Customised eTextbooks
A Stakeholder Perspective

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Abstract: In this article we present a reader's as well as an author's perception of customized eTextbooks. Customisation providers such as editors, translators and graphic designers were asked about their preferred model of compensation for their work by self-publishing eTextbook authors or publishers. Although the royalty model was preferred by authors, most providers prefer an upfront payment. The main goal of this paper is to assess the value that stakeholders put on customised content. A survey conducted in 2013 showed that readers are not willing to pay a substantial amount for customisation. Readers associate a high level of risk with purchasing a self-published eTextbook. Respondents considered a fair retail price for self-published eTextbooks should be a third lower than those distributed by publishing houses. However, current prices charged by renowned publishing houses for a typical post-graduate level textbook chapter (i.e., around US$ 8-9) are higher than readers (e.g., students) consider reasonable. Convenience is the major factor determining why people read eTextbooks and recommendations by peers and forum members rank top in creating awareness and influencing the actual purchase. The authors recommend a system based on collaborative filtering to provide customization options to readers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Customisation has spread to increasingly diverse areas such as creating one's own holiday by mixing and matching transportation, accommodations, restaurants and experiences, so no holiday needs to be the same. Other examples are: t-shirts (graphical design), M&Ms (text messages on sweets), own blend of tea or coffee, eyeglasses, golf clubs to name a few. One of the latest examples is the book market.

The global book market was valued in excess of US$120 billion in 2011 (Lucintel, 2012). Digital versions of books 'eBooks' are taking away market share from printed books, while reinventing the medium itself due to lower cost, easy distribution and digital functionalities. Fuelled by cheap distribution and low production cost, there is a continuously growing market of self-published eBooks. A sub-type of eBook is the eTextbook, mainly read by students and compiled by tutors (instructors). Whereas the printed hardcover textbook of a post-graduate course can amount to US$200 or more, the electronic version is offered, at best, for half that price. Most leading academic publishing houses offer customisation options.

Instead of selling a complete textbook (e.g., 800 pages, 22 chapters), they offer chapters for around US$8.50 each. Tutors can pick the content they like and may add third party case studies, simulations or whatever they consider suitable. However, the more copyrighted materials the more expensive the customised eTextbook becomes.

Tutors are becoming more and more interested in customising their textbooks. Large academic publishing houses support this trend by offering customisation sites for their textbooks and provide instant gratification by offering instantaneous delivery of the compiled eTextbook. Besides large publishing houses there are intermediaries that negotiate license fees with various content providers on behalf of the self-publisher or buyer. Buyer could be a professor teaching a course or a whole university that wants to customise textbooks for their courses.

Self-publishers often rely on third party service providers such as graphic designers and animation developers. The starting point can be a text, to which other providers can add covers, layouts, edited versions, translations, etc. The eTextbook project initiator can decide to either own the content/design

by paying a fixed amount to providers, or to work with other content providers on a royalty basis (Stommel and Bechter, 2013).

According to Goldberg (2011), self-published books outnumber traditionally published ones by 2 to 1, with more than 210,000 titles being self-published (based on ISBN statistics) each year. The growth rate of eBook self-publishing is a factor of four higher than printed book self-publishing (Rice, 2012). Self-publishing activities are estimated to have led to traditional publishing houses missing out on some US$100 million in revenue in 2011 (Rice, 2012). Self-publishing of eBooks is fuelled through an increasingly large number of service providers, with an increasingly diverse focus. The more the market matures, the more service providers have to specialise.

While the vanity aspect of being published instead of self-published is still a factor for some authors (Jia, 2012), this seems to become less of an issue for academic authors. Hence, according to some researchers, self-publishing will become the norm for eTextbooks (Goldberg, 2011).

Some authors recommend that tutors give away their self-published eTextbooks for free because royalties earned are only of secondary consideration for academics (Hilton and Wiley, 2010). For example, eTextbooks are already available at the Worldreader digital library, where African children have free access to such educational eBooks on their mobile phone or donated Kindles, initiated by David Risher, a former Amazon executive (Wingfield, 2012; Fowler and Bariyo, 2012).

