

2019-09

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/14559>

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10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.02.015

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

Elsevier

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## **The impact of digital books on marketing communications**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The digital and knowledge economy have brought about a world in which wealth and power increasingly depend on information technology, intellectual property and control over information flows (Simmons, 2008; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014; Rose 2018). In one sense, such an economy provides an extension of democratisation through the spread of ideas and resources; whilst in another context it contributes to a ‘digital divide’ (DD) between those with wide access to digital products and knowledge and individuals who do not (Wijetuga, 2014; Epstein, et al., 2011; Li et al 2013). Brake (2014) argued that differences in the amount and diversity of use and in the degree of creative use are bigger than differences in physical access and in skills.

Determining how notions of digital books influence digital divide and decision-making for organisations is problematic, not least because it is an evolving amorphous concept, rooted in consumer and organisational awareness in relation to levels of technological adoption. The concept represents a complex phenomenon that is ubiquitously elusive and frustratingly prone to misconception. We use a phenomenological hermeneutical approach to comprehend freedom of choice and how individual decisions have ramifications for society in general. What is important is our presence within the world and environment. Phenomenological hermeneutics is not about abstract supra-individuals or transcendental egos; rather, it involves understanding people in actual situations. We examine how

individual choices about IT products impact on social conceptualisations concerning the utilisation of technological innovations.

Rapid diffusion of information and communication technologies in recent years has added an important element to the issue of a DD, particularly the adoption of digital reading devices. In this context, individuals have defined the DD in varied ways, but with no conceptual framework to link different types of computer-mediated environments, or to indicate their interaction in influencing effective online marketing strategy. The potential of new media tools, used in an appropriate combination, and a means to manage each of these, can create the basis of a sound marketing strategy that integrates offline and online modalities. To identify the factors affecting the adoption and use of digital books on Korean middle schools, Joo, Park and Shin (2017) found that the more expectations of digital textbooks are satisfied, the more likely students are to perceive enjoyment and usefulness of digital textbooks. Despite this recent work, important gaps still remain in digital books research, particularly the impact of digital books on digital divide.

No study of computer-mediated marketing environments (CMMEs) and its effect on marketing can begin without an explanation of what the DD implies. The term appears to defy a close description and definition. This paper aims to contribute to extant knowledge on the DD; particularly its impact on the bookstore industry, and to reinforce academic behaviour related to issues wider than publication, e.g. understanding consumer behaviour in the development of innovative business models in the industry, particularly marketing communications programmes to target those segments that are digitally disaffected.

A two-stage research design is presented to solicit perspectives regarding online marketing challenges that confront marketing executives in the bookstore industry. The study is inductive, and themes emerge that are developed into a conceptual model. Indeed, the methodology is identified and discussed and the theoretical model developed through empirical data. It is recognised that a purely

inductive approach is difficult so we discuss pre-understanding through the phenomenological aspect of the methodology and this directly relates with the approach in terms of ‘purposeful sampling’.

Initially, we overview discussions and debates in the literature regarding the digital age and highlight transformations that this is initiating. In this way we comprehend pre-existing notions involved in this area and develop projections taken from the research area along with the rationale for developing the research programme and questions that have been formulated.

## **DIGITAL BOOKS: CONTEXTUALISING A DIGITAL DIVIDE**

This research is informed by ongoing debate regarding the digital divide and rationale for purchase (or non-purchase) of digital items. Literature relevant to purchasing behaviour lacks understanding of individual motivation when purchasing digital books. Even though companies provide an innovative and profitable business model centred on sales of digital items, the reason that a divide exists in relation to digital books remains unclear (Kim, et al., 2011; Samuelson, 2002). Relationships between individual perspectives and wider social outcomes is not apparent. Customer value propositions in digital environments have been approached from different directions, but we concentrate on value propositions between value-in-exchange and value-in-use dimensions. In accordance with the view of Holbrook (2006), Kowalkowski, (2011) provided pragmatic explication that treats ‘value-in-use’ as a higher-order concept than ‘value-in-exchange’ whilst acknowledging that value-in-use deserves equal emphasis in any practical definition of the value proposition. He proposed two bifurcated value creations: value-in-exchange (the negotiated evaluation that buyers and sellers offer and receive among themselves) and value-in-use as higher order value propositions. He urged for deeper understanding of value-in-use to help firms to craft competitive value propositions, but offers few suggestions on how this might be accomplished. It is demanding to pursue a true service strategy with a comprehensive focus on value-in-use, on account of time, cost and effort implications, and possibly of conflicting

business logic, customer strategies and buyer behaviour. He urged practitioners and researchers to start grappling with customer-provider dyad in networked environments.

