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Influential power and loops: the phenomenon of platformization in the publishing industry

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INTRODUCTION

Platformization can be considered as one of the most influential phenomena characterizing the contemporary economic environment. The extensive exploitation of the algorithmic structure to gather information concerning the users and the creation of more accurate audience-related databases are two of the most relevant dimensions that are impacting the market in which companies are called to operate, demanding for an attitude change. The distinctive features of the platform organizational system are exerting pressure not only on the production processes, moving it toward the enlargement of its boundaries and the involvement of new subjects, but also on the relational web at the very basis of the every business structure.

The turbulence and dynamism triggered by this new practice are affecting not only the operating environment of the more traditional economic sectors, but also the one associated with the cultural industries. To successfully develop a sustainable activity, creative producers are called to face the challenges arising from the contemporary landscape, exploiting the derived opportunities to increase their competitiveness.

The specific focus of this dissertation is to analyze the impact that the widespread use of platforms is exerting on a specific sector of the Italian cultural landscape: the publishing industry. What makes it an interesting case study is the hybrid position held by this sector: on one side, the organizational structure associated with the book value chain and the economic rules characterizing its market transactions are both aspects that push it toward the recognition as a traditional industry; on the other side, the specific elements defining the category of goods produced grant it a position inside the cultural world.

The research question that this dissertation aims to answer is the following: how is the Italian publishing industry coping with the phenomenon of platformization? The objective is to provide an overview of the main dimensions influencing the Italian publishing sector, providing the reader with information that will allow him to better understand the direction that this specific industry is taken.

In order to understand the transformations happening in the specific Italian case, the first thing to do is to outline the dimensions characterizing the platformization

phenomenon. The first chapter reports the insights resulting from a literature review concerning the topic, highlighting the fundamental features and how, in theory, they are supposed to affect the economic landscape. The reader is given a theoretical base to understand the dynamics explained in the successive chapters.

After a rapid overview of the traditional configuration of the supply value chain and the numbers characterizing the Italian case, the second chapter examines how the introduction of platforms has impacted the sector, outlining the changes. In particular, the role portrayed by the traditional intermediaries will be investigated, questioning its validity in the current economic landscape.

The third chapter focuses on the demand side. The aim is to analyze the reader's typical journey, from pre- to post-consumption, looking for changes caused by the platform-related features.

Finally, the fourth chapter takes into consideration the industry open questions, those dimensions to which, up until today, is not possible answer. The topics examined are three: the power distribution, and in particular the agent in charge of influencing the direction taken by the sector; the issue of commodification; the problem associated with the sustainability of the book value chain.

1 THE PLATFORMIZATION PHENOMENON: THE THEORY OF INFLUENTIAL LOOPS

Among the many radical innovations that have been introduced by the digital era, platforms are considered a real game-changer. The recent phenomenon of platformization is exerting intense pressure on the several subjects operating in the involved sectors, demanding the reorganization of the economy itself. As a matter of fact, the impact generated by this new paradigm is affecting not only the companies which are intentionally exploiting the opportunities coming from it, but also all the other agents engaged in the contemporary market environment. The effects generated by platform-related practices have been shaping the way actors interact in the market, triggering the emergence of new production mechanisms and upgraded value creation processes.

For this reason, from the theoretical standpoint, it is possible to observe a growing demand for a redefinition of what creates benefits and how they are captured; individuation of the new key players; a configuration of a relational structure appropriate for the contemporary environment; development of industry boundaries able to better fit with the renewed objective. The necessity of answering these questions is fundamental to create a tailored strategy, able to adapt to the new scenario and to exploit the arising opportunities.

But what is a platform? And why its spreading use is causing so many changes in the market? What are the new features that are causing a shock in the market structure?

1.1 Platforms: definition and role in the digital era

In economics studies, there are several interpretations of what a platform is. For the purpose of this dissertation, platforms are defined as "frameworks that permit collaborators – users, peers, providers – to undertake a range of activities, often creating *de facto* standards, forming entire ecosystems for value creation and capture"[1]. In particular, digital platforms possess the ability to exploit the virtual space created by the online information technologies, allowing two or more different agents of the market to

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[1] Kenney M., Zysman J. (2015), *Choosing a future in the platform economy: the implications and consequences of digital platforms*, Kauffman Foundation New Entrepreneurial Growth Conference, Discussion Paper.

interact in order to build a system of dynamic connections and to find common goals to pursue. In this sense, the idea underneath this new structure is to constitute a zone where complementary needs can find a match, so to make the burden of production and development lighter and generate higher value, both from the standpoint of producers and final users. Its main objective is to bring together different realities in a simpler and faster way, allowing at the same time the risen of a new type of collaborations, especially among actors that, according to the rules organizing past systems, did not have the possibility to encounter.

   As mentioned in the introduction, the turbulence and dynamism phenomena derived from the spread of platform-related practices are not registered just in the traditional market sectors. This new conception about the way the structure has to organize itself to achieve higher benefits has progressively been extending its boundaries, shaping and influencing every economic activity. In this perspective, the literature concerning cultural creative industries underlines the fact that this field too has been forced to face new challenges. Always struggling with the issue of finding the right balance between market satisfaction and art progression[2], several evolving conditions are strongly affecting the core structure of this specific category of producers, who are currently being asked to consider additional variables when designing new experiences for their final users. In particular, the challenges that these agents are presented with and asked to cope with are: first, the new patterns that define the contemporary demand; second, the implementation and use of technologies that are becoming more and more relevant for the consumer. Both of these issues connected to the rise of digitization and platformization are pushing the publishing sector – currently considered as one of the industries part of the creative field and the main focus of this dissertation – to change rationale.

First of all, in order to satisfy contemporary users, the publishing industry necessitates developing a high level of flexibility to be able to offer dynamic customization. In the current market landscape, in fact, perfectly tailored content is considered an essential practice to establish a sustainable activity – but the capability to follow the audience's desires is progressively becoming more complex. Due to the fast exchange of information and knowledge happening in the demand dimension thanks to the rise of digital social media platforms, people's tastes are now defined by rapid and continuous

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[2] Calcagno M., (2017), *Interpreting Innovation: Design Creativity Art*, Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica

transformations, shaped according to some short-lived trends. This situation is forcing cultural producers to increase their adaptability skills, implementing new structures, enabling an efficient gathering of the information relevant in that precise moment. Furthermore, this new approach to the product endorsed by the behavior of users calls for an open production process. The cultural experience is becoming a holistic event, in which the participants are asked not only to enjoy the final product, but also to take an active part in the creation procedure. The additional and distinctive value possessed by the contemporary book is given by the involvement of the reader in the production mechanism, and in particular in those steps associated with the selection and definition of the content. Hereof, this concept of opening up the creative moment to the audience, moving and broadening the boundaries of the sector, is allowing not only the risen new forms of collaboration, but also the transformation of the concept of the product *book* itself, that is becoming more and more the outcome of a collective effort.

The second challenge that creative producers operating in the publishing sector are called to respond to is the one strictly related to the diffusion of new technologies and platforms, which are considered fundamental to gain advantages in the contemporary economic scenario. Even in a traditional sector such as the publishing one, the implementation of ICTs is expected to support the provision of a higher and wider level of experience to the final reader. In particular, the exploitation of opportunities deriving from the rising platformization phenomenon leads to the collection of data and information about the changing tastes of the audience and its preferences, and so it is considered fundamental to increase the capability of coping with the dynamic demand. The new devices stemming from the employment of algorithms support the achievement of more customizable contents and the different patterns of interaction enacted through the establishment of unprecedented network webs endorse the creative process[3], setting up and opening new roads.

The implementation of new technologies and the exploitation of platforms do not come without critics, and their current position in the economic landscape is contributing to

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[3] In this regard, Simon Denny (a contemporary artist from New Zealand, now based in Berlin) states that "there's the rise in usage also of a more privatized environment. So the group thread on WhatsApp, on Telegram, on iMessage... Those things are what is now being called the *cozy web*. We're cozy in the sense of private. (...) And for me, as somebody who always gets information from other people, I've kind of tried to join as many kind of private groups as I possibly can. (...) That's the great thing about the cozy web: once part of these groups that impetus to share information is higher." The idea of the author reaching out for new inspiration in the discussion taking place in social networks, exploiting unconventional spaces, is recalled in the forthcoming chapters.

the promotion of several debates concerning their validity. In particular, many scholars are calling out and denouncing these new practices because of the related consequences that they are leading to, and the implicit shift in meaning that they are directing and requiring. In literature, associated with the topic of platformization of cultural production, it is often possible to find concepts such as homogenization of culture and commodification of content, both marked by a negative connotation. The rationale underneath both the critiques wants to outline a progressive deviation from the popular perception of culture as an unpolluted, autonomous experience, to favor an art expression defined only by market rules. The increased attention toward what the public wants and the urgency of giving it what it desires is creating a profit gap between the businesses that are adopting and exploiting the platform environment and those who are not[4].

This first rapid overview of the matter of platformization let emerge a loop, which appears to be characterizing the production process currently defining the structure of the publishing industry. Triggered by the availability of live data resulting from the algorithmic system, the mechanism created by platforms has turned the operation of identifying the most influential position into a very challenging process. On one hand, it is correct to state that producers regularly look at the final users to understand what type of content is trending, in order to provide them with the product they really want; on the other hand, it is also true that final users are influenced by the products already present in the market, which often end up shaping their preferences. This circular system, capable of working in a double direction and generating a never-ending process, based on a mutual ability to modify each other's decisions, makes it complicated for scholars to understand who is responsible for the decisions related to the direction the market takes. As a consequence, the ability to discern the figure holding the most powerful and influential spot on the value chain decreases.

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[4] Concerning the publishing industry, this aspect is particularly evident in the case of the different distribution channels: while chain bookstores are growing and attracting customers, independent ones are struggling with sustainability issues. (For further discussions, see forthcoming chapters.)
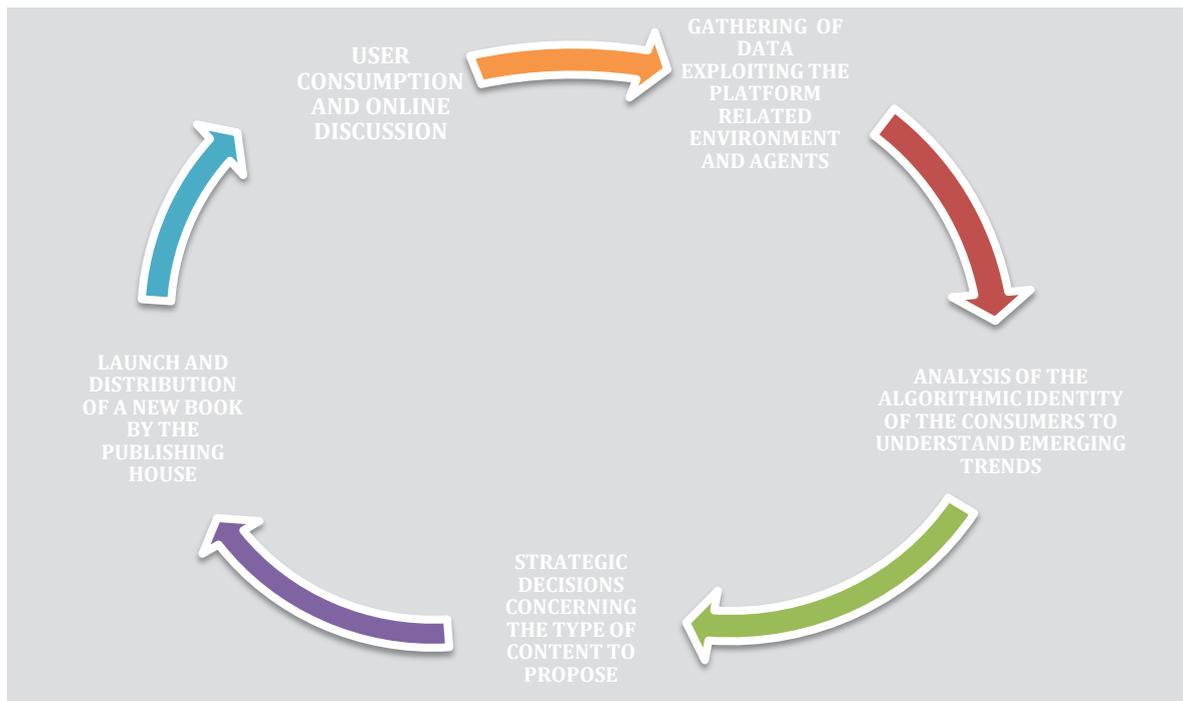
FIG 1.1 The platform-related mechanism of influence generating a loop

In order to better understand the dynamics shaping the loop, it is necessary to take under analysis some of the core elements characterizing this contemporary phenomenon. After conducting a deeper literature review concerning platformization related-practices, the concepts that appear to be the building blocks of this new paradigm are four: first of all, the development and the spread use of algorithms, which constitute the structure of the entire system; second, the shift occurring in the organization of the market itself, where the multi-sided rationale is starting to be preferred over the traditional alternatives (such as vertically integrated firms, resellers, or input suppliers[5]); third, the growing importance of establishing a long-life network, developing partnerships also with actors serving in other sectors; and finally the recognition of the practice of co-creation, whose employment allows for higher performances.

At the same time, these aspects can be further explored taking into consideration their connection with the cultural creative industries, and in particular the consequences they have generated in the publishing sector. The dimensions that emerge as necessary elements to take under examination when operating in these specific industry appear to be four: first of all, regarding the new patterns that characterize the demand side, the

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[5] Hagiu A., Wright J. (2015), "Multi-sided platforms", *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 43, pp. 162-174

commoditization of content and the concept of contingent culture, which rely mostly on the spread use of platform's algorithmic system; second, the progressive shift happening at the rationale level, with the gradual substitution of the editorial logic in favor of the algorithmic one and the consequences that this latter practice is leading to; third, the different role that intermediaries[6] are called to occupy due to the changes taking place in the structure of the sector; finally, the position that audience is progressively assuming in this new economic landscape, and in particular the widespread phenomenon of audience commodification and how their renewed active position influence the creative process of cultural producers.

The next paragraphs have the objective of investigating each of the mentioned dimensions, associating – when possible – the theoretical aspect to its pragmatic translation into the specific boundaries of the publishing industry.

1.2   The engine of the loop: algorithms

In the current economic environment – where customization and data mining are considered as the key elements to build a successful and competitive strategy – being able to analyze observations coming from many different sources[7] in the most efficient manner is becoming essential to achieving good results. In this sense, both the implementation and the employment of algorithmic systems present themselves as relevant actions to perform not only for the companies traditionally involved in technology-related activities, but also for those which are not used to capitalize on this type of functionalities. Due to the requests characterizing the market situation defined in the previous pages, the use of mathematical structures has become crucial for every business, which otherwise is just destined to suffer from the indirect consequences of their adoption without gaining any benefit. This is the reason why almost every sector operating on the market is now trying to create and exploit opportunities generated by this new approach: the external pressure arising from the aggressive competition is

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[6] This broad term takes into account the different actors operating in the creative industries, such as journalists and other experts (depending on the specific productive field). In particular, Maguire and Matthews (2012) define them as the subjects in charge "construct value, by framing how others – end consumers, as well as other market actors including other cultural intermediaries – engage with goods, affecting and effecting others' orientations towards those goods as legitimate". (For discussion, see Maguire J.S., Matthews J. (2012), "Are we all cultural intermediaries now? An introduction to cultural intermediaries in context", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5, pp. 551-562)

[7] The different sources are the consumers' online behavior, the consumers' offline behavior, the competitors' moves, the emerging trends.

pushing every subject toward the endorsement of what appears to be as the most effective framework.

But how are algorithms defined?

Tarleton Gillespie describes algorithms as the "procedures for transforming input data into a desired output, based on specified calculations"[8]. The complexity usually associated with the concept of algorithms is broken down, and the mathematical system placed at the very basis of the platform environment is here illustrated as a simple practice, whose primary ability is to extract and process information stored in databases. The definition suggests that the value lying underneath the exploitation of the calculations arises from the procedure itself, rather than the raw data, because of its capability to unpack information and knowledge that otherwise would remain untapped. To keep pace with the dominating practice of digitization and to really beat the competition, Gillespie also underlines that the relevance of developing state-of-the-art technology and spot-on mathematical structures has to be associated with the accuracy of the mechanism outcome, and so to the knowledge gathered concerning the audience. In this sense, the possession of a platform built upon a statistical structure is not directly related to the capability of defeating the competitors: the focal point is the precision associated with the information collected[9].

The algorithms employed to build the structure of digital platforms are usually constructed upon a specific hypothesis of what constitutes and defines knowledge. In particular, the typical objective of the so-called "public relevance algorithms" (Gillespie, 2014) is to identify and select only that type of information that has been recognized by their maker as the most relevant, discarding all the rest. As a consequence, the logic underneath the development of such mechanisms consists in finding a system able to organize and manage the chaotic data contained in databases; in order to take advantage of the opportunities stored in databases and to create economic value without wasting resources, it is fundamental to develop a system able to efficiently extract all the facts that can be useful and compatible with the specific goals of the organization.

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[8] Gillespie T. (2014), "The relevance of algorithms", in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, The MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 167-194

[9] Analyzing the modern configuration of the economic market as a whole, what it is possible to notice is that the most powerful and successful companies acting on the market are those which are defined by journalists as "Tech Giants" – or GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft). The investments make by these businesses to develop and employ state-of-the-art technologies and statistical structures are incomparable. (For discussion, see Smyrnaios N. (2016), "The GAFAM effect: Strategies and logics of the internet oligopoly", *Communication & Langages*, 2, pp. 61-83)

The initial step of the procedure usually consists of collecting user requests and personal characteristics through the exploitation of online cookies, IP address information, geo-location, visited websites. This is a crucial moment in terms of future profitability: the capability of correctly profiling the "algorithmic identity"[10] of the audience has to be considered as the first step to better understand the user and its preferences. The analysis of rigorous virtual IDs can lead to increased accuracy of the forecasted trends and to the correct anticipation of the demand's needs, which in turn can translate into a competitive advantage. The data collected then requires the application of statistical operations in order to determine which components are more relevant in terms of company objectives[11].

   Another aspect that characterizes the platformed economic scenario is the spread influence that algorithms are exerting on new steps of the value chain, while breaking and bending the traditional boundaries between roles. As a matter of fact, the increased use of statistic-based software is impacting not only the supply side, where companies directly exploit the information arising from the calculations to try and beat the competition, providing personalized services through a state-of-the-art designed platform – but also on the demand side. The strategies traditionally implemented by production agents impact the audience in an indirect way: the final consumer is influenced by the choices made by the upstream decisions, and it has no means to personally enter in their decisional step. It is a passive subject. However, in today's environment, the role played by customers is changing. While surfing on the Internet and connecting with platforms, users contribute to the development of their own, personal digital footprint, which is expressed by all the information gathered "through purposeful action or passive recording"[12]. As already argued, not only it is possible to trace someone's presence on the web through the collection of all their Facebook posts, Instagram pictures, Amazon reviews, but also through storing data concerning their IP address, geo-location, search history. However, this data is usually protected by privacy

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[10] Cheney-Lippold (2011) states that identity formation "works through mathematical algorithms to infer categories of identity on otherwise anonymous beings. It uses statistical commonality models to determine one's gender, class, or race in an automatic manner at the same time as it defines the actual meaning of gender, class, or race themselves." (For discussion, see Cheney-Lippold J. (2011), "A New Algorithmic Identity: Soft Biopolitics and the Modulation of Control", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28, pp. 164-181)

[11] Just N., Latzer M. (2019), "Governance by algorithms: reality construction by algorithmic selection on the Internet", *Media, Culture and Society*, 39, pp. 238-258

[12] Tatcher J. (2014), "Living on Fumes: Digital Footprints, Data Fumes, and the Limitations of Spatial Big Data", *International Journal of Communication*, 8, pp. 1765-1783

policies, which means that only If the user is willing to share the information concerning his algorithmic identity, the platform has the right to collect it. Then, of course, in order to have access to some specific features of the software application – such as suggestions and recommendations, but also production of customized content, anticipation of future needs, recall of past wishes – the consumer has to give up part of his privacy, but it is a decision that concerns him. The subject is active.

The last aspect to consider when investigating the algorithm-related practices is the following: platform and platform users can't be considered as two completely separate entities, whose relationship is defined by a one-way informational flow. What has to be stressed, in order to better understand the complex dynamics that define this new economic structure, is that algorithms are not a finished product and their boundaries are not rigid and strictly defined – and this is due to the co-evolution logic placed at the very foundation of their system. The collection of information concerning the changing behavior of the audience is not only exploited by companies to better tailor products or to forecast future needs, but it is also a fundamental practice needed to increase the accuracy of the calculations and improve the process of data gathering. In this sense, not only users end up being influenced by the suggestions resulting from the algorithms, changing their own patterns of behavior consistently with them[13], but also the software bends and shapes its structure according to the information arising from its users, appearing as a self-learning system[14]. In other words: the application itself has the tendency to adjust and conform with the environment, following the needs and the requests arising from the demand side of the market; the objective is to improve the value of the information gathered, shaping the mathematical structure according to the emerging paths and preferences of the consumers, trying to capture new knowledge.

But what consequences have been generated by the use of these algorithms on the publishing industry? What type of phenomena are rising to exploit the data resulting from this new mathematical structure?

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[13] In their everyday life, individuals are subject to many different stimuli coming from the interaction with the platform environment, which eventually shape their behavior according to a cognitive dissonance fear logic. Analyzing the behavior of people, in fact, what can be found is that individuals have the tendency to search for consistency in order to avoid the feeling of discomfort that arise whenever they act in a way which is not considered coherent with their self-image. In this sense, for example, If Amazon suggests a book, assuming that "Based on previous purchase, you may also like", a person could perceive the obligation to adequate their behavior.

[14] See Just & Latzer, *supra* note 11.

1.2.1 *Give the audience what it asks for: the commodification of content practice*

A commodity can be described as a basic product, with widespread recognition among customers, traded in the market according to some definite pricing rules and constraints. Due to the typical homogeneity of features that characterizes this specific category of goods and services, a commodity is generally equivalent among different producers – which indicates that the purchasing decision of the final user is usually impulsive and based on the price dimension only, disregarding further aspects (such as the quality level or the brand name).

In their paper, Nieborg and Poell (2018) claim that the widespread usage of platforms inside the production and consumption activities carried on in the cultural creative industries is progressively leading toward the emergence of a phenomenon of commodification of content. The specific position defended by the two scholars can be further explained If taken under analysis with the previously presented definition of commodity. Interpreting their perspective in the light of the meaning assigned by economists to that particular term generates several important implications, which are relevant to consider and analyze in order to further comprehend the evolution occurring in the publishing industry.

First of all, the claimed conversion of the cultural experience into a commodity implies a homogenization in terms of the range of the opportunities given to the customers and the activities in which they are called to participate. The core characteristic of a commodity is the absence of distinctive dimensions among different producers – an aspect that leads to an undifferentiated offer. Stating that the publishing sector, as part of the creative industries, is facing commodification of content suggests a change in the nature of the goods and services provided to the market, and in particular, it alludes to a situation in which the final user is pushed to decide what experience to participate taking into consideration the price dimension only, because every other element is not useful to discriminate among different creative agents. In a context defined in these terms, the essence of cultural industries – creativity[15] – fails to be explored and employed in the production process, forcing it to the background.

In this sense, according to this perspective, book production seems to be distancing itself from the traditional view of the creative fields as autonomous and characterized by the

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[15] Amabile (1996) defines creativity as "the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain". In this sense, If all the cultural experiences possess the same characteristics and the same features, novelty is lost – and so is creativity.

intellectual's integrity[16]. When assigning an economic value to this type of experience, there is an implication of corrupting the creative process of the author, who is forced to bend and twist his ideas in order to please the demand arising from the potential customers. Not by chance, many of the on-going debates are stemming from the practice promoted by some cultural producers of favoring the distribution of a particular type of content: the one emerging from the online conversation with the audience. As Chapter 2 will illustrate, in the publishing industry there is growing attention toward the trends registered in social media platforms, not only in terms of preferred content, but also in terms of personalities. Editors shape the drafts of the authors according to the demands of the users, but they also hire famous influencers, asking them to write a book. However, this method is suspected to move artistic independence to the background, as the content is being developed according to customers' direct feedback, regularly provided by the information gathered from the online environment.

The additional aspect associated directly with the phenomenon of commodification of content inside cultural production is contingency. Hereof, the term is defined by Nieborg and Poell (2018) through the conceptualization of two different dimensions: first, contingency as *being dependent on*, explaining how creative producers are more and more reliant on the so-called "Tech Giants"; and second, contingency as *being the result of the combination of various possibilities*, demonstrating how the cultural experience has been progressively designed following a modular structure strategy, to allow it to vary according to the changing demand patterns. As part of the creative industries, the publishing sector too is facing the consequences associated with this emerging phenomenon, trying to adjust and adapt its traditional structure to these two new dimensions.

Firstly, the platform related practices emerging in the contemporary economic environment are making cultural producer more and more dependent on the support of a specific group of digital giants – which, in turn, thanks to the spread request for their services coming from almost every sector operating in the market, are becoming more

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[16] This position is especially backed by those academics who Klinenberg and Benzecry (2005) define as cyber-skeptics. This school of thought claims that digital technologies are helping cultural industries to develop larger projects, but they are also threatening the intellectual integrity and independence of artists and thinkers. It is concerned about "commodification of aesthetics, the homogenization of popular culture, or the loss of authentic expression to the digital age". (For discussion, see Klinenberg E., Benzecry C. (2005), "Cultural Production in a Digital Age", in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, AAPSS, pp. 6-18)

and more powerful[17]. To understand users' preferences and to capture the knowledge resulting from the contemporary customer journey, western cultural producers are increasingly relying on specific companies (mostly Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft), because of their capability of efficiently tracking and profiling users' online activities. The accuracy defining their calculations is part of the competitive advantage that characterize their databases, because it allows, more than any other platform-related business, the creation of a perfectly tailored offer, other than correct forecasts concerning the future needs of the audience and discovery of untapped opportunities. However, platforms assign to the information stored in their databases a high value, and the correlated phenomenon of monetization of knowledge inevitably leads to a loss of independence: the capability of having access to this type of knowledge is strictly related to other companies' choices. Nonetheless, in today's environment in which possessing data regarding customers' activities can result in a competitive advantage, creative entrepreneurs are willing to give up part of their autonomy to get access to potentially winning information.

Secondly, to cope with the challenges arising from the contemporary economic environment, cultural producers are increasingly required to create a type of content in which design should be structured according to a modular scheme[18]. To handle the new demand patterns and so to satisfy the continuously changing requests coming from the market, the creative actors are urged to destructure the cultural experience, splitting it into quickly and easily changeable elements. The classic production process promoted by management theories – characterized by a linear progression of phases – is expected to be progressively replaced by a mechanism that supports and incentivizes constant alteration of the content, flexibility, and modularization[19]. As a matter of fact, concepts such as *liquid state* – prolonged stage of the production process in which the boundaries of the project space are kept open to allow higher levels of flexibility, postponing final

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[17] Although the focus of this dissertation does not favor the involvement in the specific discussion at hand, it is significant to keep in mind that one of the most evident consequences of the proliferation of platforms related activities is the progressive concentration of power in the hands of few players. The so-called GAFAM (see *supra* note 9) are carrying on oligopolistic practices, satisfying almost every share on the technology market.

[18] The modular approach is not an unusual concept in economic studies. Standardization and just-in-time strategies are long-established practices, based on the idea of breaking the product down into simple elements to enhance the capability of changing its characteristics according to the requests coming from the demand side. Recent is the application of this approach to the cultural creative industries.

[19] Nieborg D.B., Poell T. (2018), "The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity", *New Media and Society*, 20, pp. 4275-4292

decisions – are already recognized as fundamental to endure with the ambiguity characterizing the contemporary landscape[20]. Furthermore, it can be said that customization through modularization is achievable because of the practice of datafication of users. Provided with the opportunity of investigating current consumers' preferences and with the capability of forecasting their future behaviors, cultural agents are now able to efficiently revise and modify their offer to meet the audience's requests. The constant feedback collected from the users, together with the many observations obtained by traces left by their algorithmic identity, allows a phenomenon of steady recirculation of ideas and reconfiguration of the cultural experience, which leads the producers to implement the best possible solution[21].

As mentioned in previous pages, these platform-related consequences are registered also in the publishing sector, as part of the creative industries. In particular, the contingency phenomenon can be considered as the engine triggering the progressive commodification of content, believed to be fundamental to increase the overall profitability of the sector. Many of the traditional agents operating along the value chain are relying more and more on the information stored in databases, giving up part of their autonomy to have access, for example, to Amazon's data; publishing houses are developing plots and correcting drafts according to the preferences resulting from the constant feedbacks and live analysis of the demand's algorithmic identity. In other words, these new dimensions emerging from the development and implementation of statistics-related practices are impacting the overall structure of the book value chain, pushing its main actors to change their typical behavior and adapt to the contemporary economic environment. The traditional agents are forced to reinvent their position and their role, in order to remain competitive and reinforce their position in the production mechanism.

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[20] The concept of a *liquid* creative process has been implemented in the design thinking technique. The iterative mechanism that characterizes this particular method allows keeping the boundaries of the project open, to provide the creative actors with the possibility of carrying on the analysis, and adding further elements to their research. (See Calcagno, *supra* note 2.)

[21] The concept of contingent commodity is a straightforward response to the pressing need perceived by cultural agents of being competitive in the market and creating a financially sustainable activity. With the spread of the phenomenon of platformization and the resulting rise of new practices and new users' preferences and demand patterns, it is becoming fundamental to keep pace with the change to survive the contemporary economic outlook.

1.2.2 The expert vs. the machine: is it more influential the curator or the algorithm?

The publishing industry has always relied on a long tradition of collaborations with a specific category of professionals: editors. These figures are generally associated with the subject in charge of correcting and making changes to "texts or films before they are printed or shown"[22], and they have always sustained the activity carried on by cultural agents, supporting them throughout the creation process. The relevance attributed to their role is acknowledged by the whole value chain, which assigns to publishing houses the crucial function of selecting the characteristics of the good that will eventually reach the final consumer. The decisions taken by editors have the capability of affecting every step of the production mechanism; the choices concerning which type of content to promote and which type to block have the possibility of shaping the specific direction that the sector will take.

In this perspective, what can be noticed is that the traditional editorial logic is based on the assumption that choices regarding production and circulation of the creative content have to be committed to these experts; the decisions undertaken are made exclusively by them and "authorized through institutional processes of training and certification"[23]. The distinguishing competences and the specific know-how possessed by these professionals promote them as the most logical and rational solution to efficiently cope with the challenges arising from the market.

Nonetheless, the proliferation of platforms is inducing a change in the structure that characterizes the classic decisional process – and in particular, it is shifting the responsibility of content choices from professionals to machines. Exploiting the algorithmic configuration that distinguishes the digital opportunities arising in the contemporary era, content producers operating in the cultural industries are progressively committing to a creative experience shaped according to the results of data analysis, employing the information and insights extracted from databases. This recent knowledge logic "depends on the proceduralized choices of a machine, designed by human operators to automate some proxy of human judgment or unearth patterns across collected social traces"[24]. Perfectly in line with the theory claiming that the creative content offered by cultural producers is becoming more and more a contingent

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[22] Definition of *editor* given by the Cambridge Dictionary.
[23] See Gillespie, *supra* note 8.
[24] See Nieborg et Poell, *supra* note 19.

commodity, the algorithmic logic advocates the exploitation of information stored in databases to provide the user with a customized experience. Following this perspective, the obvious consequences that can be observed inside the creative industries are two: first of all, artists and intellectuals are assuming the role of complementors of the platform – a situation that alters the mindset at the very basis of the production process. Second, recommendation systems and ranking based preferences are now at the center of many strategies, shaping a new method to meet customers' desires and needs[25], and pushing toward the development of new distribution approaches. In turn, this moves the role portrayed by editors and other types of cultural intermediaries to the background. In this depicted landscape, the crucial position is now occupied by the engineers who design the algorithmic structure where the cultural content will be displayed or distributed, because they are in charge of building the mathematical architecture at its very basis, and so to select what will appear and what will be hidden. After analyzing the Netflix Prize event, Hallinan and Striphas (2016) were able to assert that digital technique and engineering competencies are progressively replacing cultural authorities, allowing professionals who normally operate in other fields to develop frameworks and organize cultural and creative knowledge.

However, this emerging rationale dictates a transformation in the mindset that traditionally guides these types of choices, driving producers operating in the publishing industry to reorganize the procedures and the mechanisms they usually employ throughout the creative and circulation process in order to adapt to the new correlated dimensions.

During the past years, the algorithmic logic has been at the center of many debates because of the type of practices it encourages and the type of content it favors. The so-called *algorithmic authorities* – search engines such as Google, Bing, Yahoo!, Amazon, whose analytical structure enables them to collect big data on consumers' preferences and tastes – can be considered as a new category of cultural intermediaries, which possess the ability to influence and contribute to the users' decisional process by selecting what content to display and what to hide. The specific way of arranging results in the webpage layout or the practice often employed of displaying ads, recalling past

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[25] In this regard, Hallinan and Striphas refer to *algorithmic culture*, defining it as "provisionally, the use of computational processes to sort, classify, and hierarchize people, places, objects, and ideas, and also the habits of thought, conduct, and expression that arise in relationship to those processes". (For discussion, see Hallinan B., Striphas T. (2016), "Recommended for you: The Netflix Prize and the production of algorithmic culture", *New Media and Society*, 18, pp. 117-137)

searches, are both practices that implicitly push the digital user toward the purchase of goods selected for him by the algorithm. Just like the bookseller accompanies the customer through the bookstore, getting to know him in order to then proposing him a title matching with his requests, the insights coming from the statistical analysis of the algorithmic identity of the user help the platform recommending the perfect book.

However, scholars and critics support the assumption that the platform's practices facilitate the diffusion of viral content at the expense of the unusual one. In a system based on suggestions and rankings, it is more likely to succeed and be chosen by the audience when the subject of their research is already widespread and well known by the masses. In this sense, a good example can be found in the environment of social networks. The algorithmic structure characterizing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram contributes to the development of the so-called *echo chambers*: users tend to promote their favorite narratives, creating polarized groups that resist information that does not conform to their beliefs. The same reasoning lies underneath any other platform-related environment: calculations adjustments based on the analyzed users' behavior, together the higher knowledge developed concerning the individuals' preferences, are both dimensions that push the platform mechanism to display only the content that is supposed to be liked. In this perspective, unusual solutions get lost[26]. The related risk is to support a phenomenon of homogenization of culture and conformism, in which concepts such as divergence from conventions and diversity disappear under the elimination of outlier justification[27].

The other significant issue associated with this specific rationale behind content production is related to the behavior induced in the final users. While the editorial logic pushes the audience to have a critical approach toward the information provided to them because of the existence of a subjective individual, with personal opinions and the ability to make mistakes – the algorithmic logic allows them to accept the knowledge as factual data, contributing to the rise of an uninvolved approach. Indeed, a common misconception concerning algorithms regards their objectivity. Due to their mathematical structure, these systems are believed to be unbiased and impartial but they too depend on the objectives that the platform owner wants to pursue – an aspect

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[26] The analysis concerning the consequences that this particular phenomenon is exerting on the publishing industry will be carried out in Chapter 3.

[27] Airoldi M. (2015), "Potrebbe interessarti anche: recommender algorithms e immaginario, il caso YouTube", *Im@Go*, 1(6), pp. 132-150

suggesting that the information is displayed according to some specific, human-designed aims. This passive attitude exhibited by the users contributes to the emergence of a loop, where past choices are inserted in the numerical mechanism to forecast future decisions – which, on the other hand, ends up being similar to the previous ones[28]. This phenomenon of path dependency, where old decisions create a predictable pattern of behavior, is supported and strengthened by the tendency of individuals to disregard every action not in line with their self-perception[29]. Even considering this second perspective, the risk of creating and supporting the development of a situation in which cultural experiences tend to conform and homogenize is high.

1.2.3   Intermediaries: a new position

In a scenario in which algorithms – and in particular, the recommendation and ranking systems that characterize their functioning structure – are progressively assuming the position of starting point in the content-related decisional process, the role usually portrayed by intermediaries emerges as supplementary and unnecessary. Observing the new relational network characterizing the publishing industry, it appears evident that not only editors' expertise is slowly being replaced by the insights coming from the data gathering, but also the skills typically distinguishing other categories of mediators – such as salesmen and booksellers – seem to be put aside, favoring a mathematical culture. With the classic editorial logic progressively losing importance, the competencies possessed by this specific category of professionals are progressively becoming unessential to produce successful and profitable content, and so they are gradually being wasted. The elements that the audience takes into consideration when assigning the value to the cultural experience are moving away from the traditional perspective; users are now affected by different dimensions when purchasing a good or a service, attributing levels of utility to new aspects and qualities that, before the spread of digitalization, were not significant[30]. The attitude adopted by the contemporary demand side forces creative producers to take into consideration new dimensions, which in turn results in making intermediaries losing their historical influential position.

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[28] See Airoldi, *supra* note 27.

[29] In consumers' behavior studies, this phenomenon is explained by the term cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is described as the feeling of discomfort that arises any time a person is called to perform an action that is inconsistent compared with the perception of the self and the usual pattern of behavior.

[30] Amazon, for example, changed the way the final user can purchase the product: it makes it faster to buy, cheaper, and quicker to receive directly at home. (For further discussion, see Chapter 2 and 3.)

Furthermore, as Poell and van Dijck (2018) affirm in one of their research paper concerning the platformization phenomenon, the authority of these professional figures is declining also due to the growing awareness, developing among the public, of the commercial pressures that they are called to cope with in the contemporary environment[31]. Increasingly conscious regarding the financial urgency arising in the publishing industry, the users are becoming more and more skeptical regarding the objectivity of their position, which leads them to question the legitimacy of their competencies. With a similar mind predisposition, attitudes such as switching preferences and sustaining an unbiased agent – the algorithmic platform – are presented as the most theoretically logical solution.

The relevance of the intermediaries' role is brought back to the discussion by Bonini and Gandini (2019). The two scholars affirm that in order to solve the issues of homogenization of culture and conformism generally associated with the mere exploitation of the algorithmic logic, the solution stands in combining the information gathered thanks to the mathematical structures with the expertise of traditional intermediaries, in a blended rationale that they address to with the term *algotorial[32]*. Therefore, when exploiting a similar method, the competencies and skills possessed by these professionals are not wasted, but they are exploited to better analyze the knowledge resulting from the application of an analytical framework, improving the overall capability to produce a perfectly tailored good. In this sense, in fact, this third solution can be employed to generate the best possible result, both in terms of efficiency of the production process and audience resulting experience.

Stemming from the analysis of the music sector, where streaming platforms are rising and requiring the change of many processes, the concept of a mixed form of rationale presents itself as the "new gatekeeper" of the industry, introducing a new perspective that is here illustrated to be expanded also to the other sectors composing the creative industries, such as the publishing one. Traditionally conceived to be attributed only to

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[31] Even If they refer to the news industry, the logic underneath the reasoning can be shared among all the different sectors that compose cultural creative industries. The steady necessity "to maximize audience share and advertising revenue" is required by every economic activity to be competitive and financially sustainable. (For discussion, see Poell T., van Dijck J. (2014), "Social media and journalistic independence", *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free?*, edited by James Bennett & Niki Strange. 182-201. London: Routledge)

[32] Bonini T., Gandini A. (2019), ""First Week Is Editorial, Second Week Is Algorithmic": Platform Gatekeepers and the Platformization of Music Curation", *Social Media and Society*, 5, pp. 1-11

the conventional categories of intermediaries, the role of gatekeeper[33] is now formulated as a form of collaboration: human agency relies on algorithms to better understand the new behavioral patterns developed by consumers and the direction taken by their changing tastes; on the other side, the algorithms too depend on the human agency to improve their mathematical structure. In contrast with the notion promoted by Gillispie (2014) of incompatibility between editorial and algorithmic logic – which are seen as two opposing theories, in constant competition with each other to reach the leading position –, the *algotorial* rationale disrupts this perception by incentivizing the cooperation. Both editors and platforms are recognized as cultural intermediaries, and they are encouraged to exploit each other's strengths and competencies to reach higher performances. According to this approach, personal choices exercised by the human agent do not disappear because of the presence of algorithms; on the contrary, the pressure the expert perceives as a consequence of her decisions is reduced thanks to the possibility of justifying her opinion with factual data obtained by the platform mathematical structure.

1.3   Bringing together different realities: the multi-sided markets approach

Evans and Schmalensee (2011) affirm that the neoclassical concept of two-sided market consists of the creation and implementation of a zone – which can be both physical or virtual – in which members of two distinct customer groups can meet. Other than to facilitate the interaction between users coming from different sides of the market by granting a common location, the main objective that literature attributes to this shared interface is to provide an efficient solution to cope with the externalities characterizing the economic scenario under examination. What can be noticed, in fact, is that two-sided markets usually arise whenever the high level of transaction costs does not allow a direct solution to the problem of price equilibrium[34]. The logic followed by this type of organization consists in providing an answer – in terms of structure shaping market relationships, pricing strategies – to deal with the consequences of indirect

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[33] In their paper, Bonini and Gandini (2019) report the definition given by Shoemaker, Vos, and Reese (2008) concerning the concept of gatekeeping; thus, gatekeeping is "*the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news*". The term expanded its reach over the past years, and now it refers more generally to the production and distribution of cultural artifacts. (For discussion, see Bonini and Gandini, *supra* note 32.)

[34] Evans D.S., Schmalensee R., Noel M.D., Chang H.H., Garcia-Swartz D.D. (2011), *Platform economics: Essays on multi-sided businesses*, Competition Policy International

network effects[35], in order to increase the overall value resulting from the relations. To cope with these issues, the advocates of this specific structural approach push toward the implementation of pre-defined business models, that Hagiu and Wright (2015) identify as vertical integration, reseller or input provider.

