed, Twitter’s “follow” is slightly different from Facebook “add friend:” while “add friend” marks a mutual relationship, the “follow” is a one-way relationship that doesn’t necessarily have to go both ways. As on Facebook, users can also comment or like content. An

important online convention, currently widely used, but that began on Twitter, is the hashtag. Hashtags works like regular tags, explained earlier, and take their name from the hash symbol that prepend them. Hashtags are usually used to indicate that a specific post is part of a trend or of an ongoing discussion. In fact, hashtags are also links and by clicking on one, users can see the other posts marked with the same hashtag.

2.5 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is “a business-oriented professional network” (Golbeck 127), specifically designed for professional interactions. LinkedIn main feature is the profile that resembles a resume and includes education, work experience, projects, publications and a list of skills that other users can endorse. The idea behind LinkedIn is to establish a professional network with the aim to help users finding a job or advancing their careers. This is why, after the profile, the connections are surely LinkedIn fundamental component and they are, as on Facebook, mutual. Liking, sharing and commenting content on LinkedIn can have a weight on you professional career: users are not interacting with friends, like on Facebook, but they are connecting with (future) colleagues and (future) managers. Indeed, the content on LinkedIn, besides the profile information, is only relevant for professional purposes, since it can give employers hints on future employees, but, due to the importance of the profile, the post don’t appear on the users’ personal page but only on the home page feed of their connections.

2.6 Instagram

Launched in 2010, Instagram “was designed to do one thing very elegantly – share photos” (Miles 5). Born as a mobile app, Instagram allows users to share photos and videos that can be accompanied by a caption and any number of hashtags. As for Twitter, the contents posted are usually public, aside from the ones shared by private accounts, and the relationships are not necessarily mutual. Born on Twitter, hashtags rapidly expanded on Instagram as well, due to

their nature of links: “hashtags are a way for someone's images to reach a greater audience than their own followers” (Golbeck 167).

Indeed, the possibility to reach a great audience and to become, then, famous on the web is an aspect of social media that developed mainly with Instagram. Users that have more than a thousand followers, thus a big audience, are referred to as influencers. Formerly, the term influencer stands for “someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave,” but, since the development of social media, the term evolved in “a person who is paid by a company to show and describe its products and services on social media, encouraging other people to buy them” (Cambridge English Dictionary). It is very common for celebrities, due to the obvious high number of followers, to be “used” as influencers by various brands but many influencers were also formerly regular users who became famous on the web due to the engaging content published.

An interesting feature of Instagram is the so called “Instastory.” Beside the regular posts, that can be published, liked, shared and commented, users can also publish temporary posts, called stories, that will remain online for twenty-four hours only. The stories are displayed on a separate feed and can only be commented privately using a feature called “direct message” that function as a chat. The direct message functionality is available on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, too.

2.7 Amazon Reviews

In July 1995, in a suburban garage in Seattle, Jeff Bezos, a computer science graduate, gave birth to what will later become one of the largest businesses in history. Formerly, Amazon.com was born as one of the first online bookselling websites. Currently, Amazon has specialized in almost every imaginable type of product, media, and service.

Although Amazon is not a social media but an online retailer, one of Amazon’s appealing features, the Amazon’s reviews, resemble the same mechanisms as online environments such as social media. With its review option, Amazon offers its users the possibility to rate the

products they purchase. Besides estimating products with a minimum of one star and a maximum of five, users can also leave a comment explaining the reason behind their stars choice. A sample from the reviews and comments is displayed on each product page and it usually features the three most positive comments and the three most negative ones. By rating a product and leaving a comment, users can influence each other choices of purchase.

2.8 Goodreads

Among social media, the Web also hosts social reading sites, online spaces in which “readers can connect with each other, record their reading and share perspective” (Squires and Murray 14). As noted by Thompson, reading has always been a social activity and social reading sites give readers one more space where to organize reading unions and groups. The most popular social reading site is Goodreads. Launched in 2007, Goodreads explains its purpose as:

a free website for book lovers [...] a large library that you can wander through and see everyone’s bookshelves, their reviews, and their ratings [...] post your own reviews and catalog what you have read, are currently reading, and plan to read in the future [...] join a discussion group, start a book club, contact an author, and even post your own writing (Goodreads in Squires and Murray 15).

Goodreads created the biggest virtual reading community of the Web. By creating a profile, readers can share their reading lists and their personal book reviews and rating which, as Amazon ranking, may influence other users reading choices.

Chapter 2

Social Media Marketing in the Publishing Industry

1. Birth and development of Social Media Marketing (SMM)

In *Merchants of Culture*, Thompson observes how, in the last three decades, the number of books published every year has dramatically increased. The continuous releases of new titles, reprints and titles printed on demand is currently causing saturation of products in the book market. In fact, books are just one type of many other media products and, presently, the common trend in the world of media and entertainment is a widespread overflowing of goods that too often exceeds the public demand. For what concerns book publishing, the reason behind this is to be found in the twentieth-century movement in global publishing towards conglomeration and increasing commercialisation and in the development of the digital revolution, which shortened and simplified industries' various stages of the production process. In this crowded marketplace, the publishers' challenge is to get their books noticed despite the huge competition: "It's become easier to publish and harder to sell – that's the paradox. Any old sod can publish a book now, but actually getting it out to the public has become much trickier" (Thompson 112). Thus, to make their books stand out and get noticed, publishers started investing in marketing and publicity with the aim to create awareness around a book and an author among potential readers and buyers. However, as claimed by Thompson, "the digital revolution has also had, and continues to have, a profound impact in the areas of sales and marketing" (165). Indeed, the development of new technologies saw the progressive decline of traditional media, such as television and print media, in favor of new and more specialized media: "the shift of marketing focus from traditional mainstream media to online channels is reflected in the reallocation of marketing resources within many publishing houses" (Thompson 128). Rapidly emerging and earning relevance among online channels, social media have soon become key channels for the marketing and promotion of books.