Jolibert, et al. (2012) posited that stakeholders evaluate the offer of a potential exchange partner by considering its fairness and equity. They contend that fairness of an offer is assessed by comparing benefits to be gained with sacrifices to be made.

The development of communication media creates new forms of interaction giving rise to new kinds of action. The most general characteristic is that they are oriented or responsive towards actions, or persons, who are situated in contexts that are spatially or temporally remote. In other words, the development of communication media has given rise to new kinds of accomplishment at a distance that has become important in the modern world. He goes on to suggest that the growing significance of communication media not only creates means of communication, but creates 'action at a distance' which may alienate some individuals' clear experience of the impact in the consumption process. The contextual nature of value implies that it is determined by the customer. It is important to recognise that the nature of value is eminently transient and contextually bound, which is determined by the customer. The development of sustainable competitive advantage depends on understanding a number of abstract dimensions of quality in the interactive digital marketplace. Discussing customer intention to purchase digital items in social networking sites (SNCs), Kim, et al. (2011, p.230) defined functional quality (an aspect of functional value) as the perceived overall excellence and expected performance of a digital item which can take on different qualities across SNCs. The quality of a graphical digital item may include its features (e.g. motion of digital avatars). Essentially, the content and means of digital items differ from the quality of tangible products, which is generally measured in terms of its performance. Printing, radio, television, telephone, computer networks and other technologies have altered the nature of social interaction in ways that cannot be reduced to the content of messages.

Technological advances introduce new ways of communicating (Renko and Druzijanic, 2014). In terms of digital consumption, the commercialisation and burgeoning spread of digital books as means of communication creates digitally disaffected consumers. It can also isolate literate adults from spheres of knowledge acquisition simply because they find the means inaccessible or it fails to meet up to expectations.

## **DIGITAL DIVIDE AND PERIODISATION**

The terms ‘digital age’ and ‘information age’ encompass ideas from the use of computers to widespread adoption of the internet and other technology. It refers to the transfer of the economy from the industrial age, brought on by the Industrial Revolution, to a digital economy, where creating value concerns information and communication. Unlike the industrial age and other preceding definitions of periods in history, the digital age as an entity is the epitome of the expressions of the current day, and its meaning is constantly changing and being updated as more information is discovered and shared. This digital economy, referred to as the ‘knowledge economy’, has brought about a world which increasingly depends on information technology, intellectual property, and control over information flows. Such an economy provides further democratisation in the spread of ideas and resources and contributes to a divide between those with wide access to the internet and those without. It can refer to differences in the scale of broadband penetration by a country or socio-economic differences within single sub-cultures such as university students (Kleinman, 2000). The digital divide can be extended to refer to differences between those born into familiarity with digital technology and those who have only been exposed to it as an adult.

The digital age is also defined by how information is shared. Rather than older means of transfer through personal communication or large-scale distribution through radio and television, the predominant mode of spreading information is not through personal

conversation, but through computer-based means. Wei (2012 p.304) claimed: 'the digital divide should encompass more dimensions than the simplified measure of physical access' and proposes the concept of multimodal internet use as an indicator of digital inequalities. Media and marketing attention has been focused on the concept of the digital native, defined as a person who was born after the advent of the internet and the web and this age segment develops a natural aptitude and high skill levels in relation to the new technologies. Tapscott (2009) suggested there is a distinct separation between people born in the information age and those born before widespread internet access. He describes the defining characteristic of young people to be the active role they play as consumers, citizens, and employees. He contends that such activism contrasts with previous generations' identification as passive recipients.

There is debate about the magnitude of difference between the next generation and previous generations. There is little evidence to support the idea that pre-digital age generations would naturally shy away from new technology due solely to the physiology of an aging brain. Medical science has disproved the long held notion that brains of older adults are unable to learn and adapt. In fact, the brain is highly plastic and does not 'lose the ability to adapt, to learn, and even to generate new neurons' (Herther, 2009). Additional studies from social and medical perspectives have raised more questions about how age affects the familiarity and comfort with which humans use digital technology (Horwath and Williamson, 2011).

Another argument against divisions between pre- and post-internet childhoods is that of behaviour. Adolescents still participate in the same types of activities they have for generations: gossip, bullying, involvement in mischief, or worse. This has not changed with social media or mobile phones. Rather, what is new in the digital age is that adults can see what minors are saying much more easily (Papandrea, 2011). Scepticism from the transfer of

personal interaction into digital interactions belies a general unease with technology for ‘digital immigrants’ or older generations. Where some may view digital natives as negatively socialised, others are in awe of digital natives which could be construed as a positive overreaction to the newest forms of media and its effects on the younger generation.