Nonetheless, investigating the contemporary environment it is possible to find another type of structural organization, which is more commonly associated with the platform-related space. Multi-sided markets emerge any time the need to coordinate the demand coming from two or more distinct groups of customers requires it. The main difference between two-sided platforms and MSP is the presence of an intermediary. In fact, while it is clear that both systems rely on a common place where different affiliated dimensions can connect and cooperate, only in the multi-sided approach it is possible to find a mediator figure. The main objective of this position is to assist parts during the discussion process, helping them to find and reach a solution able to satisfy both parts. In this sense, according to Evans and Schmalensee (2011), when different groups are not able to establish a bilateral transaction due to the difficulties associated with the rising costs and free-riding problems, platforms – presenting themselves as the in-between instrument – have the ability to coordinate their demand through the most efficient procedure. In the contemporary environment, the crucial role of the mediator is played by the platform itself.

Another distinctive characteristic of multi-sided markets that allows it to acquire importance in the contemporary dynamic landscape is the temporal nature of the transactions carried out by the various groups. While the traditional market approach is generally associated with a type of agreement that takes place at a specific point in time, MSP usually witnesses to an ongoing process, "with long duration over time"[36]. The connection is not depleted after the single transaction, because the rationale placed at the foundation of this new strategy involves the establishment of a long-term relation, based on different logics compared to the traditional market ones. This is the reason why the particular indicated form of market organization is usually accompanied by a

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[35] When referring to *indirect network effect*, Evans and Schmalensee want to stress how "Platforms with more customers of each group are more valuable to the other group. For example, more users make software platforms more valuable to developers and more developers make software platforms more valuable to users. These positive-feedback effects make platforms with more customers on both sides more valuable to both sets of customers". (For discussion, see Evans, Schmalensee et alt., *supra* note 34.)

[36] Holzmann T., Sailer K., Katzy B.R. (2014), "Matchmaking as multi-sided market for open innovation", *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, 26, pp. 601-615

broader analysis of the concept of network: the dynamism which characterizes the contemporary economic landscape asks for relationships build on trust and mutual understanding. Formal aspects – such as the stipulation and signature of proper, legal contracts – are postponed to further steps of the process, creating a sort of temporal informal web of affiliations, all evolved around the belief of trustworthiness of the other parts[37].

The increased attention paid to the phenomenon of digital platformization is encouraging companies toward a shift in the form of business strategy adopted, leading them to abandon traditional models (those represented by two-sided market structure), so to endorse the employment of MSP. When exploiting the opportunities generated by the process of intermediation managed by platforms such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and many others, firms have the possibility to operate in a more efficient manner. Not only the possibility of establishing long-lasting relationships allows them to organize a valuable network of collaborations, able to sustain and support their operations, but the opportunity of exploiting the data that the mediator figure has access to grants them the capability of developing a winning business strategy, able to cope with the dynamic economic environment and the unstable requests coming from the demand side.

1.4   The importance of collaboration: the network theory

Powell (1990) is one of the first scholars to propose and promote an alternative structure to cope with the increasingly complex environment in which businesses are asked to operate. Starting by criticizing Williamson's (1985) standpoint regarding the existing types of organizational models[38], Powell supports the idea of an intermediary form – which lies in between market and hierarchy – that companies can exploit to better coordinate their actions. In the contemporary economic outlook, where the rapidity of transactions and the quick exchanges of information both require the development of a high level of adaptability, networks are presented as the most effective

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[37] For further discussion concerning the network theory, see paragraph 1.4.

[38] Starting from the organization theory developed by Coase, Williamson asserts that two main structures can be used to coordinate the internal flow of a company – which he identifies as market and hierarchy; in between, he positions some secondary forms that he believes to possess specific characteristics and boundaries.

What Powell criticizes is the evolutionary view that Williamson implicitly expresses in his assumptions – positioning discrete market transactions at the very base of the spectrum, and highly centralizes firms at the other. Another issue that he highlights concerning Williamson's theory is the existence of additional organizational forms that he hasn't mentioned.

mechanism to efficiently cope with the consequences derived by the current dynamics – so as the winning solution.

According to Powell, organizing a firm's connections as a network means to rely on "indefinite sequential transactions within the context of a general pattern of interaction"[39]. As already explained in the paragraph concerning the multisided approach, the competitive advantage gained from the creation of a network is visible in the long term: since each unit believes in a durable connection with the other nodes of the network, the overall operating environment is filled with trust and fairness – which in turn results in the capability of increasing the total economic value. In this sense, the promise of long-lasting connections and the idea of possessing a stable support structure able to sustain one's activity are both dimensions that encourage parties to constantly push themselves to search for new solutions, sustaining on-going learning and creating strong ties among agents. At the same time, the existence of the mutual liabilities works too as an incentive to develop durable relationships. The overall benefits arise not only from a mechanism of sharing common goals and objectives, but also from a process of indebtedness toward the community: parts are bound by an obligation generated by the use of collective resources and know-how.

Summarizing Powell's position, what emerges is that two assumptions are needed to constitute a network: complementarity and accomodation. By the mean of the first term, he wants to stress that every group operating in the market possesses distinctive and competitive features, that, once shared with other actors, through the creation of a common pool of resources, can lead to a significant increase in profit; gains are accessible not only to the party that possesses the exploited knowledge but also to all the members of the network. This collective dimension assigned to benefits, then, is the reason why agents are asked to forgo the privilege to pursue their own objective, acknowledging that the same right has to be recognized also to all the other participants[40].

According to the author of "Neither market nor hierarchy: Network forms of organization", successful networks are established and built upon "reciprocal, preferential, mutually supportive actions"[41]. This additional statement highlights

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[39] Powell, W.W. (1990), "Neither market nor hierarchy: Network forms of organization", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 12, pp. 295–336
[40] It is the second basic assumption above-mentioned: the concept of accomodation.
[41] See Powell, *supra* note 39.

another peculiar feature of the network form: at the very core of this type of organizational system there are non-economic concepts such as mutual trust, friendship, altruism. The informal environment in which networks are usually implemented is acknowledged as one of the most advantageous dimensions of this structure, capable of creating a favorable environment for achieving fast communication. To identify the most competitive businesses in the contemporary landscape, in fact, it is fundamental to consider not only the mean employed to extract information, but also the nature of data collected and the resources required to obtain it. According to Kaneko and Imai (1987), information that passes through networks is not only "thicker"[42] in comparison to the one accessed in the market, but also "freer"[43] than the one organized exploiting the hierarchy form, and this is due to the fact that every relationship grown inside the network web is built on the hypothesis of trustworthiness. Expectations of reciprocal respect are considered the keystone to handle the escalating complexity and uncertainty of the market.

   Even though the notion of network is not recent in management studies, with the introduction of the multisided approach scholars have renewed their interest in the subject. Over the last decade, many academic papers have been written concerning this topic, and most of them tend to associate the rise of platforms to the need to create a strong connection with other agents operating in the market. A rapid overview of the contemporary economic environment sustains this theoretical perspective, confirming that ties and collaborations are progressively becoming the center of many business strategies; the relations are sought not only in the sector of competence, but also outside, enlarging and blurring the boundaries between industries, with the objective of bringing new elements to the company.

Moreover, networks are believed to be the most suitable solution to cope with the rapid circulation of ideas generated by the consistent rise of platforms, favoring a more effective capture of the relevant information and a quicker extraction of knowledge. The spirit of innovation and experimentation that characterizes the current economic

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[42] According to Powell, the price mechanism that characterizes the market form is not the most efficient solution when it comes to transferring know-how. As the data transmitted becomes more complex in nature and the knowledge more difficult to manage, prices turn into an oversimplifying practice, unable to grasp the essence of the acquired resource.

[43] One of the core drawbacks of the hierarchy form is the rigidity of its structure. The flow of information in this specific organizational system is usually regulated and controlled through routines – which, even If they are very efficient in terms of communication of knowledge, do not allow a rapid response to the dynamism of the market.

environment can be better exploited through the establishment of an informal web of communication, inside which continuous and fast changes can be caught and put into action more quickly and efficiently due to a high level of adaptability.

1.5 Searching outside the box: the role of co-creation

During his research concerning the dimensions that inevitably tie technology and innovation together, Pantzar (1997) introduces the concept of *ecology of goods*. According to the author, the higher value associated with contemporary products – and in particular commodities – comes from their ability to be "embedded "as components" in larger systems of goods"[44]. In this sense, the single item is not designed to be restricted and restrained inside the boundaries of its category, but to develop peculiar additional features, in order to create connections with elements that are characterized by different, complementary qualities. To offer a broader experience to the customer, objects are no longer created to be employed alone: to exploit efficiently all the properties held by the good or service at hand, it is fundamental to consider it as part of a larger context and system.

To better implement the multidimensional rationale and to improve the capability of creating a real holistic experience for the final user, producers are asked to mirror the expansion of the boundaries also in the relational structure defining their operating environment, blurring the perimeter characterizing their sector. In this sense, the concepts of multisided markets and network systems above-discussed present themselves as the perfect solution to cope with the sustainment of this emerging type of good. The keystone to nurture this specific category of domain is the collaborative form, which encourages the search for diversity and "confrontation across different visions and angles"[45] through the implementation of an extensive web of connections. The practice of combining different types of knowledge collected from different subjects acting on the market culminates in the emergence of a widespread phenomenon of co-creation of new spaces.

To exploit this new organizational mode at its maximum potential, firms need to consider that the traditional agents typically employed in their network web are not

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[44] Pantzar M. (1997), "Domestication of Everyday Life Technology: Dynamic Views on the Social Histories of Artifacts", *Design Issues*, 13, pp. 62-95

[45] Smorodinskaya N., Russel M., Katukov D., Still K. (2017), *Innovation Ecosystems vs. Innovation Systems in Terms of Collaboration and Co-creation of Value*, Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences

sufficient anymore; their ability to provide the organization with specific skills is necessary to generate benefits, but to limit to their knowledge would cost a significant waste of potential.

The first aspect to recognize is that users have become a fundamental part of the value creation system. Ties are no longer designed to connect only different businesses or freelancers: consumers – together with their specific set of data and related information that can be extracted from it – actively participate in the creative process that leads to the formulation of new products and services. The spread presence of platforms has facilitated the implementation of this new audience's role, not only by providing a space in which getting in touch and discussing with the final user is easier and cheaper (both in terms of money and time), but also by enabling the collection of precious information through the exploitation of the digital algorithms. While the final user can enjoy higher customization of experience when interfacing with the enhanced good or service in question[46], firms build competitive advantage by an increased understanding of the dynamics coming from the market requests, improving the capability of responding quickly to changes[47].

In the contemporary environment, crucial is also the role portrayed by complementors – a term used to refer to the producer of complementary goods. To increase its ability to boost its value, a platform requires the involvement of content creators and developers of integrative tools, with the specific objective of allowing the final user to achieve a higher level of utility thanks to the presence of related goods and services. As already stated in previous paragraphs, a specific characteristic of the type of organizational structure under analysis is the presence of strong network effects, which in this perspective means that "a growing number of complementary goods increases demand from users (and vice versa)"[48]. These secondary players are the key agents that businesses need to achieve a winner-takes-it-all position in the market – and this is true when considering two specific aspects: first, their capability of attracting users in the network web, through the offering of additional functionalities; second, the further

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[46] Powell's notion of complementarity can be also applied when examining the specific case of co-participation of consumers in the creation of a good or service: even If for the final user gains are not declined in terms of revenues or savings, they still benefit from a higher value due to the utility derived from the improved experience.

[47] See Smorodinskaya et. alt., *supra* note 45.

[48] Boudreau K.J., Jeppesen L.B. (2017), "Unpaid crowd complementors: the platform network effect mirage", *Strategic Management Journal*, 36, pp. 1761-1777

service provided by them helps to create stronger lock-in effects[49], encouraging users not to change platform.

The main consequence of the implementation of this specific organizational practice is the call for an open production process, including in the creative mechanism also those subjects that typically are not involved. In the contemporary economic environment, which is characterized by the need to provide dynamic consumers with goods and services always up-to-date and appealing, responding quickly to changing demand is the key to success. Once again, to achieve the desired position and to place themselves above the competitors, businesses have to exploit opportunities arising from the new configuration of the market. Establishing new collaborations, expanding the network web to include different types of agents, collecting and extracting information from databases, relationships, customers' feedbacks – they are all fundamental benefits emerging from the new structure. As stated by Chesbrough (2003), to win and beat the competition it is no longer a matter of creating "the most and the best ideas in the industry" but making "the best use of internal and external ideas"[50].

1.5.1   *From passive recipient to active producer: audience's role and its impact on the creative process*

When investigating the characteristics defining the contemporary cultural scenario, what can be noticed is that the position traditionally held by the customers is assuming a new meaning. The advent of the informational era, shaped by phenomena such as digitization and platformization, has induced the creative producers to support and encourage a new practice: the audience commodification. With the explicit objective of offering a more customized and complete experience, cultural agents are progressively pushed to look for data regarding the online and offline behavior of their customers – a necessity that, most of the time, is translated into the purchasing of customers' private information. While this practice allows the upstream production agents to assume a more competitive position in the contemporary dynamic market, from the standpoint of the demand it is presented as an opportunity for an active position in shaping the cultural experience that it is later called to enjoy, with the promise of becoming an essential part of the sense-making of the experience. In this sense, the final artifact is no

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[49] See Kenney et. alt., *supra* note 1.
[50] Chesbrough H.W. (2003), *Open innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press.

longer the result of a series of genius acts that are Romantically associated with the figure of the artist, but most of the time it is the outcome of a collaborative mechanism. Cultural agents and users establish a synergistic relationship, where the common goal is to create a final product able to satisfy efficiently the requests coming from the market. On one side, thanks to the development and employment of direct channels of communication and due to the gradual shift of the economic paradigm toward an interactive model, creative producers are able to cooperate with their audience to co-organize the whole experience; on the other side, exploiting the possibility offered by platforms to carry on explicit request of specific features and qualities directly to the producer of content, the consumers are now capable of pushing the cultural product toward specific wanted directions.

Proper co-creation – intended as the actual and voluntary request coming from the demand side of the market – is not the only mean that can be exploited by the final user to shape the cultural experience. Due to the online presence of specific environments designed to favor virtual conversation – such as social platforms –, the audience is gradually assuming a new, persuasive role: the critic. Observing what happens in the demand side of the publishing industry, it can be noticed that the buzz generated around a hot title is slowly reaching a dominant position in the production landscape, because of its functioning mode, similar to an echo chamber: the virtual exchange of opinions and judgments concerning a specific book is able to attract subjects interested in the topic at hand, facilitating the expression of several different points of view. This digital word of mouth, faster than the traditional one, transforms the online discussions into an incredibly rich database, according to which cultural agents can modify their behavior in order to be more accepted by the market.

In this perspective, the particular position taken by a specific category of consumers, the influencers[51], is fundamental. Due to the referent power held by them, they exert a huge impact when it comes to shaping the main stream of the public consciousness: since they are perceived as similar in terms of values by the audience, they are able to silently

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[51] The concept of influencer is not new in the economic landscape, but only in the past few years has been assuming a prominent role in the decisional and production processes. Initially associated with the figure of an expert in a certain subject, able to give specific information to help the buyer making the final decision – now opinion leaders are individuals able to "develop a network of people through their involvement in activities", be "active participants at work and in their communities", and sustain a large and well constructed social networks. (For discussion, see Tuten T.L., Solomon M.R. (2014), *Social Media Marketing*, Pearson.)

coordinate the demand and the customers' behavior simply by awarding or questioning the value of a product through a post on Facebook or a story on Instagram. This doable also thanks to the trust that their followers put in them: they are perceived as credible sources of information.

However, this renewed position assumed by the audience has been criticized in the past years by scholars because of the consequences it appears to be exerting on the conception of the demand side. As a first aspect, strictly interconnected to the already illustrated phenomenon of commodification of content, it is necessary to highlight that also the consumers are progressively assuming the qualities that are traditionally associated with the ones possessed by a commodity. Classified and labeled according to the knowledge emerging from their online presence, the consumers' identity is now considered as a common good that can be found and purchased in the market. With the increased ability of constantly tracking the digital movements of the final users thanks to the development of connections among different platforms systems, the information referring to the audience's decisional journey[52] is easily transferred among businesses according to the rules established by the classic economic theories. Observing the industries currently affected by this practice, it is evident that the data collected from the audience thanks to the widespread algorithmic structures is progressively assuming the characteristics of a mere additional category inside the different types of goods that can be traded in the market: producers and buyers involved in this practice[53], in fact, negotiate deals, stipulate contracts, establish long-term relationships following the same rules that can be found in a more traditional environment.

Nevertheless, analyzing the demand side of the contemporary economic landscape, what is interesting to notice is the actual behavior exhibited by the audience. With the diffusion of the platformization phenomenon and the typical features characterizing the digitized world, the final user is willing to voluntarily become a commodity in order to gain access to a more tailored experience. In most of the cases, the value resulting from the process of sharing personal data with the algorithmic platform is considered higher in respect to the downside deriving from the associated loss of privacy. In this sense, in opposition to the negative connotation generally associated with the notion of consumer

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[52] The information that can be tracked, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph, are: Facebook posts, Instagram pictures, Amazon reviews, but also IP address, geo-location, search history (e.g. the surfed websites, the time spent on each page…).

[53] Producers are identified as the firms qualified to gather and aggregate data; buyers are the companies that necessitate such data to create a more tailored experience.

commodification, Jennes (2014) introduces the idea of *audience empowerment*; he argues that "digital technology can also enable users in dealing with the surrounding environment"[54], increasing the value deriving from the perfectly customized experience. This specific point of view can be further understood when taking into consideration the case of the installation designed by Simon Denny at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania. At the very functioning core of this museum, there is a state-of-the-art software system: every visitor is given a device, inside which a centralized app mediates the entire experience; it exploits the location-based technology to offer specific informative material, wall labels, notices about queuing – which are displayed depending on the position taken inside the museum space. This approach not only allows the institution to gather data about the audience's behavior inside the installation[55], but it also helps the visitors to reach a better understanding of the space in which they are immersed. This experience can be analyzed as a small case that has the ability to summarize the contemporary landscape: by having every move tracked down by the platformed environment, the final consumer is able to reach a deeper and wider understanding of his surroundings.

Taking a strong position against this new conception of the market and perfectly summarizing the two above-described consequences, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) refers to this phenomenon as surveillance capitalism, which she defines as "the unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data"[56]. While accusing the datafication process characterizing the platform environment of shaping the behaviors and the minds of the persons, *de facto* destroying the democracy of choices and the free will, she also describes the general predisposition of the audience, who sees the possibility of customized content as an advantage, rather than a drawback.

  The next three chapters will focus on the specific environment characterizing the publishing sector. What makes it an interesting case study is the hybrid position assumed by this specific industry. On one side, in fact, the structure defining its supply

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[54] Khajeheian D. (2016), "Audience Commodification: A Source of Innovation in Business Models", *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 6, pp. 40-47

[55] For example, through the use of the app, the visitor is able to like or dislike a specific artwork, creating a ranking. It is also possible to understand how much time a single person spends in a specific room.

[56] Laidler J. (2019), *High tech is watching you*, The Harvard Gazette, 04/03/2019, available at: https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/03/harvard-professor-says-surveillance-capitalism-is-undermining-democracy/

chain and the spread commodification of its main product (books) pushes it to be considered as part of the traditional market, where common goods and services are traded; on the other side, it can be seen as part of the cultural world, due to the specific kind of product that it is offering to the demand. In this sense, the book (the core object of the industry) answers to the qualities that DiMaggio asks from a cultural product. After having analyzed both supply and demand side, the critical issues will be pointed out.

2 THE FIRST DIMENSION OF THE LOOP: THE SUPPLY SIDE OF PUBLISHING SECTOR[57]

## 2.1 Actors and relations: how did platforms change the industry?
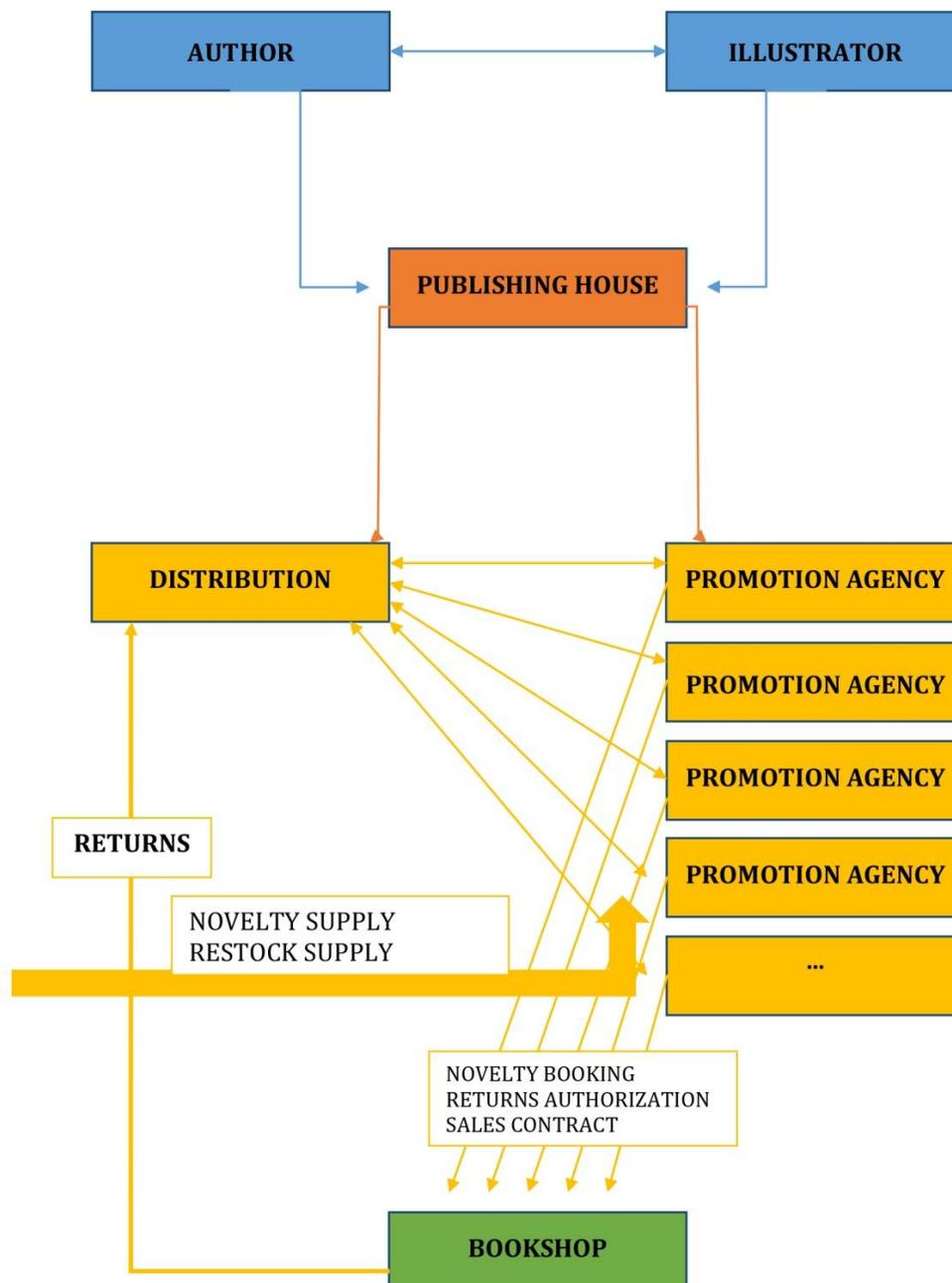
TABLE 2.1 Structure of the publishing value chain

There are different actors involved in the mechanism of value creation characterizing the publishing industry, each of which possesses specific functions and responsibilities. The overall benefit gained by the sector increases when the agents operating in the market agree on collaborating, to develop synergistic networks.

The following paragraph will focus on the description of the three main agents working in the supply side of the publishing field, illustrating their duties, typical tasks and mutual connections. A final consideration on the changes happening in the industry and the impact they are having on these job positions will be drawn.

The leading role in the book value chain is played by publishing houses, which are traditionally recognized as the gatekeepers of the whole industry: due to the functions they are generally called to perform, they present themselves as the key component that holds the structure together, able to shape the dynamics of the entire market with their decision.

Examining the traditional landscape, the publishing house is seen as the actor in charge of establishing – directly or through the employment of specific agencies – relationships with the writers and illustrators it plans to work with. Furthermore, it supervises the development and proofreading of a manuscript, and it assists the author during the launch of the book, through the formulation and implementation of a marketing plan. In performing this role, the publishing house assumes a double position, being both a mediator figure between the upstream creative agent and the downstream final reader, and an interpreter of the requests coming from the demand side. In this sense, not only it has the duty to discover the right audience to associate with a specific writer, but it is also responsible for detecting an author to cover a specific segment of the market.

Moving alongside the value chain, the next aspect to consider is the strategy of distribution a publishing house can decide to implement. In particular, the approaches that can be chosen are mainly two: a direct channel approach and indirect channel approach. While the former plan consists in exploiting the employees and resources of the publishing house itself to promote its products and to negotiate with the bookstores, the latter resorts to a third party. The independent distributor's specific business objective is to advertise and distribute publications and books, whose rights may belong to more than just one publishing house; in serving this role, it assumes also the responsibilities connected to the final logistic steps along the value chain.

When examining the operating mechanism at the very basis of the book value chain, a decisive role is played by salesmen, regardless of the strategy adopted by the publishing house. Their job consists of creating a dialogue with the booksellers, submitting them the new publications and promotions associated with the different publishing houses they represent. Salesmen have also to cope with additional tasks, such as keeping under control all the books present in the individual bookstore catalog, to ensure an efficient supply system, managing the orders made by the physical retails, supervising the returns. More importantly, they have the responsibility of creating and sustaining a widespread network of relations, with the aim of efficiently promoting the works produced by the publishing houses. Following the traditional B2B marketing logic, the salesman establishes and nurtures a personal bond with the bookseller, creating a favorable environment for a long-lasting collaboration. In this sense, the words of N.F., the owner of a bookstore located in Mestre, are exemplifying: "During the lockdown months due to the COVID-19 emergency, he [the salesman] called every week, just to know how things were going. It was nice to know that he cares". The trust and fondness developed by the booksellers toward the salesman is a fundamental element to build a strong alliance.

In the Italian landscape, the majority of medium-small publishing house relies on the services provided by a third-party distributor to reach the physical bookstores. The market demand is supplied by several companies, each of which usually distributes and promotes more than one publishing house. On the distributor side of the value chain, most of the market shares are associated with Messaggerie and A.L.I. (*Agenzia Libraria Internazionale*) – which can be both considered as pure distributors[58] –, Mondadori and Giunti.

  Finally, the last essential step of the publishing value chain is traditionally assigned to bookstores, which is generally recognized as the most direct channel of communication with the final consumer. However, the point of sale – both physical and digital – is not only a place where readers have the possibility to encounter the final product (the book, in all of its variations): it also assumes the function of a valuable field of observation. Thanks to the exploitation of the data collected through the bookstores' activity,

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[58] Companies are defined as pure distributors when the main objective of their activity is to promote and distribute books. This is the reason why the position of Mondadori and Giunti can't be associated with the figure of a pure distributor: since they are also a publishing house (and a chain of bookstores), their position is not exclusively related to distribution.

publishing houses are able to perform their double role: identifying the right market segments to serve, and profiling the identikit of the successful author based on the current preferences and trends. In this sense, the retail is crucial both for the audience and the upstream agents of the production chain.

In nowadays panorama, it is possible to distinguish three different categories of bookstores: chain, independent, online. Each of these models possesses some distinctive qualities, as well as specific advantages and disadvantages, that can be exploited depending on the fixed objectives. Chain bookshops are typically owned by a publishing house, with the aim of extending its control and power on additional steps along the value chain. The strategy traditionally adopted is franchising, which allows independent entrepreneurs to open a retail shop using the affirmed brand of the publishing house. The advantages offered to the booksellers can be observed both in terms of favorable supply contracts (a larger selection of products, higher discounts, convenient payment conditions…), and constant operational and commercial support. Independent bookstores, in this sense, lacking tailored supply conditions, operate in a more precarious situation; the exposition to financial risks is higher for an independent bookseller, because they do not have a successful brand to economically backup their structure. However, the absence of external support comes with higher flexibility in terms of assortment. The selection of products is entirely carried out by the owner of the bookstore, without any outside interference; in this way, it is possible to tailor the inventory on the basis of the preferences of the actual audience of the retail. Finally, a bookstore can decide to exploit the online environment to sell its books on an owned e-commerce website or it can rely on specialized platforms, such as Amazon and IBS.

   Analyzing the specific Italian market landscape, the most striking feature is the presence of vertical oligopolies. In this regard, the observation of the industry composition reveals the presence of several companies that extend their boundaries alongside the value chain, covering both upstream and downstream processes. Giunti and Mondadori, for example, are publishing houses that possess a distribution system and own physical (and digital) bookstores. A similar case is Feltrinelli, which is both a publishing house and a chain of physical retail shops. This situation leads to the creation of strong power positions that influence the dynamics of the market: the strategic moves carried out by these giants are able to modify the structure and the relations along the value chain.

The recent phenomena of digitalization and platformization have had several impacts on the sector – starting from the expansion of the boundaries characterizing the definition of the publishing industry. If the traditional interpretation comprehends print media (such as magazines, newspapers, and books), the contemporary denomination includes "all of the digital forms that have arisen since the internet became the most recent and popular means of distribution of text-based communication"[59]. The update is due to the dynamism that has been recognized to this branch of the cultural industries, which requires a constant redefinition of the boundaries in order to face the unceasing challenges and to embrace new opportunities. In particular, Matulionyte et alt. (2017) state that the improved technological capacity has enabled the agents operating in this field to exploit and experiment with new creative processes to reach the audience. This reasoning have lead to the extension of the definition.

The spread of platforms, then, has encouraged the development of a series of informal activities, blurring the traditional distinction among the different roles played along the book value chain. In particular, thanks to the flourishing of dedicated digital environments, the figures of readers and professionals are progressively overlapping, creating new positions with mixed characteristics and new kinds of responsibilities. This contemporary operating mechanism is perfectly explained by the words of Carolan and Evain (2013): "As readers become authors, authors become distributors, distributors become publishers and publishers become cost-conscious, the traditional publishing hierarchy is being redefined"[60]. Analyzing the sentence, the main consequences of this rationale update appear to be two: first, the possibility to neglect and move to the background the actors generally associated with the upstream processes of the book value chain; second, the reinterpretation of the boundaries generally set between the roles. In the contemporary publishing system, the authors are progressively abandoning the practice of relying on a third party agent to send their manuscripts to a publishing house, preferring to make this step on their own; the job of editors is more and more associated to a freelancer position, rather than an in-house employee; with the advent of e-books, the printing step is not necessary anymore[61]. Concerning this last aspect, there

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[59] Matulionyte R., Paton E., McIntyre P., Gleadhill D. (2017), "The system of book creation: intellectual property and the self-publishing sector of the creative industries", *Creative Industries Journal*, 10, pp. 191-210

[60] Carolan S., Evain C. (2013), "Shifting Authority: (Ex)Changing Roles in the Evolving Publishing Environment", *The International Journal of the Book*, 10, pp. 53–63

[61] See Matulionyte R., Paton E., McIntyre P., Gleadhill D, *supra* note 59.

is a phenomenon that is playing a relevant part: the acceleration of the self-publish systems. In nowadays book publishing environment, an author can decide to overcome the traditional publishing houses, and resort to self-publish.

All these phenomena are the results of a digital environment whose ability to bring different parties together is shaking the industry structure.

2.2   Publishing industry in numbers: the Italian situation

To better understand the dynamics at the foundation of the book value chain and to comprehend the evolution occurring in the industry, it is useful to consider some of the current numbers associated to the market. In line with the purpose of this dissertation, the paragraph mainly focuses on Italian statistics as a specific case study – but in order to set a benchmark it also introduces the analysis of data concerning the situation in other countries.

First, when observing the overall book market, taking under analysis not only the Italian situation but also the position assumed by other European countries, the most striking feature is the amount of new titles released per year. According to *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels* 2018 data, in Germany the number of new edition published was 71.548; the French *Syndicat national de l'édition* reported, for the same year, 106.799 new publications; Istat accounted for 75.758 new titles in Italy in 2018. Furthermore, there is a positive trend in relation to the number of publications per year – meaning that the market is witnessing a general growth in terms of total amount of titles published per year. The combined reading of these estimates gives back the concrete representation of an industry that is currently facing a phenomenon of market overload: the supply side is slowly reaching the saturation threshold, the critical point after which the demand is not able anymore to absorb the products released. This economic phenomenon is usually associated with problems of overproduction, that consists in a higher supply capacity than the actual demand coming from the consumers. Consequently, a drop in profitability is witnessed.

GRAPH 2.1 Number of titles published in Italy. Years 2008-2018
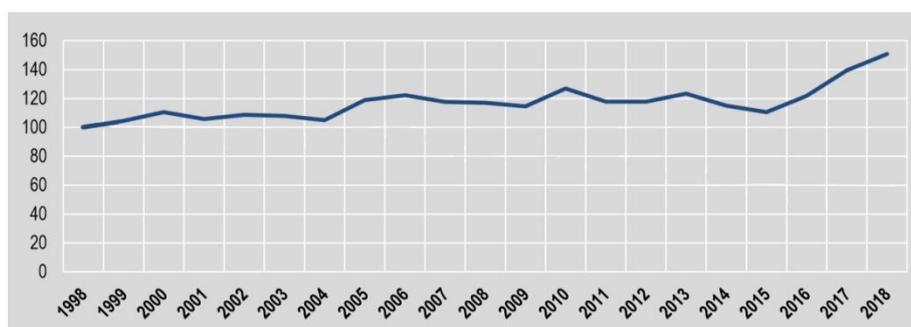
Source: Istat

   If having an highly saturated market is not an Italian specific issue, the trend characterizing the category of publications is. While France[62] and Germany[63] are witnessing a reduction of novelties publication in favor of reprinted editions, Italy outlines a counter phenomenon: 62% of the total amount of book published in 2018 were first editions – which means almost 4.000 new titles per month, 133 per day.

With an higher number of titles and a lower circulation[64], the Italian market appears to be moving toward a specific direction: exploiting the trends observed from a live analysis of the customers' preferences, so to provide them with an offer designed to be sold exclusively on the short term. The objective that may stand at the very foundation of this type of strategy is to increase the number of readers – and this is due not only because of economic reasons (to expand the market to sell more and increase the profitability), but also to improve the literacy index, which, concerning the Italian case, are very low[65]. A further analysis, in fact, shows that the only genre that was able to register a growth, between 2017 and 2018, is general non-fiction[66], which is more suitable for occasional readers. As already mentioned, this situation creates an important trade-off: the necessity to not overload the market with an excessive number

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[62] According to the French *Syndicat national de l'édition*, there was a reduction of the -5,40% in terms of novelties published, between 2017 and 2018.
[63] *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels* data shows that, between 2017 and 2018, the number of novelties published decreased by -1,3%.
[64] Istat data report, in 2018, a reduction of the -2,9% (167.961 thousand) in comparison with the previous year in terms of number of printed copies.
[65] The data related to the literacy index will be further discussed in paragraph 2.5, when analyzing the new *Legge sul libro*.
[66] In AIE annual report, the growth is recorded in the amount of +6,3% (138,4 copies). In 2018, it is the only genre able to report an increase in terms of sold copies; the other categories – such as fiction (novels), kids and teenagers, generic non-fiction (literary essay), practical non-fiction (manual), specialized non-fiction (professional) – documented a decline.

of products, so to avoid the rise of a saturation phenomenon, and the need to improve the numbers related to the readers, which are one of the lowest in Europe.

A second trend to observe is related to the transformation happening at the trade channels level, and in particular to the changes in individual market shares recorded over the past years. As a matter of fact, to better understand the impact that the contemporary economic and technological environment is exerting on the industry and its main actors, it is fundamental to grasp the general direction the sector is taken.

When studying the data associated to the strategies of distribution adopted by publishing houses, AIE splits the market into three categories: online stores, bookstores (both chain and independent), large-scale retail trade (GDO, in Italian). Observing the distribution of their market shares over eleven years (2008-2019), the most important information to extract is related to the steady-growing success of digital stores: large-scale retail trade and physical shops are progressively losing shares, while online retail is boosting its presence in the market. According to the AIE last report, between 2018 and 2019 (in only one year!), bookstores have lost an additional 2,8% of market shares, which means that the 26,7% of the book market is now served by a platform related store.

**GRAPH 2.2** Evolution of the market share. Years 2008-2019
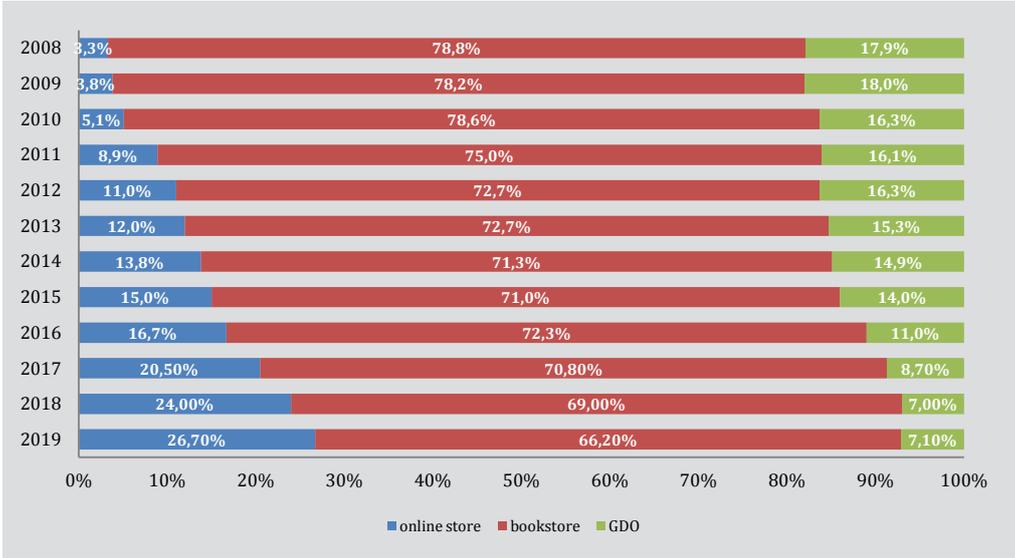
Source: AIE

A further observation can be carried out by analyzing a more specialized distribution of trade shares; in particular, the investigation can be developed distinguishing the position occupied by chain and independent bookstores.

Comparing the first quarter of 2018 and the first quarter of 2019, and keeping in mind the decline of physical channels previously mentioned, what can be assumed is that the diminished importance of physical bookstores registered in 2019 can be associated to independent retails, rather than chain ones. As illustrated by Graph 2, while chain bookstores increased their presence over the year (from 42,50% to 43,50%), independent retails appear to have lost relevance (from 25,50% to 24,00%). Therefore, according to the data, not all the physical point of sales are losing relevance: just independent ones.

GRAPH 2.3 Market shares distribution. First quarter of 2018 and first quarter of 2019
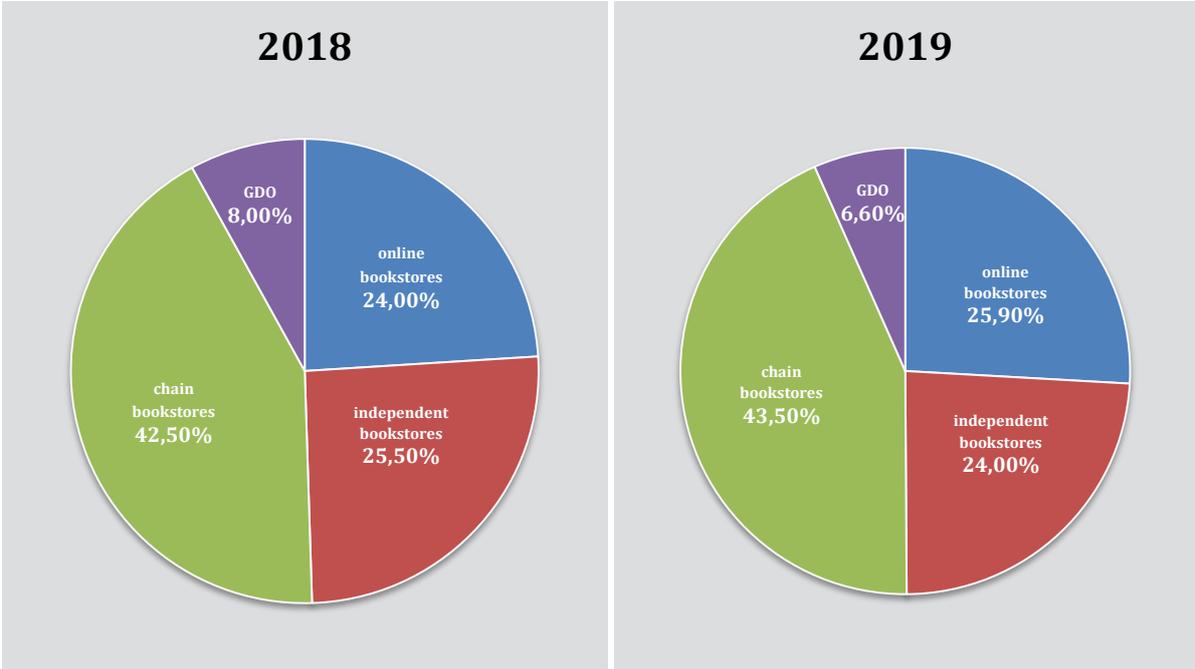
Source: AIE

Certainly related to the progressive empowerment of the online retails position, another interesting data worthy analyzing comes from the transformations happening in the accountable number of bookstores in the national territory. According to the last AIE estimate, having examined the Italian book market analyzing a time span of 5 years (2012-2017), 245 physical bookstores have closed[67] – which is the equivalent of a 6,9% drop in the total amount of brick-and-mortar retails operating inside the national borders.