Besides the obvious advantages of working with eTextbooks, self-published or not, there are disadvantages:

- Lack of universal publishing standards.
- Sharing/lending books becomes difficult without violating copyrights (Fister, 2010).
- Privacy might be impacted when personal text markings (shared on some reading platforms) are utilised by others (Fister, 2010).
- No bookshop support (Fister, 2010).
- No chance of becoming a collector's item (Jia, 2012).
- Issues pertaining to Digital Rights Management (Fister, 2010).
- Loss of income to authors because of piracy (Williams, 2012).

Usually, publishers grant licenses for a limited period of time (e.g., three years) and demand high sales (e.g., 200+) volumes. Especially students may complain that a used, customised eTextbook cannot be sold on to junior batches because of the customised content.

While a significant share of available eTextbooks are direct copies of print to the digital environment, partly in order to mimic the reading experience of a print book (layout, switching pages, etc.), some additional functions have already been incorporated (Alfa Bravo, 2011):

- Adding/sharing/seeing other student's notes
- eTextbook recommendation by email, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Online rating
- Text highlighting/copying
- Adding bookmarks
- Choice of fonts, font sizes and background colours
- Text search
- Usage on multiple devices
- Integration of animations, simulations and digital stories
- Integration of audio files (audiobook)

eTextbooks increasingly exploit the digital nature and include audio and video content, as well as hyperlinks and other interactive aspects. Examples are learning about chemistry (Swanson, 2011) and medical education (Husain, 2011) respectively. However, in most cases, these additional functionalities are often not yet compatible with eReaders, and can only be accessed on tablet computers.

Customisation is often supported by 'granulation' of creative efforts (Stumberger, 2012). A book project is split into very small components. Long term work contracts often make way for assignments, with individuals contributing their expertise for a very short period of time to such eBook projects involving a large number of individuals (Stumberger, 2012). From the author's point of view, benefits can be derived from a virtually unlimited source of providers, potentially located world-wide, with high speed interaction (Velamuri, 2012). On the downside, typical concerns are intellectual property theft and the missed chance of building competencies within the publishing house or the self-publisher her/himself.

It is difficult to get reliable data on the market share of self-published eBooks. Estimates for the U.S. market range from 30% market share of self-published eBooks to 77 % (McLaughlin, 2012). The revenue share of self-published eBooks is generally lower compared to the volume share, because self-published eBooks are lower priced than published ones.

The strong growth in eBook consumption has been propelled by widely available eReaders (e.g.

Kindle), tablet computers and smart phones, which – at the end of 2011 – enabled 807 million consumers around the world to read eBooks on their devices (Research and Markets, 2011). By 2015 this number is expected to grow to 1.8 billion unique users worldwide – this reach is roughly equal to the expected reach for daily newspapers (Research and Markets, 2011).

The most popular eBook formats are epub, kindle and pdf. By offering an eBook in all three formats, basically every available reader can process a copy of an eTextbook.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the eTextbook market is very young and dynamic, most recent information can only be found on the web. This leads to an overrepresentation of online sources compared to academic journals, which in some cases might result in overemphasising the point of view of individuals. For example, forum discussions are a good indicator of the latest developments in this very young industry, however, they often represent the convictions of single individuals only. The purpose of this study was to analyse the process of how eTextbook readers find / choose their next book and whether they had an interest in customisation and self-published books.

Apart from readers, the criteria of authors for selecting their self-publishing provider and the interest in customisation by outsourcing parts of the project were also analysed. Besides readers and author the third target group of the research were graphical designers, editors and translators. It has never been analysed whether such providers are willing to offer their services to a self-published eTextbook on a royalty basis and if for how much.

The research questions were:

- How does the eTextbook reading community perceive self-published eBooks versus the ones by renowned publishing houses?
- Does this community have an interest in customising their eTextbook?
- What is the community willing to pay for eTextbook customisation?
- How and on what motivational basis do self-publishing authors find and choose their self-publishing provider?
- What are the main perceived advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing eTextbooks for

authors?