Digital natives are studied as a consumer segment, particularly for their part in changing the priorities and expectations of consumers upon companies selling products and services. Tapscott (2009) proposes eight norms of the digital native as consumer: freedom, customisation, scrutiny, integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed and innovation. A norm relevant for this study is ‘freedom’. He uses freedom to describe multiple choices available, whether it is a pair of jeans or just the right book; finding the ‘perfect fit’ is no longer a luxury; it is the expectation. Digital natives’ familiarity with searching on-line and expecting to find specifically what they want indicate an increased preference of shopping for books on-line over shopping in bookstores as it is faster and more convenient. In the same vein is the expectation of speed and items being instantaneously available.

Customisation as a ‘norm’ or consumer requirement is becoming increasingly a part of product and service offerings. A report on digital natives’ television consumption habits and purchase behaviour pointed to the need for flexibility and customisation through various options, and especially speed in having content available on whatever platform the consumer might want to use at the moment (Devaney, 2009). However, subsequent studies have found digital natives are not as interested in using Web 2.0 tools for content creation as they are in using social tools such as chat and Facebook for communication (Horwath and Williamson, 2011). What is apparent is the growth of digital books for mass market access to collaborative games, content creation, and technology like wikis. These allow customisation to flourish, for personal use or distribution to other consumers. Integrity and scrutiny tie in with how digital natives are unique in their use of, and appreciation for, two-way marketing communications.



Companies are held accountable through young consumer's willingness to research their ethics and interests in a C2B (Consumer to Business) relationship; not just B2C. The importance of social networks (off-line and on-line), are used for seeking recommendations as well as disseminating opinions and spreading messages that they find amusing or worthwhile. Kucirkova (2017) revealed that the hybridisation of genres implies that interactive nature of reading has changed, both in terms of individual's independent and shared reading. Kucirkova, noted that the combination of different modality of media into one resource offers readers higher interactivity and the potentials for children's motivation and comprehension compared to traditional, physical books. The growth of digital devices and digital books could be associated with reading for pleasure and engagement. The emergence of digital books is increasingly fostering formal learning environments and the power for increased displays of images and amenability of texts beyond the static, traditional physical books (Meyers, Zaminpaima and Federico 2014). Animated pictures in digital storybooks are found to hold learners attention longer and promote deeper word-meaning acquisition than non-animated storybooks (Christ, Wang and Erdemir, 2018). In their study on Korean middle school students, Joo, Park and Shin (2018 p.83) noted that digital textbooks may have some alternatives that overcome the limitations of traditional paper-based books in that digital textbooks provide diverse learning resources, learning support, and customized curriculums by motivating learners and enhancing collaboration and information sharing.

## Methodology

A phenomenological hermeneutical approach to comprehend the facts of being has been used. This may only be found in the life-world, or the practical pre-abstract, pre-theory existence. As humans we are linked with past, present and future; our decisions are based on past experience and resources as we attempt to understand or second-guess future possibilities. We become vessels of possibilities; individual responsible free choices are possibilities. On what criteria should free choice be founded? There is no abstraction so criteria will be our own design; value can only emanate from humanity itself. We are condemned to freedom and must make decisions in a world of adversity. No choice is still a choice. It is 'not possible not to choose ... I must know that if I do not choose, that is still a choice ... when I confront a real situation ... I am obliged to choose, and in every respect I bear the responsibility of the choice, which in committing myself commits the whole of humanity.' (Sartre, 1973: 48). The individual constructs the world through choice; individual choices regarding digital products and usage impact on wider economic and social variables.

Phenomenological hermeneutics focuses on the epistemological assumption that knowledge claims and evaluations are undertaken within the world and that these are described and explained (Howell, 2013; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014). Such a perspective opposes a naïve realist and empiricist ontology and epistemology unmediated direct comprehension of the empirical world. How one understands the value of technological innovation (in this context, digital books) is based on lived experiences, where individual belief and action intersect with culture. Individual understandings or interpretations regarding digital books inform the marketing arena; that is, they inform emerging marketing communication environments where conflictual sets of practices develop the formation and