The increasing relevance of social media, further boosted by the development of the smartphone, enhanced social media marketing as a distinct subfield of marketing. The subsequent rise of data analytics, which enable to collect social media targeted data, then,

established social media marketing “as a dominant pillar of contemporary marketing practice” (Nolan and Dane 168). With the right analytical tools, corporations can actively follow their costumers through the Internet, learning more about their profiles, their likes and dislikes, and marketing to them accordingly (Nolan and Dane 159). Indeed, the exponential growth of social media, side by side with data analytics, has evolved into a major authority in business and industry across the global economy. These post-Web 2.0 developments marked a new era in the history of media technologies, ‘the stage of media analytics’ also referred to by marketers as ‘the age of the customer’ (Nolan and Dane 154). As the oldest media and communication industry, book publishing was deeply impacted by social media and data analytics. This development forced the publishing industry to amends its traditional charts of relations, further disrupting Darnton’s traditional model of the communications circuit of the book.

2. SMM in the Publishing Industry

In this context, the research conducted by Criswell and Canty is an interesting case study on how SM marketing campaigns work in the publishing industry. The main aim of social media marketing is “to tap into or begin conversations on the medium, and use them for commercial benefit” (Criswell and Canty 353). These conversations should, then, generate hype and word of mouth around the product being promoted encouraging people to purchase it. Concerning the publishing industry: “by letting interested readers feel engaged and involved with the publishing process of a title, they are more likely to spread their excitement to other users” (Criswell and Canty 353). Criswell and Canty’s study analyses social media activity, mainly on Facebook and Twitter, around two genre fiction titles published in the UK: *The Wind Through The Keyhole* by Stephen King, part of his Dark Tower series, published by Hodder & Stoughton and *The Song of Achilles* by Madeleine Miller, a debut author, published by Bloomsbury. Hodder & Stoughton’s strategy for King’s book was to conduct a creative social media marketing campaign that would both appeal to the loyal fans and generate excitement starting to release information about the book many months before its publication. The social media marketing campaign for *The Song of Achilles*, instead, was reactive rather than proactive and

particularly revolved around the Orange Prize that Miller eventually won. Being Miller a debut author, Bloomsbury couldn't count on an existing fan base, that is why the publisher became more active on social media only after the Orange Prize Longlist was announced. From then on, Bloomsbury created special pages and threads dedicated to the book aimed at concentrating, and thus better target, the conversation around it.

The numbers reported by Criswell and Canty show that *The Song of Achilles* gained more sales in its lifespan than *The Wind Through the Keyhole*, although, due to its existing fan base, King's book generated far more social media activity with its campaign than Miller's one. Indeed, Hodder & Stoughton could rely on an effective social media campaign because of King's already existing fame. Bloomsbury, instead, ought to made use of an external factor, the Orange Book prize, grounding their social media campaign on its reputation rather than on the one of the author, that, in Miller's case, was non-existent. Although, as noted by Nolan and Dane, no two books, are fully interchangeable in comparisons of sales and marketing campaigns because of their different content and different readers' reaction (157), this case study is particularly relevant to understand how social media marketing works in the publishing industry. Ultimately, key to social media marketing is having an established community that allows publishers to responsively share their message.

Already at the beginning of the 2000s, scholars studied how customer reviews on Amazon.com and other retailers web sites were influencing book sales. As already outlined in the previous chapter, Web 2.0's new technologies confronted the publishing industry with multiple opportunity as well as with threats. According to Nolan and Dane, while many publishing houses promptly embraced realities such as the Nielsen BookScan and sales and distribution software, at the same time, publishers were relatively slow in welcoming social media sites (155). Their study reports that most established Australian, British and American publishers joined Twitter only around 2009 encouraged by a report by Nielsen of the same year that suggested them how to better engage with readers: "fan sites or sponsored groups are, perhaps, one of the more successful examples of social network marketing that touch on the principles of interactivity and adding value – such as offers, sneak previews and co-creation of content" (Nielsen in Nolan and Dane 155). Among the panoply of social media, initially

publishers especially focused on Twitter. Its strong community building focus gave publishers the chance to build their own communities by choosing whom they followed and retweeted. Moreover, Twitter's users centred environment gave publishers full control over the message they were sharing, strengthening their traditional role as gatekeepers of literary taste. Indeed, the industry's historical view of the publisher's role sees publishers primarily as arbiters: "arbiters of taste, which generally reflected their own predilections and passions, arbiters of presentation,... arbiters of edition and price – how many copies it would be safe to print and at what price point a copy could be prudently and profitably sold" (Nolan and Dane 168).

As reported by Anne Thoring, by 2010 publishers had built strong communities on Twitter. In her study, she also notes how small and medium publishing houses were actively engaged in liking, retweeting and tweeting outside business hours, while large publishers were more prone to share naked advertisement and less likely to engage and converse with their followers. Ten years later, the SM landscape has consistently changed, as observed by Melina Hughes' study published in 2017. While SM marketing was once about building an audience responsive to the marketing messages shared by publishers, it is now more concerned with the management of said audience for the purposes of extracting and studying the data around readers' preferences. To do so, publishers share content directly related and/or linked to their 'properties' – their titles and book covers, their authors' blogs and events. As noticed by Nolan and Dane, "it is clear the conventional wisdom that Twitter was about building connections and conversations had been replaced by demands for precise writing that reflected SM's increased robustness as an instrument of e-commerce thanks to the rise of analytics" (157).