- Which aspects of eTextbooks – apart from the text – are the most crucial to the success according to authors and readers? What would be its monetary value?
- Are providers such as freelance graphical designers, translators and editors willing to work for self-publishing authors for royalties on sales? How high would those royalties need to be?
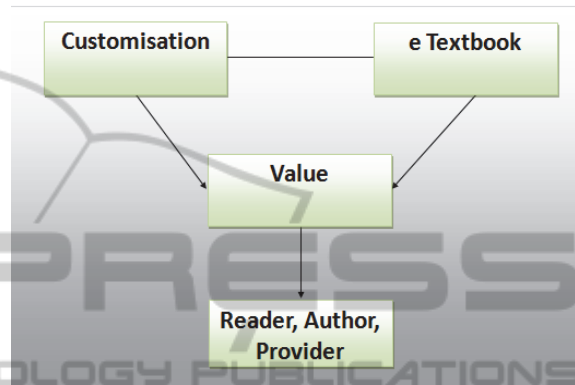

Figure 1: Research Framework.

The questionnaire addressing the value perception of *Readers* included 23 questions subdivided into 5 main categories:

1. Consumer reading habits and motivation: Time spent reading eBooks, type of eBooks, type of eReader and motivation for reading. From the various available motivational theories (Kotler et al., 2013), Maslow's theory was chosen as it is relatively straight-forward and lends itself better to online questionnaires (reducing the number of questions) compared to for example Hertzberg's theory (distinguishing between satisfiers and dissatisfiers).
2. Consumer psychology: The perception of self-published vs. published eTextbooks. Other stimuli for reading eBooks.
3. Marketing stimuli, buying decision process and purchase decision in regards to becoming aware of, finding and choosing eTextbooks.
4. Interest in customising written content and willingness to pay a premium for it.
5. Consumer characteristics: social, personal (demographic) and cultural parameters of the reader.

The questionnaire addressing *Author* issues included 25 questions subdivided in 6 main categories:

1. Introduction and author publishing history: the number of eBooks and the formats published in.

2. The publication motivation.
3. Publishing provider: How was the provider found and chosen, what are the business model preferences, what did the author learn from the collaboration?
4. Opinion/usage/pricing of (self-published) eTextbooks: analysis of author's perception on self-publishing and pricing.
5. Author's interest in add-ons to the written content and willingness to pay royalties.
6. Social, personal (demographic) and cultural parameters.

The third group, the *Providers,* were asked one question only concerning their willingness to provide building blocks to a self-published eTextbook without upfront payment, while participating in revenue sharing through royalties and stating her/his expected share of the cake. Because the largest social networks are not professional ones (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, Google+), these were deliberately not used as data source. Some of the reasons for this decision were:

• Too big a network can quickly lead to participants of lower relevant qualification and lower quality exchanges (Postrel, 2007).
• Niche social networks are often better suited to effectively reach the target market segments (Kotler et al., 2013).

Therefore, the author/provider questionnaires were posted in following groups, see Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire postings: authors and providers.

Network	Group	Members	Survey
Xing	eBook	~400	Authors
Xing	Überse	~5,000	Editors/Transl.
LinkedIn	LinkEd	~49,000	Editors
LinkedIn	ProZ.c	~28,000	Translators
LinkedIn	Freelan	~4,000	Transl./Designer

Readers were approached through twelve online eBook forums.

All in all 616 responses were received out of which 400 were readers, the rest was made up of authors, editors, graphic designers, and translators. The predominant age group was 41 to 50 years of age. 41% came from the USA, followed by UK and Germany.

3 FINDINGS

Findings are based on surveys of readers, authors,

and providers such as translators, editors and graphic designers.

3.1 Readers

Most readers used a Kindle (54 %), Sony eReader (17 %), Kobo (7 %) or Apple portable device (7 %). The primary reason/motivation for reading eTextbooks is convenience, see Table 2.

Table 2: Motivation eTextbook purchase.