re-formation in understanding consumers' needs and wants. Through the assessment of specific individual perspectives, phenomenological hermeneutical methodology develops a holistic view of issues under investigation by providing a clear account of respondents' understanding of the phenomenon. This study adopts an embedded study of individual perspectives to examine the phenomenon in context (Howell, 2013). Phenomenological hermeneutics explicitly incorporates the subject within social science analyses, through the realization that questioning and understanding involves some notion regarding the nature of the matter or situation being investigated. This contradicts positivist ontologies and epistemologies where reality is objective and external to humanity and separation of researcher and researched should be pursued. 'When we perceive something like a car we do not see this then interpret it as a car from some objective view-point. We encounter entities as beings-in-the-world with things already interpreted through a web of connected possibilities which distinct phenomena possess' (ibid; p163). 'Interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance in a for-having, fore-sight, pre-grasp or for-conception.' (Heidegger, 1962; p191). In other words, any individual attempting 'to understand a text is always projecting' with each projection able to project a new projection before itself and this 'constant process of projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation.' (Gadamer, 1977; p269).

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Empirical data collection proceeded in two stages. First, data collection was initiated through contact and discussions with students in a Study Abroad centre in London. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight individuals from the publishing industry. Each interview lasted for about 55 minutes. The researchers arranged twenty-seven semi-structured interviews and eight in-depth interviews. Each participant was purposefully selected by the researchers and emails were sent seeking voluntary participation in the study. Interviews

were scheduled with willing participants and each participant was provided with an outline interview. Shepherd and Challenger, (2013) and Howell, (2013) observe such a sampling approach is appropriate because qualitative research concerns itself with generalisation to different but similar situations (or transferability), rather than generalisation from sample to population (See Table 1: Demographic profile of interviewees)

Participant no	OCCUPATION	AGE	GENDER	Data Collection technique
1	Student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
2	Manager	45	M	In-depth interview
3	student	19	M	Semi-structured interview
4	student	21	F	Semi-structured interview
5	Graphic designer	30	F	In-depth interview
6	Project manager	35	M	In-depth interview
7	student	19	M	Semi-structured interview
8	student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
9	Executive director	43	F	In-depth interview
10	student	21	F	Semi-structured interview
11	student	19	M	Semi-structured interview
12	student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
13	student	19	M	Semi-structured interview
14	student	21	M	Semi-structured interview
15	CEO	45	M	In-depth interview
16	Graphic designer	28	M	In-depth interview
17	student	21	M	Semi-structured interview
18	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
19	student	19	F	Semi-structured interview
20	student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
21	Office manager	38	F	

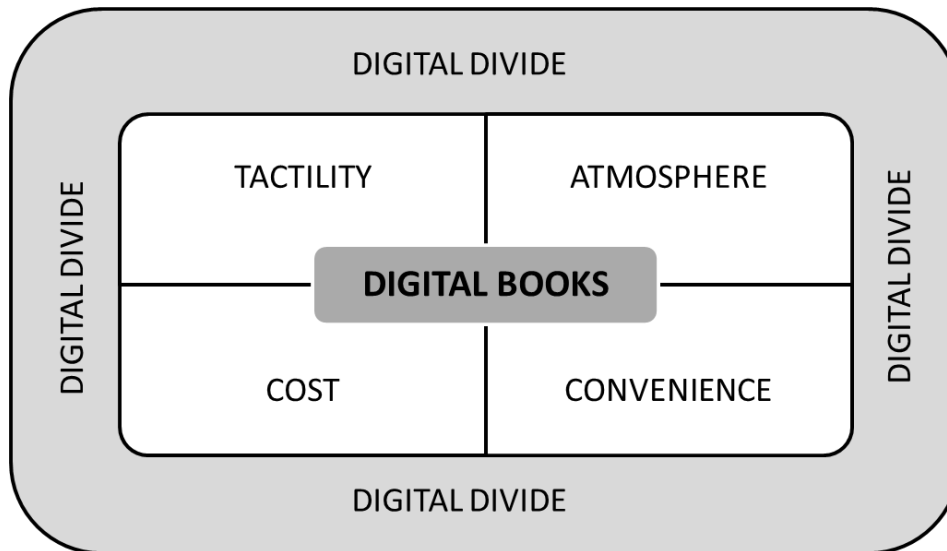
22	student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
23	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
24	student	19	F	Semi-structured interview
25	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
26	student	21	M	Semi-structured interview
27	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
28	student	19	M	Semi-structured interview
29	student	21	M	Semi-structured interview
30	student	20	M	Semi-structured interview
31	student	19	F	Semi-structured interview
32	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
33	student	20	F	Semi-structured interview
34	Marketing manager	34	M	In-depth interview
35	Student	21	F	Semi-structured interview