Software to analyse SM use already existed for quite some time, however, initially, the information provided wasn't so relevant for publishers as it was for retailers: "for book marketers it was harder to demonstrate sales conversions without, say, setting up online readers' clubs on their websites, and tracking readers' positive responses to book offerings, including online sales" (Nolan and Dane 168). The subsequent evolution of the book market, heavily influenced by the new technologies, such as the surge in popularity of e-books, eventually changed publishers' perspective. Publishers were, thus, forced to start acting and thinking like retailers: "understanding and engaging with readers' tastes and SM activity

became more important” (Nolan and Dane 168). Indeed, taking ownership of readers’ data is increasingly important to publishers. This led to new investments and refinements in the capability of analytics. For instance, when a reader signs up for a publisher’s newsletter, the analytic tools enable the company to respond with a customised letter “based on the customer’s known attributes” (Nolan and Dane 168), a functionality that wasn’t available before. Ultimately, this new customer-focused approach implemented through analytic data shifted the traditional role of publishers as gatekeepers of literary taste. Indeed, through the use of analytics, publishers not only nurture engagement with their readers but it also helps them build their lists (Nolan and Dane 161). In fact, the analysis of readers’ data generated from targeted social media platforms highlights emerging trends, which are, then, taken into consideration during the acquisition and selection process. Thus, publishers’ lists aren’t the mere result of publishers’ sole connoisseurship and judgment anymore but, rather, get heavily influenced by data analytics.

Ultimately, the impact social media analytics have on publishing decision-making and, thus, on publishers’ historical identity as arbiters, have further defaced Darnton’s circuit changing the balance among the major players in the publishing industry, as they have grasped the opportunities offered. Indeed, as observed by Squires and Murray, “the disintermediated digital publishing communications circuit hence becomes a battleground for control of the marketplace, both in terms of financial reward and placement in the value chain. Relationships between authors, literary agents, publishers, retailers and distributors are changing, with the roles of some being taken over by others, or dropping out of the circuit altogether” (Squires and Murray 9).

In her article “Taste and/or big data?: post-digital editorial selection,” Squires analyses the role of editors and editorial selection in publishing industry’s post-digital age. Fusing “technological advancement and cultural scepticism, digital evangelism and pragmatic acceptance of changing business models and practices” (Squires 4), the post-digital age of publishing has forced publishers to face the possibilities and challenges offered by ‘big’ data and algorithmic selection. Squires observes that, while Bhaskar claims that the practices of curators to that of selection and taste “aren’t dead in the age of algorithmic selection – they’re

augmented” (Bhaskar in Squires 6), Murray, instead, argues that “the digital literary sphere further erodes many of the traditional gatekeeper roles (“publisher,” “editor,” “critic”)” (Murray in Squires 6). To further understand how the traditional editorial functions of taste and selection operate alongside digital technologies, Squires interviewed a number of UK editors, some working within large publishing companies, some in small or independent houses. For many, their own instinct was at the core of their approach to commissioning, while others explained how such ‘gut reactions’ are learned skills developed over the years. “What was evident in the interviews” argues Squires “was that editors needed to fit their editorial taste-making and selection to their company environment. Gut reactions were, in actuality, learned business decisions, in constant negotiation with that environment” (9). When asked about how digital technologies might affect their commissioning decisions, editors discussed various ways in which these technologies were fusing with commissioning practices, “bringing together traditional approaches with digitally-enabled processes” (Squires 11). Indeed, Squires notes how “promotion via social media was an evident consideration for interviewees” (Squires 11). For instance, one interviewee mentioned Facebook and Twitter as “a good way of getting a sense of what an author is like” (Squires 11) while another stated that she would check “what’s happening on Google and [...] on Twitter” (11). The panoply of online environment, blogs and social media websites was perceived by editors as an advantage. Ultimately, although delimited by the editor’s own sense of judgement, Squires proves how, in the 2010s, social media largely influenced commissioning decisions.

Because the prices of analytical tools and software grew proportionally to the importance of SMM, large publishing houses, due to their superior resources and budget, currently have far more leverage in terms of analytics, in comparison to small publishers. As observed by Nolan and Dane, “43% of small publishers recorded a deterioration in their financial position; only one-quarter of them used data analytics to exploit their internal databases, and only 14% of them used market or consumer research reports” (16). In contrast, “in terms of staffing, 67% of large publishers said they had created new positions, including in SM book promotion and in data analysis. SM promotion was the largest change recorded across publishing organisations of all sizes, with 85% of respondents reporting they now use SM in

book marketing and promotion” (Nolan and Dane 162). To further analyse these data, in the next section, two different case studies will be presented: the first one concerns Elsevier, one of the leader companies in scientific publishing, while the second focuses on a smaller, trade publisher, Amsterdam Publishers.

2.1 Case Study: Elsevier

Between the XVI and the XVII century, the Elzeviers were an eminent Dutch publishing family. Starting in 1580 with Louis Elzevier, the Dutch family made a name for itself in academia by publishing, among others, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, Bacon, and Milton. Although the family business went bankrupt and ceased to exist in 1712, when founding modern Elsevier in 1880, Jacobus Robbers and his partners were so inspired by the historical publishers that they decided to adopt their name. Elsevier also borrowed the Elzeviers’ printer’s mark, an emblem of a man next to an elm tree wrapped in a vine, on which is inscribed the words *Non Solus*, Latin for “not alone.” Although the meaning of the symbol has been disputed, Elsevier official interpretation aligns with Erasmus’: “Like the vine which, though the most distinguished of all trees, yet needs the support of [...] other trees which bear no fruit, the powerful and the learned need the help of lesser men.” (Elsevier), which highlights the mutual relationship between authors and publishers.