Scale: 1 (low) – 10 (high)	Mean	StDev
Convenience	8.8	1.62
Ease of storage	8.6	1.97
Size of library	7.8	2.18
Interactive components	3.2	2.51
Video/audio content	2.2	1.95
Adjustable font (size)	7.7	2.19

Gender differences for the parameters listed in Table 2 were evaluated through mean differences. A t-test indicated significant differences for 'Convenience', 'Ease of storage' and 'Adjustable font size', which were significantly higher ranked by women. When comparing the expected price difference for published vs. self-published eBooks, all respondents expect the same or a lower price for the self-published eTextbook, with the median at 45 % i.e. 45% price deduction for a self-published book, see Figure 2.
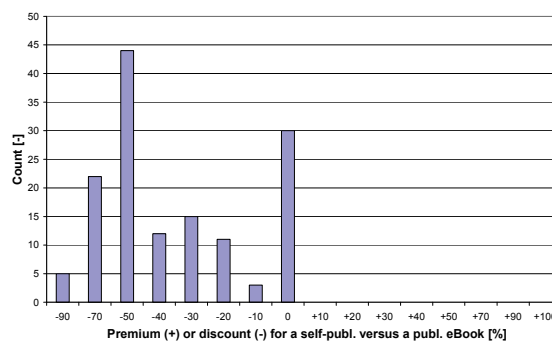

Figure 2: Price perceptions.

The main reason for the expected discount is the perceived risk of poor quality when buying a self-published eTextbook. To check for interdependence between the discount and other reasons than risk for the expected discount (e.g. lower production cost, lower overhead, less marketing expenses), a cross tabulation was carried out, followed by a calculation of Lambda coefficient and Goodman and Kruskal

tau in order to test the strength of the associations. Both statistics showed no association between expected discount and other justifications.

The next questions were: how do readers become aware of these self-published eTextbooks and what additional electronic features do they expect and how much more are they willing to pay?

Table 3: Awareness sources.

	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Online ad	3.9	2.65
Information in article	5.3	2.42
Online posting by author	4.1	2.74
Recommendations from friends / in forums	7.9	2.23
Book seller recommendations based on prior readings	5.4	2.76
Book seller homepage recommendations	4.3	2.61
Browsing by topic on book seller homepage	5.5	2.81
Browsing by price on book seller homepage	3.9	2.72

Recommendations by friends and forums were the most important factor when becoming aware of a new eTextbook, see Table 3, as well as actually purchasing it, see Table 4.

Table 4: Buying criteria.

	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Forum/friend recommendations	8.0	2.10
Book seller recommendations	5.1	2.55
Readers' reviews	6.8	2.17
Cover	4.9	2.51
Price	6.3	2.60
Sales rank	3.6	2.60
Blurb/book summary	7.3	2.19
Reading sample	6.8	2.97

Blurb and a reading sample ranked second and third.

Readers were given seven customisation options which they had to rank between 1 (lowest interest) and 5 (highest), see Table 4.

Average interest in any of the given customisation options was low, with the choice of book cover ranking highest. As a direct result, the premium that the respondents are willing to pay for customisation options is relatively low ranging from US$0.06 to maximum US$0.13 (adding personalised content). Respondents who were interested in a choice of book cover, were as well interested in a

choice of graphics and choice of layout versions, see Table 6.

Table 5: Customisable features.

	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Animations	1.5	1.51
Choice of book cover (based on content)	2.8	2.58
Choice of graphics intermixed with text	2.5	2.33
Choice of edited versions (short/long)	2.3	2.13
Choice of layout versions (e.g. gothic, fairytale, modern, …)	2.5	2.24
Adding of digital stories	2.1	2.10
Adding of personalised content	2.4	2.36

Table 6: Customisation Options Correlations.

		Cover	Graphics	Layout	Age
Cover	Pearson Corr.		.607**	.536**	-.209*
	N	140	140	140	138
Graphics	Pearson Corr.	.607**		.483**	.195*
	N	140	140	140	138
Layout	Pearson Corr.	.536**	.483**		.194*
	N	140	140	140	138
Age	Pearson Corr.	-.209*	.195*	.194*	
	N	138	138	138	138

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

No association between customisation options and gender was found. In order to reduce the number of answers/variables, a factor analysis of the questions with numerical scale was conducted. Table 7 shows that ten variables can be condensed into four factors (also known as components or dimensions). Factor one can explain the most (22%) and factor 4 the least (12%) of variance.