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[67] The data (presented at the *XXXVII Seminario di perfezionamento della Scuola per librai Umberto ed Elisabetta Mauri*) refers to the evolution of the business activities with the ATECO code 4761: book retailing in specialized business.

The next paragraphs will focus on the two crucial actors that operate in the supply side of the book industry: publishing houses and bookstores. The objective is to describe the traditional position they have held in the market, and to analyze how this position has evolved over the past years due to the phenomena characterizing the contemporary economic environment. Platformization related practices have had several consequences on the dynamics shaping the structure of the industry, threatening to modify the traditional relations among the agents.

2.3 The role of traditional gatekeepers: are publishing houses and distribution still holding their position?

The first upstream structural role in the book value chain is portrayed by the publishing house. As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, this actor has traditionally been considered as the crucial element necessary to trigger the creative mechanism: not only it is the one in charge of selecting and further developing the content of a book, supervising the several steps needed to obtain the final product, but it also possesses the competencies required for formulating the marketing plan related to the new publication, together with all the complementary tasks (designing the cover, editing the manuscript, printing the book, creating a promotional campaign, choosing a distributional strategy, selling the product). Due to the many functions it is called to implement, a publishing house occupies a very powerful position: its decisions regarding the kind of content to favor and to block are able to shape the dynamics and trends characterizing the whole market.

In the contemporary environment, due to the spread of digitization and platformization, the supremacy of its position is starting to be threatened by the emergence of a new practice: self-publishing. Thanks to the platforms[68] now available in the digital environment, authors are able to avoid the difficulties related to those steps traditionally required by a publishing house to develop and distribute an original manuscript. To publish a book has never looked more straightforward; a person interested in printing their idea just have to fill a form with the core information related to the book they intend to produce and pay the platform, that will do the rest.

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[68] Concerning the Italian market, the most used are: Amazon, Kobo (connected to Mondadori), StreetLib, Ilmiolibro, youcanprint.

IMG 2.1 Estimation page, platform Youcanprint.

The weight of self-publishing is particularly evident in the digital book segment: 2018 AIE report account for 11.698 new titles published in e-book, equal to the 22,8% of the total production.

While this new system allows the reader to change its position in the value chain without effort, evolving easily into a creative agent, from the standpoint of the publishing house it represents an alarming phenomenon to keep under control, because of the consequences it can have on the distribution of power along the value chain. Particularly interesting in light of this situation is the Istat data concerning the secondary activities performed by publishing houses during the year 2018. As a matter of fact, 21% of the surveyed publishing houses stated to had adopted self-publish as a secondary activity.

The following pages will illustrate the strategies adopted by publishing houses to consolidate their current dominant position in the value chain. In doing so, the system of reciprocity that describes their relationship with the audience will be highlighted, in order to better understand the dualistic phenomenon in which they are involved. Particular attention will be given to the influence issue: are the audience's preferences that are shaping the offer, or is it the offer that shapes the audience's preferences?

2.3.1   Amazon yes or Amazon no?

The dynamics currently shaping the publishing value chain require a constant redefinition of its boundaries, as well as the need to keep under control the several functions the different actors operating in the field are required to play. In this sense, publishing houses find themselves in a very delicate position: the emergence of new practices endangers their leading role in the industry, demanding continuous updates of the business strategy to adopt.

With the digital markets in expansion and the weight of platform-related purchasing acquiring more and more relevance from the standpoint of the customer, the online presence is mandatory as a basic element to be competitive. Some publishing houses' strategy consists in having their own e-commerce website, employed to sell books directly to the final user. *Mondadori* and *Feltrinelli*, for example, are exploiting the reputation of their own physical bookstores to encourage their customers to buy online; *Giunti* has a digital store whose deliveries are supported by the Amazon logistic service; the publishing house *il Castoro*, to allow the user to complete the purchase, redirects him toward the website of the "independent" bookstore it owns in Milan.

However, to be successful in the digital environment a business needs to be present where its audience (actual or potential) is. The ability to compete with technology leaders in their field of competences requires strong additional efforts – and this is the main reason why publishing houses often prefer to display their products also in third-party platforms, such as Amazon and IBS. Particularly weak is the position assumed by publishing houses in respect to Jeff Bezos' company: the consolidated head position possessed by the famous e-commerce platform comes with strong bargaining power and the capability of imposing specific conditions on its partners.

In this sense, an interesting case study is the one related to the choice of the publishing house *E/O* to withdraw its books from Amazon. During December 2017, Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola took the decision to interrupt their relationship with the tech giant. Ferri stated that the breaking point was reached when "[...] they asked us to increase the percentage on the cover price that, as a publishing house, we own to the seller, in this case to Amazon". In Italy, the share a publishing house is asked to pay to the distributor change based on the category selected: 30-35% for independent bookstores, 40-45% for

chain bookstores, up to 50% to Amazon[69]. According to the two founders of *E/O*, the discount required by Jeff Bezos' company was "too onerous and not even justified by the volume of deals that it is able to obtain thanks to the publishing house". The discussion went even further; in a section of the publishing house's official website it is still possible to read a proper invective against the American technology giant:

> *The closure of bookstores caused by the ruthless Amazon competition means also an economic and cultural depletion of the territory: essential gathering and cultural spaces go missing. However, many consumers accept Amazon because of its prices (usually lowered by higher discounts when national laws allow it) and its efficiency. [...] Its prices often convenient are the results of a policy that sometimes has appeared as dumping [...]; of fiscal evasion [...]; of unacceptable economic conditions required to publishing houses[70].*

The statement continues calling out the unfair practices operated by Amazon, underlying the tremendous stress that the whole publishing industry is undergoing because of it:

> *It is evident that the danger for the freedom of expression is real, constant and happening on a daily basis. Moreover, publishing houses need sufficient economic margins to invest in the search for new authors and new proposals. If these margins are too much consumed, publishing houses risk to disappear (together with the bookstores, authors and all the book world).*
> *This is why we said NO[71].*

This position was supported also by the editorial director of *Babalibri*, Francesca Archinto, whose experience with Amazon was similar to the one undergone by *E/O*. "They asked for a 52-53% share on the cover price", she said, "Then the negotiations. They lowered their demand, but they did it in a way that, for me, was not sufficient"[72]. To this day, the books published by *Babalibri* can be found in the Amazon platform, but they are not sold directly by the company: some third parties are in charge of the sale. Moreover, when selecting the voice "Buy online" in the official publishing house website, the user is redirected to IBS.

  These two cases are relevant to understand the position that agents operating in the contemporary publishing value chain can adopt. *E/O* and *Babalibri* are not devaluating

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[69] Rastelli A. (2017), *Elena Ferrante, il suo editore sfida Amazon: «Condizioni inaccettabili»*, Corriere della sera, 21/12/2017, available at: https://www.corriere.it/cultura/17_dicembre_21/eo-rompe-con-amazon-88f60a1c-e68f-11e7-a31d-9c65415bd8d8.shtml
[70] https://www.edizionieo.it/news/1440/le-edizioni-eo-dicono-no-ad-amazon
[71] See *supra* note 70.
[72] See *supra* note 70.

the online environment: they are criticizing the ruthless policy at the very basis of Amazon's business strategy, denouncing its practices as dangerous for the sustainability of the whole value chain. Nonetheless, the majority of publishing houses are still selling their books on Jeff Bezos' platform. Why?

The platform environment, as explained in Chapter 1, is build upon the network effect: the higher the number of users, the more valuable the digital space is considered by complementors, because of the presence of potential customers; in turn, this phenomenon encourages more developers to join to the platform, that, enriched by the new content, is able to attract new users. The loop created by the platform structural logic can be the reason why the majority of publishing houses are still tolerating Amazon's strict policies. Due to the large number of services that the e-commerce leader is currently offering to its users, it represents a valuable space for the digital purchaser, who is constantly attracted to the website. According to Statista data, in a period of 2 years (from 2016 to 2018), in Italy, Amazon increased the number of users by 4.4 million; in 2018, the total amount of Amazon unique users was equal to 22 million, which represented the 36,38% of the population[73].

2.3.2   Give to the audience what the audience wants: the YouTubers phenomenon

The position assumed by publishing houses is for sure the most authoritative along the book value chain. Their decision concerning the type of content to publish and distribute traditionally shapes the direction of the whole industry, as well as the preferences of the audience. However, in the era of platform-related practices, being able to discern who holds the most influential spot is becoming more and more complex. Upstream agents are constantly examining the behavior of the final consumer, exploiting the live data resulting from their online presence. The information gathered is usually employed to understand the current trend and preferences of the demand side of the market, in order to develop a product able to satisfy its continuously changing requests. In this sense, the content delivered to the audience is designed by their own choices, rather than the editors' ones. So who is affecting who?

Publishing houses and final consumers are stuck in a loop generated by the presence of platforms' data, whose related information is being affected by the decisions made by

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[73] According to Eurostat, the Italian population in 2018 was 60,48 millions.

the leaders of the market and, at the same time, is affecting the decisions made by the leaders of the market.

A clear example of this never-ending spiral of influential effects is connected to the spread of books written by contemporary influencers – and in particular by YouTubers. As the publishing house AGA provocatively states in blog article, "YouTubers' books: If you read one, you read all of them[74]". The publications associated to this specific category of authors are typically based on the personality itself rather than the plot – and this is the reason why, content-wise, they can be categorized in two main groups: the books that present themselves as the written version of the typical content of their videos (i.e. videogames guides, makeup advices, love tips), or their autobiography. "[...] these books will become what, in the past, was the young-adult novels. The only difference is that now the characters coincide with the authors", said Peccatori to the *Corriere della Sera[75]*. In this sense, the success of this type of content is based on the likability of the author. "The audience likes them because they are relatable. It is a matter of charisma. They give up balanced images, choosing a more honest approach. By being normal, they gain clics", explains Luca Casadei, founder of a company (Web Stars Channel) that support the work of Youtubers[76].

Their ability to increase the demand and broadening up the market is often exploited by publishing houses to boost their numbers and promote their brand. Thanks to the following that a YouTuber is usually able to gather, the chance of acquiring new customers with the launch of an influencer related book is higher compared to other categories. Moreover, they give the editor the chance to create events[77] around the launch of a new title – marketing strategy usually associated to a strong social buzz and a fast digital word of mouth.

This new trend is often criticized by insiders, because of the implicit message that stands behind this specific kind of content. Not by chance, the above-mentioned publishing house (AGA), concludes its blog post by saying: "We leave the big, greedy PH the freedom to publish this volumes. We, in our small reality, continue to direct

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[74] https://www.editriceaga.it/2018/06/01/youtuber-scrittori-lo-strano-fenomeno/

[75] Milani N. (2016), *Chi sono gli YouTuber e perché i loro libri vendono*, illibraio.it, available at: https://www.illibraio.it/news/editoria/chi-sono-youtuber-libri-369527/

[76] Landi S. (2016), *Le opinioniste della Rete: fenomeni su YouTube e idoli delle ragazze*, Corriere della sera, 10/03/2016, available at: https://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/16_marzo_10/opinioniste-rete-fenomeni-youtube-idoli-ragazze-cf16b3e2-e6f1-11e5-877d-6f0788106330.shtml

[77] This type of events typically consist in a promotional tour. During the tour stops, the audience is usually invited to meet the author and to participate to book signing.

ourselves toward quality books for an audience who is still able to recognize beauty"[78]. Publications such as the ones described are the perfect pragmatic translation of the phenomenon of commodification of content. Firstly, the books associated to the personality of a YouTubers all presents the same structure: a collection of quotes, photos, some anecdotes on the life of the author. Even If the main character changes, the type of content proposed to the audience sticks to a pre-arranged format. The creative process is moved to the background, acquiring importance only when it comes to display in the most appealing way the brand related to the YouTuber. This editorial choice shape the offer, bringing a specific section of the industry closer to the characteristics usually associated to the commodity market. Second, the role portrayed by platforms (and, in particular, social media platform) is progressively gaining weight during the author selection process. Investigating the numbers associated to the fame of an influencer is becoming a fundamental step to understand which public figure is the most likable at the moment, so to exploit the social wave that follow them. The idea of contingency here assumes the meaning of capability of changing direction according to the audience preferences, which are always developing. In this perspective, the final users (readers) appear to be as the most influential figure alongside the publishing value chain, affecting the upstream actors choices with their behavior. However, at the same time, the decisions taken by the publishing houses concerning the type of personality to promote are capable of shaping the demand, leading the audience attention toward an intended direction.

2.3.3 *The influential role of salesmen: the mechanism that sustain the loop*

Despite the new dynamics shaping the value chain, which are forcing a reorganization in terms of roles and functions to be performed by the different actors operating in the market, the position occupied by distribution is still to be considered crucial to the effective functioning of the industry. While the boundaries defining the figures of publishing houses, authors and readers are blurring, the job of the salesmen remains well defined. The spread of the platformization phenomenon did not undermine their traditional position of mediators between the publishing house and the bookstores – which remains their main responsibility. Since these agents are constantly in contact with the booksellers (who are, as already said in previous paragraphs, the most direct

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[78] See *supra* note 74.

channel of communication with the final customer), analyzing the information collected by them proves to be a key reference point to comprehend the preferences and the trends that the market is witnessing. On the other hand, to understand the supply-side perception of the industry dynamics, it is also relevant to consider the nature of the material collected to serve their function. The marketing department of the publishing house is in charge of equipping them with catalogs, each of which possesses a series of information to pass on to the booksellers. In this sense, the approach developed by salesmen and encouraged by the publishing house is a practical representation of the rationale at the very foundation of the strategy adopted: push products praised by the audience.

During June and July, 2020, I had the opportunity to attend to 4 meetings between different salesmen and the owner of an independent bookstore in Mestre. The findings contained in this sub-paragraph are the result of a personal observation.

Kind of meeting	Participants	When	Duration
Presentation of novelties Restocking order	Owner of the bookshop Salesman Intern	June, 2020	2 h
Presentation of novelties Restocking order	Owner of the bookshop Salesman Intern	June 2020	3 h
Presentation of novelties Restocking order	Owner of the bookshop Salesman Intern	July 2020	1 h
Presentation of novelties Restocking order	Owner of the bookshop Salesman Intern	July 2020	30 min

TABLE 2.2 List of observed meetings

The marketing department of the represented publishing house provides each salesman with a so-called *copertinario*. This catalog – still available in two formats, physical or digital – groups together all the basic information concerning a book, such as title, author, genre, release date, number of pages, price, type of binding, ISBN code, and plot; its function is to present the bookseller with the primary information concerning the product, in order to help him make a quick decision concerning the supply-related numbers.

However, in the light of the phenomena characterizing the current economic landscape, the most interesting thing to analyze in the *copertinario* is the additional data that often follow the elementary ones.

Firstly, having observed many catalogs written by different publishing houses, the most striking aspect to notice is that, in more than one case, social media platforms related data were displayed in the informational sheet. The titles involved in this specific type of promotional strategy were frequently associated with a particular genre of books, such as best sellers and the latest publications. The numbers reported were often related to Twitter trends, and in particular to the rank position of the connected hashtag, the number of Tweets concerning the specific topic, the amount of profiles following the conversation. All this distinct knowledge can be referred to as the social media buzz associated to a subject, which can be gathered and stored in databases thanks to the use of the algorithmic structure of the social media.

Therefore, examining what I witnessed during the meetings occurred in my observation period in the bookstore, the type of approach frequently adopted by salesmen appears to be as the pragmatic translation of the theory of algotorial culture. The intermediary figure of the booksellers is implicitly encouraged to abandon the traditional editorial logic, in favor of a more effective rationale based on live data and up-to-date statistics; nonetheless, the role played by the sale agent is still considered important to take the final decision. In this sense, the most reasonable choice is not built just on the distinguishing competencies and the specific know-how possessed by the experienced traditional actors (i.e. salesmen and booksellers), but it relates more and more to the numbers provided by the algorithmic structure of a platform (specifically, of a social media platform).

Interesting in this sense was the discussion[79] provoked by the supply decision around the new publication of Stephenie Mayer, the American author who became famous in 2005 because of the worldwide phenomenon triggered by her saga, "Twilight". Placed in front of the informational sheet, the owner of the bookstore did not seem to be convinced by the claimed advantages of displaying "Midnight sun" in the shelves of its retail; according to him, this specific type of titles (i.e. best sellers) does not suit the typical audience of his bookstore. The salesman responded to this concern rattling off a series of information regarding the numbers made by the related hashtag on Twitter; in particular, he reported the quantity of topic followers and the amount of discussions connected to the release of the new book of the saga. Finally, he gave his personal

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[79] The discussion happened in June 2020.

opinion on the problem, advising the bookstore owner to buy at least a couple of copies. The owner of the bookstore accepted.

Even If the case above-presented illustrates just a small example[80], it is effective to underline the change in strategy the supply side of the value chain is undergoing and promoting. The salesman seems to be still available for giving his own opinion concerning a specific topic, but the exposition of platform-related numbers is progressively becoming a decisive part of the decisional process. To help booksellers to make supply choices, salesmen provide them with data concerning the current preferences and trends recorded in the market thanks to platform activities. As a result, the practice is slowly moving from an editorial logic, to an algorithmic logic, passing through the medium stage represented by the algotorial rationale.

  Social media statistics are not the only supplementary data that salesmen provide to booksellers to help them making a supply decision. Most of the *copertinari* I examined during my observation period reported also the number of copies sold in other countries – once again, considering the informational sheets associated with specific categories of books (i.e. best sellers and the latest publications). In every attended meeting with a salesman (independently from the distributor they worked for, or publishing house they represented), there was a moment dedicated to the presentation of this additional type of detail. The knowledge of foreign statistics was presented as a key factor to take a decision that was, in turn, related to the domestic market; the salesman often reaffirmed the success in other countries as a legitimate reason to display the title under evaluation in the bookstore.

This specific promotional approach adopted by salesmen is particularly relevant as it represents the pragmatic representation of the homogenization of culture theory. The practice of exploiting the success in a foreign market as a key point to make domestic decisions (and, later in the process, as a benchmark to compare the obtained results) is implicitly supporting a very specific vision of the sector. According to this perspective, the characteristics outlining the Italian book industry are not different from those constituting other realities (i.e. other world nations) – meaning that trends and

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[80] Similar scenes were witnessed in the other meetings that took place between June and July 2020. The procedure followed was analogous to the one described for the "Midnight sun" case: a best seller informational sheet, doubts concerning the supply decision, provision of additional numbers related to the social buzz, salesman advice.

audience's preferences are treated as perfectly comparable[81]. The elements describing the demand are the same in every circumstance, with no distinguishing qualities or peculiar necessities – an assumption that endorses the idea of a popular culture progressively involved in an undergoing phenomenon of homogenization.

The information associated to the success obtained by a publication in foreign countries is not just employed by the salesmen when interacting with the booksellers. The marketing department of publishing houses typically design the so called "editorial band", the additional wrapped of paper that can be found in the cover of certain books (usually best sellers and new publications).

IMG 2.2 Two examples of editorial bands referring to the foreign success of the book.
On the left, "Figlie di una nuova era", written by Carmen Korn, recorded "600.000 sold copies in Germany".
On the right, "In tutto c'è stata bellezza", written by Manuel Vilas, was an "editorial case in Spain".

The above illustrated strategy is once again representative of the on-going dualism that describe the contemporary book industry. On one side, there is a strong use of algorithms to understand audience's trends and preferences, with the explicit objective to provide the market with the products it requires; on the other side, there is the exploitation of this information to shape the desires of the target.

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[81] A further exploration of the industry, on the other hand, shows that the specific characteristics of the Italian book market make the comparison with foreign ones nonsensical. Even without analyzing the specific target's demography of other countries, the data concerning the percentage of people who stated to have read at least one book in 12 months is explicative enough. The Italian population presents issues that, at a first look, do not influence other markets.

2.4   Bookstores: the role in a platform world

Graphs 2.2 and 2.3 illustrated and explained in paragraph 2.2 have revealed the overall trend currently involving the audience of the publishing industry: the importance of physical bookshops is progressively diminishing, favoring the rise of online retails, which are steadily gaining market shares. The brick-and-mortar retail store is being replaced with virtual ones thanks to the exploitation of digital platforms, that allow a faster and more convenient purchasing journey.

Nevertheless, according to the latest Istat report concerning the year 2018, publishing houses still believe that physical bookstores (and, in particular, independent retails) are the most strategic point of reference to reach the audience in the market. On a scale from 0 to 10 (where 10 equals the maximum effectiveness), different publishing houses (small, medium and large) were asked to state how much they consider effective each of the listed trade channels when it comes to increase the demand and broaden up the market. The results present a clear preference for independent bookstores, with an average score of 7.7 out of 10.

TABLE 2.3 Publishing houses per distribution channels believed to be the most effective to increase the demand and broadening up the publishing market. Year 2018.
(average scores on a scale from 0 to 10)

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS BELIEVED TO BE STRATEGIC	Active publishing houses			
	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Independent bookstores	7,7	7,7	7,9	7,7
Italian online stores (online bookstores, e-commerce online stores, etc.)	7,1	7,3	7,7	7,2
Events (fairs, festivals, reading expos, etc.)	6,8	6,9	6,6	6,8
Chain bookstores	6,4	6,3	7,0	6,4
Foreign online stores (online bookstores, e-commerce online stores, etc.)	5,9	5,8	6,1	5,9
Large-scale retail trade (supermarkets, multistore, etc.)	5,0	4,8	5,1	5,0
Generic retail stores (kiosks, stationary stores, service stations, post offices, ecc.)	5,0	4,7	4,7	4,9
Other	1,1	1,2	0,8	1,1

Source: Istat

This preference is even clearer when analyzing the distribution channels actually exploited by publishing houses to trade the publications. Independent bookstores, once again, occupy the first position in the options available for the survey respondent, scoring an average result of 6 points out of 10.

Source: Istat

In the light of this data, a question emerges: If the gatekeeper of the industry (publishing houses) shows such an high consideration in regard to physical retail, why do the numbers related to brick-and-mortar bookstores keep on diminishing? How can we interpret the impact that the contemporary phenomena have had on this specific step of the production mechanism?

The following pages will illustrate the current environment in which bookstores are called to operate, and how the introduction of platforms have reshaped and repositioned their position in the book value chain.

2.4.1 Jeff Bezos' predictions: the changes in the books world

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Amazon has always been a leading figure in the publishing industry. Starting with its debut in 1994 as the first online book retailer, the Seattle company has grown and grown, changing its core business but still intersecting its history with the one of the book value chain.

The tech giant, over the years, has made several moves as an actor operating in the publishing sector, having a relevant impact on the structure of the industry itself. In this sense, the first strategic decision stands right in the foundations of the company. While working for D.E. Shaw & Co (1990-1994), Jeff Bezos discovered an untapped resource: the internet. This finding pushed him to evaluate several options of online marketable items – whose list included compact discs, computer hardware, computer software,

videos and books. This last product category was selected for three main reasons: the large worldwide demand for literature, the low prices points for books and the large number of titles available[82]. In 1994 he was the first to launch an online bookstore, whose success was immediate: between July and August 1994, the newly founded company was able to sell to every state of the US and over 45 foreign countries. Its point of strength lied in the large assortment available, which could not be equaled by brick-and-mortar retailers.

Bezos' capability to forecast the expansion of the internet phenomenon allowed him to become the contemporary leader in the platform-related environment. Amazon's consolidated brand image grants it the top-of-mind position in the consumers' choices concerning online purchasing, guaranteeing an easy win over the competitors. According to the data gathered through some interviews conducted during July and August 2020, when buying books online the first choice is usually Amazon.

Part of the success of the Seattle company is guaranteed by the capability of Jeff Bezos to efficiently predict the upcoming trends of the market, and to implement them before the competitors. In this sense, examining the changes in the strategy adopted may help to understand the direction the market is currently taken.

Focusing specifically on the publishing industry, the most recent strategic move taken by Amazon concerns the position of wholesaler it intends to occupy. Announced during summer 2019, this choice has been harshly criticized by industry insiders, who are afraid of the impact it could have on the value chain. This further evolution, in fact, can easily provide the technology giant with the possibility of enlarging even more the control on the production chain, increasing its overall power.

Operating as a mediating figure between publishing houses and bookstores, the wholesaler is a fundamental part of the book value chain, which often competes with distributors for a spot in the last steps of the publishing production mechanism. Amazon Business (this is the name of the new service offered by the leader platform) is presented as a service whose main objective is to help physical bookstores (and other small retails, such as stationery stores and kiosks). Mirroring the B2C strategy, Amazon Business claims for large assortment, availability and rapidity; free deliveries and returns; reserved discounts.

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[82] https://www.companieshistory.com/amazon-com/

Interesting are the words used by Todd Heimes, Director of Amazon Business, when referring to the launch of the new business tool:

> *From 1995 we have invested to favor readers and authors from all over the world: it is in our DNA to sustain culture and to actively promote the reading practice. This new initiative starts from Italy and it is designed to concretely help all book sellers, from bookstores to stationery stores, to kiosks, giving them means useful to facilitate and enlarge the business. [...] All this is translated in higher benefits for the Italian readers, who can obtain the books they want in a rapid and easy way, online or at a retail store, according to their necessities or purchasing experience they desire[83].*

First of all, he highlights the position of Amazon as a cultural agent. According to him, at the very core of the company business model, there is a commitment to support cultural realities and, in particular, the practice of reading. Furthermore, the decision to enter the sector as a wholesaler is presented as a way to enlarge consumers' possibilities and, consequently, to broaden up the market. However, the most interesting element of analysis can be found in the very last concept articulated by Heimes. The promise of Amazon Business is to make sure physical bookstores matters again, presenting them as a perfectly alternative purchasing method; thanks to the tools offered by the platform, they could become equally easy and equally fast. In this perspective, according to him, the final choice of the consumers simply depends on the type of *experience* they want to enjoy: exploiting Amazon's online services to easily receive their books at home, without having the necessity to physically go to the retail store – or visiting the brick-and-mortar bookstore, taking pleasure in wandering around the shelves. Considering the contemporary take on the audience's purchasing journey, focusing on the word *experience* is crucial to be able to stand out from the competitors. Particularly heated in this sense is the debate concerning the importance of a physical point of sale – whose relevance from the economic standpoint has increased in the COVID-19 emergency period, when customers were obliged to purchase only online through the use of digital platforms. "[...] the consumer acquired familiarity both with the physical and the digital channel, hence the name *omicustomer*. [...] For this reason, from the COVID crisis the consumer will emerge with new capabilities and he will look for an hybrid and

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[83] Il Corriere della Sera Economics Editorial Board (2019), *Amazon Business per le librerie, il nuovo servizio per i rivenditori di libri*, L'Economia, Il Corriere della Sera, 23/09/2019, available at: https://www.corriere.it/economia/consumi/19_settembre_23/amazon-business-le-librerie-nuovo-servizio-rivenditori-libri-426d68d6-dded-11e9-b3ae-814cb7847a2b.shtml

customized purchasing experience with the brand, because the boundaries between physical and digital will no longer exist", says Massimo Curcio, associate partner of Kpmg and author of the paper of "Social distancing and new Retail Experience models"[84]. This statement is for sure calling for an online structure to support the in-store practices, due to the acquired familiarity of the final user with the contemporary technology, but it is also underlying the need of the audience for the real life experience of the product.

The importance of a brick-and-mortar store, a place the audience can visit, exploiting its senses to really *feel* the product, is not a new concept for Jeff Bezos, who (up to 2018) had opened 17 physical bookstores all over the United States. The discussion concerning Amazon's brick-and-mortar stores is still undergoing in today economic environment – especially because of its recent decision to open a store in Germany.

In the light of these considerations, an important question arise: why do physical bookstores keep closing If the brick-and-mortar presence is so important in nowadays economic environment?

2.4.2   Influencer or employee? The contemporary role of the bookseller

Among the several roles associated with the traditional book value chain, the position occupied by booksellers is for sure one of the most controversial, especially when considering the contemporary environment. Despite the importance attributed to their place in the value chain by the publishing houses[85] and the progressively high attention Amazon is showing towards them, the physical retail seems to be steadily losing relevance in the eye of the consumers and, at the same time, the job of the bookseller is perceived as less and less worthwhile in the customers' purchasing journey. What are the causes of this phenomenon? Who is responsible for the apparently incompatible vision of this actor?

Starting from 15 June 2020, I had the opportunity to personally witness the routine the two owners of an independent bookstore in Mestre are used to go through during a typical working day. From Monday to Saturday, for over a month, I followed their daily

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[84] De Ceglia V. (2020), *Fisico e online, il negozio è uno solo così vuole il nuovo "omniconsumer"*, La Repubblica, 02/06/2020, available at: https://www.repubblica.it/economia/rapporti/osserva-italia/trend/2020/06/02/news/fisico_e_online_il_negozio_e_uno_solo_cosi_vuole_il_nuovo_omniconsume r_-258266896/

[85] It refers to the data presented at the beginning of this paragraph through Table 2.3. The appreciation score registered by independent bookstores is significant, because it represents the value that the supply side of the market attributes to this specific actor operating in the production chain.

steps, being granted the possibility to take part in staff meetings and brainstorming sessions.

The rationale constituting the foundation of this sub-paragraph structure is the result of field observation.

There are several tasks a bookseller is asked to perform on a daily basis: check and register the supply packages on the computer, reorganize the shelves according to the new titles arrived at the store, constantly updating the restock order. The bureaucratic functions are combined with the more well-known activities, such as answer to customers' questions, help them during the purchasing journey, conclude the sale. Independent bookstores, then, traditionally requires further efforts to stand out in the competitive environment – which means that, in addition to all the functions previously mentioned, new partners need to be found and reached, events have to be designed and developed, unique creative ideas must be produced to enlarge the audience. Finally, a distinctive task that can go unnoticed is *reading*. M.S., one of the two owners of the *Libro con gli stivali*, an independent bookstore in Mestre, often says that "even booksellers have their homework to do". Being able to advice properly the customers requires a huge preparation in terms of knowledge of the offer – aspect that, in this specific step of the value chain, asks to the bookseller to get to know their book. In an interview released to Diacritica, the words of two owners of *Tempo Ritrovato Libri*, an independent bookstore in Milan, perfectly summarize this additional function: "[…] the number related to new publications is high, in Italy we publish a lot: the function of the bookseller should consist in choose and act as a filter. We like to think about us as proposal bearers: being able to select in the wide sea of yearly publications, almost 60.000, what we believe to be not only interesting for our customers, but also what can give them something more, to enrich them as persons"[86].

In this sense, the position occupied by the independent booksellers can be easily associated to the role performed by the traditionally-defined influencer: they represent those intermediaries, positioned between the upstream actor (i.e. publishing house) and the market audience, who are in charge of shaping the opinion and preferences of the final consumer[87]. Hereof, the specific competences and know-how possessed by these

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[86] To read the complete transcript, see: https://diacritica.it/storia-dell-editoria/intervista-ai-librai-di-tempo-ritrovato-libri-a-milano.html

[87] The classic definition of influencer includes also the capability of shaping the decision of the upstream actors of the value chain.

agents are a key dimension of the value creation process, as they influence the behavior of the demand side of the market. To get in touch with the audience in a physical space, where a real conversation can take place and object of interest (the book) can be examined together, is recognized as a crucial element to offer an effective experience to the buyer. Not by chance, brick-and-mortar independent bookstores are still considered by publishing houses as the most strategic trade channels of all. Nonetheless, the market shares associated to this specific mode of distribution are slowly diminishing. What is happening?

   First of all, a further investigation of customers' habits shows that a crucial role is played by the mental association the contemporary audience form when thinking about the physical bookstore. The primary objective a person has in mind when entering the brick-and-mortar retail store is usually not associated with the act of purchasing a book, but to a moment of *visiting* the place. In this sense, the core function a potential user attributes to a bookstore is shifting, moving toward a specific direction: it is not about buying a book anymore, but about living the experience associated with the place per se. It is a matter of atmosphere, of having granted the possibility to spend an afternoon relaxing. However, according to this contemporary conception of physical retail, the role of the bookseller can be easily moved to the background, assuming the position of a simple employee. The value of the bookstore does not lie on the competences and knowledge possessed by the owners, but it stands on the experience itself that it is possible to live inside the retail. Interesting in this sense is the observation made by C.P. during our interview: "[...] and then I've always found nice and accommodating people, who never made me anxious even If I spent an entire hour (it happens often) wandering around or in any case were never bothering me asking me If I needed something". In her perspective, the presence of a bookseller is a secondary aspect of the experience inside a bookstore; in particular, she said that "I talk with the bookseller only If I'm not able to find a book, and maybe I saw on the website of that specific bookstore that it was available".

Re-examining the market with this change of perspective in mind, the dynamics currently affecting the distribution of shares among different trade channels now present a logical explanation. While the presence of the online retails continues to grow, the only physical counterpart that it not losing space in the market corresponds to chain

bookstores[88] – which can be considered as a brick-and-mortar translation of the digital space. Publishing house-owned stores display a large variety of assortment, while bringing the advantages of the physical experience. In this scenario, the role of the bookseller is considered in the same manner as a traditional shop assistant.

Then who is replacing the booksellers in their role of influencers? In the contemporary landscape, who is in charge of advising the audience, shaping the dynamics characterizing the demand?

GRAPH 2.5 Methods adopted by customers to choose a book. 2017-2018
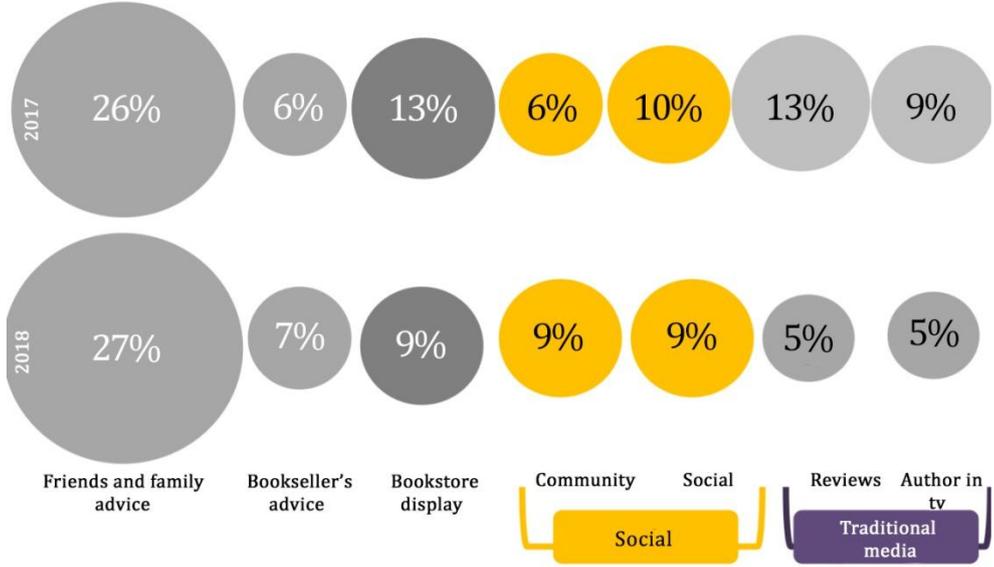
Source: AIE

The means traditionally adopted to choose a book are progressively losing importance, while alternative methods are reinforcing their position. In particular, what is interesting concerning the behavior of customers is the emergence of a strong sense of community. The opinions supported by a selected group of people are more and more influential both in the initial and the final steps of the purchasing decision.

R.M., during her interview, described to me how the Telegram reading group she participates in works. What was particularly interesting, in this sense, were the comments she made concerning the other people of the community: "I find myself in a nice position [in the group], because they are very smart and friendly people, so If I'm looking for a more peculiar or specific title they are willing to guide and help you!".

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[88] See Graph 3.3, paragraph 2.2.

The growing capability possessed by the communities to influence the behavioral patterns is well summarized by the title given by Maguire and Matthews to their paper: Are we all cultural intermediaries now? The opinion developed by the members of the reference group can be considered as the starting point to cultivate one's personal preference, the position of the critic can be occupied by whoever possesses an internet connection; the ability to clarify the doubts and indecisiveness is close at hand: thanks to a Tweet written by a reader in the other part of the world, a consumer can make a decision concerning their own purchasing choices.

In this sense, the online presence of social platforms that allow the gathering of people with the same interests appears to be favoring the progressive substitution of the booksellers as the most influential intermediary of the value chain.

2.5   Legge sul libro (Legge 13 febbraio 2020, n. 15)

On March 25, 2020, approving the law proposal formulated by Flavia Piccoli Nardelli et alt. (*Partito Democratico*) on July 8, 2019, the Italian Government has introduced a new regulation, whose main objective is to coordinate and sustain the book value chain. The new *Legge sul libro* is conceived as the foundation of a broader National plan to encourage the population to experience and enjoy the literary offer, promoting and supporting the reading practice[89]. In particular, the legislative text explicitly asserts that guaranteeing broader access to the practice of reading leads to the improvement of the BES index. Introduced and developed by the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (Istat), BES is an acronym that stands for *Benessere Equo e Sostenibile* (i.e. Fair and Sustainable Well-being), a measure whose objective is to combine the main economic indicators with the traditional dimensions characterizing the well-being of a person. Structured in 12 domains, the BES index acknowledges the reading practice when considering the importance of education, and in particular when measuring the synthetic indicator of the level of cultural participation[90]. What can be observed in the 2019 BES report is the scarce improvement in terms of percentage for what concerns the reading practice.

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[89] The first comma of the article state that: *La Repubblica, in attuazione degli articoli 2, 3 e 9 della Costituzione, favorisce e sostiene la lettura quale mezzo per lo sviluppo della conoscenza, la diffusione della cultura, la promozione del progresso civile, sociale ed economico della Nazione, la formazione e il benessere dei cittadini.*

[90] Istat defines this indicator as follows: "percentage of people aged 6 years and over who have carried out 3 or more activities in the 12 months before the interview on total people aged 6 years and over. The activities considered are: go to the cinema at least four times, at least once to the theatre, exhibitions and

GRAPH 2.6 Share of people participating in at least 3 cultural activities. Years 2017-2018
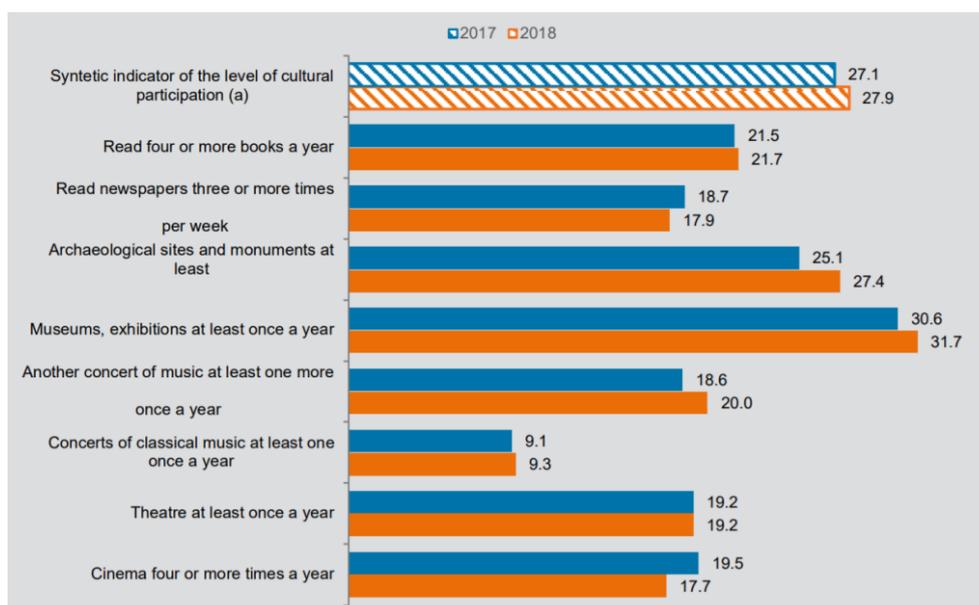
Source: Istat

Moreover, as Flavia Piccoli Nardelli suggests during her intervention on July 8, 2019, when broadening up the perimeter of the analysis, particularly alarming is the position assumed by the Italian population when taking into account the more general European context. Defining the figure of the reader as a person who has read at least one book in the 12 months before the date of the interview (excluding those read for professional reasons), the literacy indicator shows that the percentage associated to the Italian citizens is much lower than the one recorded in other European countries, such as France, Germany, Norway. According to Statista, for example, the percentage of French persons who claimed to have read at least one book during the year 2018 reaches 92% – while Istat data shows that, analyzing the same year, the Italians associated percentage is 40,6%.

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museums, archaeological sites, monuments, concerts of classical music, opera, concerts of other kind of music; read the newspaper at least three times per week, read at least four books".

GRAPH 2.7 Share of people participating in at least 3 cultural activities. Year 2018

Country	Percentage
Bulgaria	48,20%
Greece	48,80%
Cyprus	51,90%
Slovenia	54,10%
Brazil	56,00%
Italy (only books)	60,00%
Spain	62,20%
Italy	64,00%
Germany	68,70%
Finland	72,70%
Austria	73,00%
USA	73,00%
Sweden	73,50%
France	84,00%
Canada	83,00%
UK	86,00%
Norway	90,00%
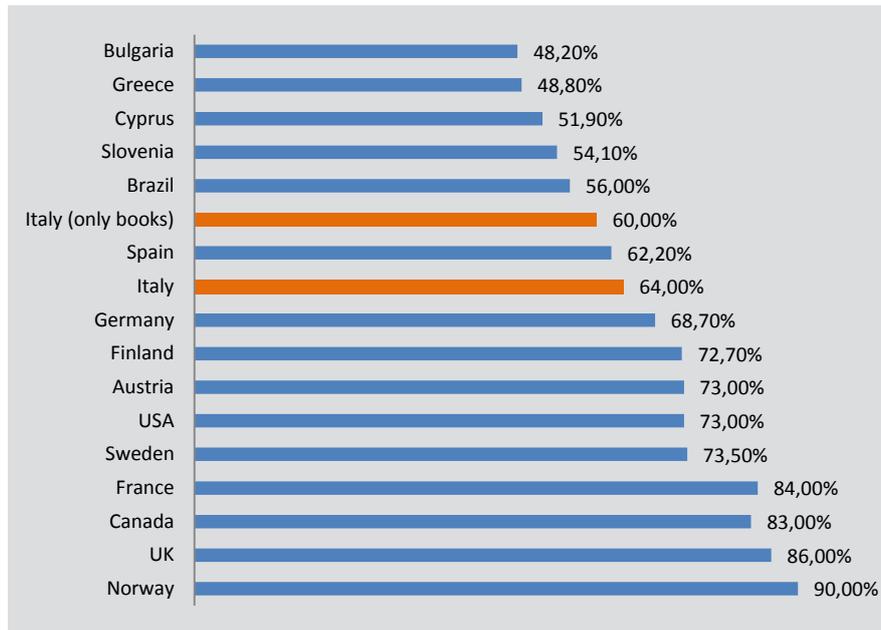
Source: AIE

Entered into force during the COVID19 pandemic, the regulation has the aim of reinforcing the foundations needed to improve the numbers related to the percentage of people who read – but it has also a direct effect when analyzing the standpoint of digital platforms. Particularly interesting are the possible consequences that the new regulations concerning the allowed discount policies may have on online retailers, such as Amazon and IBS.