Initially, Elsevier’s aim was to spread knowledge among all layers of the Dutch population, publishing educational works such as Anthony Winkler Prins’s *Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Seizing the opportunities offered by the changing times, in the first decades of the XX century, the company invested in the latest developed media and advertising, thus, increasing the competition with the other business on the market. Foreseeing the shift of academia towards the English-speaking world, Elsevier opened up to internationalisation founding offices in London and New York. The breakout of the Second World War and the subsequent Nazis occupation put on hold the company’s ambitions for a while. After the war, the company kept investing in academic publishing launching *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, Elsevier’s first scientific journal. By the 1960s, “Elsevier has become an internationally-oriented

publishing company that includes a thriving science division” (Elsevier). In the 1970s, the acquisition of the medical publisher Excerpta Medica, the only company in the world that employed a digital database, introduced computer technology to Elsevier. As observed in Chapter 1, big companies as Elsevier were among the first to implement online platforms and digital workflow. Indeed, the digitization particularly suited scientific and scholarly journals, which were Elsevier’s main publications, and the company soon started delivering articles and journals to libraries electronically. In 1991, partnering up with nine American universities, Elsevier launched The University Licensing Project (TULIP), which aim was to make published, copyrighted material available on the Internet. The project paved the way for the development of ScienceDirect. Launched in 1997, ScienceDirect is “the first online repository of electronic (scientific) books and articles” (Elsevier). ScienceDirect also opened librarians and researchers to the new technologies launching e-only subscriptions. In 2004, it is the time for Scopus, an abstract database that covers journals and books from various publishers, measuring performance on both author and publication levels, which aim is to help researchers with their work. In 2009, Scopus databased got updated with SciVal Spotlight, “a strategic analysis tool [that] enabled research administrators to make informed decisions by measuring their institution’s relative standing in terms of productivity, grants, publications, and more” (Elsevier). With the further development of digital technology, the company started focusing on analytical and decision-making tools, becoming the “technology-driven business with an audience of millions of researchers worldwide” (Elsevier) it is nowadays.

As the majority of the companies, and the publishers, Elsevier started heavily investing in data analytics in the 2010s, as proven by the many new positions opened in those years, mainly oriented towards digital marketing and data analysis (Treccani). To further analyse the disruption of Darnton’s model of the communications circuit of the book, in this section, the study will report two interviews I personally carried out while interning as Social Media Specialist at Elsevier. The interviews were conducted on Elsevier’s employees, professionals of the field, especially focusing on the new positions created by the implementation of social media in the publishing industry and not included in Darnton’s, currently outdated, model.

Hired by Elsevier in 2017, Sonia Kolasinska is a Digital Marketing Specialist, working with Elsevier's Science, Technology, and Medicine Journals. Asked about what exactly her job consists of, she explained that every journal comes with its own portfolio of articles, put together by the editors, and her main task is to drive these articles to the public by creating targeted strategies for social media. She mainly works with Twitter and LinkedIn as, she noted, the percentage of researches, the journals target audience, on Facebook is quite low. She continued describing how every article promoted gets a number of actions performed on it by readers as opening it, liking it, sharing it, etc: higher the number, higher the engagement and/or the appreciation of that specific content. These numbers are calculated through analytic tools and influence future editorial decisions on which type of articles get chosen for the portfolio and get subsequently promoted on social media. Although, personally, she feels "overwhelmed by the cacophony of voices" present on social media, she declared that, professionally, social media offer the opportunity of a much wider reach than other type of media allowing content that people would never see otherwise to reach its target audience. She also highlighted how, in the environment of academic publishing, the roles of author and reader often overlap: the same scientists and researchers sit at both ends of the circuit.

The other professional interviewed for this study is Sneha Mittal Sachdeva, Marketing Manager at Elsevier. She doesn't just handle the acquisition of journals published outside the company but she also deals with the promotion of many scientific journals directly published by Elsevier, among which *The Lancet* and the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. Sachdeva's team drives the acquisition and subsequent sale of these journals, which are meant to be bought mainly by librarians, who are often subjected to budget constraints by their own institutions. Although, in this case, the number of buyers is limited, institutions libraries make their titles available to university staff and students, and it is mainly them to advance requests on what to buy. To raise awareness towards such journals and their content, the team promotes them through ScienceDirect website, social media associated accounts and email campaigns, which target both librarians and researchers. Although, she specified in the interview, she doesn't work directly with social media, Sachdeva is the main organizer of webinars aimed to promote the journals. Indeed, Elsevier is specifically investing in these types

of online seminars lately as the analytics showed a particularly high engagement and appreciation by the audience on such content.

2.2 Case study: Amsterdam Publishers

Founded in 2012 by Liesbeth Heenk, Amsterdam Publishers is regarded as the biggest international publisher of Holocaust memoirs in Europe. Nevertheless, the trade publisher is a one-woman band, thus, a fairly small reality. Before engaging with the analysis it is worth to outline the differences between scientific and academic publishers, such as Elsevier, and trade publishers such as Amsterdam publishers.

Although the different size, Amsterdam Publishers is a small publisher whereas Elsevier is a big corporation, the main difference between the two presses lays in the audience. Scientific and academic publishing generally seeks to reach a small and specialised audience, namely the scholarly community, thus, it mainly targets university libraries and academics, less often students. Trade publishing, instead, aims at a general readership, the public as a whole, and its books are expected to sell more widely (Fletcher). The publication process is also different. Scientific presses are often open to direct submissions from authors, which, usually, get peer-reviewed and, then, examined by experts in the field. Trade presses don't usually perform peer-reviewing but carry out more substantial editorial work on manuscripts. They also seldom accept direct submissions and the major ones expect authors to be represented by a literary agent (Fletcher). However, being Amsterdam Publishers a small publisher, it does accept direct submissions. Fundamentally, direct submissions mean more editorial work is needed. Since Amsterdam Publishers is a one-woman band, Liesbeth Heenk often relies on interns and freelancers to help her in the various steps of the publications process. I personally served at Amsterdam Publishers as Editorial Assistant, thus, the subsequent analysis comes from my personal experience interning there.