The four factors can be described as follows:
1. The first factor has four high loading variables (cut-off : 0.6) and can be described as valuing the 'easy to use' characteristics of eTextbooks.
2. The second factor has two high loading variables and can be described as valuing the 'interactive' characteristics of eTextbooks.
3. The third factor has two high loading variables.

The dimension can be described as 'sales price' dimension.

4. The fourth factor reflects the 'discount' that a self-published eTextbook comes with.

Convenience in the broadest sense is the main reason. Second reason reflects the additional interactive features that eBooks offer.

Table 7: Major Factors.

	Factor Loadings			
	1 (22%)	2 (16%)	3 (15%)	4 (12%)
Ease of storage	0.779	0	-0.10	0.014
Size of library/modules/chapters	0.730	0.017	-0.21	0.172
Convenience	0.666	0.035	0.158	-0.2
Adjustable font	0.636	-0.06	0.148	-0.09
Reading time	0.478	-0.31	0.031	0.202
Interactive components	0.069	0.892	-0.01	0.001
Video/Audio content	-0.14	0.852	0.148	0.126
Price published eTextbook	0.057	0.009	0.896	-0.25
Price self-publ. eTextbook	-0.03	0.17	0.806	0.464
Discount self-publ. eTextbook	-0.01	0.069	-0.02	0.932

3.2 Authors

A total of 90 authors answered the questionnaire. The predominant age group was 31 to 65, see Figure 3.
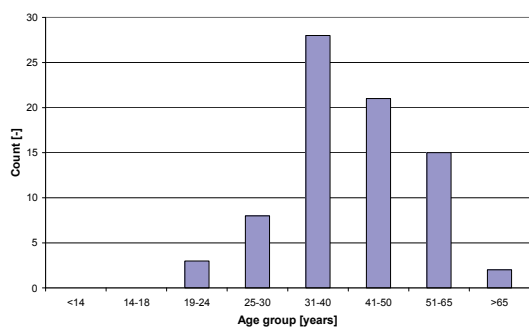

Figure 3: Age distribution authors.

When asked about their motivation, income seems the main driving force to write eTextbooks, see Table 8, but self-development in the sense of Maslow's motivation theory ranked a close second.

One can hypothesise that the more global exposure of an eTextbook the more income can be generated through royalties or revenue when self-published. This was confirmed by our research finding, see Table 9.

Table 8: Authors' Motivation.

	Mean	Stand. Dev.
(additional) Income	7.3	2.73
Peer pressure	1.3	1.24
Self-esteem	5.1	3.28
Recognition by others	4.3	2.98
Status	3.4	2.46
Self-development	7.1	3.05

Table 9: Why author eTextbooks?.

	Mean	Stand. Dev.
eTextbooks are the future	8.0	2.23
eTextbooks are cheaper to produce	8.9	1.82
eTextbooks give global access	9.1	1.65
eTextbooks are interactive	5.2	3.30
eTextbooks come with video/audio content	4.6	3.40
eTextbooks give a better chance of success	8.5	2.29

When asked to assign a fair selling price to one of their own eTextbook chapters, the average was US$3 or 25% lower than the readers are willing to pay. However, the authors think in terms of income and the readers in terms of retail price (incl. VAT) so both are not too far apart.

The preferred compensation model of working together with service providers was on a royalty basis (82%) versus upfront payment. When it came to the question how authors chose their current publisher, the distribution reach ranked highest. The amounts they are willing to share are relatively small, see Table 10.

Table 10: Authors' Royalty Model.

in US$	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Cover	0.25	0.22
Graphics	0.16	0.18
Editing	0.26	0.21
Layout	0.17	0.17
Translation	0.26	0.25
Digital Stories	0.21	0.32

On average translation ranked highest, a fact that is down to non-English speaking authors. Assuming that an eTextbook gets sold 10,000 times then US$2,600 would go to the translator.

3.3 Providers

Nineteen graphical designers took part in the survey. Only a third of respondents would consider providing a cover based on a royalty model. The

ones who did, consider around US$1 as a fair share for their contribution to an eTextbook, a far cry from the US$0.16 per book that authors consider as appropriate. Out of the twenty five editors who participated only 25% consider the royalty model as fair. The few who would settle for it consider around US$0.70 as fair share. 56 out of 82 translators were not willing to contribute without upfront payment and 8 would consider this on a case by case basis. Royalty expectations are in the region of US$1.50 per eTextbook chapter.