2.5.1   Structure and objectives of the law

The new regulation is developed in 13 articles; each one takes into consideration a specific dimension concerning the value creation mechanism that characterizes the publishing industry, intending to establish new support systems able to sustain some of the relevant actors involved in the process[91].

The first article – denominated "Principles and objectives" [*Principi e finalità*] – claims that the Italian Republic sustains and supports the reading activity as a mean to promote the civil, social and economic progress of the country. Moreover, the Government promotes activities whose objective is to sustain and encourage the "production, preservation, circulation and consumption of books". These general statements constitute the *ratio* upon which the whole structure of the law is based.

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[91] For the complete legislative text, see appendix C.

The other articles are denominated as follow:

Art. 2: National action plan to promote the reading practice [*Piano nazionale d'azione per la promozione della lettura*]

Art. 3: Local pacts to favor the reading practice [*Patti locali per la lettura*]

Art. 4: Book Italian Capital [*Capitale italiana del libro*]

Art. 5: Promotion of the reading practice at school [*Promozione della lettura a scuola*]

Art. 6: Measures to contrast the educational and cultural poverty [*Misure per il contrasto della povertà educativa e culturale*]

Art. 7: [*Donazioni librarie*]

Art. 8: Modification of the 27 July, 2011, law, n. 128, on the subject of discounts on the selling price of the books [*Modifiche alla legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, in materia di sconti sul prezzo di vendita dei libri*]

Art. 9: Qualification of "quality bookshop" [*Qualifica di "libreria di qualità"*]

Art. 10: Fiscal incentives for bookshops [*Incentivi fiscali per le librerie*]

Art. 11: Abrogations [*Abrogazioni*]

Art. 12: Financial coverage [*Copertura finanziaria*]

Art. 13: Entrying into force [*Decorrenza dell'efficacia*]

Considering the subject examined and regulated by each article, it is possible to observe that brick-and-mortar bookstores are often positioned at the center of the discussion. In many cases, the rationale posed as the foundation of the Article is to provide bookshops with a solution able to help them in creating a financially sustainable environment. As stated in the introduction, physical libraries are (at the moment) one of the three modes of distribution that are considered by publishing houses as the most strategic – which means that their sustainability is essential to the whole value chain.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is particularly relevant to analyze Article 8, which takes into consideration the regulation of discounts, both in terms of maximum percentage allowed, and specific period of the year designated for promotions. Starting from the limitations on book prices imposed by the previous law[92], the new

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[92] Denominated Levi after the first signer of the regulation, it is the *Legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, Nuova disciplina del prezzo dei libri*.

Legge sul libro establishes a stricter discipline on the subject of discounts, reducing the allowed percentage of price reduction that can be offered to the final consumer.

Art. 8

Modifiche alla legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, in materia di sconti sul prezzo di vendita dei libri. Relazione alle Camere.

Comma 2: [...] La vendita di libri ai consumatori finali, da chiunque e con qualsiasi modalità effettuata, è consentita con uno sconto fino al 5 per cento del prezzo apposta ai sensi del comma 1. Il limite massimo di sconto di cui al primo periodo è elevato al 15 per cento per i libri adottati dalle istituzioni scolastiche come libri di testo. I limiti massimi di sconto di cui al primo e al secondo periodo si applicano anche alle vendite di libri effettuate per corrispondenza o tramite piattaforme digitali nella rete internet. I limiti massimi di sconto di cui al primo e al secondo periodo non si applicano alle vendite di libri alle biblioteche, purché i libri siano destinati all'uso dell'istituzione, restando esclusa la loro rivendita.

As illustrated by the norm, these restrictions are applied not only the physical bookshop, but also to online retailers. Starting from the 25 March, 2020, all the actors involved in the process of selling books to the final consumer, have to comply with the 5% discount policy, leaving no space for non-approved promotions.

2.5.2   Platforms and discounts: forecasted consequences on the value chain

This new law promoted by the Italian *Partito Democratico* is built on the assumption that, to create a financially sustainable mechanism, the whole publishing value chain needs to be reorganized. Aligning itself with the prevailing models characterizing other legislative systems among the European Union countries[93], the Italian *Legge sul libro* has the objective of supporting the whole structure of the industry, which is now struggling under the pressure of market competition and new practices born with the phenomena of digitization and platformization.

Particularly relevant in terms of forecasted consequences to the platforms environment is the implementation of more strict regulation on the subject of coupons and discounts. The introduction of a discount season and the reduction of the

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[93] Flavia Piccoli Nardelli herself, during her intervention on the law proposal on July 8, 2019, refers to the French law, promoted in 1981 by the former minister of Culture Jack Lang. The regulation was developed to protect the position of the independent libraries against the practices (considered unfair) carried out by the chain libraries. In 2013, this law was enlarged to include further dispositions to block the advancement of Amazon.

percentage of discount allowed on a book do not concern only the physical point of sale (both chain and independent bookstores), but also the online retailers.

According to the information collected during the online observational period[94], the primary reason why customers are pushed to prefer the digital retails over the traditional brick-and-mortar bookstores is the presence of a higher level of discounts. D.F. says she tends to buy books online (usually on Amazon) because she reads a lot, and "being able to save some money means a lot to me". Particularly interesting then is the statement articulated by L.M., who affirms that the main reason why she shops online (in *Feltrinelli*'s digital store) is the presence of discounts. "Unluckily for me, *Feltrinelli* offers a lot of discounts on its books, and If you reach a specific threshold the delivery is free. This is the reason why I prefer to buy them online, because I save a lot of money. It's 15%, but If you get 15% on every book, in the end, a book comes for free". The adjective "unluckily" seems to adequately express the overall attitude that I experienced both during the interviews and by taking part in the online conversation. The majority of the people I examined seemed to perceive the online environment as an inevitable choice when it comes to purchasing books: the decision is imposed by economic reasoning (i.e. save money), other than convenience in terms of practical utility. In more than one occasion, then, the interviewee felt the urgency to underline how unhappy they were because of this choice, detail that gave me the perception of a really forced situation.

Before the introduction of the regulation, on websites such as Amazon and IBS.it, the most striking feature visible on the page was the caption "25% off" right next to the title of the book under examination. The possibility of saving money thanks to the discounts available only in the digital retailers was the key point of their promotional strategy. After the approval of the *Legge sul libro*, to balance the impossibility of beating the competition in terms of discounts, online shops provided the customer with additional services and features. In the case of Amazon, the first thing that pops to the eye is the presence of a "FREE shipping" wording placed under the price of the book.

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[94] The examination period took place in July and August 2020. Other than traditional interviews, I analyzed the comments on several discussions concerning the topic of online social platform users.

IMG 2.3 Example of an Amazon purchasing page.

The specific direction taken by the promotional strategy implemented by e-commerce platforms is a clear answer to the changes the market is currently undergoing. The implementation of the new *Legge sul libro* is clearly giving some signals to the industry, whose actors are now trying to adjust and adapt their behavior to the new environment. The question that emerges after these considerations, at this stage of the analysis, is the following: is it possible to further forecast the consequences that the new law, together with the platformization phenomenon, is going to have on the industry?

2.6 Tradition and innovation: which direction is the industry taking?

The ability to forecast the future development of the market is compromised by the COVID-19 word crises, whose consequences on the economic landscape are still being gathered and processed. The dynamics resulting from platform-related practices are currently biased by the emerging needs and correlated issues, which are accelerating the spread and usage of the digital environment. The *Legge sul libro* itself was approved during the lock-down period, which means that customers were obliged to buy books mainly through online retails because of the impossibility to go to the physical bookstore. In a similar situation, the final user was not concerned with economical reasons (such as discounts): the online choice was affected by external factors. This situation biased the investigation on the consumers' reaction to the introduction of the new law.

Nonetheless, AIE data is showing a slight improvement in the numbers related to the industry, which during the first semester of the year was suffering due to the poor market performance caused by the Coronavirus emergency. In particular, the shares associated to the physical bookstores are slowly increasing – even If the percentage is still very far from the one registered in the 2019.

GRAPH 2.8 Market share comparison between online and physical bookstores.
2019- up to April 2020-up to July 2020
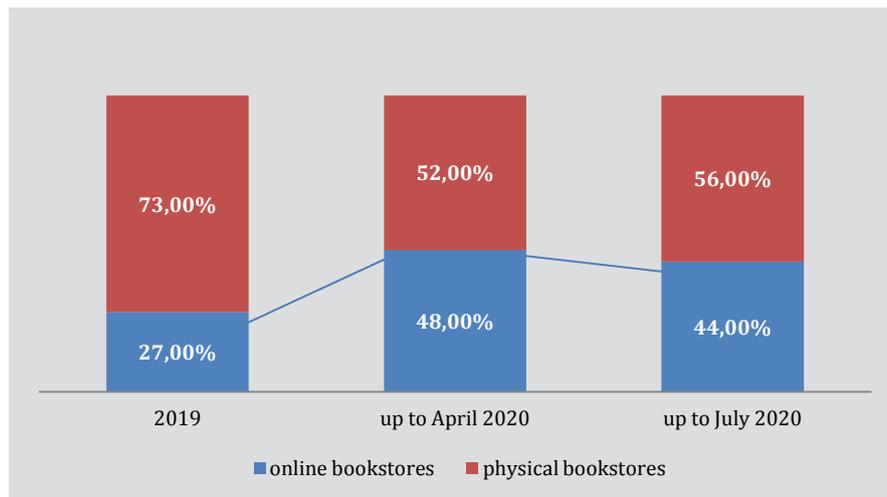
Source: AIE

However, the supremacy of online bookstores is the result of an unexpected external factor, and being able to discern the impact of the new *Legge sul libro* and the contemporary platform-related practices is difficult.

In order to truly understand the future evolution of the publishing sector, it is fundamental to investigate the behavior of another crucial actor: the audience. Even if the patterns of behavior have been forced to change according to the emerging restraints caused by the health issue, examining the preferences of the final users is still a fundamental step to be carried out to have a wider perspective on the market.

The next chapter will focus on the demand side of the publishing industry. The main objective is to understand how their behavior is evolving. Moreover, I will try to answer the following question: are the supply-related actors influencing the audience preferences, or is the audience influencing the supply-related actors' decision?

3   THE SECOND DIMENSION OF THE LOOP: THE DEMAND SIDE OF PUBLISHING SECTOR

3.1   The promise of a perfectly tailored proposal: the algorithmic culture theory

When investigating the role of distribution, in subparagraph 2.3.3, one of the most interesting observations made is the attitude adopted by the bookseller toward the platform-related data the salesman was presenting to him. In that situation, taking into consideration the information acquired thanks to the online algorithms was not the influential action guiding the decisive moment: the final supply decision was carried out acknowledging and valuing the personal opinion of the expert. The doubts were resolved, rather than by the statistics concerning the consumers' social habits, by the subjective judgment of the salesmen, whose viewpoint was recognized as crucial for the final choice. In this sense, in the offer side of the publishing industry it is possible to recognize the hybrid algotorial logic illustrated by Bonini and Gandini in their paper[95]; while the algorithmic rationale tries to affirm itself in the sector, some of the core agents still perceive the need to be supported by the competences and knowledge possessed by the traditional intermediaries.

But, in this preference, where does the audience stand? Are the final users already willing to give up their decisional power to allow the machine to choose for them or do they prefer to be helped by more traditional mediator figures?

The examination of the topics associated with these questions is the first step to understand the direction the demand side of the publishing sector is taking due to the rise of platforms. In particular, observing the attitude that the typical users adopt in the digital environment, with specific attention to the analysis of behavior they exhibit toward the new features, before and after the purchase, can help to outline where the influential power lies along the value chain.

First of all, it is important to remember that, during the decisional moment of the purchasing journey, the digital presence of the industry gatekeepers is usually made evident to the consumer through the mean of the so-called "Suggested for you" section of the online platform. In this sense, the recommendation system can be recognized as

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[95] See Bonini and Gandini, *supra* note 32.

the visible outcome of the platform algorithmic structure, and its relationship with the user has to be acknowledged as the starting point for upstream actors to actively shape the market demand. Its recognition as a functional, trustworthy mechanism is fundamental to push the final consumers (potential or current) to rely on it, and so to implement its influence on their final choices. If the audience believes to know better than the machine, then the capability of the upstream agents to shape the purchasing decision diminishes, and so does their potential power of directing the market toward a pre-defined, specific kind of content.

Nevertheless, the "Suggested for you" section present in the website is just the visible result of a thorough analysis of the users' choices and preferences, which involves the invisible gathering of a huge amount of data. The information collected through the examination of their algorithmic identity, developed starting from their online behavior, is used to actively provide the market with more customized content; the tailored recommendation is an additional feature of the platform, not the focal point, which in turn can be identified in the formulation of useful knowledge about the final users. In this sense, the demand side of the industry appear to be always under the conditioning of the upstream agents, with or without considering the suggestions given by the mathematical system they interact with.

The following pages will focus on the effects that algorithms exert on the demand side of the publishing industry. Examining in particular the relationship between the final consumer and the numerical structure of the online environment, the aim is to understand its true influential capability.

3.1.1   Algorithmic identity and tailored suggestions: the theory underneath the recommendation system

At the very foundation of Amazon and IBS' recommendation systems there is the idea of providing the customer with a more personalized experience; the "Suggested for you" section present in both websites has the objective of presenting the audience with a series items – which usually consist in other books or associated box sets and merchandise –, in a way that claims to make the purchasing journey easier and faster. The clear display on the website page of similar products is supposed to trigger a new need, inducing the consideration of additional articles to be purchased, which are supposed to be perfectly in line with the image that the user has of himself.

The mathematical structure of the platform takes under examination the algorithmic identity of the consumer, analyzing his online presence through the cookies' data collected from previous choices and visited websites, in order to get a deeper understanding of his attitudes and preferences; then, it compares his history with the one observed in other individuals stored in the database, looking for similarities. Just as it happens in the traditional marketing process, where the demand side of the investigated industry is segmented and potential customers are grouped together according to some distinguishing characteristics to better target the offer, the main objective of the use of algorithms is to associate the user's identity with those similar in terms on online behavior, in order to display in his web page the choices that subjects with comparable characteristics made.

The data-gathering logic underneath this improved ability to predict future choices of the users is most of the time invisible, thanks to the exploitation of the platform's digital features and the existence of cookies.

The capability of the online platform to improve the accuracy of the suggestions is then provided by the constant collection of data. The algorithmic identity of the customer can't be considered as a stable element: just as it happens in the real world, the online individual is always changing, projecting these self-developments into his digital searches. These continuous behavioral adjustments are mimicked by the mathematical structure of the platform, which, gaining new information concerning the subject under analysis, is able to revise and correct itself according to the inputs.

Presented as a manner to de-commoditize the audience, the recommendation system praises the individual as a unique subject, conferring him importance as a singular, concrete person[96]. The focus is on the promise of taking away the abstract conceptualization of the final user, giving him back the subjective dimension he is asking for. Nevertheless, the practice of collecting and buying customers' data to better customize the service appears to be even worst in terms of safety and protection of the identity of the users. As stated in Chapter 1, the practice of audience commodification is a delicate issue, not only in terms of privacy, but also from an ethical point of view.

In the light of the theoretical explanations presented above, is it possible to understand where does the audience stand in the discussion?

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[96] Prey R. (2018), "Nothing personal: algorithmic individuation on music streaming platforms", *Media, Culture & Society*, 40, pp 1086–1100

3.1.2 The need for novel ideas: why the recommendation systems are not working. Quantitative research insights

During May 2020, I prepared and distributed a questionnaire with the specific aim of investigating the relationship between people and the reading activity[97]. The questions were formulated keeping in mind the insights resulting from a deeper literature analysis on the topic of contemporary reading habits. In particular, the survey is structured in order to examine three different theoretical aspects that are recurrent in the reviewed papers: the phenomenon of homogenization of pop culture, the new approach adopted by the reader during the steps that precede the purchasing decision, the cultural shift happening in the definition of the concept of reading[98].

To be able to answer the several questions presented at the beginning of the paragraph, it is interesting to observe the attitude showed by the survey respondents concerning the platform-related activities. In the third section of the questionnaire (the one dedicated to the formulation of reading conception), making use of a Likert Scale, I asked the respondents to state how often they buy a book because it is listed in the category "You might also like/Chosen for you" of an e-commerce website; the value 1 corresponds to "Never" and the value 7 corresponds to "Always".

GRAPH 3.1 Distribution of preferences for the
"How often do you buy a book because it is listed in the category "You might also like/Chosen for you" of a e-commerce website (e.g. Amazon, IBS, Mondadori)?" question.
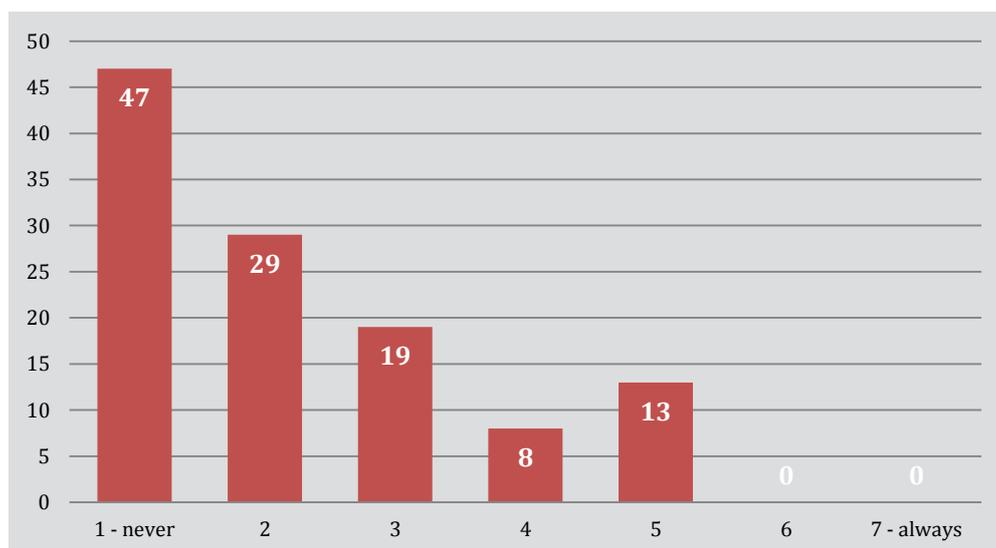
Source: personal data

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[97] For the complete description of the survey methodology adopted, see appendix A.
[98] The other two aspects will be investigated in the next paragraphs.

The distribution of answers illustrated in Graph 3.1 reveals two interesting trends. First of all, it is possible to observe a clear preference: 40,52% of the respondents (that is 47 persons out of 116) claim to never buy a book because of the advice provided by the recommendation system of the e-commerce platform used. Second, when examining the opposite side of the distribution, where the answers correspond to "Very often" and "Always", what can be noticed is that, in both cases, none of the respondents affirms to regularly take under consideration the proposal given by the platform.

This general predisposition toward the suggestions offered by the e-commerce platform is further confirmed by the information gathered from the question concerning the steps that precede the purchasing moment. When being asked about the reasons that usually stand as the foundation of their purchasing decision ("When it comes to buying a book, you usually choose it:"), only 5 persons out of 116 (4,31%) state that they follow the advice of the e-commerce website.

In order to better understand the reasoning behind this consumers' choice, I carried out supplementary investigations, asking some of the survey respondents to explain the motivation underneath their answers[99]. An interesting insight, in this sense, is given by the high frequency of people saying that the advice offered by the recommendation system associated with the e-commerce platform is usually discarded because of the lack of interesting and fresh titles. "The only titles that it suggests to me and that I actually consider taking are the one I already have in mind", says E.P., expressing the same concerns of other members of the community. She also points out that, "just as it happens with Netflix television shows and movies", most of the time the recommended items are the ones subjected to a very strong promotional campaign, an aspect that makes them extremely mainstream and uninteresting. "It is basically impossible that it recommends me something that I don't already know" – a situation that does not seem to trigger the foreseeable positive feeling of comfort due to the absence of cognitive dissonance, rather it raises a certain level of skepticism toward the platform's recommendation mechanism.

The same reasoning stands underneath the distribution of choices concerning another preference-related question, underlining an additional aspect correlated to algorithmic culture pointed out by theoretical frameworks. When being asked "How often do you

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[99] This question ("Do you ever consider the *Suggested for you section* of a platform?") was asked in a Facebook book-related group.

buy a book because of its position on the "People's favorite" chart of a bookshop or a e-commerce website?", the majority of people positions itself on the left side of the graph, where low ratings stand. In particular, 68,97% of the respondents claim to never of rarely buy a book because of its position on the preference chart.

In the light of previous observations, it can be supposed that, as the recommendation system, this promotional strategy is not able to give the audience the different and new content it is looking for. The display of books known to be best sellers, results of a culture becoming homogenized, does not appear to type of suggestion the individual is searching for.

GRAPH 3.2 Distribution of preferences for the
How often do you buy a book because of its position on the "People's favorite" chart of a bookshop or a e-commerce website? question.
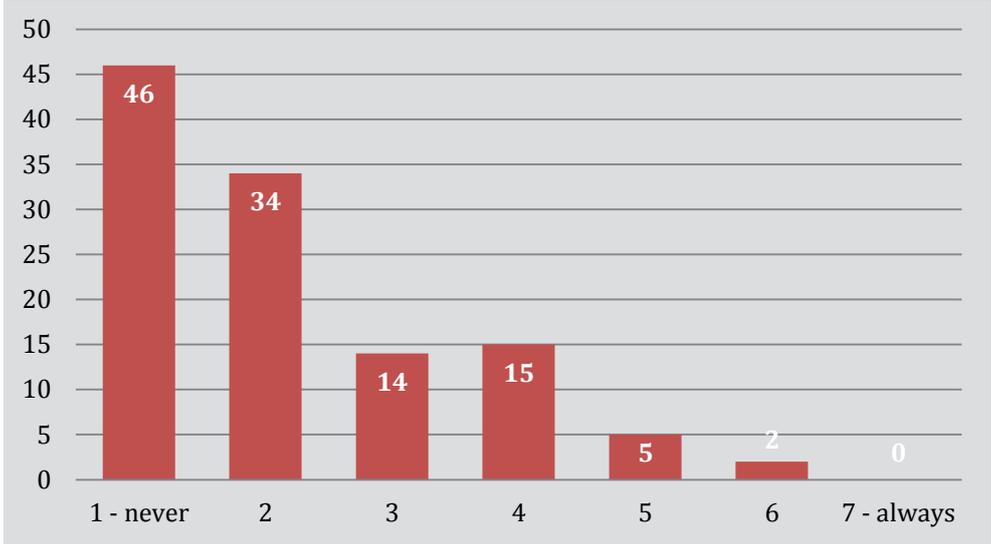
Source: personal data

Once again, the theoretical foundation of the platform-related environment has to face the effects of its pragmatic application – and in particular, the loop it creates exploiting the data gathered from the algorithmic identity of its users. Due to the ambiguity of the situation in which this spiral of strictly correlated actions takes place, the ability to actually discern which actor is influencing who is becoming more and more complex. The use of big data analysis to understand the preferences of the consumers and to forecast their future needs is unquestionably effective to grasp the direction the market is taken, but, after hearing the observations made by the actual audience, it seems that its power to shape the choices of the demand side of the industry is still dubious. Customers do not appear to be convinced by the platform competencies when it comes

to purchasing decisions; nevertheless they claim to sometimes purchase the items from the "You might also like/Chosen for you", but only because they have "already decided I wanted that specific book".

How can we understand who holds the power in this choice? Is it the customer who voluntarily decides to purchase a specific title or is it the algorithmic structure that, involuntarily, pushes him to pick it, displaying it on the online page? Is a book present in the "You might also like/Chosen for you" section of the e-commerce website redundant because of the obviousness of the decision, or is the customer need so correctly forecasted by the mathematical structure that it falls into triteness?

   This aspect of strict dependency between the platform mechanism and customers' attitude recalls the co-evolution concept outlined in Chapter 1 and recalled at the beginning of the paragraph. In particular, what can be said is that technology and technology users can not be considered as two separate entities because of their need for co-existence and mutual learning, necessary to further develop and improve. In this sense, while the users are influenced (voluntarily or not) by the algorithms, adapting their behavior to the upcoming trends displayed in the platform environment – the algorithms keep adjusting and modifying their mathematical structure on the basis of users' behaviors. The boundaries set between the two digital agents (platform and user) are gradually blurring, and the capability of identifying the subject acting as an engine for the changes progressively diminishes as the interdependency between the parts grow.

   The outcomes registered from the analysis of the consumers' behavior show that Italian platform-users do not seem convinced by the algorithm's suggestions when it comes to decisions concerning books. The investigation has highlighted that, when arriving at the most crucial moment of the decisional step, the automated advices generated by the recommendation system are often discarded, considered unable to truly understand the consumers preferences.

This consideration concerning the readers' behavior inevitably rises some questions. If the recommendation systems do not help the customer in taking a buying decision, then what actor is actually influencing the purchasing journey of the Italian readers? Which figure is in charge of shaping the customers' preferences and trends?

The next two paragraph will focus on the role portrayed by community in the contemporary reader's journey.

3.2 Pre-consumption moment: who is responsible for the reader purchasing decisions?

The analysis of the impact that recommendation systems have on the final consumer has shown a diffuse mistrust in the algorithm's suggestions when it comes to book-related buying decisions. The exploitation of the mathematical structure characterizing the platform environment to better tailor the offer does not seem to be recognized by the demand side of the market as a fundamental feature needed to truly improve the overall reading experience.

Nevertheless, the examination of the phenomena associated with the rise of platforms does reveal the development of a new digital-related consumers' trend, that now accompanies the traditional ones: contemporary readers are now often seeking advice and suggestions concerning what book to purchase in the online environment, and in particular exploiting the digital landscape for asking peers (who can be impersonated by friends, followers or users) for recommendations.

**IMG 3.1** Two examples of Facebook posts in which users ask for recommendations.

Supporting and integrating the traditional real life discussion, community-related platforms[100] are, in this sense, gaining relevance in the eyes of the consumers, leaving the newborn statistical suggestions in the background.

The possibility of enjoy others' opinions concerning a specific title before the actual consumption moment is not something entirely new in the landscape characterizing the demand side of the publishing industry; the position occupied by other people (friends, family, but also booksellers, librarians) has always been at the center of the classic customer's journey, playing a fundamental role to help the person moving from the consideration to the action step. The exploitation of the digital environment, rather than to achieve a customized suggestion, has the objective of extending the boundaries of one's personal connections, in order to increase the ability of reaching more people and sharing opinions. In this sense, while the other traditional influential positions (such as the presence of the author in television, the specific display of books in the bookstore, newspaper and magazine reviews) are losing importance, the concept of community is progressively acquiring influential power.

GRAPH 3.3 Changes in the way people choose books. Years 2017-2018.
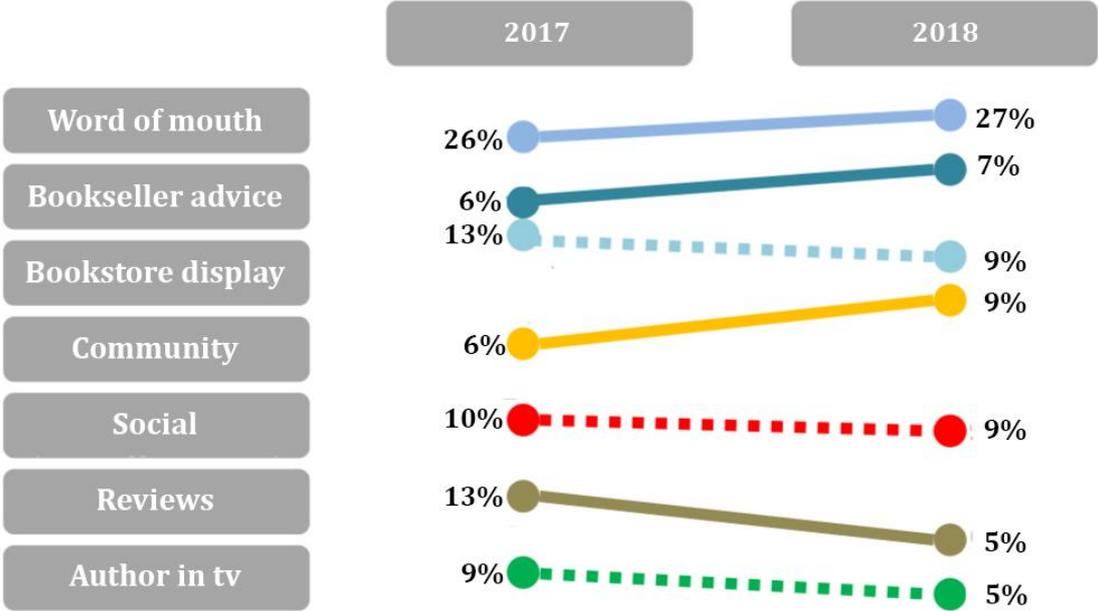
Source: AIE

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[100] This term is used to refer not only to social networks (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and similar), but also to online dedicated forums and blogs.

3.2.1   Peer-centric consideration moment: quantitative research insights

The investigation of the answers given by respondents to the "Reading habits" section of the survey[101] I distributed in May 2020 seems to endorse this theory, outlining two interesting aspects concerning the distribution of pre-decision choices. The first one puts under the spotlight the traditional role played by the traditional actors, highlighting the influential position they still hold in the contemporary and digitalized environment; the second one emphasizes the modernized take on a classical mechanism, assigning to platform-generated communities a role in the shaping of the demand.

GRAPH 3.4 Distribution of preferences for the
"*When it comes to buy a book, you usually choose it:*" question.
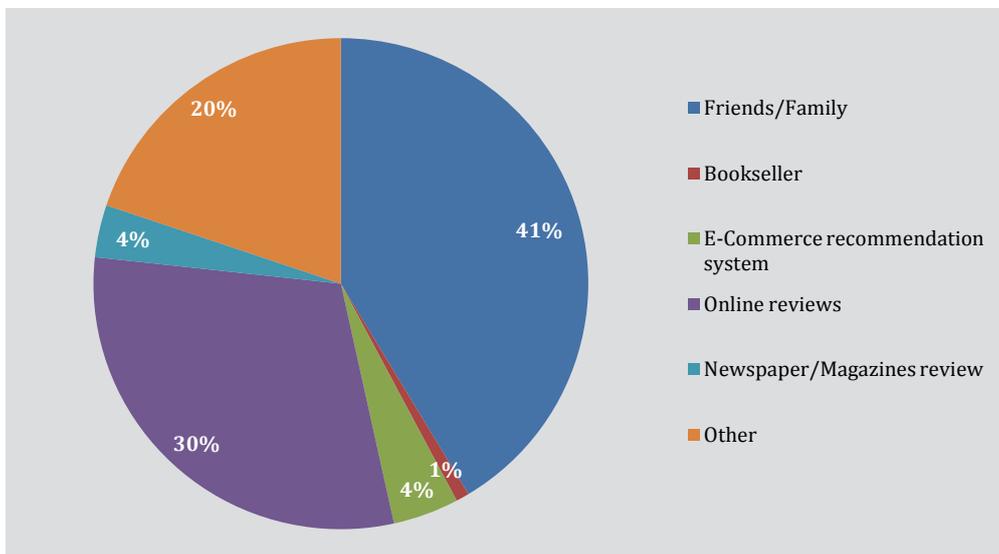
Source: personal data

As Graph 3.2 shows, before carrying out the final purchasing decision, when they are still wandering in their consideration step of the journey, readers are particularly interested in the recommendation coming from friends and family. As a matter of fact, approximately 41% of the survey respondents (47 persons out of 116) states that the final choice is often carried out highly valuing the advice coming from friends and family. This consumers' predisposition toward whom getting an opinion from before carrying on the decisional process is also supported by the answers given by people during the interviews I conducted during July, August and September 2020. In this regard, M.D.'s thoughts concerning the decisional moment well summarize the general predisposition of the typical book consumer that can be observed in the publishing demand side. She

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[101] For the complete description of the survey methodology adopted, see appendix A.

confides me that even If she possesses a long list of constantly-updated titles, the suggestions given by her friends are way more relevant, "especially when the subject in question is similar to me and so I know that If they like it, I will like it too". Even stronger is the position assumed by C.P., who tells me that, when in doubt between two titles, she usually asks her closest friends to take a decision for her. The attitude adopted by both the interviewees (and generally recognized also in others) stresses the importance of traditional peers' recommendations, granting them the top position in the readers' mind when it comes to decide.

Interesting are then the numbers related to the consultation of online reviews. 30% of the survey respondents (35 persons out of 116) affirms that surfing the internet for recommendation is the most frequent activity they carry out before taking a purchasing choice – which results in assigning to online reviews the second most adopted support during the decisional moment. This insight helps clarifying the position of the consumers toward the digital world: the problem is not related to the exploitation of internet knowledge to better understand the item in their wishing list, but the recommendation system itself. As already illustrated in the previous paragraph, it is the results of the algorithmic structure that appears to be useless, not the online environment itself.

Whether through real-life conversation or forum discussions, these insights underline the importance that today's readers attribute to people, and in particular the influence they are subjected to when exchanging opinions with their similar. The judgment expressed by the peers who are part of the community is more relevant than a perfectly customized mathematical system, whose algorithmic structure struggles compared to the concept of trust. In a sense, this idea of confidence and reliance on others' opinion recalls the notion of the non-economic factors at the very foundation of the network structure that characterizes the platform environment. As the bonds between nodes are stronger than those of defining the traditional relationships tied by contractual conditions, the decision made because of peers' tips are more valuable than the those endorsed by a mathematical system.

All these considerations are the result of the investigation of a moment that takes place before the actual purchasing decision. The influential position held by the peers is here assumed to be located a step before the consumption moment of the literary product.

They are considered as one of the most relevant figures that dominate the demand side of the market, responsible for the actual choice made by the audience.

But the importance of peers is fundamental also in the post-consumption moment of the customer journey. The possibility of sharing thoughts and ideas concerning the read book is nothing more than the other side of the community in which people look for advice. Who was asking for a recommendation is now the expert acting as an intermediary in charge to give answers to persons searching for suggestions.

3.3   Consumption and post-consumption moment: intimacy vs. community

The literary reading notion has been traditionally considered as a solitary activity, an intimate way for the consumer to "release the private, unsocialized, dreaming self"[102]. In her paper "Lo spazio del leggere come crocevia di relazioni. Cenni interpretativi", Lollo puts a particular emphasis on the subjective dimension of reading, describing the practice of literary consumption as an "internal necessity"[103]. The book is presented as a spiritual outcome, whose main objective is to engage actively with the reader, allowing him to explore new dimensions of himself. Adopting a romantic perspective on the subject, the author of the paper states that the literacy item frames indirect questions and triggers personal reflections – whose answers are then hidden in the pages, between the lines. Observing individuals carrying out the reading activity, what can be noticed is that the main focus of the consumption moment lies on creating an active relationship with the item of consumption itself. The personal bond that is generated through the process of reading is one of the most relevant aspects in the mind of the literacy consumer: the benefits a book is able to offer to its reader go well beyond the pragmatic value, due to growth opportunity stimulated by the intimate connection with the words of the author.

Moreover, to better understand the consumer's personal involvement, it is important to point out that the traditional literary reading concept is often associated with the idea of private possession, which is the ownership of the physical artifact. Part of the experience related to this specific cultural activity is the possibility to shelve the read books, to

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[102] Albrechtslund A.B. (2019), "Amazon, Kindle, and Goodreads: implications for literary consumption in the digital age", *Consumption Markets & Culture*, pp. 1-16

[103] Lollo, E. (2000), "Lo spazio del leggere come crocevia di relazioni. Cenni interpretativi", *Studium educationis, PD, Cedam*, 3, pp. 419-428

expose them as part of the home furnishing. In doing so, the individual is able to create a tangible and visible representation of the self – or to let the other people see a perfectly constructed image of the dreamt self. In this sense, the possession of the item has always been seen as an integral part of the reading process, because it helps to point out the inner perception the consumer has of himself.

While the distinct action of reading is still performed by the individual alone and it is still designated by the same private characteristics above-mentioned, with the rise of the platformization phenomenon the complementary post-reading activities appear to be moving toward a specific direction, acquiring a even more collective connotation. In particular, social media-related platforms have been at the center of the cultural discussion because of their capability of attracting persons of interest, and creating specialized poles able to bring together subjects that otherwise would have stayed in their different realities. This reasoning can be applied also to the publishing industry. With this regard, it is possible to notice that in nowadays digital landscape it is easier for literary enthusiasts to gather together in specific digital environments to discuss about a certain book or author. Conversation is often triggered inside specialized communities, and the buzz created around a specific topic is able to generate word of mouth – which, on the other side, can draw the attention of new users.

Even If the aspect of sharing opinions and ideas is not new in the book landscape, which has always witnessed similar phenomena[104], the development of platforms has boosted the number of people who can have access to it. Thanks to the presence of accessible online spaces and to the typical features characterizing digital environments, that allow an easier mechanism of conversation, everyone with an internet connection can join the discussion and share his own ideas.

Of course, differentiating itself from the physical counterpart, the online discussion has some advantages for the supply actors, especially for what concerns the collection of readers' information. All the data resulting from this practice are fundamental to understand the direction that the market is taking and the preferences the audience is developing. In this sense, even passed the consideration moment of the purchasing journey, peers are able to shape an influence the choices of the upstream actors of the publishing industry, directing them toward the contents they prefer the most.

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[104] Book clubs and literary café are just two examples of occasions during which readers can join a literary conversation concerning the books they have read.

The possibility of gathering data from the readers' communities is then becoming more and more relevant for the supply side of the sector. Not by chance, in 2013, Amazon decided to join the social media scene, acquiring Goodreads.

3.3.1   Goodreads: where the platform meet the reader community

The ability of Jeff Bezos to forecast the future development of the market has already been taken under consideration in Chapter 2. As a big agent operating in the supply side of the publishing industry, he has always been able to predict the changes and to give the audience what it wants, beating the competition.

With this regard, a further strategic decision concerning the publishing sector that he was able to carry out was the acquisition, in 2013, of the social media platform Goodreads.
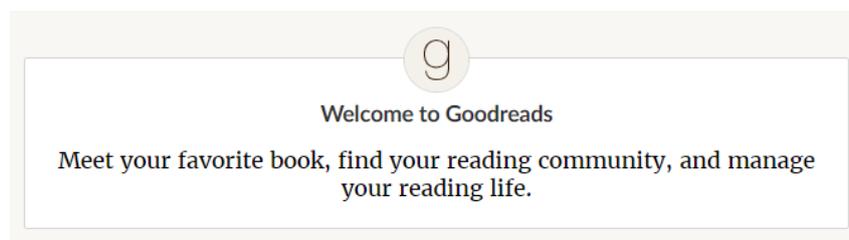
IMG 3.2 Welcome banner on Goodreads.

The world's largest book-related platform has been welcoming literary enthusiastic from all over the world starting from January 2007, the date of its launch. Up to July 2019, the website has accumulated almost 90 million members[105].

Reporting the words of its CEO and co-founder, Goodreads can be considered as "the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations", whose mission "is to help people find and share books they love"[106]. It is structured as a social media platform, in which persons have the possibility to gather together in a common space to share thoughts and connect with their peers. There are several features that it is possible to enjoy thanks to the free subscription to the website, including seeing what books your friends are reading; tracking the books you're reading, have read, and want to read; checking out your personalized book recommendations; finding out if a book is a good fit for you from our community's reviews[107].

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[105] Data source: Statista, Number of registered members on Goodreads from May 2011 to July 2019.
[106] https://www.goodreads.com/about/us
[107] See *supra*, note 106.

As the illustrated features point out, at the very heart of Goodreads stands the idea of community and peer-to-peer communication. The possibility granted to the user of sharing ideas and opinions with people who possess the same interests is one of the core elements of the platform. Thanks to the website, readers from all over the world can join the conversation about their favorite book, and peek others' virtual bookshelves looking for inspiration – just as they would do in a real life situation.

The attention toward the collective activity associated with the moments that follow the practice of reading is well summarized in the words of Otis Chandler, the co-founder of Goodreads.

> *When I was in second grade, I discovered the Hardy Boys series. Ever since, I've loved to read — both for fun and to improve my mind. And I'm always looking for the next great book.*
>
> *One afternoon while I was scanning a friend's bookshelf for ideas, it struck me: when I want to know what books to read, I'd rather turn to a friend than any random person or bestseller list.*
>
> *So I decided to build a website – a place where I could see my friends' bookshelves and learn about what they thought of all their books. Elizabeth, my co-founder (and now my wife) wrote the site copy and I wrote the code. We started in my living room, motivated by the belief that there was a better way to discover and discuss good books, and that we could build it.*
>
> *Goodreads is that site. It is a place where you can see what your friends are reading and vice versa. You can create "bookshelves" to organize what you've read (or want to read). You can comment on each other's reviews. You can find your next favorite book. And on this journey with your friends you can explore new territory, gather information, and expand your mind.*
>
> *Knowledge is power, and power is best shared among readers[108].*

Before anyone else, Chandler was able to understand and exploit the crucial role occupied by other people in the decisional and post-consumption moment, and in particular the weight assigned to the opinion of the ones closer to the decisional subject – who can be identified as friends, family, colleagues. In other words, he recognized the fact that the typical book consumer seems to appreciate more the recommendations made by close persons rather than the ones coming from an arid mathematical calculation. Not surprisingly, to better translate the coziness of this familiar concept into the platform environment, the Goodreads community is founded on connections denominated "friendship"; in order to see the books virtually owned by other individuals (in other words, to see their digital bookshelves) and to communicate

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[108] See *supra*, note 106.

directly with them, asking for recommendations, two users need to be friend in the platform.