The research was inductive and data analysis was conducted through identifying the emergence of themes. The core of thematic analysis emphasises the importance of a detailed and representative creation of these themes. Indeed, through abductive procedures the research process, analysis and data collection are influenced by the researcher as the study progresses (Ozuem, et al., 2008; Howell, 2013). Analysis provided code names to themes that

emerged from participants which evolve as the research progressed. Rather than using qualitative software packages (e.g Nvivo), analysis of data were traditionally conducted by listening to the recorded tape on several times, and transcribing participants' response verbatim. As the process of data generation and segmentation progresses, we started to identify the similarities and differences among the segments. The essence of these categorisations and coding is to identify a chunk or unit of data as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon (Correa and Pavez, 2016; Azemi et al 2019). Following Quach et al (2017) procedural steps in categorisation, preliminary coding of the data was examined, coded and completed in the first ten interviews. This practice involves naming, or giving labels to, instances of the phenomenon found in the data. An in-depth analysis of the interview responses resulted in a number of themes and labels surrounding book reading and attitudes towards digital and print books. These are now reported in more detail.

### **Identifying Themes**

A number of recurring themes emerged through the analysis of data (Figure 1). These major themes emerged during interviews and reflected frequently discussed issues on digital books and digital divide. As the research progressed, it became apparent that there were a number of implicit and permeating issues recurring within the themes. At this point, we created descriptive codes (our categorisation follows that of Gioia, et al, 2012), which formed the basis of the emergent framework. Condensed sets of descriptive and interpretative codes were derived from recurring issues identified through informants' responses.



**Figure 1: Progression and categorisation of higher order themes**

Tactility emphasised the feel of the book and emotional feelings associated with the notion of print as well as content. Convenience involved issues regarding levels of ownership. Atmosphere concentrated on purchasing books; the idea of browsing and related to tactility. Cost involved concerns regarding value for money and ownership issues. Each theme and sub-theme was related and developed through positive and negative individual perspectives to digitisation of reading material. Indeed, each related to wider concerns regarding the relationship between human beings, the printed word and social being.

### **Tactility: Emotion**

One recurring theme among respondents was the ‘feel’ of the book, and emotional association with the physical component of printed books. As this respondent indicates:

*“I really enjoy the feeling I get when I sit at a coffee shop, outside on my lunch break, or curled up on my couch with a real paper book. It feels more natural and comfortable. Plus, I love using the library for books.”*

Feelings play a role for many respondents, the emotional connection to reading which extends beyond just the content; the experience is tied to the physical characteristics of printed pages (Kurcikova et al 2014). Words like ‘natural’, ‘comfortable’ and ‘real’ were

frequently used to describe a printed book or the experience of reading a printed book. A forty-six years old, marketing manager in the publishing industry indicated:

*“I love books. They are like friends that I revisit from time to time. I like to see them on my shelf. I can count on them to be there, write in them, loan them, share them, cry on them or throw them at someone!”*

Physical books are more than an intangible objective, waiting to be consumed. Rather, physical books provide strong bond and emotional association which digital books are eminently lacking in terms of a close friend that can be count on. Similarly, a twenty-one old student considered:

*“The physical substance: the reason why I think that physical books are far superior to digital ones is the tangibility of them. When I read a book I want to flick through, feel the book. After reading a physical book you can use it to expand your library, something you cannot do to a digital book.”*

Although attitudes towards print books persisted throughout all responses, the intensity of emotions is more apparent among respondents. As the above respondent highlighted, books are personified, but only within the printed format, or at least only perceived to have that potential in the printed format. The visible reassurance is relevant to books and to bookstores, having the transfer from a bookstore shelves to one's own bookshelf brings a sense of accomplishment and comfort. The idea of permanence in a physical object is one that is more pervasive in older age segments, as the new, digital formats seem more likely to be taken away or lost.

Of the e-reader owners, only 6 respondents said they no longer purchase print books now that they have an ebook reading device: a surprisingly low number given the cost-effectiveness and ease of purchase of books in digital format once the original investment is made. One explanation for this is the lack of availability of all titles in digital format.



Another, however, is the above emotional connection to printed books which even early adopters of technology find hard to shake.

*“I would miss the weight of the book. The tangibility I guess. Also the way you turn pages and the way words on books look. I don't like the pure black and white contrast of e-readers. I prefer slightly off-white pages of physical books.”*

Besides the emotional, intangible appeal of print books, the actual physical characteristics such as the appearance of the pages, the feel of the pages, to the point of preferring to fall asleep reading a book as the paper would softly fall on one's chest, instead of a hard electronic device. These very specific comments reveal definite ideas ingrained in many readers about what a “book” is. Academic and industry opinions aside, it will remain to be seen how quickly, and to what extent, the public opinion of the definition of book evolves.