In conclusion, providers ask for more than authors and readers are willing to pay. However, it has always been difficult to evaluate the willingness to pay. Most people underestimate their propensity to buy. In this context a conjoint analysis may yield more reliable results and can be scope of further research.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The eTextbook reading community finds its next read through recommendations of friends and in forums. Self-published books should be priced at a 45% discount. Generally, eTextbook readers are not willing to pay a significant amount of money for any type of customisation. Convenience is the main factor why people buy eTextbooks. This may explain why customisation is not considered a major value-added feature. The moment a reader has to think about customisation, the convenience suffers. A compensation model based on royalties will work for authors but not for service providers.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Focusing on instructors, publishers have to take the initiative and offer customisation services. Otherwise they risk that tutors/instructors offer their textbooks in form of self-publishing and may even give it away for free. The eTextbook customisation itself can be done in-house or outsourced through a straight buy or on royalty basis. Tough negotiations between self-publishing authors on one side and graphic designers, translators, editors on the other side can be expected.

Asian students may want digital stories dealing within an Asian context whereas Europeans may go for their cultural setting. In a more formal approach this can be done in two ways. The first technique is content based filtering (Pazzani, 1999). This filtering

technique could, for example, suggest book covers, layout formats etc. to readers based on a set of eBooks in which readers have expressed interest or bought in the past. Collaborative filtering (Konstan, 1997), the second method, is making automatic predictions (filtering) about interests/preferences of a reader by collecting information from many other *neighbouring* readers.

Collaborative Filtering systems usually take two steps: Firstly, look for readers who share the same patterns with the user. Secondly, use the ratings from those like-minded neighbours found in step 1 to calculate a customisation prediction for a specific eTextbook reader/customisation and his/her willingness to pay a certain amount for it.

$$P_{a,i,k} = \rho_a + \frac{\sum_{u=1}^{n} (r_{u,i,k} - \rho_u) * w_{a,u}}{\sum_{u=1}^{n} w_{a,u}}$$

$P_{a,i,k}$: prediction for reader a for customisation feature i under a given price k

n : number of neighbours u

$w_{a,u}$: similarity weight between reader a and u

$r_{u,i,k}$: rating neighbour u for customisation feature i under a given price k

ρ_a : average rating reader a

ρ_u : average rating reader/neighbour u

The likelihood that a reader is willing to pay for a certain customisation feature (e.g. a personalised digital story) can be calculated according to above formula. It depends on the reader's general disposition i.e. some readers want to have any possible customisation, others are more cautious. The prediction whether reader a likes customisation i is based on his/her neighbours. The similarity index $w_{a,u}$ is a simple correlation.

In the era of digitalisation, customisation can easily be done as demonstrated. Surprisingly, no publisher has seriously pushed it yet. Offering book chapters and case studies as modules lacks the potential that custom eTextbooks offer, even more so when they come at a deterring price.

Another media industry that went through a similar experience is the music industry. Nowadays, most money is made by selling merchandise and concert tickets and not by music recordings itself. Some artists even post their songs for free on sites

like Youtube and make money through advertising. A real game changer could be the eTextbook because it engages students and tutors. Although lacking the traditional administrative backend of a LMS, an eTextbook can offer a wider variety of interactive features and choice of devices. Publishers have been offering eTextbooks in the form of course content integration but not as LMS in its own right. Especially in the context of blended learning, where a physical infrastructure and administration system already exists, the drawback of a missing backend can easily be overcome. Both, LMS providers and publishing houses commit to 'doing the things right' by adding more and more technical features to the LMS and publishing more and more textbooks in prevailing eBook formats. The real mantra, however, should be 'doing the right things' by delighting customers – the students. Students love their mobile phones that enable them to access all sorts of information, from friends to lectures. This is a major advantage of m-learning. Since publishing houses, universities and LMS providers are not necessarily known for delighting customers or embracing disruptive innovations, it may be self-publishing eTextbook authors who will the first to provide engaging m-learning (Bechter and Stommel, 2014).

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