In this sense, observing the Goodreads environment, what can be noticed is that the idea underneath the structure of the platform is to offer to the user an experience capable of miming as much as possible a real life experience. Not by chance, the user profile recalls a virtual bookshelves, with sections such as read, currently reading, to-read.
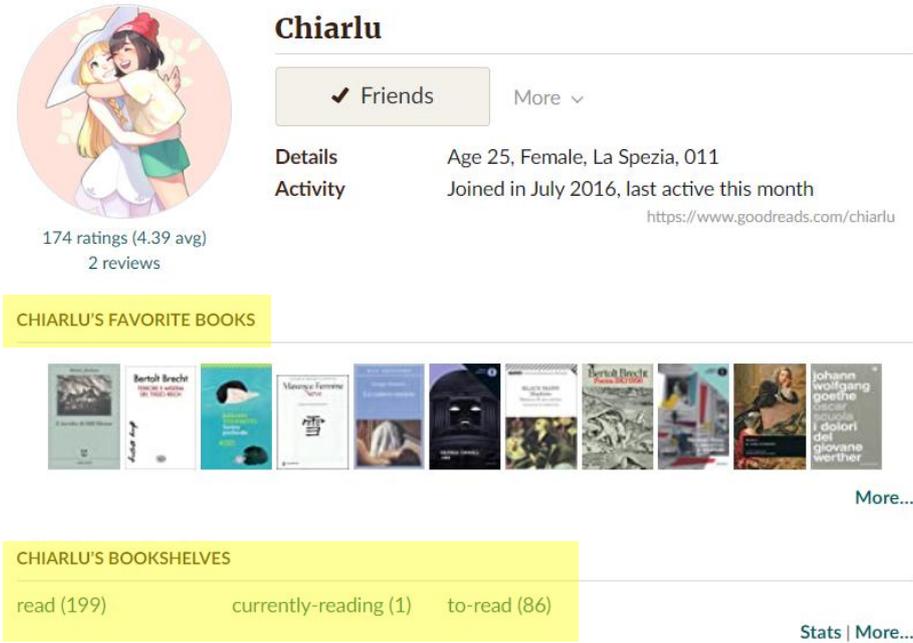
IMG 3.3 Example of user's profile on Goodreads.

The other crucial element characterizing the Goodreads platform is the presence of a recommendation system, whose main objective is to suggest the user with new titles. Exploiting the information gathered from the reviews and ratings of books previously read, the algorithm is supposed to provide the person with customized proposals. Thanks to the acquisition of a start-up named Discovereads.com carried out in March 2011, Chandler was able to implement a mathematical structure capable to examine people's literacy history and display recommendations based on books they've liked in the past and books that people with similar tastes have liked[109]. According to co-founder, the accuracy of the Goodreads algorithm was for sure higher compared to Amazon's one because of the absence of distortions. While the e-commerce platform is not able to recognize which items are bought for the user himself and which are

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[109] Miller, C.C. (2011), *Need Advice on What to Read? Ask the Internet*, New York Times Bits, 10/03/2011, available at: https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/need-advice-on-what-to-read-ask-the-internet/

purchased as gifts, the Goodreads' algorithm just takes into consideration books that the user is actually reading, supposedly giving back more truthful suggestions.

When signing up to the website, to get customized recommendations, the platform requires some additional steps. First of all, it asks to list the genres the users prefers; second, it provides the new subscriber with a list of books belonging to the favorite genres, demanding to rate at least 20 among the read ones in a scale from 0 to 5 stars.
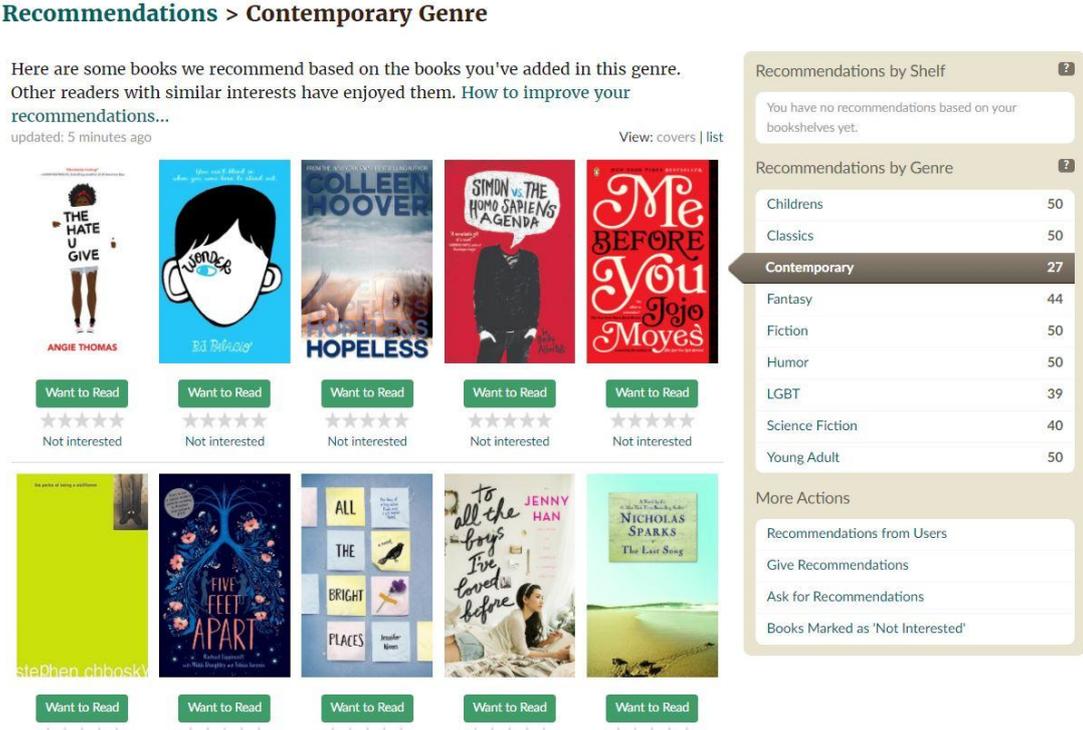
IMG 3.4 Example of recommendation page on the Goodreads website.

This relevance attributed by the CEO of Goodreads to the recommendation system is an interesting point to examine. Assuming the same perspective of the upstream actors of the publishing sector, Chandler seems to believe in the actual possibility of the recommendation systems to improve the reading experience of the literacy consumer – and this opinion is carried on regardless the diffuse mistrust in the algorithmic mechanism that characterizes the demand side of the market.

Given the interest that the demand side of the publishing sector was progressively showing toward Goodreads and its features, in 2013 Amazon decided to buy out the company, which was considered to perfectly fit in its recommendation-based business model. While many actors playing in the American market denounced this action as brutal vertical integration, displaying their worries concerning the growing influence of

the technology giant on the publishing value chain, the platform's users expressed their concern, perceiving the move as a "corporate intrusion". The community, together with all the data associated with its discussions and conversations, was sold as any other marketable item, in a way that recalls the audience commodification phenomenon illustrated in Chapter 1.

The attention showed by Amazon in this specific step of the reader's journey is meaningful. The recognition of the importance attributable to the community is a fundamental point to start understanding the real direction the market is taken. Rather than the accuracy of the recommendation system, the audience seems to be still valuing more the personal opinion of people – even when these people are part of a virtual space and not physically known.

### 3.3.2 Traditional approach in a contemporary world: quantitative research insights

The Goodreads-related case study helps to give a correct perspective on the conditions characterizing nowadays demand side of the publishing sector, outlining some of the fundamental elements of analysis that must be considered to have a more complete overview of the subject at hand. In particular, the investigation of the social media platform has highlighted the fact that, taking into consideration both physical and digital environments, the traditional role portrayed by peers is not losing relevance due to the rise of platforms and platform-related activities. On the contrary, the preferential position hold by people is strengthening, relegating the recommendation systems to the background of the decisional scene.

In this sense, the theory that promotes the crucial influence power of algorithms in the reader's journey does not appear to be backed up by the data resulting from the consumer analysis I carried out in May 2020[110].

First of all, as already discussed in the previous paragraph and showed through Graph 3.3, persons' suggestion-based choices are the most frequent answer. 78% of the total of respondents to the survey (that is 91 persons out of 116) states that, before taking a decision concerning the purchase of a book, they look for recommendations coming from other people – which here assumes a general definition, including friends, family, booksellers, online reviews, journal inserts. Moreover, analyzing the remaining

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[110] For the complete description of the survey methodology adopted, see appendix A.

percentage, only 4% is associated with recommendation systems. The others state to choose a book only based on their personal opinion or, as they said, "inspiration".

**GRAPH 3.5** Distribution of preferences for the
"How often do you share information about a book that you are reading on social media? (blog reviews, Facebook posts, Instagram stories,...)" question.
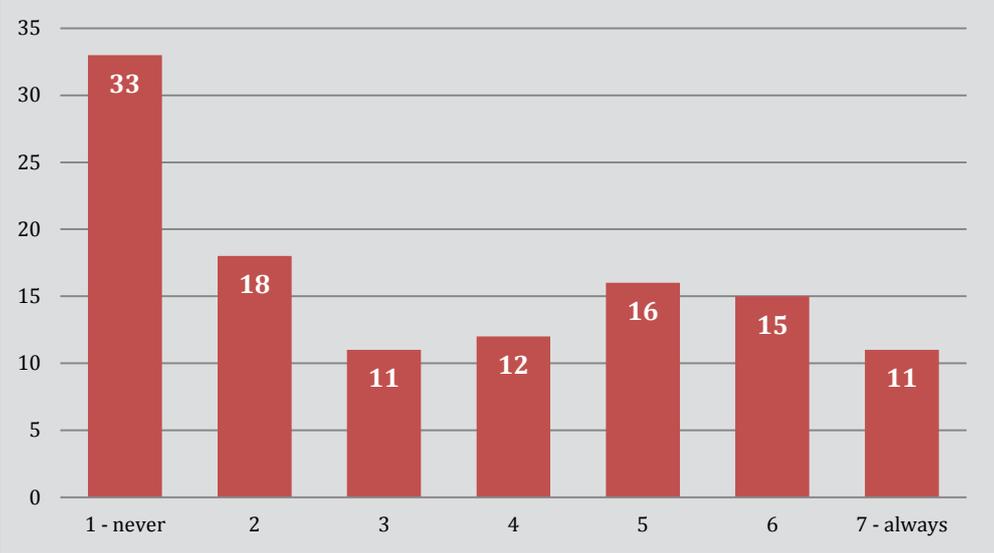
Source: personal data

   Curious, on the other hand, are the insights resulting from the question related to social media activities. When being asked "How often do you share information about a book that you are reading on social media? (blog reviews, Facebook posts, Instagram stories,...)", the majority of respondents state to never adopt this type of attitude – an aspect that seems in contrast with the previously illustrated theories. The idea of sharing information with the community is the crucial aspect of Goodreads, but here it appears as not supported by data.

But when comparing the numbers related to Graph 3.4 with the ones registered in Graph 3.5 interesting information arises. The percentage of people associated with the high ratings of the Likert scale (4, 5, 6, 7) in the "How much important is for you to discuss with other people of a book you've read?" question is equal to 81%, while the percentage of people associated with low ratings in the "How often do you share information about a book that you are reading on social media? (blog reviews, Facebook posts, Instagram stories,...)" question is just 53%. Moreover, only 27% of persons who affirm to never/rarely (1, 2, 3 in the Likert scale) share in the social media platform

information about the book they are reading are not interested in further discussion with their peers, while all the others rated the importance of debating 4 or more.

GRAPH 3.6 Distribution of preferences for the
"How much important is for you to discuss with other people of a book you've read?" question.
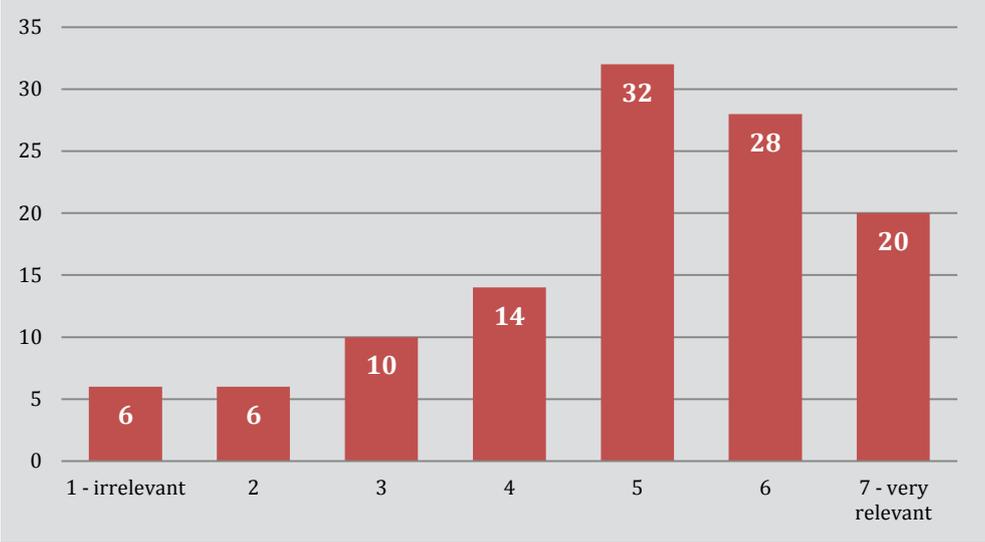

Source: personal data

The cross-examination of the answers given to the two above-mentioned questions seems to suggest the existence of two different definitions of levels of intimacy when it comes to the reading activity. On one side, the individual is still looking for a private connection with the book, exploiting the pages to find new dimensions of the self; this is the step of the reading process that wants to be hidden from the eyes of others, as it represents something personal. In this sense, the action of sharing thoughts during the reading moment can be seen as an unnecessary step, which distracts from the deeper connection with the words written by the author and expose the self in a way that is not perceived as right. On the other side, the person values the collective conversation and the active discussion with peers, but only as a separate act from the reading activity. This second level of intimacy can also be seen as connected to the practice of displaying books in shelves that everybody can have access to: the construction of a public representation of the self is a wanted, but following step, which takes place only after the actual consumption of the literacy item. To summarize, according to this perspective there is a collective post-reading activity that individuals feel the need to accomplish to have a complete experience, but the reading activity is still perceived as something individual and intimate.

Not by chance, when being asked to illustrate where the value of a book lies according to their personal opinion and experience, the majority of persons still underlines the relevance of the impact that a book can have on the internal and personal sphere of its reader.

GRAPH 3.7 Distribution of preferences for the
"Which of the following aspects related to the reading practice you think constitute a source of personal value?" question.
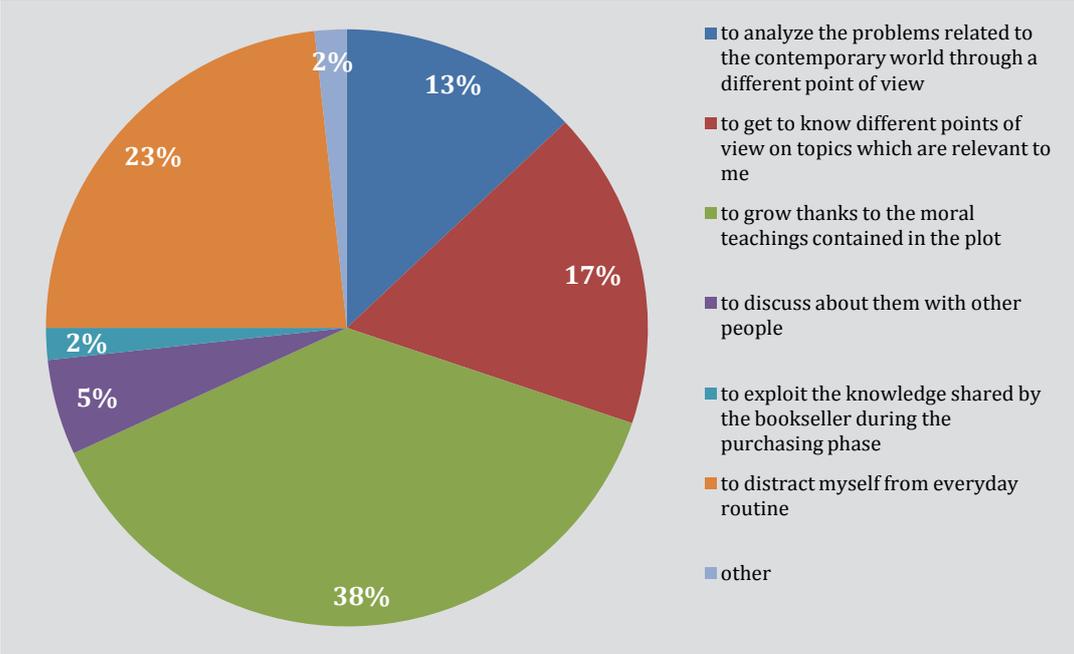
Source: personal data

This paragraph has illustrated the importance the demand side of the publishing market still recognizes to the opinions given by their peers and community. In this sense, it appears as If the real engine of the content that can be found on market is the audience itself, rather than the upstream agents. The suggestions given by the recommendation systems thanks to the data collected through their algorithmic identities seems to be neglected by the literacy consumers, believed to be too mathematical to be relevant in such a cultural field.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to guarantee that the opinions formulated by the final consumers, those responsible for later advising their peers, are entirely free from the influence of upstream directed preferences. The overall digital environment is structured in a way that makes it difficult to discern who is really in charge of the choices – and this is particularly true when its product recalling system is taken under examination. It is not a secret that one of the most used and effective advertising

strategies is retargeting; this practice consists of exploiting the information collected from the users' online behavioral history to display customized banner, reminding the consumer of his previous searches concerning a specific item of interest.

3.4 Resistance or acceptance? The position of readers toward the platformization phenomenon

The previous paragraphs have taken under analysis the role played by algorithms in the customers' decisional process, with the specific objective of identifying which figure is really in charge of influencing and shaping the demand side of the market. The investigation has shown that the difficulties related to the capability of truly understand the actor responsible for the customers' choices are very high, due to the way the platform is structured and the phenomenon of co-evolution that characterize its relationship with the users.

Nonetheless, there is a platform-related aspect whose impact can be easily analyzed, in order to draw pragmatic conclusions. Thanks to a deeper analysis of the answers collected through the survey and the investigation of the attitude observed in the interviewee, in fact, it is possible to suggest at least the general predisposition of readers toward the new features deriving from the spread of the platformization phenomenon in the publishing industry. As explained in Chapter 1, just like any other innovation, platforms first need to be accepted by the market in order to be able to perform properly, without incurring into resistance.

Particularly relevant in this sense has been the lockdown period that Italian citizens have been called to face due to the world health emergency. The obligation of staying at home and the required development of alternative ways of approaching the traditional book intermediaries (which is through the exploitation of the platform environment) may have pushed the audience toward new specific steps of the purchasing journey, which in turn would ask for a redefinition of the relationships with the main actors of the supply side of the industry. The first section of my questionnaire was developed in order to understand If the emergency period has favored the acceptance of platforms as part of the publishing industry or not.

Among the five questions developed to examine the sector situation, the most striking insight comes from the cross-analysis of the answers related to the sellers.

GRAPH 3.8 Distribution of preferences concerning the seller. COVID19 emergency period-habits.

	Independent bookstore	Chain bookstore	Used bookstores	Thrift store	E-commerce website	No purchase	Other
■ COVID19	6	7	0	0	53	50	0
■ HABIT	12	45	7	4	43	0	5
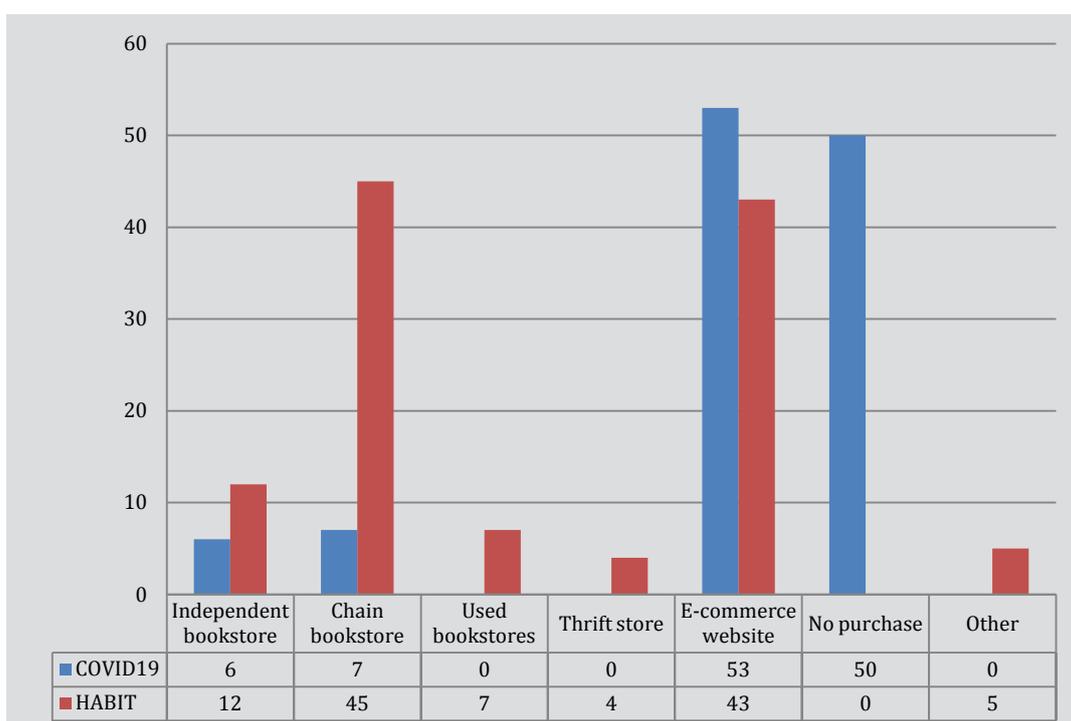
Source: personal data

Graph 3.8 shows the different distribution related to the purchasing channels adopted by the respondents; while the blue bars represent the choices carried out by customers during the pandemic, the red bars display the habitual approach. Observing the two series on the histogram, what can be noticed is that the channel which suffered the most during the pandemic period is chain bookstore – which loss is compensated both by the fruition of an e-commerce platform and by the decision of not buying books, as it is possible to observe in the absolute and relative frequencies reported in Table 3.1. While 49,89% of the survey respondents state to have not purchased any book during the COVID19 emergency, 40% confess to have switched to e-commerce services.

Sellers	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Independent bookstores	2	4,44%
Chain bookstores	3	6,67%
E-commerce websites	18	40,00%
No purchase	22	48,89%
TOTAL	45	100,00%

TABLE 3.1 Habitual chain bookstore consumers sellers choice during the pandemic emergency: absolute and relative frequency

The outlook resulting from the cross-analysis of Graph 3.8 and Table 3.1 gives a clear representation of the position currently held by the traditional agents of the publishing industry in the mind of the book consumers, and it outlines more clearly some of the signals arising from the audience. To understand the new dynamics characterizing the market, it is fundamental to try to investigate the causes at the very basis of these changes, proposing an explanation of the users' behavior.

The first thing that can be noticed is that, when being forced to resort to online purchasing methods, customers are more prone to exploit Amazon's services. Not by chance, Jeff Bezos' business holds the position on top of mind of consumers concerning e-commerce platforms and online purchases, with no specific product category distinction. The consequences of this preference are evident when considering the readers' choices during the pandemic: a high number of survey respondents state that, during the worldwide health emergency period, books were bought exploiting the features of the tech giant, rather than the similar ones provided by chain and independent bookstores. While the neglecting of independent bookstores services could be attributable to the difficulties observed by booksellers to obtain the permission by the government and so to the late start of the initiative, the exclusion of chain bookstores[111] seems to enlighten the struggle the traditional actors operating in the supply side of the industry face when it is time to compete with Amazon. In this sense, the customers' survey-registered tendency of choosing Jeff Bezos' platform over other similar options is in line with the fears displayed by one of the owners of the bookstore I had the opportunity to observe during my internship. According to M.S., the issue of establishing an e-commerce section in the bookstore website is connected to the impossibility of beating Amazon in terms of logistics. "Amazon can ship products in one day, and thanks to Amazon Prime the delivery is free. We can't create a sustainable strategy compared to them." At the same time, during the interviews with some of the survey respondents, what comes up is the capability of Amazon to offer a service to those individuals who otherwise would not be able to obtain it because of geographical restrictions or budget constraints. Its capillary logistic network and its low prices are broadening up the group of persons who can have access and afford books – which is the

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[111] As Table 3.1 shows, only 3 out of the 45 typical chain bookstore's customers claim to have exploit the possibility of buying books online, through the e-commerce platform related to the brand (Mondadori, Feltrinelli, Giunti…).

reason why the company often claims to support and sustain the democratization of culture.

In this sense, the rise of platformization and the crucial role assumed by Amazon during the past years ask the traditional supply side actors to face a huge challenge, and in particular to reinvent themselves in order to provide the customers (actual and potential) with benefits Amazon is not structurally able to offer.

The second aspect perceivable from the pandemic-related behavior of readers is the attitude held by consumers toward bookstores and booksellers. Chapter 2 has already illustrated the importance attributable to the physical point of sale; in nowadays' digitalized world, the brick-and-mortar store is the safe space in which it is possible to *experience* the book. This aspect is supported by readers' behavior during the pandemic. The apparent absence of switching costs – and in particular, shifting from the physical chain bookstores to an e-commerce platform not related to the usual brand choice – suggests the absence of loyalty toward a specific bookstore, which in turn implies that the decision of spending time inside the retail is not strictly related to the possible distinctive features of the place. As many interviewees tell me, the physical bookstore is not perceived as the place where the purchase of books happens; the buying moment generally accompanies the *trip* to the store, but it is not the main objective. The customer aims at spending free time inside the store, wandering with no specific goal other than look around and observe the shelves. Meaningful in this sense is the statement made by C.P., who refers to the retail as the place where she feels comfortable and, while trying to explain the kind of sensation perceived inside the boundaries of the brick-and-mortar store, she simply says "I just feel home".

Even more evident is the new position occupied by booksellers. The typical competencies that in previous years allowed them to earn the position of influential intermediaries are now not considered as relevant as in the past. The bookstore is not the place where the reader goes to exploit the knowledge possessed by the booksellers, which in turn become just a simple employee, whose primary task is to superintend the store.

Having observed and analyzed both the supply and the demand side of the publishing industry, what appears to be evident is the uncertainty characterizing the sector. The rise of platforms required the introduction of new digital features in a traditionally structured market, whose modernize elements are still being studied by the classic upstream agents. Moreover, the platformization phenomenon has bring in the publishing industry new actors, which, while re-discovering their boundaries, adding a cultural twist in their business model, are pushing the whole value chain to re-define and re-shape its structure. The typical role of the audience is changing too, adapting to the contemporary environment. The final consumer is now an active member of the production process, and in particular his position in the decision concerning the content appears to be fundamental.

The on-going adaptation to the new mandatory model still rises some questions, doubts that are difficult to be solved due to the dynamism defining the industry. The last chapter will focus on the open issues, outlining their characteristics.

4 OPEN QUESTIONS

4.1 Influential power distribution and loop

The quick overview of the traditional book industry landscape illustrated in Chapter 2 has underlined the crucial spot that publishing houses used to occupy in the decisional mechanism related to the production process. The literature associated with this specific sector of the market often refers to this upstream agent as the gatekeeper of the industry, conferring it the most influential and critical position along the book value chain. The typical tasks performed by this actor[112] grant it the possibility to shape the direction and the structure of the industry, other than to determine the content that is going to be distributed to the final consumer. As stated in previous pages, all the choices associated with the initial steps of the creative mechanism are controlled by the editors and has to undergo their approval before being presented to the audience. In this sense, according to the classical perspective on powers' distribution, the book production process is always triggered by a decision reached by the editor of a publishing house. After having examined several proposal drafts with the objective of understanding which one will be able to respond to the current demand's requests, the *iter* expects him to accept one of them. Reflecting on all the possible consequences associated with this simple choice made by a single actor of the mechanism, it appears evident that the strategic decision made concerns not only the direction that the individual publishing house will take, but also the preferences the market will likely develop. This is the reason why literature refers to the role occupied by publishing houses as the most influential one: not only it has the ability of shaping the actions and performance of the other agents of the supply side of the industry, but it is also responsible of affecting the behavior and the decisions of the demand.

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[112] The tasks traditionally performed by the publishing houses have been explained in Chapter 2, and are here reported for clarity. "The publishing house is seen as the actor in charge of establishing – directly or through the employment of specific agencies – relationships with the writers and illustrators it plans to work with. Furthermore, it supervises the development and proofreading of a manuscript, and it assists the author during the launch of the book, through the formulation and implementation of a marketing plan. In performing this role, the publishing house assumes a double position, being both a mediator figure between the upstream creative agent and the downstream final reader, and an interpreter of the requests coming from the demand side. In this sense, not only it has the duty to discover the right audience to associate with a specific writer, but it is also responsible for detecting an author to cover a specific segment of the market."

FIG 4.1 Step 1: traditional linear production process

The traditional production chain can be analyzed as a linear process, as one step follows the other observing a path dependency logic; the decisions made at the very first stage of the mechanism are the reference point upon which all the other choices are determined, and while downstream actors are influenced by the outcomes registered of the previous ones' judgments, the first agent is not influenced by any additional figure. Nevertheless, what has to be underlined is that, even If the main role is played by publishing houses, the actors operating in the book production system after them play a relevant role too. The traditional distribution channels – such as logistic services, salesmen and bookstores – are fundamental in terms of making the product available to the final consumer. The last step of the process witnesses the users' consumption, which consists in reading the book after having it purchased.

   The introduction of platforms inside the publishing industry is responsible for shaking the linear structure of the production mechanism, forcing the re-organization of the traditional network of relationships. The emergence of new actors capable of exploiting the features associated with the platformization phenomenon has pushed the sector to re-invent itself, in a way that could take advantage of the opportunity arising from the algorithmic system and the multisided arrangement of the market. In this sense, one of the most evident consequences generated by the introduction of platforms is related to the re-shuffle of power distribution that the publishing industry contemporary environment has been witnessing. Particularly interesting is this scenario is the position occupied by the traditional actors, which has been questioned and challenged since the first introduction of the platform environment.

To start outlining the upgraded publishing mechanism, the first dimension to analyze is the platform domain itself, and in particular the consequences that the typical features describing its structure have on the overall book value chain. The rise of new intermediaries is strictly related to the development of online spaces, in which they can easily meet their users and provide them with improved services. It is through digital platforms that everyone who wants to become an author can now find an editor always willing to publish their work, in a process that is both easy and quick; it is thanks to social media that readers can now effortlessly collect a large number of suggestions regarding what book to purchase and read, expanding the base of peers from who looking for recommendations. As already stated in previous chapters, one of the most distinctive characteristics of platforms lies exactly in this ability to bring together some of the subjects rotating around the market who otherwise would not be able to meet directly, allowing them to create new network nodes and, generally speaking, new types of relationships. This practice, while turning the industry into a more modern and upgraded environment, granting it a high level of flexibility to cope with the constant changes driven by the contemporary economic outlook, is also pushing traditional agents away from the influential spots located along the value chain, calling for the re-assignment of power. What can be observed in particular is that the classical editors are facing the trend of self-publishing, trying to reinforce their position as the only gatekeeper of the industry; booksellers working at physical bookstores are coping with the growing importance of online communities, looking for alternative ways to remind the audience about their competences and skills concerning the literature world. The new platformed intermediaries have not substituted the traditional ones yet, but they have been able to shake the structure and force the agents to reconsider their position. However, the multisided aspect of the platform environment is not the only feature that has been able to transform the structure of the industry. The exploitation of algorithms and the related practice of data gathering and data mining have both been a fundamental element in the gradual reorganization of the relationships describing the book value chain, and this is true for two main reasons. First of all, it has to be said that the possession of information concerning the algorithmic identity of the customers is progressively becoming a fundamental feature to be competitive in the publishing industry – an aspect that is evident when recognizing the relevance ensured to those agents in charge of collecting information regarding the demand side's behavior.

Whether gathered through an owned platform or bought by third parties, the necessity of statistic knowledge concerning the customers is obliging the traditional actors to reconsider their strategy currently based on an editorial logic. Due to the direction taken by the industry, which sees a high number of first editions published per year, the ability to anticipate trends and needs of the final consumers is becoming more and more relevant to occupy a stable position on top of their mind. Understanding the preferences of the demand side of the sector before the competitors is a necessary step to identify and bond with the right authors, increasing the possibility to develop a profitable relationship with the mass market.

The second reason why the exploitation of algorithms is so important in nowadays publishing environment is its ability to let new agents emerge and acquire a crucial role along different steps of the book value chain, bringing new dimensions to the industry as a whole. Besides the companies in charge of gathering data concerning the statistical identity of the demand side of the market, the other subject who has acquired great importance thanks to the development of platforms is the audience. While according to the traditionally conceived industry the reader is just considered as the user of the finished good, in the contemporary environment shaped by the platformization phenomenon he becomes an active subject of the production mechanism, whose role goes beyond the mere consumption. The content to publish is selected on the basis of a live analysis of the consumers' comments on forums, to serve every arising niche; the plot is developed and adjusted in order to please the requests emerging from the social media discussions, aiming at increasing the number of copies sold, in a strategy that resembles the penetration approach typical of commodities. The authors' creative process itself bends and twists on the basis of the advice given by the publishing house promoted under the consideration of the algorithmic preferences emerging from the data mining process. These considerations are clearly pointing toward the assignment to the audience of a new role, which is typical of the platform-related spaces: from the position of a passive final user, whose main concern is to purchase and consume the book, to the position of an active user/creator, whose thoughts and opinions are crucial during the creative process. The consumer appears to have gained higher dignity, silently invited to the decisional table in order to be able to express his own thoughts and considerations concerning the good he is going to consume.

Underneath the platform-related structure described above, there is a new understanding of how the publishing industry mechanism works and how the new agents' practices are able to affect it and give it a new shape. In this sense, representing the production process as a linear path-dependent system does not present itself as the best suitable solution to effectively describe its upgraded platform-influenced space. For this reason, there is a spread necessity to redefine the operating network posed as foundation of the sector through the development of a new framework, which has to be based, rather than on a strict step by step procedure, highly dependent on the judgment expressed only by the gatekeepers of the value chain (publishing houses), on a more flexible circular process, capable of involving more than one subject in the decisional moment. The horizontal arrow visible in Fig 4.1 has been replaced by a cyclical diagram (Fig 4.2), which is believed to give a more accurate description of the contemporary system.
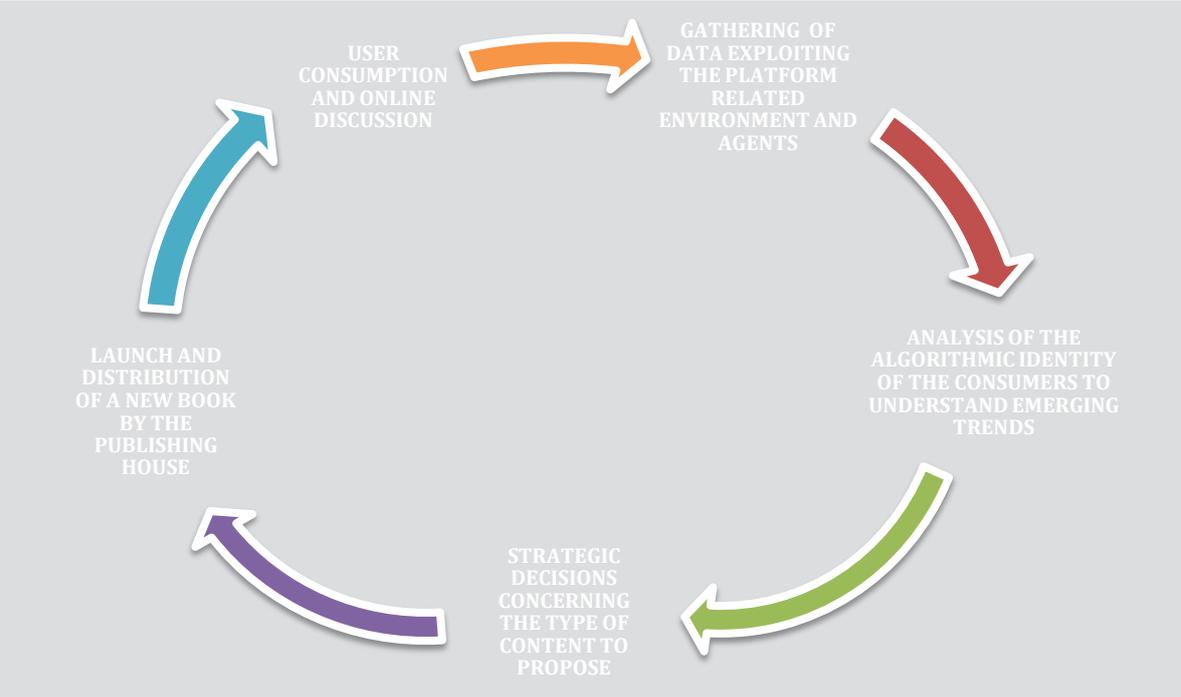

FIG 4.2 Step 2: platform environment related circular production process.

While in the traditional framework previously illustrated there is a clear first step, a well defined moment that triggers the production chain, in the platform-shaped environment it is difficult to discern which agent is the real engine accountable for starting the process – and this is due to the influential loop that characterizes the contemporary

publishing industry. In order to understand how the framework and the loop both work, two main dimensions need to be analyzed.

First of all, after having examined the considerations made regarding the contemporary situation of the industry, it can be argued that the decisions about the content and the type of book to print and distribute still concern the editors working for the publishing houses[113], with no apparent differences in respect to the previous classical conception. However, the novelty can be found in the importance that the process of gathering data about the current trends through the exploitation of platform-related features is slowly acquiring; the traditional competencies possessed by the editors is flanked by the algorithm-resulting knowledge concerning the customers. The combination of the two logics – following Bonini and Gandini's idea of an algotorial rationale – provides the content creator with a wider and more precise perspective on the individuals forming the demand, creating a perfectly tailored offer. In this sense, the second thing that can be identified as a platform-shaped practice is the higher attention displayed by the upstream agents toward the necessities of the audience. In the contemporary environment, the author of a new book is often selected because of the reputation he or she has among people – an aspect that is sustained by the observation made in Chapter 2 concerning the trend of books written by YouTubers or Instagram influencers. The reader himself becomes part of the group of agents in charge of triggering the production process, bringing new ideas to the table and allowing the examination of a totally new perspective.

Investigating the observations carried on in the previous lines what is evident is the incapability of solving the loop. The circular representation of the framework has the objective of underlining the difficulty that lies on the identification of the actor in charge of triggering and influencing the most the production process. While it can be argued that the final decisions concerning the product are still carried out by the publishing houses, it is also true that the discussions happening among customers inside the online communities are strongly affecting the direction taken by the editors. The algorithmic knowledge collected about the audience's preferences gathered through the platform structure is influenced by the judgments of the agents operating in the upstream part of

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[113] The phenomenon of self-publishing can't be considered as a real competitor of traditional publishing houses. Even If it is present in the Italian publishing industry and it does push editors to add this particular service to their complementary activities, the numbers related to it are still too low to be treat as a real threat to their position.

the value chain, but it is also influencing their decisions, pushing them to generate the content that the final users are discussing about.

4.2   Commodity or cultural product? The book case

The distinctive characteristic of the publishing industry lies on its hybrid position. As already mentioned in Chapter 1 when introducing the topic of interest, this specific sector has always stood in between the traditional market and the cultural creative field, assuming and combining elements of both structures. In this sense, while the item book is commonly treated like a product, whose price is defined by market logics, the idea underneath its conception derives from cultural or artistic elements, that reserve the center of the production process to the creativity of the author.
However, the emergence of platforms seems to be pushing the industry toward a specific direction, leaving less and less room for the creative aspect of the experience, and associating the readers' purchasing journey with the one that usually identify the commodity's user. The analysis of the impact that the new digital features are exerting on the publishing value chain shows that platforms are not only modifying the position of the traditional actors, but also changing the attitude of the final consumer.

The first aspect to consider in order to understand the position assumed by books in the contemporary market environment is the attitude of consumers toward the bookstore space. Investigated both from the standpoint of the supply actor and the customer, the journey of the individual subject to the bookstore has been presented in the previous chapters as an actual *trip*. During the interviews, several persons have associated the time spent inside a bookstore with the idea of a general experience, rather than a purchasing moment, explaining how the decision of entering the store is often triggered by the necessity of spending some time while waiting for friends or appointments. In this perspective, it is not surprising to see bookstores located in spots where people generally have to just stand and wait, such as airports and train stations. The physical retail is compared to the traditional commodity shop: just as individuals walk in clothes or shoes retails intending to wander around and observe the different items exposed in the shelves, with no other specific motive, readers are now entering the bookstore to see the titles displayed, leafing through the books without the objective of buying them. In this sense, the fact that the data referring to the consumers'

preferences[114] points out chain bookstores as the favorite distribution channel is not unpredictable. The possibility of walking in a chain retail and just wandering around is perceived higher than the one related to independent stores; the typical characteristics of the latter – in terms of spaces, but also in terms of presence of a qualified bookseller – make the idea of not buying anything uncomfortable for the subject.