#### **Convenience: Accessibility**

One of the intriguing themes to emerge is the ease of carrying multiple titles when travelling, and always having books and other content accessible through one device. As this respondent noted:

*“I like that I can be almost anywhere and be able to access the news/websites. I mostly find the convenience the appealing part.”*

Although in reference to reading on a mobile device, the respondent's comments pertain to e-readers and any digital format device. The appeal of digital is the ability to access whatever reading material is desired at that moment.

*“I love travelling, so I'd like to have something I can store all of my books on in one place. It's also nice to have other applications available to use on the device.”*

Similarly, a fifty-three year old publishing director says:

*“I believe that access to digital resources only hurts my eyes and deprives me of the efficiency of flipping through a book. Often if I refer to a specific page in a source, I will bookmark and highlight the important information, but if I use only an online source I cannot bookmark and it will take longer to find the necessary information. In the case that you can print off the material, I will then highlight the necessary information and have a more efficient outlet to work”.*

Similar to the idea of accessing anything, is the potential for storing a collection. The subtle difference between actually owning the e-books versus accessing on-line content reveals the differences in attitudes towards books as possessions and reading as an activity displaced from a physical storage space. In the same sense, on-line shopping is commonly appreciated for its convenience, not having to leave the house, finding exactly what the shopper is looking for quickly.

*“I enjoy the ease of being able to browse a variety of books without having to actually physically go to a bookshop i.e. in the comfort of my own home as well as the flexibility of timing. Also like the ease of finding the book and the ease of obtaining relevant info about the book e.g. various reviews or synopsis. I believe that digital books contain the same amount of information, but provide different needs. Physical books are easier on the eyes and allow you to highlight and bookmark specific points. Digital books serve a convenience factor and the ability to carry the medium on the go, but do not allow you to highlight or bookmark as well”.*

The implication is the value of time in an increasingly busy society. This response highlights the time saved by two factors: first, staying at home to use the internet, and second, finding the book she is looking for quickly. More and more functions are served by the internet, from banking to photo sharing to personal organization, all largely motivated by

convenience and time. As this becomes more and more the norm, transferring book reading to a more flexible format seems a logical next step in the evolution of technology.

### **Atmosphere: Browsing**

The overwhelming majority of respondents were in favour of bookstores centred around the experience of browsing and the atmosphere of the shop. Similar to the theme of the “feel” of the book, the involvement of senses and emotions comes into play as a reason for enjoying the bookstore as more than just a place to purchase an item.

*“The smell; the escape, the touching and exploring of topics that I didn't know existed. Bookstores are for browsing vs. online stores are for looking at specific books.”*

Association with browsing as a pleasurable experience was a recurring point for many respondents. There is a feeling of reward from finding and exploring new topics; the essence of discovery, which is only mentioned as part of the physical bookstore experience.

*“I like the atmosphere and wandering around with no direction. I like the ability to pick up different things and flip through them and to see books that I may not have heard of before. Browsing for books online is not as productive as browsing physical books. It's harder to see something catch your eye if you're not looking for anything in particular.”*

*“Walking around and browsing; feeling like I am exploring the store for options; getting to open the book to any page without waiting for a computer to load.”*

Common terms used to describe bookstore shopping were to ‘wander’, and ‘explore’, revealing the essential element of bookstore shopping as its ability to allow the consumer to stumble upon books they might like. Where on-line shopping is the fastest, cheapest way to find what one wants, bookstores offer the chance to ‘find’ a book, with no goal or particular

title in mind. The opportunity to stumble across a new book is not seen as possible with on-line shopping. Websites make recommendations based on a consumer's search and ordering histories, but the experience of wandering from one section of a bookstore to a completely unrelated one and finding something interesting has not been replicated in on-line shopping experiences.

*"I definitely love the experience of going to a bookstore to be able to pick up, touch and flip through books that I'm interested in, as well as to take a look at what other related books there might be in the area. I like to be able to get a coffee and sit down to read a book for thirty minutes before deciding to buy it. This experience is definitely missing in online shopping."*

*"I guess I'm kind of traditional, but I've always loved to shop for books in an actual bookstore. Not on the web. I used the word 'coldness' because shopping online sort of is. You don't get the same experience online as you do at a shop. For me, part of the fun of buying books is the experience of buying them."*

The focus here is again on the transactional nature of websites as an opposing characteristic to the personal and emotional nature of bookstores. As the above respondents noted, the bonus activity of reading a book as a trial is seen as part of an 'experience', rather than just a factual evaluation that might be gained from on-screen previews in online shopping. A common feature of bookstores in the U.S. and occasionally found in the U.K are in-store coffee shops, which was pointed out by a number of respondents as a luring factor for them to choose to shop in a bookstore. The use of the word 'cold' by respondents verbalised the broader sentiment of the majority of positive feedback for bookstore shopping.