Differently from Elsevier, Amsterdam Publishers size and budget are smaller, thus, the trade publisher doesn't have access to the same analytical tools. However, since the utmost importance of analytics in the current marketing landscape, the majority of social media

platforms started offering some kind of depthless analysis to companies' accounts. Amsterdam Publishers mainly makes use of those and, furthermore, heavily relies on the Amazon reviews section: "We are especially proud that many of Amsterdam Publishers' books reach the Amazon bestseller lists. Getting the meta data right and effective book promotion are key" (Amsterdam Publishers). Indeed, for what concerns marketing, trade publishers and academic publishers also differ. Academic and scientific book marketing tends to focus on reaching a niche of scholarly individuals, thus, it needs more targeted and attentive marketing and social media campaigns, whereas, trade book marketing mainly involves getting the book noticed by the general public through articles, reviews, posts and literary festivals (Fletcher). Indeed, Amsterdam Publishers attends the Frankfurt Bookfair and the London Book fair, the two most important bookfairs in the world, bringing along manuscripts of their bestselling authors to negotiate foreign rights. Furthermore, Amsterdam Publishers also converge its effort in building global coverage: "Your books will have maximum visibility. They will be available in 245 countries around the world. Because we are based in Europe (Holland), we also know the continental European market inside out" (Amsterdam Publishers). This reach for visibility is mainly carried out through social media. Indeed, interns and freelancers are asked to work on blurbs, articles and reviews that, then, get shared on Amsterdam Publishers accounts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn.

Amsterdam Publishers also offer assisted self-publishing services. As already outline in Chapter 1, the inclusion of self-publishing opportunities in publishers' services is a result of the pressure and new opportunities offered by the digital revolution. Self-publishing, even when carried out through a publishing company, strips the publisher of his traditional role as cultural gatekeeper. This is, indeed, a further example of how publishers renounced to their historical identity and stretched their roles according to the demands of the market. It is also further proof of the disruption of Darnton's communication circuit operated by the implementation of new technologies.

Chapter 3

The Process of Promotion and Production

As discussed in the previous chapter, the growing deployment of digital technology in the publishing industry and, particularly, the rise of machine-driven curation caused a shift in the role of publishers who, by now, are not anymore the sole arbiters of literary taste. This shift has been, then, endorsed by the democratization of the web operated by social media. Indeed, the surge of participatory culture subsequent to the rise of Web 2.0, and, then, further enhanced by social media, blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers, between professionals and amateurs. This led to a digital democratization of traditionally literary practices such as curation and content creation, which, eventually, turned the process of promotion and production on its head. The lowering barrier of participation into such processes made the traditional roles constituting the publishing chain more fluid since some of the agents started taking over aspects and functions of others. Ultimately, the figures most impacted by this democratization are the ones that sit at the opposite ends of Darnton's communications circuit: author and reader. This chapter will, thus, investigate, the new roles take up by authors and readers, now active participants in the process of co-promotion and co-production of literature.

1. Co-promotion

1.1 The Celebrity Author

The concept of celebrity author has been firstly theorised in the '70s by Cawelti. He sets the rise of the celebrity author in the second half of the XIX century as a consequence of various cultural changes, namely the increasing literacy and the greater cheapness of books and periodicals through new printing technologies; meanwhile, the rise of a new popular culture greatly increased the size and diversity of the writer's public (165). These changes generated a need for new forms of mediation between the writer and his fast-growing public. Eventually, the media catered for this need, mediating so much communication that, by then, as Cawelti observes, "the only way in which the general public can be present to a writer, and he, as

person, to them, is through the mechanism of celebrity” (165). By the end of the XIX century, the process of literary celebrity became an established business carried out through tours, interviews, reviews, gossip, etc. further enhanced through the development of new media: “the development of film, radio, and television has made it possible for the writer to reach an even larger public than he could in the nineteenth century” (Cawelti 170). During the XX century, two main factors boosted the role of the celebrity author considerably. On the one hand, the development of the adaptation industry, and particularly Hollywood, has given further visibility to authors, effectively hastening the whole process of celebrity: “a writer whose work is adapted into a popular film or television program can become an international celebrity overnight” (Cawelti 170). On the other hand, towards the end of the XX century, the surge of conglomerate, market-oriented, publishers forged the role of the author-promoter, who marketed his work via the media, bookshops events, and literary festivals. This role has, then, further evolved with the advent of new digital technologies in the XXI century. Among these technologies, social media specially granted authors the possibility “to communicate directly and immediately with their readers, solidifying the dotted line drawn from reader to author in the communications circuit” (Squires and Murray 5). Currently, the majority of the leading authors have popular accounts with very sizeable followings on social media, especially on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

1.1.1 Case Study: J. K. Rowling

An interesting case study for what concerns the impact of the digital revolution, and in particular the development of social media, on authors celebrity is J. K. Rowling and the most acclaimed *Harry Potter* saga. *Harry Potter*’s narrative unprecedented success is rooted in three main facets: its contemporary development of new digital technologies, the subsequent shift in the process of adaptation and the rise of Rowling as a celebrity author.