This paradigm shift induced by the introduction of an additional space of purchase (the online platform) pushes the perception of the book industry nearer to the ones that can be found in the traditional market, rather than those related to the cultural creative field.

Furthermore, what can be noticed investigating the answers given by respondents to my survey is that the readers' physical purchasing journey is getting closer to the one characterizing the commodity user also in terms of attitudes defining the pre-decision moment. A deeper analysis of Question 11 ("When it comes to buy a book, you usually choose it:") outlines an on-going phenomenon concerning the method adopted by customers when buying a book.

GRAPH 4.1 Upgraded distribution of preferences for the
"*When it comes to buy a book, you usually choose it:*" question.
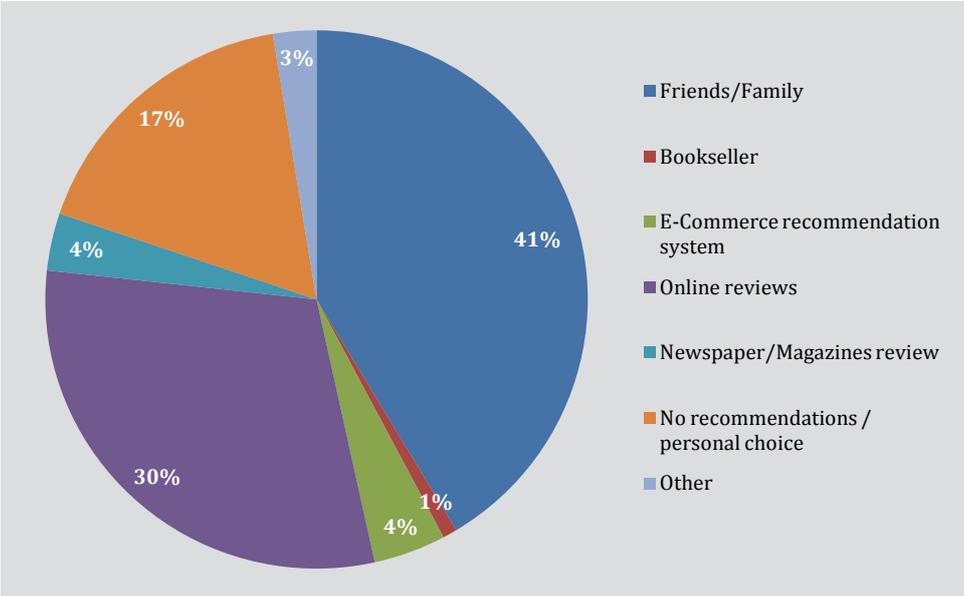
Source: personal data

Among the 23 persons who responded "Other", 20 claims to not look for any recommendation before buying a book, neither from friends and family or online community. The absence of the necessity of gathering information concerning the

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[114] The data refers both to the information collected through the survey I designed in May 2020 and the statistics of AIE.

product is typical of the commodity-related purchasing journey; the characteristics defining this specific category of goods guarantee the possibility of avoiding a deep analysis of the product, facilitating an instant buy.

The same reasoning stands underneath another observation that can be made concerning the distribution of answers of Q11. Curious is the fact that 11 persons out of the above-mentioned 20 explicitly use the words "By instinct" or "On a hunch" when describing the method adopted to choose a book[115]. The short amount of time dedicated to the consideration phase of the purchasing journey and the consequent impulsive buy is typically associated with a commodity, rather than a cultural product.

The two observed phenomena seem to push the publishing industry toward its assimilation to a commodity market, where there is no real distinction between one item and the other. The lack of gathering of information before the purchasing moment and the instinctual buy are typical element of mass goods, whose individual characteristics are not able to help the customer with the final decision because of the high level of similarities between one product and the other.

  Nevertheless, when investigating the overall attitude adopted by readers toward the book as an item, the outcomes seem to be pushing in a different direction. The qualitative differences between one title and the other emerge as fundamental in the decisional moment, and the fungibility characteristic fails to be recognized and applied to the products. The book regains a position in the cultural and creative field, being perceived as an artistic object needed to escape everyday life and find a new dimension of the self.

As Graph 3.7 has shown in Chapter 3, the majority of the respondents still believes in the capability possessed by literary consumption of allowing personal growth. The book choice is based on its ability of triggering reflections, offering a different point of view in respect to one's typical perspective.

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[115] One of the respondents even claims to choose a book only considering the cover page – a practice that can be easily associated with the notion of instinctual purchase.

Value of a book	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
to analyze the problems related to the contemporary world through a different point of view	15	12,93%
to get to know different points of view on topics which are relevant to me	20	17,24%
to grow thanks to the moral teachings contained in the plot	44	37,93%
to discuss about them with other people	6	5,17%
to exploit the knowledge shared by the bookseller during the purchasing phase	2	1,72%
to distract myself from everyday routine	27	23,28%
to grow as a person thanks to the way literature nurture the imagination in an extremely aesthetic perspective	1	0,86%
concerning the reading of magazines and papers, to gather information concerning trends and new solutions to contemporary problems. concerning books, i don't like realistic plots, I prefer fantastic stories that allow me to imagine a world	1	0,86%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

TABLE 4.1 *Which of the following aspects related to the reading practice you think constitute a source of personal value?*
question: absolute and relative frequency

The distribution of frequencies associated with the "Which of the following aspects related to the reading practice you think constitute a source of personal value?" question highlights the relevance that the item book still possesses in the eyes of the consumers. Unlike commodities, which are traditionally positioned on the basic steps of Maslow pyramid, those associated with physiological and safety needs, books appear to be standing in the highest spot, where self-fulfillment and self-actualization lie.

The issue of commodification of the cultural item "Book" is difficult to clarify, because of the controversial aspects that can be found analyzing the behavior of consumers. As illustrated in the above pages, it is possible to recognize a double attitude of the consumers toward the literacy consumption. On one side, the presence of a platform-related environment has pushed the demand side of the market to perceive the bookstore as an experiential space, independent from the practice of buying; just as it is happening for any other retail store, the physical store is acquiring a different positioning in the mind of the consumers. Moreover, in the moments that precede the buying decision, there is a percentage of people whose behavior is strictly associated with the traditional commodity purchasing journey, and in particular with the absence of time dedicated to the consideration phase: the book is chosen by instinct. These are the practices registered from the actual facts, rather than the personal opinions.

On the other side, the questions related to the subjective dimension of the reading activity and the answers given during the interviews with regard of the private conception of what a book is have outlined a different image of the industry. The consumer still perceives the consumption of literacy as a moment of personal growth – an aspect that is not usually related to mass goods.

In this sense, the difficulty of categorizing the primary outcome of the publishing industry (the book) inside a specific group of goods appears high, and the issue remains unsolved.

Nonetheless, even If it is still not possible to truly understand the position of books in the commodity market, the outcomes of my research seem to suggest at least a change in the way readers are categorized. The different attitudes recognized in the contemporary customers toward the reading practice ask for an update in the way the statistical authorities such as Istat and AIE classify them.

Up until today, the most used method to organize readers is the one proposed by Istat, which consists in dividing the subjects mainly in two groups: on one side, there are "Strong readers", identified as the persons (from 6 years old up) who have read 12 or more books in the 12 months previous the interview not for strictly educational or professional reasons; on the other side, there are "Weak readers", identified as the persons (from 6 years old up) who have read no more than 3 books in the 12 months previous the interview not for strictly educational or professional reasons[116]. However, this type of classification does not seem adequate to truly capture the essence of the contemporary demand side of the publishing industry; the mere division based on the number of books read during the year appears as an oversimplification, unable to accurately describe the distinctive characteristics that make one final user different from the other. The possibility of better tailoring the content characterizing the book and the opportunity of improving the customization of the promotional strategies related to the launch of a new title are here both absent, depicting this classification as merely descriptive. The overall level of utility made available for the industry actors by the Istat methodology is very low, unable to grant additional information concerning the final user relevant for the implementation of both the production and distribution strategies.

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[116] ISTAT (2019), *Produzione e lettura di libri in Italia*, available at: https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/12/Report-Produzione-lettura-libri-2018.pdf

The classification here proposed takes under consideration the insights resulting from the analysis of the behavior currently exhibited by the demand side of the industry, and it groups the consumers on the basis of their pre-purchase attitudes. On one side, there are "Community readers", identified as the persons (from 6 years old up) who value the opinion of peers when it comes to choose a book; the reference community can be both online or offline. These are the subjects who still attribute importance to the consideration phase of the customers' journey, broadening the time required to make the final buying decision. On the other side, there are "Independent readers", identified as the persons (from 6 years old up) who do not value and/or look for the opinion of peers when it comes to choose a book; the decision is carried out solely on their instinctual opinion. These are the subjects who do not attribute importance to the consideration phase of the customers' journey, eliminating the time required to make the final buying decision, relying on impulsive purchasing. This methodology has been developed with the objective of sustaining the upstream agents in the implementation of both the production and the distribution strategies. In this sense, the possibility of investigating the pre-purchasing attitude of the customers is fundamental to carry out a successful and effective functional scheme, especially when operating in an environment in which the differences among individuals have the ability of considerably change the structural elements of the action plan. The mere possession of information concerning the number of books read per year is not sufficient to efficiently manage the differentiation, because it is evident that the approach needed to cope with the requests arising from the Community readers is totally diverse from the one demanded to deal with the Independent readers' interests. While in the first case it is important to collaborate with the community, creating a new network of relationships capable of sustaining the activity carried on by the publishing house, directing the audience toward the preferred direction, in the latter what is relevant is the physical appeal of the book, which means focusing on the concrete and visible appearance of the cover page, the specific disposition to adopt on the shelves of the bookstore, the promotional events correlated to the launch, the merchandise. According to this rationale, the availability of data related to the pre-purchase consumers' attitude is the foundation of a successful decision-making process.

4.3   Value chain sustainability and the role of independent bookstores

The last point to take under analysis when investigating the impact of the platformization phenomenon on the book sector is the alterations that occurred in the relational structure. Besides considering how the production system has changed due to the introduction of platforms and platform-related features, it is fundamental to perform a comprehensive examination of the transformations that the agents operating in the industry have been obliged to undergo, finishing the investigation by trying to assess the current level of sustainability of the value chain.

When referring to the changes triggered by platforms in the publishing sector, it is fundamental to acknowledge the role portrayed by one of the biggest technology giants now operating in this market: Amazon. As illustrated in previous chapters, Jeff Bezos' company is accountable for many of the remarkable variations that happened in the publishing value chain, and this is mainly due to its ability to steal the spotlight in several critical positions of the book system. The unprecedented ideas conceived as the foundation of the business were just the first step of its successful rise; his capability of bringing managerial and financial expertise into a traditional sector and the ability to determine the elements that the market will need in order to grow have both granted the e-commerce platform the possibility of reaching a steady growth, slowly occupying every step of the value chain[117]. Up until today, Amazon strong presence in all the industry crucial moments has allowed it to exert dominance, and thanks to the high level of bargaining power gained over the years it is now able not only to shape the direction taken by the sector, but also to attract customers toward its own services.
The ascent of Amazon in the publishing industry has exerted a considerable impact on several positions held by different traditional agents operating in the market, pushing a re-design of the relational system and a reorganization of roles in order to reach a new equilibrium and to accomplish an effective level of value chain sustainability. However, the investigation concerning the supply side of the sector carried out in previous chapters has revealed that one specific agent has been having trouble adapting to the Amazon-shaped environment. The role of independent bookstores has been the most

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[117] To summarize the findings of previous chapters: up until today, Amazon can present itself as a (self-)publishing house, B2B wholesaler, bookstore (both physical and digital) and owner of a book-related social media platform.

damaged in this scenario, not only strictly because of the employment of Jeff Bezos' company practices, but also because the influence that Amazon has exercised over other businesses, extending the adoption of similar model and implicitly influencing the final consumers' purchasing routine. In this sense, part the capability of independent bookstores of obtaining a positive cash flow in the contemporary environment is undermined by an unforeseen customers' change of attitudes, which has been implicitly triggered by the introduction and implementation of platform-related practices. In particular, analyzing the pre- and post-platform scenario, what can be observed is that two behavioral changes have notably hurt this traditional agent. The first thing to consider is that the strategy typically developed by an online bookstore aims at attracting customers on the basis of low prices and all-year-long promotions. IBS often offers a special selection of books 50% off, Amazon gives away free deliveries when buying a book exploiting the subscription to Prime – and, according to the insights resulting from the interview I carried out in August and September 2020, this system has always allowed the e-commerce websites to draw the attention of the readers. As a matter of fact, the unrivaled price policies pursued by Amazon and IBS are perceived by the final consumers as very convenient, because of the possibility of saving money. However, on the supply side, these practices have created a sustainability issue: the low selling prices displayed by the websites have made it difficult for small independent bookstores to keep the pace of competition. The implementation of additional activities is becoming a crucial dimension to increase their ability to attract new customers and retain the old ones – but of course they are expensive in terms of both money investments and time. The second aspect causing issues in terms of economic sustainability is the correlated transformation that the concept of bookstore itself is undergoing in the market. As explained in previous pages, thanks to the development of alternative ways to purchase goods through the exploitation of online platforms, physical retail is perceived by contemporary consumers just as a place where to experience the product, rather than buying it. The action of wandering around the bookstore and silently analyzing the shelves is recognized by individuals as an important part of their journey as readers, essential to truly capture the intimate atmosphere related to the practice of reading. Nonetheless, from the standpoint of the business "bookstore" it can't be considered a favorable dimension for the financial sustainment of the economic activity.

The formulation of a strategy aimed at helping bookstores to implement a financially sustainable business plan is the last open question concerning the sector. In order to ensure the endurance of the publishing industry there is the necessity of supporting the institution of independent bookstores, because of the crucial role they play on the value chain according to its current gatekeeper[118]. The final pages of this chapter will present two different perspectives that the Italian book value chain could adopt to improve the current unsustainable situation. Both of the alternatives start from a real case scenario, to then display the theoretical pros and cons of each position.

The first solution that can be adopted to deal with the issue and sustain independent bookstores sees private companies as the focal figure; their objective should lie in the creation and implementation of new powerful networks and complementary market structures. With this regard, the Italian book landscape has recently witnessed the launch of a new platform, called Bookdealer, whose goal is to explicitly and actively support the activity of independent bookstores.

As stated in previous pages, customers are not used anymore to perceive the bookstore as a purchasing space. It often occurs that persons enter the physical retail just to wander around and check the new titles, thanks to the possibility granted by the digital environment to purchase the desired item afterward. In this sense, the demand's need that independent bookstores are not satisfying with their current strategy is that of buying the product of interest in a second moment – an aspect that appears to be fundamental to consider in terms of collection of positive cash flows. The possibility of filling this gap becomes crucial to beat the digital competition, especially when considering that, in comparison with the online book retailers, the brick-and-mortar store is typically capable of offering its audience many of complementary services that can't be perfectly translated into the digital world, which represent an advantage[119]. The scenario here illustrated is the one observed by Leonardo Taiuti (co-editor of Black Coffee) and Mattia Garavaglia (a bookseller from Turin), the two creators of Bookdealer, who formulated their business mission keeping in mind these untapped opportunities. According to one of the co-founder, the platform is imagined for a wide target.

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[118] The data illustrated in Chapter 2 has revealed the preference expressed by publishing houses toward the distribution channel "bookstores".

[119] This higher power in terms of competition is true in the moment in which the new *Legge sul libro* is capable of limiting the discount practices of the online retailers. With a maximum of 5% applicable discount, the reasons to choose digital stores over physical ones are reduced.

[The target] corresponds both to the reader who frequents bookstores but also buys online, and to that reader/user who is used to e-commerce and does not normally go to physical bookstores; our ambition is to expand the audience of bookstores by integrating it with those customers who, for one reason or another, can't/want to go to the store. We therefore address not only strong readers but also to all the people who read and who over the years have gotten used to buying books online: Bookdealer's "audience" is not a niche, but a broad target that we hope will help really support bookstores. After all, the user experience, although the service is new and never experienced before, does not differ much from that experienced on other sites, with the added value of the unique offer that each bookseller can make. And over time Bookdealer will become even more sustainable for the reader, let us remember, with every book he buys it really helps an independent local bookstore.[120]

The idea underneath the platform is to give virtual visibility to independent bookstores, grouping them in the same digital space to help the final user to find the most suitable solution for him. The service is presented to the readers highlighting the importance of sustaining independent booksellers, with particular attention toward the territory and the idea of belonging, trying to win back the fidelity of the users, which is fundamental to battle against the big online competitors.

Independent bookstores are essential cultural aids for our Country and they represent a irreplaceable point of reference for the neighborhood in which they are located. However it is not always possible or easy to physically go to the store. Now that an increasing number of people choose to buy books on the web, Bookdealer represents a valid alternative to large online stores.

[…] By purchasing on Bookdealer you really support independent bookstores because, thanks to the home delivery and courier service, booksellers can keep the relationship with their regular customers alive, reach new ones, and make themselves known outside their area of competence or in poorly served places, where until that moment the reader had had no choice but to buy on the big online stores.[121]

The new book-related online shop presents itself to the potential audience as an "easy, accessible, fast and cheap e-commerce that allows you to support your bookshop concretely"[122]. Once entered in the platform, the user can virtually visit the different independent bookstores located in his zone of interest; he can peek their shelves looking for novelties, but also exploit the advice written by the booksellers to discover new

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[120] Cosimi S. (2020), *Bookdealer, come funziona l'e-commerce delle librerie indipendenti*, StartupItalia, 19/09/2020, available at: https://ischool.startupitalia.eu/bookdealer-librerie-indipendenti-ecommerce-libri

[121] https://www.bookdealer.it/bookdealer

[122] See *supra*, note 121.

books and find out the initiatives promoted by the individual retail. The amount of money spent by the online customer goes directly to the coffer of the bookstore selected at the moment of the purchase, with no extra fees to pay from the standpoint of the store – and this is possible thanks to the specific business model adopted by the platform. As a matter of fact, Bookdealer obtains economic benefits by the deliveries: for every package delivered at home by the booksellers, the platform retains 50% of the delivery costs (which corresponds to 95 cents); for the packages sent by specialized logistic services, the platform gains 50 cents[123].

The development of solutions promoted by private companies gives the possibility to achieve a faster reaction to an untapped need coming from the industry, and higher flexibility to quickly adapt to the dynamics defining the contemporary market. Creating extended networks of small entrepreneurs willing to collaborate can be the most efficient answer to avoid the heavy bureaucratic structure characterizing public institutions. In this sense, the digital space created by the exploitation of platform features represents a facilitator that allows the establishment of new relations, overcoming the issues related to both market and hierarchy strategies and allowing the creation of a more informal and flourishing environment.

Nevertheless, the Bookdealer example has shown that the success of this type of private initiatives depends on several variables; concerning the specific case, the possibility granted by the updated *Legge sul libro* of more fair competition in terms of price policies was fundamental to make the new platform able to enter in the same competitive space of the big online retailers such as Amazon and IBS. As the interviews have revealed, the main reason why consumers usually decide to purchase books online is the possibility of saving money, which, before the introduction of the new law, was the foundation of the online agents' competitive advantage.

  These considerations make it clear that the second solution that can be adopted to better organize the publishing industry and to deal with the sustainability issue has to be triggered by the Italian government itself. Even If the hierarchical system describing the public institutions makes it difficult to cope efficiently with the dynamism typical of the sector under analysis, the higher authority associated with the reached decisions and the greater capability of supporting the activities thanks to the stronger auxiliary structure are both aspects to take under consideration.

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[123] See Cosimi, *supra* note 120.

An example of a virtuous Governmental intervention is portrayed by France. In 2013, the French Chamber unanimously approved the law that allows the publishing houses to establish a fixed cover price that bookstores can diminish applying a maximum discount of 5%[124]. The objective, stated by the advocates of this law, was to protect independent bookstores against the dumping performed by the chain and online retails. Moreover, listening to the concern arising from the booksellers association and accepting its requests, the text additionally regulates the behavior that book-related e-commerce websites have to exhibit. In particular, the *Loi Leng* explicitly limits the practice generally exploited by Amazon, Fnac and similar e-commerce platforms to give away free shipping, because considered as unfair competition. According to the law, the website can either apply a 5% discount on the book price or granting free delivery. France's book landscape is of course different from the Italian one, and a direct application of French directives is not suitable and/or effective. According to the editorial staff of *Il Post*, at the time of the introduction of the law, France was the first country in the world for number of independent bookstores – a detail that helps to understand the importance that this particular distribution channel holds in the French publishing industry. The safeguard of independent bookstores activity was a priority for the State: due to the crises that small shops were facing that was impacting the value chain, the Government decided to intervene, to support and save such an essential cultural and economic aid[125]. Nevertheless, the French example allows giving a glance into a well-organized value chain, correctly sustained by the Government with the objective of making it flourish. The support given by public aids was fundamental for the French publishing industry, the first step into an efficiently operating sector, with no waste from the standpoint of both the traditional actors and the final consumers. Even If the direct translation into the Italian landscape is not possible, it could be useful for the Italian parliamentarian to analyze the case and to study a solution starting from this example.

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[124] The updated *Loi Leng n. 81-766 du 10 aout 1981 relative au prix du livre* is one of the laws taken under examination in 2018 by the parliamentarian Flavia Piccoli Nardelli in order to develop the text pertaining the Italian equivalent.

[125] The results were visible starting from the last months of 2014, during which some of the independent bookstores beat the recession. (For further discussion, see Redazione Il Post (2016), *Le librerie indipendenti francesi stanno bene*, Il Post, 04/02/2016, available at: https://www.ilpost.it/2016/02/04/librerie-indipendenti-francesi/)

The Italian publishing industry operates in a peculiar scenario. The two souls defining the sector – the traditional market perspective and the cultural creative dimension – are progressively combining together, making it difficult to discern one from the other. The introduction of platforms has accelerated the fusion mechanism, leading to a situation in which the equilibrium between forces is very precarious. The push toward commodification of books and content of the books asks for a loose regulation, while the preservation of traditional figures fundamental for the cultural empowerment of the country calls for a strict law.

Due to the high level of dynamism that characterizes the contemporary environment, the capability of choosing the right strategy is a complex matter. Both private and public solutions present advantages and disadvantages – an aspect that makes the decision difficult to take. A possible solution may lie in the middle: good conservational legislation can function as the foundation for the implementation of practices proposed by private companies. The certainty given by the presence of strong Governmental support may incentive the development of innovative solutions to cope with the new scenario.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed at investigating the transformations that the Italian publishing industry has been facing in the past years due to the spread of platform-related practices. By examining both supply and demand side of the sector, the broad objective was to understand how the traditional agents operating in the value chain are coping with the presence of new intermediaries and the reaction of contemporary readers in front of these changes.

The introduction of new agents – whose structures can gather accurate information concerning the users thanks to the exploitation of algorithms and calculations – caused a shock in the book's traditional system, not only in terms of the production mechanism employed, but also in terms of the relational scheme adopted. The renew web of connections triggered the formation of an influential loop, making it difficult to identify who plays the most powerful position in the sector, and so to understand who is the gatekeeper of this updated value chain. Moreover, this circular mechanism is also associated with the problem of commodification and the issue concerning the overall sustainability of the industry.

After conducting a preliminary literature review on the main features of the arising phenomenon and identifying the above-mentioned unsolved issues, the general research question (how is the Italian publishing industry coping with the phenomenon of platformization?) has been followed by two additional queries: how is the influential loop created by the use of platforms affecting the overall value chain? And who is the new gatekeeper of the sector?

First of all, the examination of the supply side of the sector has outlined an overall loss of power of traditional intermediaries. The editorial logic typically located at the basis of the content selection process is slowly being replaced by the algorithmic logic, passing through a momentary hybrid rationale called *algotorial*; the competencies possessed by the editors working for publishing houses are combined with the data resulting from a mathematical analysis of the market, with the promise of creating a perfectly tailored final good. An additional exemplification of this phenomenon is given by the position currently held by salesmen working for the distribution companies. They are asked to change their usual promotional strategy, pushing for the type of content that, according to the information collected by the platforms, is more suitable for satisfying the current

market trends. However, it is the figure of the bookseller the one suffering the most: while the bookstore is progressively perceived by the final consumer as a place in which experiencing the book, separated from the purchasing act, the implementation of a sustainable business model is becoming more and more difficult. The incapability of competing with Amazon is slowly forcing independent bookstores out of the market, generating an overall loss of value. This instable situation has pushed the Italian Government to take action, promulgating the new *Legge sul libro*, whose objective is to sustain the traditional book value chain, safeguarding it against the unfair practices of the big e-commerce companies.

The observation of the supply agents seems to suggest a growing relevance of the platform-related companies, which appear to be holding the power of shaping the audience according to their will.

However, the analysis of the demand side of the sector has shown the relevance the consumers exert on the creative process. Reluctant to follow the suggestions resulting from the recommendation systems, the contemporary reader exploits the online platforms with the main objective of extending the group of peers from which gathering suggestions and opinions concerning the reading decisions.

According to this other perspective, the subject able to shape the purchasing decisions of the audience is the audience itself. Whether through the exploitation of online social platforms or a real-life conversation, the importance recognized to peers' suggestions is a central dimension in the overall journey.

In the process of shifting from an editorial logic to an algorithmic rationale, the industry seems currently stuck in a hybrid configuration, which permeates all the critical dimensions. Unable to completely discard traditional intermediaries' competencies and to fully embrace the idea of culture made of calculations, the book sector appears to be implementing a mixed strategy – an aspect that makes it difficult to understand the direction the sector will take. The lack of additional information concerning the behavior of the agents operating in the market, both from the supply and demand side, causes the development of an uncertain study scenario.

The double perspective assumed by the Italian publishing industry is better explained in the final chapter of the thesis, which highlights the difficulty of letting go of the past structures to favor the new ones. First of all, due to the adaptation mechanism that is still going on, identifying the new gatekeeper is a difficult task. The inability to solve the

loop created by the use of algorithmic systems leads to a situation in which more than one agent is in charge of deciding the cultural content. But If the editors of the publishing houses, together with their historic competencies, are not the only responsible for deciding the direction of the content industry, where is it destined to go? In this regard, the quality of the product *book* is uncertain too. Even If some of the practices carried out both by the upstream agents of the value chain and final consumers are typically associated with a commodity good, the overall perception of the reading activity emerging from the survey and the interviews is similar to that of a cultural product. How will the changing environment influence this dimension? Is the commodification phenomenon going to inevitably change the position held by the publishing sector in the cultural field?

The last aspect examined in Chapter 4 is related to the overall sustainability of the sector. Particularly relevant is the role currently portrayed by bookstores, which are seen by consumers as experiential spaces, rather than a purchasing one. Once again, this issue witnesses a mixed rationale in terms of solutions: on one hand, the private creation of networks; on the other hand, the State intervention to regulate the competition. Up to now, it is not possible to state which resolution is the most effective and efficient, because of the lack of data concerning both the numbers associated with the new *Legge sul libro* and those associated with Bookdealer.

Outlining the limits of the current market situation and the open questions still associated with it, the research has recognized the need to further analyzing the Italian publishing industry. As mentioned above, it is important to understand who is the new platform-designated gatekeeper of the industry, and so who is in charge of selecting the content to propose to the final consumer; to redefine the position of books in the cultural industries, trying to comprehend If it still holds a role as a cultural product; to search for solutions to ensure the financial sustainability.

APPENDIX A: DEMAND SURVEY

The findings presented in Chapters 2 and 3 are the summary of the information resulting from a survey, created *ad hoc*, and distributed to investigate the relationship between the final consumer and the reading activity. The objective is to test the validity of the main argumentations illustrated in the theoretical part – hereof to underline: the phenomenon of homogenization of pop culture; the cultural shift happening in the definition of the reading concept; the new approach adopted by the reader.

Strategy and channels of distribution

The questionnaire was prepared using the Form feature implemented by Google; the platform offers a straightforward system to collect and summarize data, providing the user with different tools and options to better organize its structure. The decision to gather data through the use of digital support, excluding the possibility of distributing paper forms, was due to a matter of clarity and simplicity – especially in light of the COVID19 emergency that the country was facing at the moment of the research.

Since the analysis of the publishing sector, focus of this dissertation, is limited to the specific case of the Italian situation, to grant access to the survey to every possible group of the population and to reach a broader audience, the questionnaire was written and distributed only in Italian.

A first preliminary test was conducted on May 19, 2020; the goal was to identify potential errors and distortions given by misleading phrasing of the questions or inability to express every point of view. Two additional tests were performed on May 20 and May 21 to follow the suggestions resulted from the trial session.

The final link of the Google Form was distributed through the internet starting from May 22, 2020. It was shared using Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram, reaching out also in some specific groups dedicated specifically to readers, and it was supported by word of mouth and re-shares.

Structure of the survey

The questionnaire is structured in five sections; each section is developed to achieve a specific theoretical objective. To avoid the loss of information due to the translation, each question is here reported both in English and Italian.

– *Introduction.* The introductory section of the questionnaire presents the case study, clarifying that the scope of the research is to accompany a master dissertation about the publishing sector during the platform era. Moreover, it is specified the structure of the questionnaire, the granted anonymity, and the minutes needed to answer the questions. All these information are designed to encourage the respondent to take part in the survey.

– *Reading during COVID-19 times.* In this section, respondents are asked to provide some information concerning their relationship with the practice of reading during the forced quarantine. The aim is to understand if and how their reading habits have changed because of the COVID19 emergency, and to learn the role played by the phenomenon of platformization.

The section is made by the following questions:

1. *During this emergency period, did you read more? (newspapers/magazines, paper books, ebooks, fanfictions,...)* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza, hai letto di più? (giornali/riviste, libri cartacei, ebook, fanfiction,...)]

    For this question, the possible answers are:

    - yes
    - no

2. *During this emergency period, what did you read more frequently?* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza, cosa hai letto/ascoltato con maggiore frequenza?]

    For this question, the possible answers are:

    - newspapers/magazines
    - digital newspapers/magazines
    - paper books
    - ebooks
    - audiobooks
    - fanfictions
    - other

3. *During this emergency period, what kind of device did you use the most?* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza, quale supporto hai utilizzato maggiormente?]

For this question, the possible answers are:
- paper
- digital

4. *During this emergency period, you purchased books at:* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza, gli acquisti di libri sono stati effettuati presso:]

   For this question, the possible answers are:
   - independent bookshops
   - chain bookshops
   - e-commerce websites
   - I have not bought any book

5. *During this emergency period (February, March, April), how much time did you dedicate to reading per day?* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza (febbraio marzo, aprile), quanto tempo hai dedicato quotidianamente alla lettura?]

   For this question, the possible answers are:
   - less than 1 hour
   - 1-3 hours
   - 4-6 hours
   - more than 6 hours

6. *During this emergency period (February, March, April), how did you spend on reading?* [Durante questo periodo di emergenza (febbraio marzo, aprile), quanto hai speso per leggere? (inserire risposta in cifre)]

– *Reading habits.* In this section, respondents are asked to provide some information regarding their everyday relationship with the practice of reading. The objectives are two: first, to use this information in comparison with the one provided by the previous section, to understand if platforms use increased during the forced quarantine; second, to analyze the habits of the consumers in the platform era.

The section is made by the following questions:

1. *Which of the following do you read/listen more frequently?* [Cosa leggi/ascolti con maggiore frequenza?]

   For this question, the possible answers are:
   - newspapers/magazines

- digital newspapers/magazines
- paper books
- ebooks
- audiobooks
- fanfictions
- other

2. *Why do you read?* [Per quale motivo leggi? (massimo 2 risposte)]

    For this question, the possible answers are:
    - for school/university
    - for work
    - for information
    - for pleasure
    - other

3. *What kind of device do you use to read?* [Quale tipo di supporto utilizzi per leggere?]

    For this question, the possible answers are:
    - paper
    - digital

4. *What kind of device do you prefer to use to read?* [Quale tipo di supporto preferisci utilizzare per leggere?]

    For this question, the possible answers are:
    - paper
    - digital

5. *When it comes to buy a book, you usually choose it:* [Quando devi comprare un libro, generalmente lo scegli:]

    For this question, the possible answers are:
    - friends and relatives' advice
    - bookseller's advice
    - e-commerce website's advice
    - after have read online reviews
    - after have read inserts on newspapers and magazines
    - other

6. *Where do you usually purchase books?* [Dove acquisti generalmente i libri?]

   For this question, the possible answers are:
   - independent bookshops
   - chain bookshops
   - used bookstores
   - thrift shop [*mercatini*]
   - e-commerce websites
   - other

7. *How much time do you usually dedicate to reading per day?* [Quanto tempo dedichi quotidianamente alla lettura?]

   For this question, the possible answers are:
   - less than 1 hour
   - 1-3 hours
   - 4-6 hours
   - more than 6 hours

8. *Considering December, January and February, how much money did you spent for reading?* [Nei mesi di dicembre, gennaio e febbraio, quanto hai speso per leggere? (inserire risposta in cifre)]

– *Reading conception*. In this section, respondents are asked to provide some information regarding their conception of the practice of reading. The aim is to grasp the meaning that the reader attribute to the reading activity, to infer the possible future evolution of the relationship between individuals and books.

The section is made by the following questions:

1. *How much important is for you to have a paper support when you read?* [Quanto è importante per te il supporto cartaceo quando leggi?]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Irrelevant" and the value 7 corresponds to "Very relevant".

2. *It is difficult to focus on the meaning of the text that you are reading when using a digital device (computer, smartphone, tablet, ereader)* [Trovi difficile concentrarti sul significato del testo che stai leggendo quando utilizzi un mezzo tecnologico (computer, smartphone, tablet, ereader)]

For this question, respondents are provided with a Likert scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Agree" and the value 7 corresponds to "Do not agree".

3. *How much important is for you to discuss with other people of a book you've read?* [Quanto è importante per te discutere con altre persone di un libro che hai letto:]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Irrelevant" and the value 7 corresponds to "Very relevant".

4. *How often do you share information about a book that you are reading on social media? (blog reviews, Facebook posts, Instagram stories,...)* [Condividi sui social informazioni sui libri che stai leggendo? (recensioni su blog, post su facebook, storie su instagram,...)]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Never" and the value 7 corresponds to "Always".

5. *How often do you buy a book because it is listed in the category "You might also like/Chosen for you" of a e-commerce website (e.g. Amazon, IBS, Mondadori)?* [Quanto spesso acquisti un libro perché compare nella sezione "Scelti per te" di un sito di e-commerce (e.g. Amazon, IBS, Mondadori)?]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Never" and the value 7 corresponds to "Always".

6. *How often do you buy a book because of its position on the "People's favorite" chart of a bookshop or a e-commerce website?* [Quanto spesso acquisti il libro in cima alla classifica di gradimento esposta dalla libreria o dal sito di e-commerce che frequenti?]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Never" and the value 7 corresponds to "Always".

7. *How often do you buy a book because you have just seen the film/tv show adaptation?* [Quale dei seguenti aspetti connessi alla pratica della lettura costituisce fonte di valore personale per te?]

   For this question, respondents are provided with a semantic differential scale – where the value 1 corresponds to "Never" and the value 7 corresponds to "Always".

8. *Which of the following aspects related to the reading practice you think constitute a source of personal value?* [Quale dei seguenti aspetti connessi alla pratica della lettura costituisce fonte di valore personale per te?]

   The answers can be:
   - to analyze the problems related to the contemporary world through a different point of view
   - to get to know different points of view on topics which are relevant to me
   - to grow thanks to the moral teachings contained in the plot
   - to discuss about them with other people
   - to exploit the knowledge shared by the bookseller during the purchasing phase
   - to distract myself from everyday routine
   - other

- *Demographic characteristics of the respondent*. In this last section, respondents are asked to share their demographic data.

  The section is made by the following questions:
   1. *Gender identification*
   2. *Age*
   3. *Current province of residence*
   4. *Current region of residence*
   5. *Educational qualification*
   6. *Occupation*
   7. *Number of members of your family*
   8. *Number of income earners of your family*

Measurements and scales

To evaluate some of the characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation, it is important to delineate a set of rules – which means to identify the primary scales of measurement needed to carry out the analysis.

- *Nominal scale*: it is a figurative labeling scheme, without rankings, in which the numbers serve only as a tag to identifying and classifying objects. This type of scale generates qualitative nominal variables.
- *Ordinal scale*: it is a ranking scale that allows to determine the relative extent to which the object possesses some characteristics. This type of scale generates qualitative ordinal variables.
- *Interval scale*: it is a scale that allows to rank objects so that numerically equal distances on the scale represent numerically equal distances in the characteristic being measured. This type of scale does not possess a zero point, and it generates quantitative variables.
- *Ratio scale*: it is a scale that possesses all the features of the interval scale, plus the absolute point. It allows the identification and classification of objects, the ranking, and the comparison. This type generates quantitative variables.

Furthermore, the questionnaire has been implemented with two different itemized rating scales, with the objective of studying the predisposition of the respondent toward certain aspects of the reading activity. The number of categories chosen are 7, allowing a neutral position.

- *Likert scale*: it requires the participants to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with each statements.
- *Semantic differential scale*: it is typically associated with bipolar labels that have opposed semantic meaning.

Sample characteristics

The survey gathered 121 respondents. During the preliminary check for acceptable questionnaires, 5 strings were discarded because of the repetition of the same answers, which I attributed to an error in the form submission process, and because of the presence of non-Italian subjects (the analysis strictly refer to the Italian market).
The final sample is composed of 116 subjects.

The majority of respondents (81 out of 116) identifies as female, while 26 subjects identify as male and 6 as non-binary. This distortion can be due to the method of survey distribution adopted: both my personal network of relationships and online communities of readers are mainly composed of girls.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 1 Gender identity of the respondents
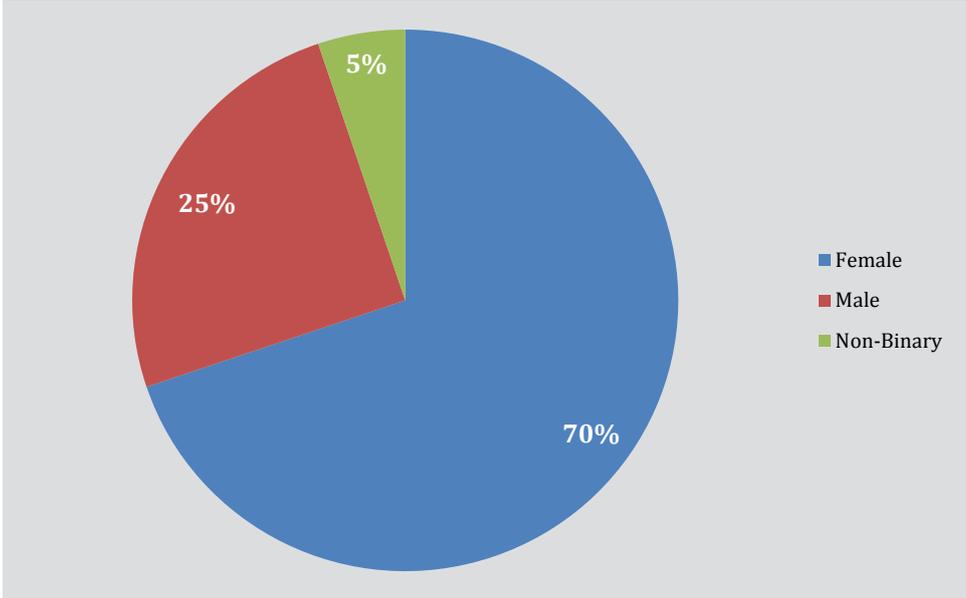
Source: personal data

The same reasoning stands behind the particular distribution that describes the age-related question. Due to the kind of persons I was able to reach using Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram, the medium age associated with the respondents is 24 years old.

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Age	23,88 (~24)	24	17	30

APPENDIX A TABLE 1 Age related descriptive statistics
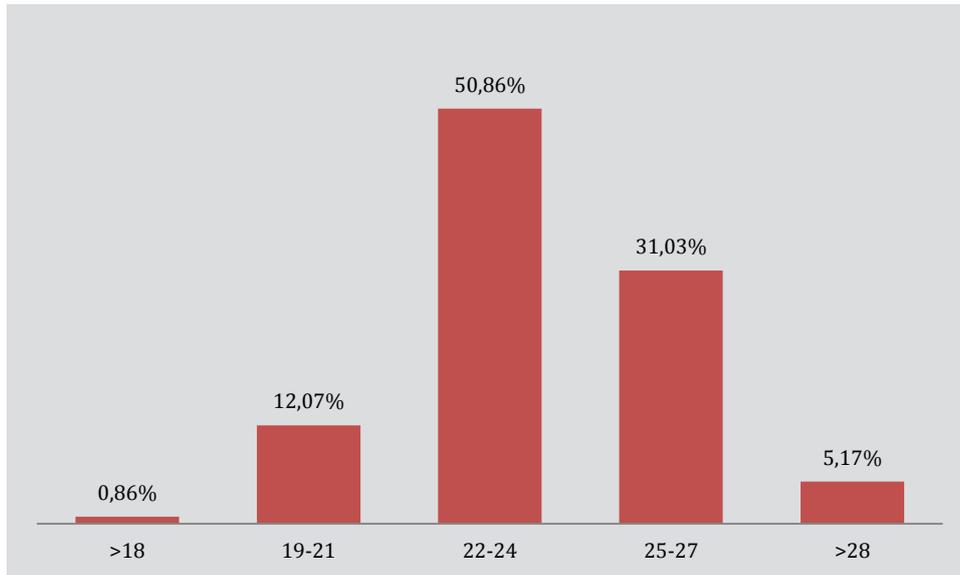
Source: personal data

Concerning the spatial distribution of the sample, the majority of respondents are currently living in North Italy (81 out of 116), while the others are in Central Italy (11), South Italy (17), and distributed between Sicily and Sardinia (7).