*"A general overall lack of flexibility to flick through the book: it depends on the website and the publisher. The disadvantage will be the fact that you are not able to flick through the book to see the content or the style of writing. With*

*books that allow you to read-through online, the content tends to be selective or biased towards the best bits of the book. My eyes get tired from reading the book content from the computer if it is too long. I get pleasure flicking through paper.”*

The physical nature of the book and bookstore combine as the options available include both opening a book to a chosen or random page and flipping through to read without using online search or being limited by page loading times. The pleasure derived from flicking through paper pages is reiterated as part of the benefit of bookstore shopping. Whether met with resignation, indifference, or excitement, a common theme of the short life expectancy of traditional bookstores became apparent in survey responses and interviews. When asked what would entice them to a bookstore in a more digital world, respondents often resorted to a plea that the fate of extinction be avoided.

*“Stay open: don't go bankrupt. Have a coffee shop available to make it a social event. Make sure people can buy gift cards!”*

Comments like these reveal consumers' understanding of severity facing bookstores as well as reiterating emotional connections to the traditional bookstore experience. Industry professionals confirmed the general public's fears for bookstore survival.

*“I expect store locations to drop at least 30%. The locations that will survive will become either small service convenience stores or the large experience stores.”*

This informal prediction is based on an assumption that demand for bookstores will reduce significantly as digital formats become more ubiquitous. Digital books and e-readers have made unknown book titles become global icons, and the action of distance has been reduced to a cobweb of local communities of readers. Both of these purposes are reflected in themes emerging from this study.

*“With e-books is simply easier to be available. The internet has proven itself as a powerful search tool which will make each niche title visible for its niche market, so metadata for book titles will be a key for the future.”*

This respondent emphasized the importance of search data for niche titles. In order for niche titles to sell more, they must be easily found by those searching for them. He believes the search capabilities of the internet are already proven, and thus has a positive prediction for niche sales in digital format.

*“Not generally. But I think that the whole definition of a book is being altered by the technology. A look at Scribd.com, one of the 50 top visited websites in the world and most of the content is not book length, often never edited, marketed, or packaged. These are all traditional functions of the publisher. As the technology allows consumers to create their own mashups and custom books comprised of many different forms of content, then yes”*

These comments imply a lack of confidence in current search capabilities. He also downplays the effectiveness of simply tagging niche products and allowing search to bring these titles to reach the searching consumer. The emphasis is instead on new types of niche content which is now possible with digital technology, touching upon themes of mass customization. For this respondent, the creation of custom books is equally important to the discoverability of niche books.

The consistent thread in all responses concerning niche titles is the dependence upon search for lifting obscure titles to the same visibility as those marketed and distributed through publishing houses. There is little data available on e-book sales which can be tied to show buying behaviour changes, so industry opinion is fragmented. For example, a consumer's purchases for two years before owning an e-reader might include books bought online, in shops, given as gifts, which is a history only the buyer knows. Post-reader-

ownership, books are downloaded and the digital book purchase history is available to the retailer linked to the device, but cannot be compared to the prior history without great difficulty and access to enormous data. Whether readers' own comments or industry opinions turn out to be true remains to be seen as more books and more e-book sales data is available.

### **Cost: Value for Money**

Cost, or value for money, appeared in different contexts in responses. Those who did not have an e-reader often used the expense of the initial investment as a barrier to purchase, whereas owners often cited access to free downloads and cheaper books through the e-reader. With regard to bookstores, a common complaint against shopping was the higher price relative to on-line shopping. When asked what would attract them to a traditional bookstore in a world where every title was available in digital format, lower prices were frequently suggested. However, the statement of price on each side of the argument shows a consistent theme of value for money. If no value is placed on the technology of an e-reader, its purchase seems unnecessary. In the case of bookstores, the qualities of a physical bookstore are worth the higher cost per book to many people, while not at all to others.