As observed by Alberti and Miller, “the Harry Potter narrative took place as digital technologies and the Internet were radically redefining all aspects of the media landscape, from the production and distribution of visual narratives to the very relationship between

readers/viewers and cultural texts” (1). Indeed, as seen in the previous chapters, the rise of Web 2.0 marked the development of “radically participatory cultures, with that participation ranging from comments sections to blogs to mashups, fan fiction, and fan videos” (Alberti and Miller 7). As Web 2.0 increasingly blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers, “the process of ‘adaptation’ began to include fan-based texts such as fan fiction and fan sites, mash-ups, GIFs, and other forms of ‘prosumer’ activity” (Alberti and Miller 1). In fact, it was the first time the readers/consumers opinions were listened to, due to their unprecedented amplification through the newly developed digital technologies, specifically social media.

Key to this unprecedented shift in the process of adaptation has been J. K. Rowling, who “has done much to secure and keep control of fan culture” (Alberti and Miller 9) through her online presence. As observed by Alberti and Miller, “social media and fan sites can bring attention and success to a series or an author like Rowling” (8), and, indeed, Rowling particularly takes advantage of social media to “engage fans and to add details to the Harry Potter canon” (Alberti and Miller 8). Beside the encyclopaedia-like website *Pottermore*, Rowling especially engages with fans on Twitter, leaking new and juicy information not included in the books/films through Tweets, keeping up the interest of her fan-base. Although many of these facts had never been mentioned before, nor in the books, nor in the adaptations, “once Rowling stated it, it became canon” (Alberti and Miller 8). For instance, when many fans boycotted the casting of a black actress for the role of Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child*, Rowling posted the tweet: “Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified. Rowling loves black Hermione” (Alberti and Miller 8). Ultimately, through her engaging social media presence, Rowling secured the *Harry Potter* narrative ongoing success and, at the same time, her own fame.

Yet, the *Harry Potter* narrative unprecedented success has been both a blessing and a curse. As a book mainly targeting young readers, but also widely appreciated by adults, critics have been wondering whether a successful children book can be measured against critically acclaimed books for adults. Many believe that failing to consider that *Harry Potter* is first and foremost a children’s book would constitute “the infantilization of adult culture, the loss of a sense of what a classic really is” (Whited 7). However, there are also critics who noted that

critique is often biased by the stereotype that success and literary value are mutually exclusive. Ultimately, *Harry Potter* unprecedented success, infinitely amplified by the digital technologies and by its celebrity author social media presence, severely compromised its perceived literary value.

1.2 Influencers

Besides celebrity authors, other celebrities started using social media to further engage with their audiences. Interested in enhancing the readership or just moved by marketing opportunities, many celebrities have taken up the role of literary tastemakers and cultural intermediaries, using their personal accounts to promote specific titles and new releases. Reese Witherspoon's Instagram book club, and Emma Watson's intersectional feminist book club Our Shared Shelf on Goodreads (Bronwen) are just examples of this phenomenon.

However, celebrities are not the only ones taking advantage of social media affordances. The digital revolution and, subsequently, social media's democratization of the web, offered potentially everyone the digital possibility to become literary tastemakers and cultural intermediaries turning readers from mere consumers into literary co-promoters (Squires and Murray 17). In particular, social media platforms had long been recognized for their power to create 'microcelebrities' known with the name of influencers. Formerly, the term influencer stand for "someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave," but, since the development of social media, the term also includes the definition of "a person who is paid by a company to show and describe its products and services on social media, encouraging other people to buy them" (*Cambridge English Dictionary*). Born as regular users, influencers build a reputation and, thus, a substantial audience, for the especially engaging content they nurture, which, often, result in a personal cult. Following an effective and widespread SM marketing strategy, brands lean on influencers to promote their products taking advantage of their wide and affectionate audiences. Usually, influencers build their online presence for their knowledge and passion on specific topics such as food, travels and, of course books. As digitally self-proclaimed literary tastemakers and cultural intermediaries, the majority

of publishers court and take advantage specifically of book bloggers and influencers to promote literature.

An example of this phenomenon is the book blogger Dove Gray Reader. Far from being a professional literary critic, Dove Gray Reader still considers herself as “a reader connected to other readers” (Squires and Murray 15) although the reach and success of her blog since its establishment in 2006 turned her into much more than a regular reader. Indeed, the impact she has made on social media, made her “an influential and alternative voice, courted by publishers and making in-person appearances at literary events” (Squires and Murray 15).

On Instagram, instead, the ongoing democratization of the process of curation has a specific name: bookstagram. It takes the name from the hashtag of the same name, which is used by an increasing number of users to label their book related content, to express and explore their interest in books. Over twenty million posts are labelled with the #bookstagram hashtag making the bookstagram a full-fledged phenomenon. Since its growing popularity, the bookstagram is often referred to as “the community of book-loving users on Instagram” and the place where “Instagram’s bookworms congregate” (Hammoudi 1). The bookstagram community includes readers, booksellers, and book influencers whose mission is mainly to re-engage people with literature (Bronwen). However, the growing popularity of the bookstagram and of the bookstagrammers didn’t pass unnoticed. Not just authors, but also publishers, started using the power of the hashtag and of the community built around it for commercial proposes. Indeed, it is currently very common among publishers to send bloggers and influencers copies of new releases in order to promote the titles and encourage the discussion around it.

Ultimately, thanks to social media, readers are now co-promoters, working “alongside authors, publishers and retailers in the social media promotion of books, by sharing, retweeting and reposting information” (Squires and Murray 17). Indeed, co-promoters “play an important role in the circulation of books, but moreover they are indicative of the reshaping of roles that occur when various agents in the communications circuit takeover aspects of the functions of others” (Squires and Murray 16).

2. Co-production

2.1 Electronic Literature

The democratization enhanced by social media didn't just lower the barriers of promotion and curation, but also the ones of creation. The new digital trend of readers creating content granted them the name of 'prosumers.' Moreover, this trend of social media user-based content didn't stop with readers. Also authors and would-be authors started making use of the affordances of social media to create content, taking part as prosumers as well in the process of co-production of literature.