APPENDIX A GRAPH 3 Regional distribution characterizing the sample
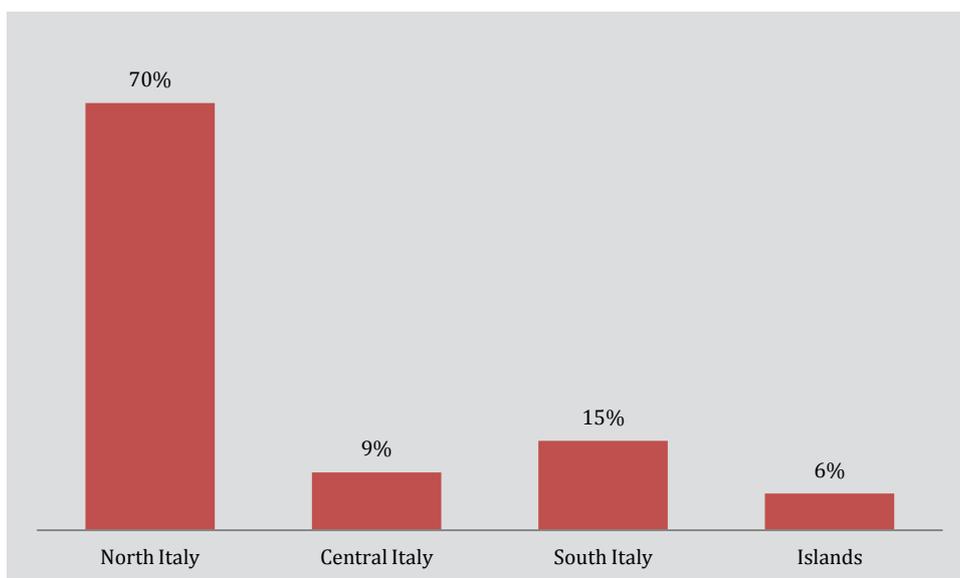
Source: personal data

Region	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Abruzzo	2	1,72%
Basilicata	0	0,00%
Calabria	0	0,00%
Campania	12	13,34%
Emilia-Romagna	6	5,17%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	5	4,31%
Lazio	5	4,31%
Liguria	4	3.45%
Lombardia	16	13,79%
Marche	1	0,86%
Molise	0	0,00%
Piemonte	9	7,76%
Puglia	2	1,72%
Sardegna	2	1,72%
Sicilia	5	4,31%
Toscana	6	5,17%
Trentino-Alto Adige	0	0,00%
Umbria	0	0,00%
Valle d'Aosta	0	0,00%
Veneto	41	35,34%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 2 Regional distribution: absolute and relative frequency

Analyzing the sample from the educational point of view, what can be noticed is that the subjects are medium-high educated. 48 out of 116 respondents state that they have at least a high school or middle school diploma, while 68 affirm to possess a bachelor or master university degree or higher educational achievements.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 4 Educational distribution characterizing the sample
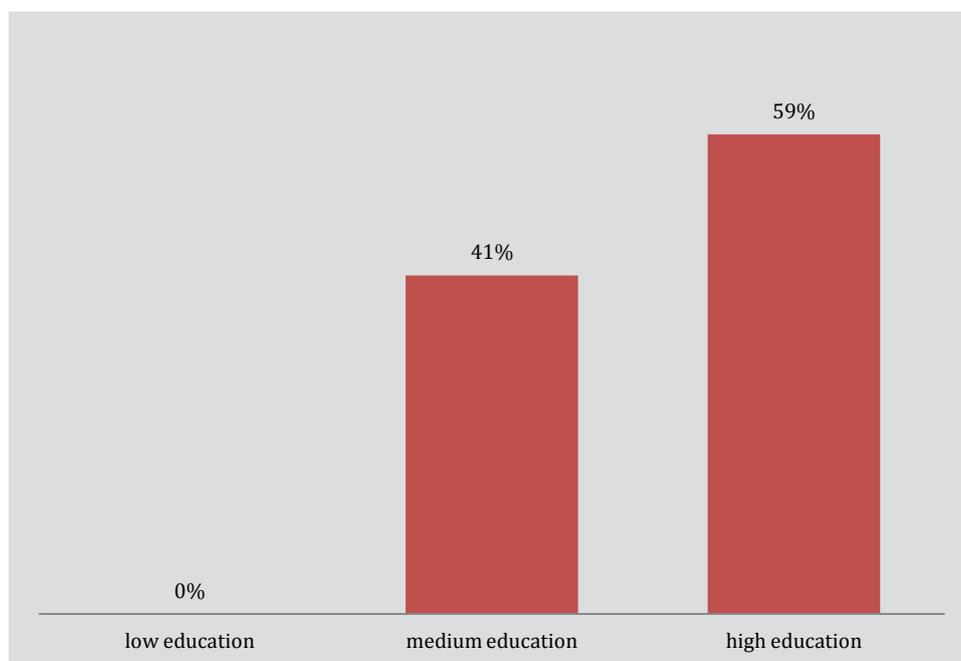
Source: personal data

Degree	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
No degree	0	0,00%
Elementary diploma	0	0,00%
Middle school diploma	3	2,59%
High school diploma	45	38,79%
Bachelor degree	53	45,69%
Master degree	15	12,93%
Higher education	0	0,00%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 3 Educational achievements: absolute and relative frequency

From the occupational standpoint, the sample is composed by 23,28% of workers and the remaining 76,72% of non-employed subjects. In particular, 67,24% of the sample is still studying.

Status	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Manager	0	0,00%
Employee/Worker	21	18,10%
Professional	4	3,45%
Self-employed	2	1,72%
Student	78	67,24%
Unemployed	11	9,48%
Retired	0	0,00%
Homemaker	0	0,00%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 4 Working situation: absolute and relative frequency

Finally, the average respondent's family is composed by 4 people and 2 income earners.

Number of family members	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
1	1	0,86%
2	6	5,17%
3	33	28,45%
4	55	47,41%
More than 4	21	18,10%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 5 Number of family members: absolute and relative frequency

Number of income earners	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
1	27	23,28%
2	44	37,93%
3	32	27,59%
4	12	10,34%
More than 4	1	0,86%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 6 Number of income earners: absolute and relative frequency

Answers' analysis

Q1. During this emergency period, did you read more? (newspapers/magazines, paper books, ebooks, fanfictions,...)

During the emergency period, what I noticed talking with typical consumers and booksellers was a discrepancy between what newspapers and journalists were claiming – that is the tendency developed by Italians to read more books because of the increased spare time – and the everyday life experience of the population. This question aims to understand the real trend.

The majority of respondents states that, during the lockdown period, they read more. 82 subjects out of 116 choose the option "Yes", while the others 34 admit that their reading habits did not change due to the quarantine emergency.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 5 Distribution of preferences for Q1
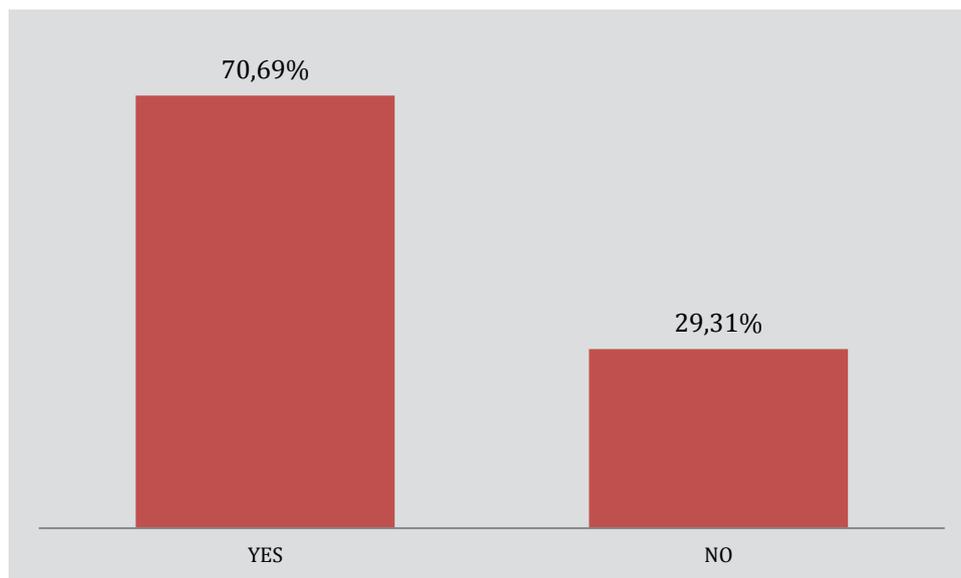
Source: personal data

Q2. During this emergency period, what did you read more frequently?

Together with Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, this question was developed in order to understand how much the reading habits of Italian consumers were affected during the quarantine period.

Specifically, Q2 has the objective of identifying which type of reading activity was the most undertaken by the respondents during the lockdown emergency period. According to the answers collected, the majority of individuals (44%) read paper books.

Activity	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Newspapers	7	6,03%
Digital newspapers	18	15,52%
Books	51	43,97%
Ebooks	26	22,41%
Audiobooks	4	3,45%
Fanfictions	5	4,31%
Others	5	4,31%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 7 Activity undertaken during the emergency period: absolute and relative frequency

Q3. During this emergency period, what kind of device did you use the most?

Q3 wants to understand If the COVID19-related situation has been able to accelerate the exploitation of the digital format or If, on the contrary, has pushed the individuals to look for more traditional means. In this sense, in order to really understand the trend characterizing the sample, the outcomes of this question have to be analyzed together with those resulting from Q9.

Nonetheless, what can be said here is that more than half of the respondents (72 out of 116) states they had used digital support during the emergency period.

Support	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Paper	44	37,93%
Digital	72	62,87%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 8 Used support: absolute and relative frequency

Q4. During this emergency period, you purchased books at:

The importance of the role portrayed by supply actors is here analyzed requiring the respondent to state which service was exploited the most during the emergency period to purchase books.

As expected, the majority of subjects identify the e-commerce websites (Amazon, IBS…) as the most utilized mean – but the striking insight here is the high frequency related to the respondents who state to have not bought books during the emergency period. Reading this statistic together with the one resulting from Q1, what can be supposed is that individuals, rather than purchase new books, read those already in their possession.

Sellers	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Independent bookstores	6	5,17%
Chain bookstores	7	6,03%
E-commerce websites	53	45,69%
No purchase	50	43,10%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 9 Sellers: absolute and relative frequency

Q5. During this emergency period (February, March, April), how much time did you dedicate to reading per day?

Q5's objective is to identify a correspondence with the answers given to Q1 and Q13. In order to verify the truthfulness of the insights resulting from the first question, the respondents are asked to state approximately the number of hours dedicated to the reading activity during the pandemic emergency.

More than half of the respondents (67 out of 116) states to have read between 1 and 3 hours per day.

Hours	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
<1	35	30,17%
1-3	67	57,76%
4-6	11	9,48%
>6	3	2,59%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 10 Reading hours: absolute and relative frequency

Q6. During this emergency period (February, March, April), how much did you spend on reading?

The last question of the COVID-19 section of the survey wants to investigate the book-related expenditures made by subjects during the quarantine period.

Perfectly in line with the results obtained in Q4, the modal value is equal to 0, due to the high number of persons who did not buy books. The maximum value is €200, leading to an average expenditure of €27,96.

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Reading expenditures	€ 27,96	0	0	200

APPENDIX A TABLE 11 Reading expenditure related descriptive statistics

Q7. Which of the following do you read/listen more frequently?

Together with Q9, Q12, Q13, Q14, this question was developed to be cross-analyzed with the answers registered from the first section of the survey. The aim is to understand If the reading patterns has changed during the pandemic emergency period. Specifically, insights resulting from Q7 have to be compared to the ones resulting from Q2.

Activity	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Newspapers	3	6,03%
Digital newspapers	22	15,52%
Books	63	43,97%
Ebooks	21	22,41%
Audiobooks	2	3,45%
Fanfictions	2	4,31%
Others	3	4,31%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 12 Activity usually undertaken: absolute and relative frequency

What can be observed is that, with the exception of digital newspapers and paper books, the frequencies related to the other reading activities are higher during the pandemic time. This confirms the hypothesis previously stated of individuals reading more during the emergency period.

Q8. Why do you read?

Q8, together with the statistics resulting from the last section of the survey, wants to try and clarify where the value of a book lies in the contemporary cultural environment.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 6 Distribution of preferences for Q8
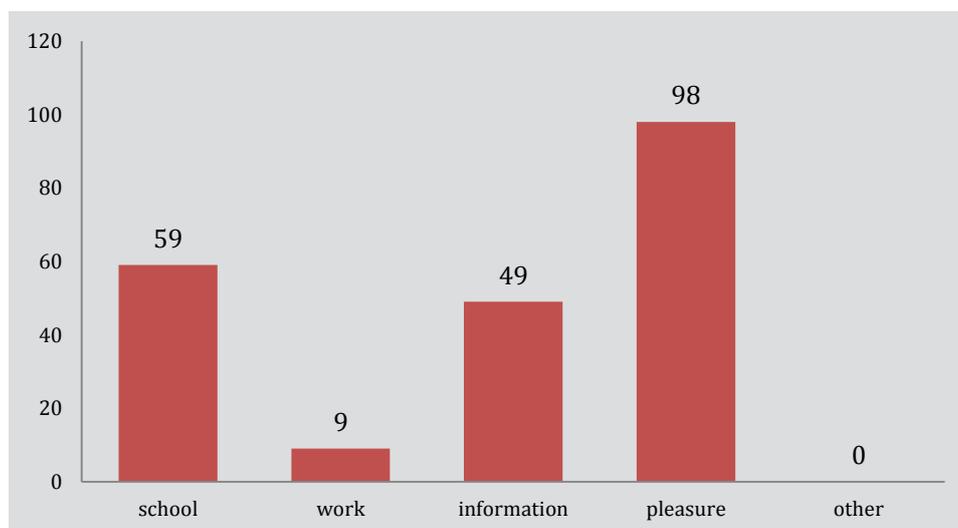
Source: personal data

While some of the respondents state that one of the reasons underneath the practice of reading has to be acknowledged to school-related obligation, the majority of the subjects (98 out of 116, which is the 84,48%) associate the literary activity with pleasure. This particular distribution of answers sustains the idea illustrated in Chapter 3 of the reading activity as a personal and intimate experience, whose main objective is to help the person taking a break from the life routine and enjoying some time alone.

Q9. What kind of device do you use to read?

Q9 has been developed with to carry out a cross-examination with Q3. The insights should provide a foundation to understand the direction that the industry is taken, and in particular it could picture the position held by the final users toward the use of digital support when it comes to reading.

Support	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Paper	58	50,00%
Digital	58	50,00%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 13 Habitually used support: absolute and relative frequency

The distribution related to the habitual choice of the respondents shows a clear division in terms of shares percentage: 50% of the subjects read on paper supports, while the other 50% use a digital device. When comparing these results with the ones coming from Q3, what emerges is that during the emergency period people were pushed to use more the digital format. In particular, observing the type of activities usually undertaken, during the COVID19-forced quarantine Italians increased their use of audiobooks, online stories (such as fanfictions), ebooks.

Q10. What kind of device do you prefer to use to read?

To really capture the personal predisposition of the consumer and to understand the level of innovation acceptance, Q10 asks the respondents to state which device they *prefer* to use. In respect to Q3 and Q9, the subject is here asked his preference, rather than the device he used or he habitually uses.

Support	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Paper	88	75,86%
Digital	28	24,14%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 14 Preferred support: absolute and relative frequency

The answers give back a clear predilection: even If in previous questions respondents state to typically use digital devices, here it is clear that the personal propensity lies in the utilization of traditional paper support. The discrepancy between the preference and the actual behavior emerging from this outcome can be due to the lower price that generally accompanies the digital format.

This is one of the issues that will be analyzed through interviews.

Q11. When it comes to buy a book, you usually choose it:

To better understand the position held by traditional intermediaries in the platformed environment and to discover the role assigned by customers to the emerging recommendation systems, Q11 asks to identify the most influential figure in the consideration phase of the purchasing journey.

Motivation	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Friends and relatives' advice	48	41,38%
Bookseller's advice	1	0,86%
E-commerce website's advice	5	4,31%
After having read online reviews	35	30,17%
After have read inserts on newspapers and magazines	4	3,45%
No recommendations	20	17,24%
Others	3	2,59%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 15 Purchasing motivation: absolute and relative frequency

The outcomes of this question make it clear that, when it comes to deciding which title to purchase, the most influential role is played by peers, whether represented by friends and family or members of the online community. Summing up the numbers, it results that 77,51% of the respondents rely on other persons to make a buying decision.

The other striking feature is the high number of respondents who affirms to not look for recommendations, preferring to trust their instinct.

Finally, concerning the platform environment, relevant is the position assumed by the respondents toward the algorithmic recommendation system: only 4 persons out of 116 states to regularly follow the tailored suggestions of the e-commerce website.

Q12. Where do you usually purchase books?

To understand the direction that the industry is taken, and in particular to try to weight the importance traditional distribution channels still hold in the contemporary environment, Q12 asks the respondents to identify their habitual book seller.

The numbers related to this question can be read together with those resulting from Q4, to understand how did the quarantine period impacted the distribution channels.

Sellers	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Independent bookstores	12	10,34%
Chain bookstores	45	38,79%
Used bookstores	7	6,03%
Thrift shops	4	3,45%
E-commerce websites	43	37,07%
Other	5	4,31%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 16 Habitual sellers: absolute and relative frequency

In line with the Istat data concerning this issue, the majority of respondents (45 out of 116) habitually rely on chain bookstores, while the second most exploited distribution channel is represented by e-commerce websites.

Concerning the different approaches used during the emergency period, as expected the numbers associated with the online purchase are lower in normal conditions because of the impossibility of going to the physical bookstore.

Q13. How much time do you usually dedicate to reading per day?

Q13 is developed to work as a benchmark for Q5. The objective is to verify the hypothesis concerning the population's reading time during the quarantine; in particular, it wants to confirm the higher number of hours dedicated per day to the reading activity.

Hours	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
<1	57	49,14%
1-3	52	44,83%
4-6	5	4,31%
>6	2	1,72%
TOTAL	116	100,00%

APPENDIX A TABLE 17 Reading hours: absolute and relative frequency

While the number related to the "<1" answer is higher in comparison to the one registered in Q5 (from 30,17% up to 49,14%), all the results associated with the other

hours' levels are lower, validating the hypothesis of a population who read more during the quarantine.

Q14. Considering December, January and February, how much money did you spent for reading?

This last question related to the consumers' habit wants to investigate the typical reading expenditures. To understand If and how they changed during the emergency period, the insights are analyzed together with the ones resulting from Q6.

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Reading expenditures	€ 28,69	0	0	200

APPENDIX A TABLE 18 Habitual reading expenditure related descriptive statistics

While the modal value is still represented by 0 (29 respondents out of 116 states to have spent €0,00 considering December, January and February), the average spending before the COVID19 crisis is higher (€28,69 against the €27,96).

Q15. How much important is for you to have a paper support when you read?

Q15 is the first question of the section dedicated to the reading conception.

To be analyzed together with Q10, Q15 has the objective of outlining the importance that readers still attribute to the traditional paper support in the contemporary digitalized world.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 7 Distribution of preferences for Q15
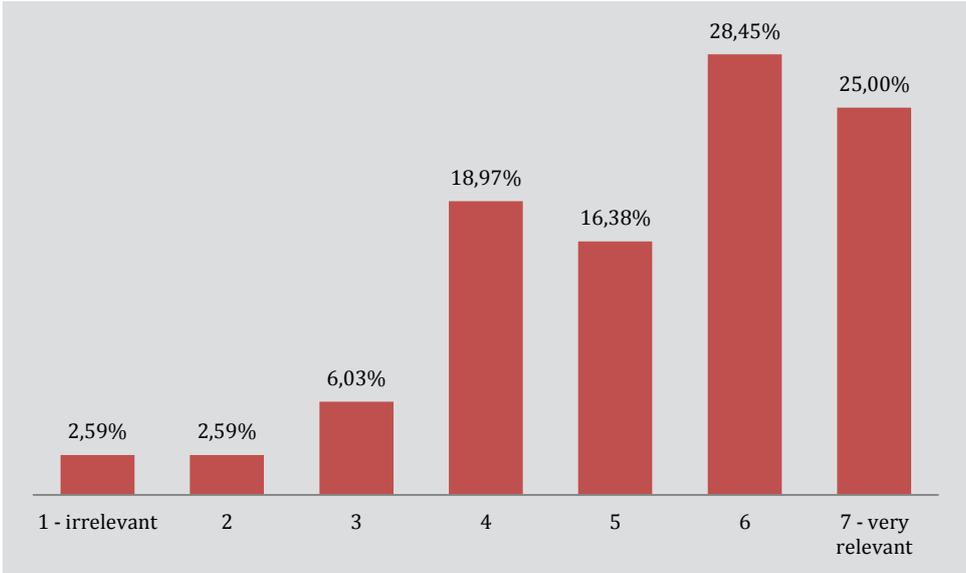
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Importance attributable to paper support	5,29 (~5)	6	1	7

APPENDIX A TABLE 19 Paper support importance related descriptive statistics

The data shows that the majority of respondents still believes in the importance of the paper support when reading: 88,79% attributes a relevance of 4 or more. This general predisposition is sustained by the insights coming from Q10, according to which 75,86% of respondents still prefer the paper support.

>*Q16. It is difficult to focus on the meaning of the text that you are reading when using a digital device (computer, smartphone, tablet, ereader)?*

This question aims to explain the distribution of choices deriving from Q15. Studies concerning the different comprehension capability displayed by the reader when using different supports (paper and digital) show that individuals have higher recalling levels when something is read on paper, rather than through a screen.
The rationale behind this question is to understand if the preference for paper books is due to a higher comprehension capability or If other factors influence the choice.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 8 Distribution of preferences for Q16
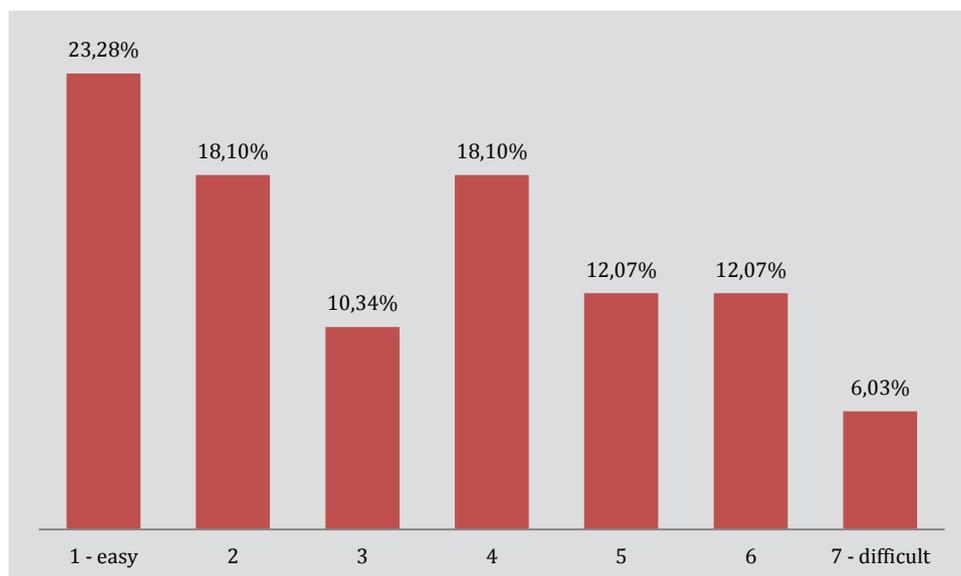
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Importance attributable to paper support	3,38 (~3)	1	1	7

APPENDIX A TABLE 20 Level of comprehension related descriptive statistics

The average answer is positioned in the lower part of the distribution, suggesting a general absence of difficulty when it comes to reading in a digital device.

In the light of this insight, what can be supposed is the existence of other dimensions, rather than the lower ease of reading, that pushes the reader to prefer the paper support.

Q17. How much important is for you to discuss with other people of a book you've read?

Q17's objective is to understand where the value of the reading activity lies according to the respondents. Having talked with both booksellers and customers before the development of the survey, what I noticed is a discrepancy between what the traditional intermediaries believe to be the value of the book (the knowledge they pass on during the purchasing moment) and what the actual consumer thinks.

Discussion is one of the dimensions connected with the reading activity I acknowledged as relevant.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 9 Distribution of preferences for Q17
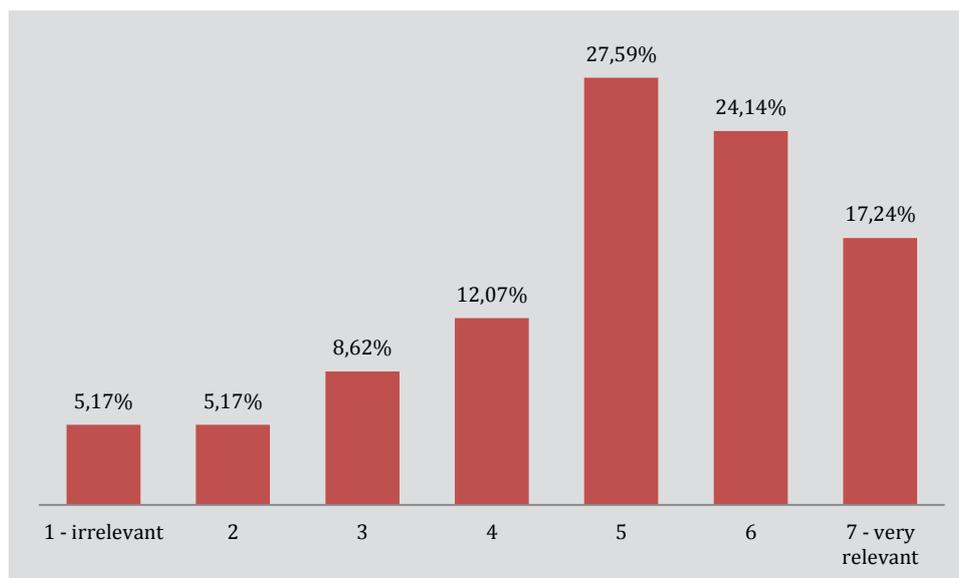
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Importance attributable discussion	4,93 (~5)	5	1	7

APPENDIX A TABLE 21 Level of importance attributable to discussion related descriptive statistics

With a modal value of 5 and a high percentage of respondents who graded the importance of the discussion 5 or more, it appears evident that the moment of conversation following the reading activity represents a source of value for the reader.

Q18. How often do you share information about a book that you are reading on social media? (blog reviews, Facebook posts, Instagram stories,...)

With the spread of the digitization phenomenon and the tendency registered among contemporary consumers of regularly sharing personal information on social media, Q18 aims to understand If this practice has infiltrated also the reading activity.

The starting point for the development of this question is Lollo's paper, in which reading is presented as traditionally associated with a private and intimate sphere, rather than a public one.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 10 Distribution of preferences for Q18
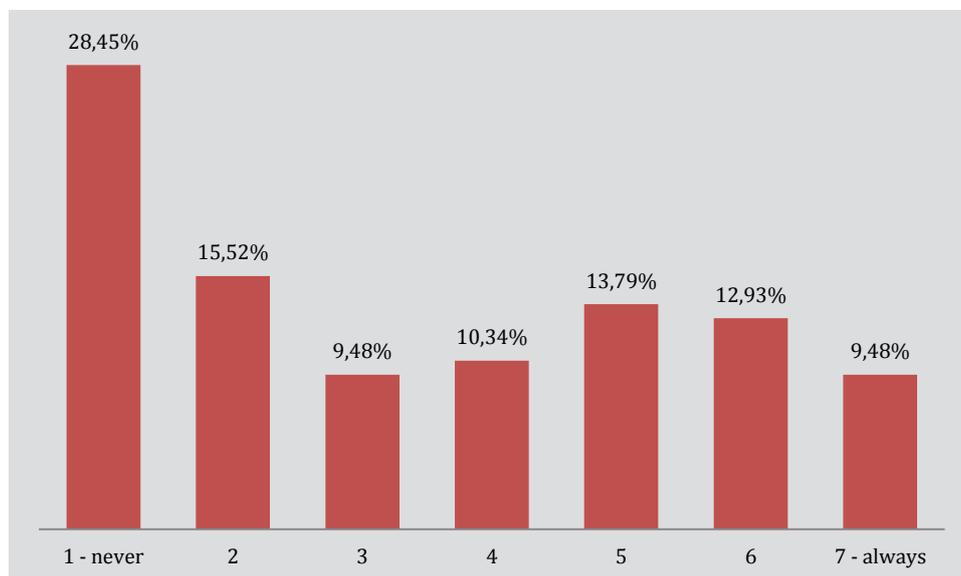
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Frequency of social media sharing of information concerning the reading activity	3,42 (~3)	1	1	7

APPENDIX A TABLE 22 Frequency of social media sharing of information concerning the reading activity related descriptive statistics

The particular distribution assumed by the answers shows that the reading activity is still considered by the majority of people as a private moment. This outcome is not in contrast with the one recorded for Q17; rather, it implies that the collective moment associated with reading has to be located *after*, and not *in the middle.*

Q19. How often do you buy a book because it is listed in the category "You might also like/Chosen for you" of a e-commerce website (e.g. Amazon, IBS, Mondadori)?

Q19 has the objective of investigating the relevance that platform-related suggestions bears in the customers' purchasing journey. In particular, by the mean of this question, I want to discover the actual capability of the recommendation systems of shaping the buying decisions of the reader.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 11 Distribution of preferences for Q19
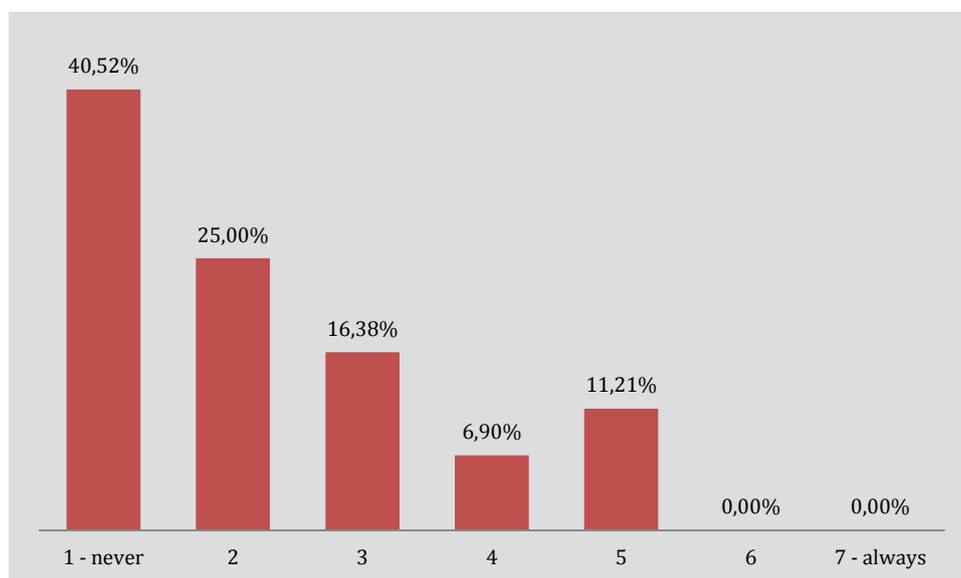
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Frequency of reliance on the e-commerce recommendation system	2,23 (~2)	1	1	5

APPENDIX A TABLE 23 Frequency of reliance on the e-commerce recommendation system related descriptive statistics

The most striking insight is the absence of answers associated with the higher grades. No one in the sample responded 6 or 7, which correspond to the "Very often" and "Always" levels. This insights, together with the percentage of respondents who state to never take into consideration the suggestions of the e-commerce website, implies the scarce ability of recommendation systems to shape the demand's decisions.

> *Q20. How often do you buy a book because of its position on the "People's favorite"*
> *chart of a bookshop or a e-commerce website?*

Q20 is developed to learn about the behavior held by consumers during the consideration phase. In particular, the reasoning underneath this question is to understand how much the opinions that do not come directly from peers impact the decisional moment. In this sense, charts, just like the "Recommended for you" section of an e-commerce website, are perceived as something artificial.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 12 Distribution of preferences for Q20
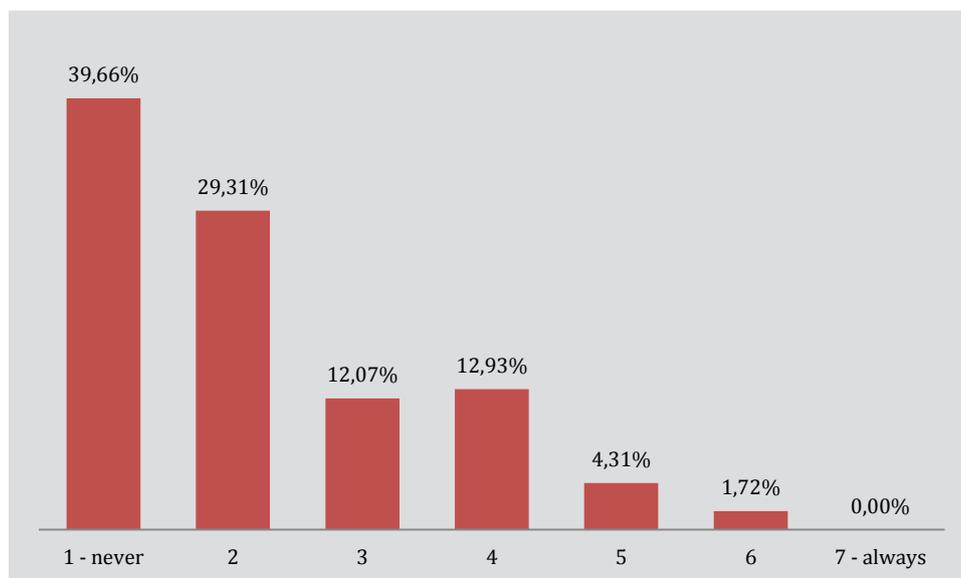
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Frequency of reliance on the "People's favorite" chart	2,18 (~2)	1	1	6

APPENDIX A TABLE 24 Frequency of reliance on the "People's favorite" chart related descriptive statistics

Confirming the tendency registered in Q19, the low average value and the modal value equal to 1 (39,66% of respondents state to never rely on the "People's favorite" chart) show the general skepticism of readers toward these practices.

Q21. How often do you buy a book because you have just seen the film/tv show adaptation?

This last scale-related question aims at understanding the consequences that decisions taken by correlated industries lead to in the publishing sector. In particular, Q21 wants to register the impact that movie producers' ideas exert on the demand in terms of book purchasing choices, in order to investigate the commodification of content issue.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 13 Distribution of preferences for Q21
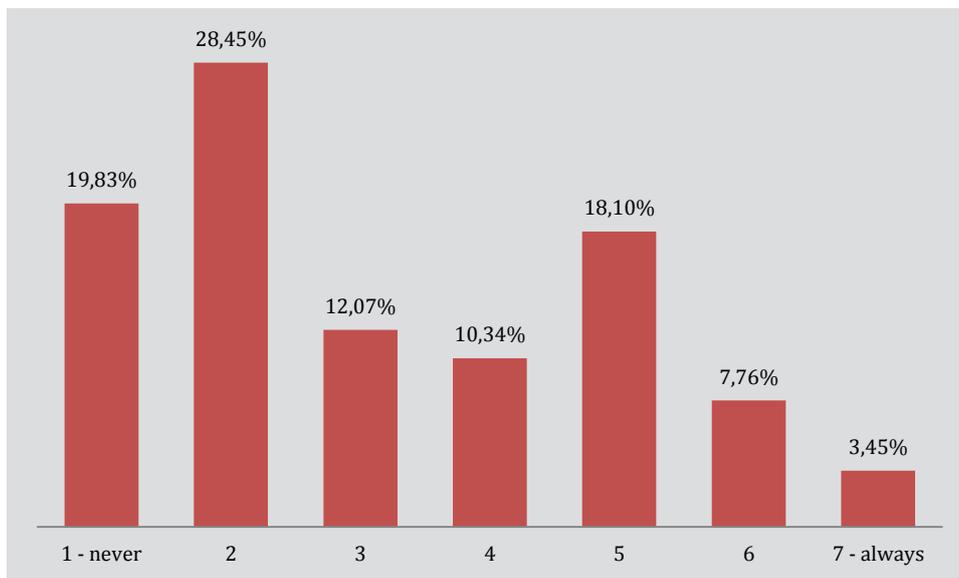
Source: personal data

Variable	Average Value	Modal Value	Min	Max
Frequency of film/tv show associated purchasing decision	3,16 (~3)	2	1	7

APPENDIX A TABLE 25 Frequency of film/tv show associated purchasing decision related descriptive statistics

Considering the low average value, it is possible to state that the promotion of a movie inspired by a novel does not necessary translate in higher sales of the book itself.

Q22. Which of the following aspects related to the reading practice you think constitute a source of personal value?

The last question asks the respondents to identify the element characterizing the value of a book. In this sense, the goal pursuit by Q22 is to identify those dimensions that, according to the contemporary consumer, are associated with the benefits resulting from the practice of reading.

The pre-determined answers are the result of a theoretical investigation and a practical observation.

APPENDIX A GRAPH 14 Distribution of preferences for Q22

- to analyze the problems related to the contemporary world through a different point of view
- to get to know different points of view on topics which are relevant to me
- to grow thanks to the moral teachings contained in the plot
- to discuss about them with other people
- to exploit the knowledge shared by the bookseller during the purchasing phase
- to distract myself from everyday routine
- other

Source: personal data

What can be observed in the resulting distribution of answers is that the majority of the respondents associate the value of the reading activity with an aspect related to their inner sphere, rather than something connected with other individuals. Even If some subjects state to benefit from the discussion happening with people, both peers and professionals (booksellers), this practice is not recognized as the most relevant dimension. It appears evident, then, that the object book is still faithful to its Romantic

conceptualization, and in particular with the idea of a literary practice that enables the individual to reach a higher awareness of himself through the re-elaboration of the authors' words and thoughts.

APPENDIX B: DEMAND INTERVIEWS

Objectives and strategy

To achieve a deeper understanding of the subject at hand and to gather additional information concerning the relationship between the final consumer and the reading activity, during August and September 2020, I conducted seven interviews involving some of the survey respondents. The subjects were chosen based on their purchasing habits; in particular, I accurately selected both habitual bookstore customers (chain and independent) and online customers, both Community and Independent readers.

The information obtained from the survey has been used as the starting point for the development of further questions. The interviews aim at asking *Whys* regarding some areas of interest arising from the quantitative data; in particular, the goals are to understand the motives underneath the choice of the specific channel of distribution, to verify the hypothesis of concerning the new conception of bookstores, to sustain the implementation of the new readers' classification.

The general structure of the interview is composed of three questions:

- *What is the last book you have read?* It is a warm-up question. The goal is to create a comfortable environment for the interviewee, trying to make the interview feel like a normal conversation.

- *Why did you choose it?* The main objective of this question is to understand the reasoning made by the customer during the consideration phase of his purchasing journey, in order to verify the hypothesis regarding the two types of readers (Community and Independent).

- *Where did you buy it?* This last question aims at identifying the key seller in the contemporary environment shaped by platform-related practices. The interviewees are also asked to give a reason for their choice, in order to understand the core advantages of each distribution channel.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, every interview has been carried out utilizing the virtual environment offered by the video call feature of the Whatsapp application. Even If the video-call does not allow a rigorous examination of the interviewee's attitude and body language, leading to a loss of potentially relevant information, it helps to reach a more geographically spread audience.

Interviews transcripts

Interviewee: Chiarilu is 25 years old, and she currently lives in Liguria. She is a regular chain bookstores client.
Date: afternoon, 05.08.2020
Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

What is the last book you have read?

C: I think that the last one was "*Ballata dell'usignolo e del serpente*", written by Suzanne Collins. The prequel of Hunger Games, to be clear!

Why did you choose that one?

C: I simply thought that it was the fastest book to read. In fact, I've finished it in less than a week! Then I have to say that I have also read a lot of opposing opinions on the internet, which got me curious. So I decided to take the opportunity and read it!

And may I ask you where did you read these opinions you talked about?

C: I found some of them on Facebook, while the others on Goodreads! I have this habit of reading spoiler-free reviews of the books I want to read, in order to understand what to expect. I try not to let myself being influenced by these reviews, because I like to have my own opinion concerning what I read.

And when do you usually read all these reviews? I mean, do you look for the specific book because you have already made up your mind or is the iter *different?*

C: Most of the times I have already chosen the book! Maybe If I am not sure about which book to purchase among two, to say, I let my friends choose, sight unseen. To be clear, I ask them "Tell me! A or B?"! Then, once I've decided which book, I read the reviews. Let's say that I usually follow these steps with books of authors who I don't know very well. If it is a book written by, for example, Thomas Mann, I do read the review, but not as carefully, in a sense. Because I know very well Thomas Mann, so I already know what to expect.

*Got it! May I ask you where did you purchase "*Ballata dell'usignolo e del serpente*"?*

C: I bought it in a bookstore! In a Mondadori bookstore, to be specific.

Was it a typical choice or an exception?

C: Typical choice! It is the place where I usually go when I want to purchase a book. It is Mondadori or Feltrinelli.

And how does it typically work? If you have to describe your journey as a book purchaser.

C: Well. First of all, I have to say that it is not just a matter of purchase. I go to the bookstore whenever I can, so not only to actually purchase a book. Maybe If I am wandering around the city and I need to spend some time waiting for someone, I usually go to the bookstore and just have a look around! Even If it is just for, I don't know, making up my mind for my next purchase. This doesn't mean that I don't buy anything. I don't deny that I often exit the bookstore with some books. Even better, I tend to buy more when I enter with the intention of just wandering around and not with the intention of actually buy something in particular. Also because when I go to the bookstore for a book, I pick it up, but then I still wander around to see If there is something else that might be interesting.

So what is it? You told me that you go to the bookstore whenever you can, even If you don't need a book. Why? What is it about the bookstore that push you to enter?

C: Let's say that it is a place where I feel comfortable, in a sense. I don't even know how to explain myself. I mean, I just feel home. Then I am always curious to see If there is something new, If there are books of my favorite authors, the new editions of the classics. And then I've always found nice and accommodating people, who never made me anxious even If I spent an entire hour, which happens very often, wandering around or in any case were never bothering me asking me If I needed something.

Do you ever ask the bookseller for advice?