*"I can't see the return on investment and if I would spend that amount of money on an e-reader, probably I would not want to take it with me to places (which kind of defeats the idea)."*

*"I have so many books already that I haven't read! Plus once you buy an e-book, you can't regain that investment by selling or swapping the book... it feels like the money is permanently invested, whether or not you want to ever read it again!"*

Both of these respondents focus on the initial investment required. Although prices of e-books themselves are cheaper than print it would take too long to save enough of e-book purchases to justify the price of the device itself. This objection to e-readers draws a similar

comparison to objections to previous technological advancements, which reduce in price after the early adopter phase and soon become commonly accepted as a necessary item. For example, the iPod as a music-playing device seemed extraneous to most people until it reached penetration levels high enough to become an accepted normalcy of music listening. The strength of the above comments are weakened by their short term nature as they are based on cost-benefit ratio which will soon be outdated.

*“I’d like the prices to decrease a bit more and for more books to be available. I think that the kinks are still being worked out, so I would rather get one when the system is more established. I have worries about the ‘ownership’ of digital books and whether Amazon (or whoever one buys the book from) has the right to control what one views on the device.”*

The other side of price or cost is in what is actually obtained that is of value. If the digital book is not explicitly owned with all rights to the e-reader holder, the risk of loss of investment in recalled titles or other potential causes for seizure of titles is too great for many. With a print book, one can see the product which has been purchased and physical account for its whereabouts and ownership. This security is somewhat lost with digital formats.

## **CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The development of a field of study depends on relationships between scholars’ ontological assumptions around and the object of study. Through phenomenological hermeneutics, we have attempted to contribute further by extending debate on the development and adoption of digital books and wider ramifications. Phenomenological hermeneutics identifies an approach based on consumers’ experiential knowledge and emotional positionality which provides an account of variations in the experiencing and understanding of the digital divide. Research on digital divide remains dominated by access



and skills mantra. There is an underlying assumption that researchers and practitioners tend to focus on trappings rather than substance in conceptualising digital divide. Despite the super-ordinate role accorded to value-in-use in this conceptualisation, individual firms may encounter situations in which emphasis on short-term transactions, rather than long-term collaborative exchanges, may be more appropriate. We are linked with past, present and future; our decisions are based on past experience and resources as we attempt to understand or second-guess future possibilities. We are historical entities that define and determine the direction of social transformation in specific and generic circumstances.

As Kowalkowski (2011) points out, customers should not only be segmented on the basis of current and potential relationship proximity, but also on customers' current and potential roles in the value creation processes. From a managerial point of view, firms must manage different customer segments through different value propositions, based on a multidimensional segmentation scheme that recognises the dynamic nature of value and value propositions. The characteristics of value principles presented and discussed here can help managers to classify their firms' customer portfolios, and craft effective value propositions.

There are conceptual ambiguities around the concept of digital divide and the contradictory findings in the literature. For example, one major disjuncture is the emphasis on inequalities in material access to ICTs, which focuses on the technical and infrastructural domains of digital divide. Given the individual perspectives identified in this paper, one major conclusion identifies that the challenge for researchers and practitioners in the field of marketing, particularly in the design and implementation of marketing communications is to cautiously re-examine their perspectives on ownership, value for money, tactility and the emotional positioning of individuals in relation to the digital divide. Each theme identified in the research has been developed through individual perspectives to digital reading material. More importantly, each related to wider concerns regarding relationships between the social

world, daily existence and the printed word. A conceptualisation that focuses on the affective aspects of the digital divide renders the conceptualisation of research less problematic than the current emphasis on two master interpretations or frames of the problem: inequalities in material access to ICTs, and inequalities in the skills necessary to use ICT effectively.

Although there may be other approaches, this research concludes that a focus on the emotional positionality of a digital divide, offers a much wider spectrum in the design and development of a strategic marketing communications programme. Indeed, this research indicates that this is what would integrate the two major frames into more eclectic designs of marketing communications programmes. One value of such an approach is that it focuses research on the dynamic processes by which a digital divide may influence the design and implementation of such a programme. Another value is that it focuses on processes, as it directs attention away from investigating characteristics of inequalities. Instead, it focuses on a wider range of findings beyond the issues associated with 'have and have not'. By focusing on value-in-use rather than value-in-exchange in understanding digital divide, such an account might clearly provide insights on the design and development of suitable communications programmes. In relation to marketing communications design, focusing on value-in-use may help to explain the experience of consumers in seemingly complex and ever-changing computer-mediated marketing environments. **An important contribution of this study is a new insight that captures the complexity of digital books and digital divide and provides a way forward for researchers and practitioners in the field. In conclusion, this paper sought to engage with the digital books concepts, and highlights some degree of emerging digital divide emerging from the adoption of digital books.**

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