As stated by Bronwen, "writers have always been fascinated by the emergence and impact of new technologies" (24). In fact, from the 1980s onwards, the developing digital revolution increased the affordability and usability of computers leading to the rise of what Rettberg defines electronic literature: "writing created by or on computers which responds to the affordances of new technologies and is characterised by a sense of play and wonder" (Rettberg in Bronwen 24). Rettberg claims that electronic literature former, and major, influences are postmodernism, Dadaism and surrealism. Indeed, one of the earlier products of electronic literature has been the hypertext, "a branching and responding text read on a computer screen" (Barnet in Bronwen 27), clearly inspired by Genette's theory of categorization of textual transcendence and by the literary experiments of post-modernist and surrealist authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and the Oulipo group.

By the end of the XX century, digital technologies were increasingly becoming a necessity rather than a curiosity. This shift transformed the earlier scepticism towards the digital revolution into a growing sense of inevitability towards the role of technology in the production and consumption of literature. The turn of the century was, then, marked by the rise of Web 2.0, extensively treated in Chapter 1. Besides promoting greater openness and access of both consumption and production of online environments and content, Web 2.0 was not just a change in the possible uses of the web, but also marked a profound cultural shift. Indeed, as reported by Bronwen, "as the computer has transitioned from a device capable of

transmitting only numbers and text to one able to carry multiple modalities, it has increasingly brought into question the notion of ‘literariness’” (Hammond in Bronwen 30).

From 2005 on, then, Bronwen posit the emergence of the so called “third generation” of electronic literature, which mainly relies on existing platforms with easy access and possibility of subscription. It is no coincidence that 2005 also corresponds to the year social media platforms were launched and/or made available to the public. Democratization, specific feature of social media, gave birth to the figure of the prosumer, who, getting access to the creation process, started acting as co-producer in the literary social media-based landscape. One of the most evident and enduring examples of this is fanfiction. Formerly born as a subculture of most devoted fans who kept creating stories based on their favourite characters and plot lines long after the ‘official’ story had ended, fanfiction has evolved in vast fan sites and communities online which rise questions regarding authorship and originality (Bronwen). Indeed, the growing popularity of fanfiction is grounded in the power of aggregating participatory audiences, specific of social media, which offered the third generation of electronic literature authors a ready-made mass audience.

Among the many social media platforms, Bronwen notes how Twitter has received most attention in terms of literary outputs. Particularly debated was, for instance, David Mitchell use of Twitter, who committed to the platform to publish a story in 2014. The story, composed by 300 tweets, was meant to promote his book *The Bone Clock* (2014) giving readers a ‘digital’ taste of it. Inspired by the Oulipo group and its explorations of the potentiality of literary writing, Mitchell experiment remarkably publicise his novel. However, the Twitter story *per se* was thoroughly criticised mainly due to Mitchell’s lack of engagement and acknowledgment of the affordances of the Twitter platform. Although Bronwen remarks how “the fact that novelists are engaging with social media in this way points to its significance culturally” (50), Mitchell’s story was also called out by critics regarding the ongoing debate surrounding works which social media presence is somewhat considered to compromise their literary value.

2.1 Case Study: Rupi Kaur

An interesting outcome of prosumer activity is ‘Instapoetry,’ a new social-media-centred literary genre. This poetry sub-genre is defined “as short, as few words as possible, fitting within the standard Instagram format of a picture, and with fonts of the words and drawings alongside the words carefully selected to be an aesthetic extension of the poem” (Assink 11). Besides the accessible and appealing format, ‘Instapoetry’ is mostly appreciated due to the recognizable and relatable themes it treats, such as (self) love, loss, feminism, empowerment and identity exploration. Its authors, the ‘instapoets,’ ground their success in tackling and, thus, opening up on issues that are normally swiped under the carpet on the web, namely gender inequality, self-harm and rape. Instagram, which is recognized to “play a dominant rule in influencing perceived social norms” (Assink 9) has been the perfect stage for this new kind of poetry that seek to raise awareness through simplicity, gaining instant understanding from readers. Both ‘Instapoetry’'s authors and audiences are mainly millennials, the latest generation of young adults, who are particularly active and interested in such topics, as well as Instagram’s majority stake.

With her 4 million (July 2020) followers and two published poetry collections, the Indian-born Canadian poet, illustrator and performer Rupi Kaur is currently the most famous ‘Instapoet.’ Her poems, among the most shared posts on the web, are characterized by free verses written exclusively in lower case and without punctuation, always paired with simple line drawings. Although her collections, *milk and honey* (2014) and *the sun and her flowers* (2017), outsold most of its contemporary poetry, Rupi Kaur’s work has largely been ignored by the academic spheres and the debate surrounding her poetry has mainly taken place on social media and on newspapers and magazines. Predominantly, Kaur’s work has faced harsh criticism. One of the most debated critics is the article published by the poet Rebecca Watts on *PN Review* in 2018. Watts fiercely attacked ‘Instapoetry’ describing it as “a departure from everything that makes poetry artful, the complete rejection of complexity, subtlety, eloquence and the aspiration to do anything well” (Watts in McQuillian 14). In her article, Watts compares the growing popularity of the ‘Instapoetry’ phenomenon to the rise of consensus achieved by the populist politics of Donald Trump (Bronwen). However, rather than associating social media and the content shared on the platform with a generalised “dumbing effect,” as observed by

Bronwen, Watts “[doesn’t] show any interest in attempting to understand how they engage with their audiences and with the affordances of social media, but instead focuses purely on ‘craft’ in terms of their print outputs” (90). Watts article caused an abrupt split in the poetry world and was soon responded to with a prompt response supported by many eminent personalities such as Judith Palmer, Director of the Poetry Society, and Eleanor Spencer-Regan from Durham University. Watts, and her supporters, were hereby accused of mislabelling ‘Instapoetry,’ forcing it into an unnecessary comparison with the standards and conventions of print. ‘Poetry native of Instagram,’ they argue, should instead be “celebrated for its diversity and for providing a similar ‘gateway’ for younger readers as the Harry Potter novels” (Bronwen 90). Indeed, the arguments used to defend ‘Instapoetry’ are very similar to the ones often used to defend fanfiction, which is also at the centre of the debate regarding the literary value of works native of the web.

Ultimately, the case studies investigated above sought to further prove the disruption and disintermediation of Darnton’s publishing chain operated by the implementation of social media in the publishing landscape. Indeed, the democratization brought by social media lowered the barriers of participation into the process of curation and content creation, eventually affecting the promotion and production of literature. Readers and authors sized the opportunity expanding their roles into those of co-promoters and co-producers, or prosumers. Indeed, the role of the already existing figure of the celebrity author further evolved acquiring a digital dimension as self-promoter, expanding and securing his success outside the targeted promotional campaigns pushed forward by the publishing presses. Meanwhile, readers/users take advantage of the affordances of social media platforms to digitally self-proclaim literary tastemakers and cultural intermediaries. Their role has been recognized by the publishing environment for their powerful aid in the process of literary promotion. For what concern the lowered barrier into content production, the chapter investigated the rise of prosumer activity, which involves readers and authors alike. Eventually, the development of literary genres specific of social media as ‘Instapoetry’ split the public opinion. While the publishing industry favourably welcomed these new co-producers, the academic spheres still struggle to recognise the implications of the democratisation process operated by social media.

Conclusion

In this study I investigated the significant impact social media currently have on the publishing industry. In particular, I analysed how the introduction and employment of social media in the publishing environment changed and expanded the publishing chain's traditional roles defined by Robert Darnton's model of communications circuit of the book. Social media are the latest development of the digital revolution, a series of new technologies and digital innovations, which started convulsing the publishing industry in the 1960s. Already Squires and Murray analysed the impact of the new digital technologies on publishing redrawing the relationships of Darnton's model and the consequent impact on the journeys of books. In this thesis I particularly focused on the shift occurred to the roles of publisher, reader and author, predominantly caused by social media.

The rise of data analytics, which enable to collect social media targeted data, established social media marketing as the backbone of contemporary marketing practice. At the beginning, publishers' SM marketing strategy was to build engaged communities online. However, with the subsequent evolution of the book market, SMM has become more than an opportunity to communicate and engage with readers. Indeed, publishers became increasingly interested in taking ownership of audiences' data for extracting and studying readers' preferences. As showed by Nolan and Dane study, the analytic data collected, then, started influencing the acquisition and selection process. My argument is that the implementation of SM marketing and data analysis in the publishing industry shifted the traditional role of publishers as arbiters of literary taste as they were represented in Darnton's circuit. To further analyse the disruption of Darnton's model, I also proposed two case studies. Presenting Elsevier as first case study, I investigated how the turn to SM marketing especially favoured large publishers rather than small ones. Due to their superior resources, large publishers heavily invested in SM marketing also opening new positions. The interviews I conducted on Digital Marketing Specialist Sonia Kolasinska and Marketing Manager Sneha Mittal Sachdeva, both Elsevier employees, further demonstrate the significant impact SM marketing has on the publishing industry, and particularly, on large organizations. The report of my own experience as Editorial Assistant at the trade publisher Amsterdam Publishers, helped me investigate how SM marketing affects smaller organizations.

The rise of machine-driven curation has been mainly endorsed by the democratization of the web operated by social media. Indeed, the surge of participatory culture enhanced by social media blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers, between professionals and amateurs. I, thus, argued that the digital democratization of traditionally literary practices such as curation and content creation eventually turned the process of promotion and production on its head. My claim is that the lowering barrier of participation into such processes reshaped the traditional roles of the figures that sit at the opposite ends of Darnton's communications circuit: author and reader. To further explore the new roles taken up by authors and readers as active co-promoters and co-producers of literature, I, then, investigated the experiences of J. K. Rowling and Rupi Kaur as case studies. As celebrity author, J. K. Rowling has been doing much to promote *Harry Potter* fun culture, mainly through social media. Adding details to the *Harry Potter* canon on her Twitter account, she keeps engaging with her fans securing the *Harry Potter* narrative ongoing success and, at the same time, her own fame. The lowered barrier into content production gave space to the so called prosumer activity. 'Instapoetry' is an interesting outcome of this new

practice. As the most famous 'instapoet', Rupi Kaur uses the affordances of social media platforms as Instagram to take part in the co-production of literature.

To conclude, it is unmistakable that social media have a serious impact on the publishing industry. However, the shifts brought by the implementation of social media into the publishing environment are more complex than it might seem at first glance. The digital revolution already caused many changes, which, as noted by Thompson, involved operating systems, content management and digital workflow, content delivery, sales and marketing. Nevertheless, social media have been the force which eventually compelled the publishing industry to amend its traditional charts of relations. While we can be significantly sure that the publishing circuit will never go back to Darnton's model, social media are still an ever-changing reality. There is much more to say about them than the little investigated in this study. As a non-fixed phenomenon, it is really hard to predict what social media will lead to next, but, as their influence is affecting all levels of being, it is important to keep trying to define and understand them. I, thus, hope that in the future many more studies will be carried out on social media and their impact to see if they will further deface Darnton's model. In particular, it would be especially interesting to design a new model, which would take into consideration social media current, and maybe future, influence on the publishing chain.

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