C: No, I usually just wander around. I talk with the bookseller only If I'm not able to find a book, and maybe I have seen on the website of that specific bookstore that it is available.

Would you ever buy books through a e-commerce platform?

C: Yepp! I bought some books online. Also because there are books that are impossible to be found in the bookstore, nowadays.

Interviewee: Silvia is 24 years old, and she currently lives in Veneto. She is a regular online client.

Date: morning, 07.08.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

What is the title of the last book you have read?

S: So, I guess that the last one I read is "Love", written by Roddy Doyle. But at the very moment I am reading "*Alta fedeltà*", written by Nick Hornby.

Oh, I love Nick Hornby!

S: I know, right? I think he could be easily considered as one of my favorite authors, even If I have read only "*Non buttiamoci giù*" written by him. But I really love his style, and I feel this sort of connection with him. I don't know.

*How did you decide to read "*Alta fedeltà*"? I mean, among the many titles available.*

S: Because during the quarantine period I saw that Hulu had recently promoted a tv show based on this title. And I really wanted to see it, because Zoë Kravitz plays the role of the protagonist. But I usually read the book first, so.

And how did you discover Nick Hornby as an author?

S: There is this friend of mine who reads a lot. He even worked in a bookstore, for a short period of time, so, you know. He knows a lot of books, and he has always recommended some good titles to me. I think it is because he knows me, so he knows what I could actually like. He is the one who suggested me some of the books that, up to now, are my favorite of all times, such as "*Il giovane Holden*" or "*Dio di illusioni*". They were not really my style, you know? I mean, I thought they were not my style, because I was used to read only classics for school, and I really liked those. But then one day I trusted him, and here we are!

Is it something that you do often? Looking for suggestions from other people?

S: Well, when I was still in high school no. But recently, especially after having trusted Luca, I have developed this tendency to look for advice from other people. A *lot* of other people. Collecting information here and there, from all my friends.

Sounds like an exhausting activity!

S: [She laughs.] Oh, it is! Sometimes it takes even weeks before the actual decision. I usually spend a lot of time thinking about the different suggestions people gave me, reading the plot and stuff like this. Let's say that it is difficult for me to buy a book on a hunch.

Why?

S: Partly it is because of the money I have to spend. I mean, books are quite expensive, these days, and the decision to buy a book has an impact on other purchasing decisions. Do you understand what I mean? Right now, for example, that the graduation season is coming up, I have to decide If I want to save money for my friends' gifts, or If I want to spend it on something for me. So there are moments when I really want a book, and I

have even decided which one I want, but then I have to wait to buy it. Sometimes even months!

And then? What triggers the actual purchase?

S: Well, If I have to be totally honest... It's IBS free delivery coupon. [She laughs.] Sometimes, IBS sends you these emails where it says "Only for this weekend, free shipping!", right? And so I combine the lower prices of online bookstores with the free shipping and bam! There it is. My final decision.

Do you usually purchase online, then?

S: Yeah, most of the times! I think that, in the last few years, I bought only a couple of books in an actual bookstore.

So you never go to physical bookstores?

S: Oh, no, I go whenever I have the possibility! For example, there is a Coop Bookstore in the mall near where I live. And anytime me and my mom go there for grocery shopping I force her to enter. But also, I don't know, when I am waiting for the train in the train station. Or when I visit a new city, I like to enter the Feltrinelli bookstore, because there are no Feltrinelli bookstore where I live.

And do you ever buy books when you enter?

S: I know I sound awful, but no. I like wandering around, and spending some time just looking at books. Of course I know it is not fair for the bookseller, but... You know. I don't have a lot of money, but I *do* like books. My mom is always complaining about my attitude. [She laughs.]

What attitude?

S: The whole "enter in the bookstore without buying anything" story. She says that it is not fair for the bookseller, because If every customer does the same thing that I do, how can they earn something? And, I mean, I know she is right, but I miss that specific part of the book journey. Because buying online is cheaper for sure and it helps me saving some money that I can spend elsewhere, but I don't have the same feeling, the same sensations. When I was little I went to this independent bookstore, in the city center, and the nice thing was to just wander around, and look at the different books, and touch them, and feel them. Instead, using IBS, the book is delivered to me, and I just have to open the box. Which is exciting and everything, but it is not the same thing.

Interviewee: Roberta is 21 years old, and she currently lives in Sicilia. She is a bookstore client, but she also reads books she finds online.

Date: afternoon, 11.08.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

What is the last book you have read?

R: At the very moment, I'm reading a book called "*Il femminismo delle Zingare*", which is a sort of essay. But before this one, I read "*Il libro delle verità nascoste*", written by Amy Gail Hansen.

Woah, super cool! I mean, they sound like very interesting titles!

R: They are! I'm enjoying them both, to be honest. Very much!

Why did you choose to read these two books?

R: Concerning the essay, I did not actually choose it. I mean, I did not choose it in first person. I am part of a reading group, and the month title is this one. [She laughs.] The other one instead was a gift.

Oh, I love that! A reading group!

R: I know, it is amazing!

And where is it? I mean, real life or online?

R: No, no. Unfortunately certain topics are often difficult to discuss in real life. It is a Telegram group, and it was initially promoted by an Instagram page.

And how did you find this Instagram page? By chance or...?

R: The Instagram page is managed by a girl I have on my Facebook friend list, If I'm not wrong. I think she promoted it some way. A post maybe? And so I got interested.

Got it, okay. So how does it work? Once a month you have a suggested title, right?

R: Right!

And who is in charge of suggesting?

R: Generally speaking, every time someone finds an interesting title, he or she suggests it. And then, at the end of the month, we vote and we decide what to read among the suggested ones. Everybody can recommend a book, in conclusion. So maybe there are some people that suggest titles more often than the others. But it is not a centered thing.

Got it. Cool, though. And how is it going? I mean, do you like it? In terms of suggestions, community...?

R: It is very nice, to be honest! Also because I have never had similar experiences, so it has been something pretty much new to me. I feel very comfortable, in there, because there are a lot of smart and friendly people, so even If you are looking for more particular or specific titles they are all available to help you! I don't usually read books of this genre. I grew up with fantasy books and novels. So opening up to essays and books like that is really enlightening.

Okay, thanks! Now can I ask you where did you buy the essay?

R: I did not buy it, actually. One of the admin of the reading group gave it to us in digital format. Generally speaking, I buy very few books. Physical ones, I mean. And I'm really sorry about this habit I have developed. I tend to buy the paper version only of the books written by my favorite authors or classics.

May I ask you why?

R: Of course! Concerning the specific case of the essay the main reason is because the book was given to me in the digital formal, so the need to physically go to the bookstore and buy it had disappeared. Then I have to say that I discover the majority of books by hearsay and suggestions from people who also read them digitally, so it is often easier and cheaper to ask them to pass me the digital format. I have to say, though, that If I particularly liked a book or a saga I prefer to have the paper version, so I buy it anyway. It usually depends on the moment, you know. Because I don't live in the city, but I live in a small town, where deliveries are incredibly slow. So sometimes it happens that I do not have the opportunity to buy the books I want.

What about the bookstores? Do you ever go?

R: Yes! I mean, If you don't count the last six months, I go at least once a month. And almost every time I exit the bookstore with a book.

Can you describe me your classic journey inside the bookstore?

R: I actually don't have a real typical journey. Let's say that I just wander around, looking at the shelves until I find something that captures my attention. Sometimes I even take into consideration the stand where they usually display the best sellers of the month or the week. The only thing that I am sure I do every time is spending a lot of time looking at the classic section, the historical novel section, those sections dedicated to different sagas. Then I often look for those books that people suggested me. I guess it depends on the mood I am in. I mean, If I am looking for a specific book, then I go directly to that

section and I don't spend much time observing around. If I want an interesting book, then I can spend also one hour just wandering around.

Interviewee: Mariapia is 20 years old, and she currently lives in Calabria. She is a regular online client.

Date: afternoon, 16.08.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp videocall

First question, super easy. What is the title of the last book you have read?

M: "*La signora delle camelie*", written by Dumas!

Wow. Looks like a though one! Why did you choose this book?

M: I'm having a really stressful relationship with reading, lately. Let's say for a couple of years maybe? I have like twenty books to read in my shelves, because I keep buying them, but I'm not able to read any of them! I am kind of stuck, If you know what I mean. Concerning the choice... I was helped by despair. [She laughs.] Then they told me that maybe re-starting with this book would help me be more constant, so I give it a try!

Who is they*? I mean, who did tell you this?*

M: A friend of mine who loved this book like crazy. I mean, I still remember when she read it – like two or three years before me – and she told me how much this book was able to really carry her away in a deep emotional level.

And how is it going? Is it still difficult or your friend was right?

M: I'm still struggling, to be honest. I mean, I have read this one, the one of Dumas, between January and February, and after this I have tried to start new ones, but I have never finished them.

I totally get it. I think it depends on the life moment you are living, you know. During the quarantine I was totally incapable of reading. Like, zero. Even If I had more time. But then, during my internship, I started reading again and... Makes zero sense, you know. Because I was more tired!

M: I know, right?! The Dumas' book? I read it during the winter exam session. And when I was finally free? When I finally finished everything? Nothing. I went back doing absolutely nothing. A living paradox, here I am.

[I laugh.] Do you remember where you bought La signora delle camelie*?*

M: I do! It was in Naples, during Christmas holidays 2017!

WOAH, 2017. [I laugh.] What a memory, ladies and gentleman!

M: I swear I have no idea why I remember all this. [She laughs.]

[I laugh.] And how does it work? The purchasing moment, I mean. Do you buy online, do you prefer to physically go to the shop? Christmas holidays 2017 excluded. Let's say how does it work generally speaking.

M: I really like going to the physical bookstore, you know. And just wandering around the different sections and the different shelves, and wasting time in chronic indecisions. But I usually buy online. Or at least this is what I have been doing for the past year and an half, two.

How come?

M: Mh. Partly because of some sort of reasons that reinforced the need to order online. Meaning that: I live in a very small town, and in the local bookstore you don't find much, you know? Other than old Nicholas Sparks' novels, erotic novels written worst than 50 Shades, and stuff like these. Consider that I live in a very important area for Calabrian literature, and to read such a book I always have to go elsewhere. Which is absurd, right? Then of course it happens that I don't always have ways to move to the bookstore, and so I end up ordering online for convenience. Also because you have to consider that we are a small group of towns. Like, there are small ones adjacent to mine. So the bookstore is not exactly close even if it is in another small town. I have to drive for a while.

Oh no! That is a bummer.

M: Yeah. Because I *do* like the bookstore, you know.

So If you do not rely on the bookseller for an advice because you buy online, how do you choose a book? I mean, generally speaking, to which figure do you rely on?

M: I have a list. I have *the* list. Let's say that I usually decide based on the hype. For example: today I want to save money to buy *Piccole Donne*. Then maybe, when I finally have the right amount of money, I use it to buy a collection of poems written by Federico García Lorca, here we go. I'm very instinctual when it comes to books.

What a mood. It happens to me all the time! [I laugh.] And this list? Where does it come from?

M: It is a very weird list, to be honest, because from time to time I eliminate it and start it all over again from scratch. And then I add back again books that I previously deleted. It's a mess. But I usually write titles that inspires me after having read the plot!

And do you rely just on this list? Or do you look for advice around?

M: I'm always looking around for advice! I believe they are more important than the list, especially when the subject in question is similar to me and so I know that If they like it, I will like it too.

So you look for suggestions from people you actually know. I mean, you are not signed up in Goodreads or similar communities.

M: No, no. I really don't like this kind of things.

How come?

M: I have no idea, you know. I guess I tried to download the app, but simply it is not something for me. The settings, the challenges, the number of books to read in a year. I don't know, it sounds weird to me.

Interviewee: Denise is 23 years old, and she currently lives in Emilia Romagna. She is both a bookstore and online client.

Date: afternoon, 18.08.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

What is the title of the last book you have read?

D: The last one is… Wait a minute, I have to check on Goodreads, just to be sure, you know. [She laughs.] Okay, it is "*Scelti dalle tenebre*", written by Anne Rice. Yes, I think this is the last one worthy of the term book.

[I laugh.] What do you mean?

D: I read also one of the mini ebook of Pottermore, but it doesn't say anything new. It was kind of frustrating.

*But "*Scelti dalle tenebre*" did not frustrate you.*

D: No, no. [She laughs.] On the contrary.

What does it talk about?

D: It is an urban fantasy, and it is the second book of a saga. The first one is "*Intervista col vampiro*", which was made into an amazing movie with an exceptional cast. In this one, the one I have just read, there is the story of Lestat the vampire, who is a young French man made immortal by a supernatural being who abandoned him and died immediately after creation. It is interesting because it explains better the figure of a character who was seen in the first book as the antagonist almost for half the book.

*Ah! I didn't know that "*Intervista col vampiro*" was a saga, wow. So this is the reason why you decided to read this one? Because of the whole saga thing?*

D: Exactly! But I have to say that generally speaking I always appreciate when I have the possibility to deepening the story of a character I fell in love with.

What about "Intervista col vampiro"? How did you find that one?

D: Totally random, to be honest. My sister has always been a fan of horror and stuff like that, and I grew up without being able to touch her stuff. Which is a classic, come on! Anyway, one day I was choosing a film to rent with my friends, and before my eyes popped up this movie I had seen among the titles of my sister. And so here we are! I have found it, seen it and loved it! As much on screen as in the pages.

Uh, so you saw the movie first?

D: Yes, I didn't even now there was a book!

And so how did you discover the book?

D: I looked it up on Google! And Wikipedia referred me that the movie is based on a book!

Got it! And except this specific case? How do you usually decide what book to read?

D: I normally decide on a hunch! I like looking at the shelves of physical libraries as much as virtual ones, and even If I tend to focus more on the specific genre, there are often titles that attract me regardless of it. What convinces me is always the first page. Not the cover page, eh. The first written page. Or at least the first chapter. If the style of the author does not convince me, then it is difficult for me to decide to purchase it. Then short passages from magazines like IlLibraio or Amazon also come in handy!

So you are not one of those persons looking for suggestions from peers.

D: No, no. On the contrary! Very often I have found myself disappointed by the suggestions received. Probably because I approached the book with expectations that in the end, due to the different interests from person to person, were broken.

Really?

D: Unfortunately! Maybe sometimes I ask if they liked it and why, but then I don't let their opinion influence my decision.

Get it! And what about being on the other side? I mean, do you like recommending books after you have read them?

D: Yes! After reading something I always tend to recommend it, but I also specify why I liked it and why I recommend it to that specific person. But in the end I think that the preferences when it comes to books are so personal that it is difficult to see the same things, despite having similar tastes. Or at least, it rarely happened to me! But in the end

I find debating an interesting practice, so I often recommend them hoping of getting to the discussion part.

So you do like to discuss!

D: Oh, I love discussing about books! I think it's the best way to truly understand any book. You can always understand the general sense, but I believe that if you do not talk about it you will end up losing most of the messages, which can be interpreted or understood according to the personal perspective of the reader.

Is this the reason why you sign up on Goodreads? To have more perspective?

D: I signed up on Goodreads mainly to keep track of what I read. I am a very messy person, so I tend to miss bookmarks, notes, and stuff like that. I have found out only after how useful that website is also for discovering new things! I mean, I find a lot of interesting proposals looking at the virtual shelves of new friends.

So you like it?

D: Generally speaking yes! But it has the big flaw of not having all the different editions of a single book in its archive, which is a thing that messes up the "bookmark" function, which I think it should be fundamental.

The "bookmark" function?

D: When you add a book in your currently reading section, you have the possibility to mark which page you are on! If you don't find exactly the edition you are reading, you are forced to choose another one, so you find yourself with a book in your hands that has a specific number of pages, while on the site it marks a different number and... Well, it's really uncomfortable.

Ah, okay, I get it. And what about the Goodreads recommendation system? Do you use it?

D: I check it when I'm looking for novelties, but it mainly focuses on United States rankings rather than ours. So okay, it can be useful sometimes, but I prefer to use it on websites such as Amazon, which are usually more targeted on your purchases, rather than Goodreads, where it's much more generic.

So you use the Amazon one?

D: Yes! In fact most of the time I end up buying the ones it recommends me!

Oh, really? So you find its suggestions useful!

D: Yes! I'd say the suggestions are right 80% of the time. Then of course it happens that in the middle of the recommended section there are trash proposals, such as novels that are basically fanfictions about the classics. Really, I can't even tell you the huge books

that looks like *Orgoglio e Pregiudizio* that keep popping up, lately. But in general it is very useful! Especially if you have lists of books you would like to purchase.

So where do you usually purchase your books?

D: Let's say that I purchase books at the physical bookstore only when I need something quickly and I know it is already there. Otherwise I shop online, mainly on Amazon and rarely on Libraccio, simply because I am a person who reads a lot, so being able to save some money means a lot to me.

I got it. So in your opinion what does the physical bookstore have more than Amazon?

D: Physical bookstores have a range of sensory perceptions on their side that e-commerce websites can't give you. When you physically wander around the shelves of a bookstore, you instantly have books in front of you. Do you know what I mean? You don't have to wait days or weeks to touch them. You actually know what they look like. You have the advantage of being able to leaf through them and have an immediate look at what you will buy. Plus, you can talk to people with the same interests as you, which is something I always do. My bookseller is practically one of my favorite people in the world. Cultured, interesting, kind, affable and very, very curious! Anyway, I was saying. You can talk with interesting people, who can help you evaluate your purchase on an emotional level compared to the more critical one, such as that of the reviews that you can usually read on the internet. When I browse online, the contact with the book is non-existent and I am left with a feeling of, I don't know, emptiness. Emptiness, yes, due to the insensibility of the whole experience. Not being able to touch the pages, smell them, understand their weight, peek between them. I think it takes away a lot of the reader's experience.

Ah, so you do have a favorite bookstore! Because earlier you said you usually purchase online to save money!

D: If I have to be honest, from my favorite bookstore I buy the books I always end up falling in love with. On the internet I often end up buying books that I really don't know if they are going to be interesting. In fact, I usually buy these in ebooks, in order to pay them less, just because I don't know what I'm going to find. Yet my house practically has a small private library, because my father and I really need to buy physical books. It's a bit like therapy for sad days.

Interviewee: Clorinda is 21 years old, and she currently lives in Campania. She prefers buying books at used bookstores or thrift shops.

Date: afternoon, 29.08.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

First question! What is the title of the last book you have read?

C: So. Currently, I'm reading "Peter Pan", which is super weird, I know. However, the last book I read is "*L'amica geniale, Storia della bambina perduta*". And I have just finished it.

*Oh, I really want to read "*L'amica geniale*" too! How is it?*

C: Super duper nice, I totally recommend it! It is well written and realistic. In fact, I think I will start the tv show very soon.

Ah, so you have not seen it yet! You have decided to read the book first.

C: Yes, I preferred reading the books first. Also because it did not take me a lot of time.

*And why did you choose "*L'amica geniale*"? I mean, what triggered your decision? The spread promotion of the tv show or...?*

C: To be honest, I have not seen anything about the tv show. And up until the other day, when I followed an Instagram page concerning the "*Amica geniale*" after I had finished the book, I didn't even know who the actors were. But then people who usually have the same tastes as me suggested it to me, so here we are! Then, 1950 Naples is already an excellent reason to watch it or read it. Because I find a lot of things about my parents' reality. Or mine, to be honest. Part of that Fifties mentality is still there, unfortunately.

Ah, so someone did suggested it to you!

C: Yes. A friend of mine had read it before they decided to make the tv show, and she always says good things about it. So at a certain point, out of nowhere, I decided to read it. And when we went on holiday together, I was reading the first one.

Got it, okay. And what about "Peter Pan"? Why did you decide to read Peter Pan?

C: Well. A childhood throwback, I guess. [She laughs.] It is something that I do, from time to time. Maybe reading again books that I read when I was a kid. Pollyanna, for example. Or Harry Potter.

So this one you actually chose it by yourself. No suggestions.

C: Exactly!

Okay, okay. So how did you buy these books?

C: Let's say e-book. Even If they are all pdf files I downloaded from the internet. But I want to look like a civilized person.

[I laugh.]

C: Well, excuse me If I don't have money!

No, no. I totally get it, really! So is it something that you do often?

C: The pdf files?

Yes! I mean, the pdf files instead of the actual book.

C: Yes! I mean, it is difficult for me. Because concerning the whole matter paper book versus ebook, my heart says paper book, but my mind supports the electronic device. Also because you have to consider that I usually read at evening, and in my room I don't have a night table or a small light near the bed. So I tend to use my smartphone, when I read. So I love paper books, but I tend to look for pdf files because it is easier for me that way. And also because it is cheaper. I mean, *L'amica geniale* is almost 17 euros per book. It is a lot.

So what about bookstores? Do you go to bookstores anyway or you don't need them?

C: No, when I find myself in a town or city where there is a bookstore, I usually go. But I tend to prefer thrift shops or little street shops, where you can find used books, because they are cheaper. And that's how I meet my wonderful copy of "*Cime Tempestose*". [She shows me her copy of "*Cime Tempestose*".]

Woah! Did you manage to find this edition in a used bookstore?

C: No, maybe not. I just wanted to show you. I think I bought this one online, when I still had the culture bonus to purchase books. In that moment, yes, I bought a lot of books! But just because I had the bonus.

And where did you buy them?

C: Mostly online, like on Amazon. Sometimes also on Libreria universitaria. But to be honest, If it was for me, I would buy all the bookstores in the world. So every time I enter a bookstore is quite painful.

So why do you go, If it is so much painful?

C: Here, real bookstores are in Salerno. Here where I live or in the little towns near me, I mean, there are no bookstores. Or, at least, it is difficult for me to reach the zones in which they are located. So when I go, most of the times it is because I'm with other people, and all my friends read, so it is easy for me to convince them. Or maybe because I have some gifts to buy! That is another reason. I usually go to buy gifts. It goes like: "Do I

have to spend money to buy books for me? Nah, maybe I can find it in pdf or I can borrow it. Maybe I can save the money and spend it somewhere else. Do I have to spend money to buy books for other people? Take my money, dear bookstore. I will give you anything you want".

I get it. So when you enter the bookstore to purchase a gift, how does your journey change? Do you ask for suggestions or?

C: I tend to decide by myself, especially because If I decide to buy a book for a certain person usually it happens because I know what they want. Or because I know that person and I know their taste, and so I buy something that reminds me of them, hoping that they don't have it already. Then I really like deciding, you know. Wandering around the shelves, reading the titles, the plots. Which is something that I do also when I enter by myself, without the idea of purchasing a gift. And then it becomes very difficult for me not to buy anything.

And when it comes to you? How do you choose a book?

C: I usually buy classics, because I'm always telling myself "You have to read it! It's a classic! Everybody has read it!". But then books like "*L'amica geniale*" happens, and I really liked it, even more than any other classic I have read. And so If it is not the classic that I want to read, I usually choose on a hunch, you know. Just on the basis of the vibes that the book gives me.

*But you told me that someone recommended you "*L'amica geniale*".*

C: Yes, but. Let's say that some time has passed from the suggestion to the actual decision of reading it. Maybe even a year? My friend was like "You should read it!", but I haven't listened to her immediately. Then one day I said to myself "I really want to read something, after "*Anna dai capelli rossi*"! What can I read? Oh, yes, "*L'amica geniale*", why not?" So I guess that, in the end, it is always a choice of mine.

And Goodreads? Do you know it?

C: I know it, but I don't use it!

Oh no, how so?

C: First of all, because I don't have space on my phone. So I can't actually download the app. Second, because I think that it would just freak me out? I don't know. Third, because it sounds silly to me. I can't see books as something that you need to keep track to. Except the university ones, maybe. I mean, what I understand about Goodreads reading

some comments on Facebook is that it keeps record of your readings, and you can decide a threshold of books to read in a year, maybe.

Yes, these are some of the features! Then, in theory, it is conceived to give a space to discuss about the books you have read with a community! I mean, that is its core feature. Sharing thoughts and opinions concerning the read books.

C: Okay, but. If you think about it, you can easily find opinions everywhere. Maybe it is because I spend so much time on Facebook, and I see all these people who like to play the role of opinion leaders, but. I don't know, I have started not to care about opinions of other people.

So you don't like to discuss about the books you have read?

C: No, I like it! But when I want an opinion about a book, I usually discuss my friends. I mean, If they have read it, of course. No, that is not even true. Even If they haven't read it, I talk about it anyway, to trigger them, hoping that they will decide to read it too, so I will have someone to talk to. And consider that, even in this way, I talk a lot.

What do you mean?

C: I mean that I tend to speak about a book even for hours. And with very long vocal messages sent to my friends. One of them is the one who suggested me "*L'amica geniale*". And we are very alike, even If we do not agree on certain things. Especially on tv shows, or even books. So, when it comes to discussions, I'm okay. I don't feel the need to discuss even with strangers, in a way.

Why?

C: Uhm, let's say that sometimes I fear the disagreement. And the following explanation of why I am right and they are wrong. Also because it's something personal, you know. And when you don't agree with people, especially online, they tend to ghost you and not answering you. And it is like I'm talking alone. And I don't like it.

Interviewee: Carolina is 25 years old, and she currently lives in Lombardia. She is both an online and bookstore client.

Date: afternoon, 10.09.2020

Environment: digital, Whatsapp video-call

What is the title of the last book you have read?

C: "*Dei bambini non si sa niente*", written by Simona Vinci!

Is it the disturbing one?

C: It is the one talking about children's sexuality! There are these five children, aged between 10 to 15, who find themselves in a shed and decide to play… let's say *games*, which are decided by the oldest. Then you discover that these games are all practices that lead them at discovering bodies and sex. But it all proceed in an increasingly problematic and violent way. The point of view varies between the different protagonists, but more often it is that of one of the girls and. Yes. I guess *disturbing* is the right word.

Why did you decide to read this one?

C: Because I was following a campaign promoted by this guy… I don't remember his name, okay, but he was spamming books written by authors who were all female, contemporary, and Italians. And in that occasion I saw "*Mai più sola nel bosco*", which is written by Vinci too, and I remembered she is Einaudi's *enfant prodige*, so I said to myself: "Well, maybe I should read her debut". Because at the time it was very scandalous. Then consider that she was very young when she first published, and I really like to see the evolution of an author. So.

Do you remember where you saw the campaign?

C: From Murgia! Michela Murgia. Let me check something.

What?

C: If I am able to find the posts where she talked about this. She talked about sexism in the cultural environment. [She looks distracted.] Anyway, no, I can't find it. But anyway she re-posted in her stories the profile of this guy who, every day, shared a book written by a woman. Ah! His name was Giorgio Ghiotti!

And who are these people?

C: She is a writer, the one of "*Accabadora*". She won the Campiello Prize and the SuperMondello, but you can easily find her in television too, being a critic. She was in that program in which she reviewed books. I think it broadcasts on Friday, but I am not sure. She was becoming very mean, by the way. She is the one of "Fabio Volo, trees will get back at you". [She laughs.]

And what about him?

C: I am very ignorant, to be honest, and I did not know him before this thing. But I think he is an author too. And maybe he does something on *Rai*, but I am not sure.

And is this something you do often? I mean, looking for suggestions on tv programs or Instagram influencers.

C: No, no. In television never. And the same goes for influencers, to be honest. However I follow a lot of Instagram pages about books, and a lot of authors. Then I follow also some publishing houses! For example, I follow the Instagram page of Adelphi, so when it publishes the novelties I check them out and I go reading the plots!

Got it! And then where do you buy your books?

C: I don't buy them, because I don't have money. [She laughs.]

[I laugh.] Okay, let's say *generally speaking*.

C: The last one I bought, that is "*Dei bambini non si sa niente*", I bought it at the bookstore at the train station, because I had to wait an hour to take my next train, so. It was the classic "I go in and spend some time there while waiting" situation. Then I already know what I want, so.

Ah, okay. So when you enter the bookstore you already know what you want?

C: No. I mean, If I know what I want and I have money, then I buy it online, because here there are no bookstores. I mean, in the town where I live there are none, while in the town next to mine there is only one, and it is not well stocked.

And what about the recommendations of the e-commerce? Do you follow them?

C: Ah, no, no. You mean the "Suggested for you" section? No, no. I never look at them.

Why?

C: Because I don't believe that the suggestions made by the website really match my taste. I have this idea, concerning the "Suggested for you". I think that they recommend things similar to those that I am currently buying. And usually If I am purchasing something is because I want to read *that one*, not because I am interested in things that are similar.

What do you mean?

C: I mean, I am not buying a book that talks about the sexuality of children because then I want immediately to read similar books. I choose that one because I was interested in that one, stop. And then it rarely suggests me books that I don't already know. So I usually know the titles it displays. For example, after I bought "*Dei bambini non si sa niente*" it displayed all the books written by Vinci, but I know them, because I know her. Or when I was looking for information about "*Il racconto dell'ancella*", it suggested me "*Ragazze elettriche*", which I was interested to, but I knew it already.

Insights

Interviewee	Highlights	Quotes
Chiarilù, 25 *CHAIN BOOKSTORE*	– She reads online reviews to understand what to expect from a book; – She lets her friends decide when she can't make up her mind; – She goes to the bookstore not only to purchase books, but to enjoy the overall experience; – She buys online when she can't find the book she wants in the physical retail.	– [the bookstore] is a place where I feel comfortable, in a sense. I don't even know how to explain myself. I mean, I just feel home. – And then I've always found nice and accommodating people, who never made me anxious even If I spent an entire hour, which happens very often, wandering around or in any case were never bothering me asking me If I needed something.
Silvia, 24 *ONLINE BOOKSTORE*	– She purchase books exclusively following the suggestions of other people; when talking about them, she uses the word *trust*; – She does not like to buy books on a hunch because they are expensive; – She purchases books only when she receives coupons from the online bookstore; – She goes to the physical bookstore at the mall, when she goes shopping with her mom, or when waiting at the train station; she does not buy anything, but she says that otherwise she feels like she is missing something of the reader experience.	– Sometimes it takes even weeks before the actual decision. I usually spend a lot of time thinking about the different suggestions people gave me, reading the plot and stuff like this. – I like wandering around, and spending some time just looking at books. Of course I know it is not fair for the bookseller, but… You know. I don't have a lot of money, but I *do* like books. – Instead, using IBS, the book is delivered to me, and I just have to open the box. Which is exciting and everything, but it is not the same thing.
Roberta, 21 *BOOKSTORE*	– She is part of a reading group on Telegram; all the members can suggest a book, and every month there is a book to read; – She buys very few books; – She prefers the digital format, because it is cheaper and easier to pass from one person to the other; but, when she really likes a book, she buys the paper copy; – She says deliveries are slow, because she lives in a small town; – She goes to the bookstore at least once a month; she wanders around, with no real purpose.	– I feel very comfortable, in there, because there are a lot of smart and friendly people, so even If you are looking for more particular or specific titles they are all available to help you! – I buy very few books. Physical ones, I mean. And I'm really sorry about this habit I have developed.
Mariapia, 20 *ONLINE BOOKSTORE*	– She likes to go to the physical bookstores, but she does not have the possibility; she lives in a small town, and there are none near her; this is the reason why she usually purchases online; – She decides what to read based on a list she has; – She says she is very instinctual with books, but then she also says that she lets other people's suggestions making the final decision.	– Consider that I live in a very important area for Calabrian literature, and to read such a book I always have to go elsewhere. Which is absurd, right? – I'm always looking around for advice! I believe they are more important than the list, especially when the subject in question is similar to me and so I know that If they like it, I will like it too.
Denise, 23 *BOTH PHYSICAL AND ONLINE*	– She decides what to read on a hunch; she does not trust suggestions made by other people; – She likes to recommend books hoping to discuss about them; – She uses the recommendation system of Amazon (not Goodreads' one), but	– What convinces me is always the first page. Not the cover page, eh. The first written page. Or at least the first chapter. – Let's say that I purchase books at the physical bookstore only when I need something quickly and I know it is already there.

	then she also says that the books she really loved are the ones suggested by the bookseller; – She buys a lot of books, so she usually purchases online to save money; – She associates the trip to the bookstore with the word *experience*.	– When I browse online, the contact with the book is non-existent and I am left with a feeling of, I don't know, emptiness. [...] I think it takes away a lot of the reader's experience.
Clorinda, 21 *ONLINE BOOKSTORE*	– She reads using the digital format because it is less expensive and easier to read in the dark, before going to sleep, but she prefers paper books; – She buys paper books as gifts, but not for herself; – She lives in a small town; physical bookstores are not very accessible, because they are too far away; – She does not like Goodreads because she does not perceive books as something you need to keep track of; – She likes to discuss about books, but only with her close friends, not with strangers.	– Because concerning the whole matter paper book versus ebook, my heart says paper book, but my mind supports the electronic device. – [...] when I still had the culture bonus to purchase books. In that moment, yes, I bought a lot of books! But just because I had the bonus. – "Do I have to spend money to buy books for me? Nah, maybe I can find it in pdf or I can borrow it. Maybe I can save the money and spend it somewhere else. Do I have to spend money to buy books for other people? Take my money, dear bookstore. I will give you anything you want".
Carolina, 25 *BOTH PHYSICAL AND ONLINE*	– She follows book-related pages on Instagram, but also authors and publishing houses' profiles; – She checks out the novelties suggested by publishing houses on their Instagram profile; – She bought her last book at the train station bookstore, while waiting; – There are no bookstores in the little town where she lives; this is the reason why she purchases books online; – She does not look at the recommendations made by the e-commerce platform because she usually already knows the books.	– [...] I had to wait an hour to take my next train, so. It was the classic "I go in and spend some time there while waiting" situation. – I think that they recommend things similar to those that I am currently buying. And usually If I am purchasing something is because I want to read *that one*, not because I am interested in things that are similar. – And then it rarely suggests me books that I don't already know. So I usually know the titles it displays.

Examining the answers given by the interviewees, it is possible to outline three recurrent themes and related patterns associated with the reading practice. These observations are useful to better understand the general predisposition of the demand side of the Italian publishing industry and to verify the initial hypothesis.

First of all, concerning the analysis of the pre-purchase behavior displayed by readers, what appears to be evident is that the preference for online websites is usually driven by the typical price strategy carried out by e-commerce platforms. Most of the interviewees who affirmed to purchase books online, in fact, have associated this decision with the goal of saving money.

Another theme emerging from the conversations with the interviewees is the one related to the position assumed by contemporary readers toward the physical bookstore. First of all, even the subjects who confessed to rarely buy books outside of

the online environment seem to enjoy entering the bookstore and just wandering around. This observation suggests a change in the concept associated with the physical space owned by the bookseller: the bookstore is not conceived as the shop devoted to the purchasing moment, rather the place where to enjoy the book. More than one person used the word *experience* when talking about the trip to the physical shop, describing the possibility to touch the book, to feel it, to leaf through its pages, as part of the value of walking in a bookstore. Silvia and Denise said that they associate the impossibility of looking at the shelves of a physical store with a relevant loss in terms of the reader's experience.

Finally, the conversations let clearly emerge the importance that peers hold during the different steps of the purchasing journey, from the consideration phase to the post-consumption moment. While it is possible to make a distinction between the individuals who do not rely on anybody when it comes to making a decision concerning what book to read and those who look for suggestions, asking recommendations to peers, all the subjects seem to highly value the discussion taking place after the reading activity.

An additional observation can be made concerning the reason why subjects decide to buy online rather than at a physical bookstore. Interviewees from North and South Italy, with no apparent geographical distinction, state to have problems reaching out for a physical bookstore. Living in small towns in the countryside, the presence of brick-and-mortar book retails is very low, obliging them to buy online. While this aspect is in line with Amazon's promise to make the culture available for everyone, with no restrictions, it also explains the business model adopted by Bookdealer.

APPENDIX C: LEGGE SUL LIBRO[126]

Art. 1
Principi e finalità

1. La Repubblica, in attuazione degli articoli 2, 3 e 9 della Costituzione, favorisce e sostiene la lettura quale mezzo per lo sviluppo della conoscenza, la diffusione della cultura, la promozione del progresso civile, sociale ed economico della Nazione, la formazione e il benessere dei cittadini.

2. La Repubblica promuove interventi volti a sostenere e a incentivare la produzione, la conservazione, la circolazione e la fruizione dei libri come strumenti preferenziali per l'accesso ai contenuti e per la loro diffusione, nonché per il miglioramento degli indicatori del benessere equo e sostenibile (BES).

3. Lo Stato, le regioni e gli altri enti pubblici territoriali, secondo il principio di leale collaborazione e nell'ambito delle rispettive competenze, contribuiscono alla piena attuazione dei principi della presente legge.

Art. 2
Piano nazionale d'azione per la promozione della lettura

1. Il Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, di concerto con il Ministro dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca, previa intesa in sede di Conferenza unificata di cui all'articolo 8 del decreto legislativo 28 agosto 1997, n. 281, adotta ogni tre anni, con proprio decreto, il Piano nazionale d'azione per la promozione della lettura, di seguito denominato «Piano d'azione», da attuare nei limiti della dotazione del Fondo di cui al comma 6. Il primo Piano d'azione è adottato entro dodici mesi dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge.

2. Lo schema del decreto di cui al comma 1 è trasmesso alle Camere per l'espressione del parere delle Commissioni parlamentari competenti per materia e per i profili finanziari, le quali si pronunciano entro trenta giorni dalla data dell'assegnazione. Decorso tale termine, il decreto può essere adottato anche in mancanza del predetto parere.

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[126] The following pages report the full legislative text, that can be found at: https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/10/20G00023/sg

3.   Nell'individuazione delle priorità e degli obiettivi generali del Piano d'azione si tiene conto delle seguenti finalità:

a)   diffondere l'abitudine alla lettura, come strumento per la crescita individuale e per lo sviluppo civile, sociale ed economico della Nazione, e favorire l'aumento del numero dei lettori, valorizzando l'immagine sociale del libro e della lettura nel quadro delle pratiche di consumo culturale, anche attraverso attività programmate di lettura comune;

b)   promuovere la frequentazione delle biblioteche e delle librerie e la conoscenza della produzione libraria italiana, incentivandone la diffusione e la fruizione;

c)   valorizzare e sostenere le buone pratiche di promozione della lettura realizzate da soggetti pubblici e privati, anche in collaborazione fra loro, favorendone la diffusione nel territorio nazionale e, in particolar modo, tra le istituzioni pubbliche e le associazioni professionali del settore librario;

d)   valorizzare e sostenere la lingua italiana, favorendo la conoscenza delle opere degli autori italiani e la loro diffusione all'estero, anche tramite le biblioteche;

e)   valorizzare la diversità della produzione editoriale, nel rispetto delle logiche di mercato e della concorrenza;

f)   promuovere la formazione continua e specifica degli operatori di tutte le istituzioni partecipanti alla realizzazione del Piano d'azione;

g)   promuovere la dimensione interculturale e plurilingue della lettura nelle istituzioni scolastiche e nelle biblioteche;

h)   prevedere interventi mirati per specifiche fasce di lettori e per i territori con più alto tasso di povertà educativa e culturale, anche al fine di prevenire o di contrastare fenomeni di esclusione sociale;

i)   favorire la lettura da parte delle persone con disabilità o con disturbi del linguaggio e dell'apprendimento, anche mediante la promozione dell'utilizzo degli audiolibri e delle tecniche del libro parlato nonché di ogni altra metodologia necessaria alla compensazione dei bisogni educativi speciali;

l) promuovere la dimensione sociale della lettura mediante pratiche fondate sulla condivisione dei testi e sulla partecipazione attiva dei lettori;

m) promuovere un approccio alla lettura in riferimento alla valorizzazione delle competenze richieste dall'ecosistema digitale, connesse alla lettura ipertestuale, alla lettura condivisa, all'ascolto di testi registrati e alla postproduzione di contenuti, come integrazione alla lettura su supporti cartacei.

4. Le amministrazioni pubbliche, in collaborazione con l'industria editoriale, senza nuovi o maggiori oneri per la finanza pubblica, promuovono, per le pubblicazioni, l'utilizzo di carta con origine forestale ecologicamente sostenibile.

5. Il Piano d'azione contiene altresì indicazioni per azioni volte a:

a) favorire la lettura nella prima infanzia anche attraverso il coinvolgimento dei consultori, della pediatria di famiglia e delle ludoteche;

b) promuovere la lettura presso le strutture socio-assistenziali per anziani e negli ospedali mediante iniziative a favore delle persone ricoverate per lunga degenza;

c) promuovere la lettura negli istituti penitenziari mediante apposite iniziative a favore della popolazione detenuta, con particolare attenzione agli istituti penali per minorenni;

d) promuovere la parità di accesso alla produzione editoriale in favore delle persone con difficoltà di lettura o con disabilità fisiche e sensoriali, in coerenza con i principi e le regole dell'Unione europea e dell'ordinamento internazionale;

e) promuovere la lettura presso i teatri, anche in collaborazione con le librerie, all'interno delle programmazioni artistiche e culturali e durante i festival;

f) promuovere l'istituzione di un circuito culturale integrato per la promozione della lettura, denominato «Ad alta voce», con la partecipazione delle istituzioni scolastiche, delle biblioteche di pubblica lettura e delle altre istituzioni o associazioni culturali presenti nel medesimo territorio di riferimento.

6. Ai fini dell'attuazione del Piano d'azione, nello stato di previsione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali è istituito il Fondo per l'attuazione del Piano nazionale d'azione per la promozione della lettura, con una dotazione di 4.350.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020. Il Fondo, gestito dal Centro per il libro e la lettura, è ripartito annualmente secondo le modalità stabilite con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, di concerto con il Ministro dell'istruzione, dell'università e della

ricerca e con il Ministro dell'economia e delle finanze, da emanare entro novanta giorni dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge.

7. La predisposizione della proposta del Piano d'azione, il coordinamento e l'attuazione delle attività del Piano d'azione nonché il monitoraggio delle attività pianificate e la valutazione dei risultati sono affidati al Centro per il libro e la lettura previsto dall'articolo 30, comma 2, lettera b), numero 5), del regolamento di cui al decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri 29 agosto 2014, n. 171. Il Centro per il libro e la lettura dà conto, ogni due anni, in un apposito documento, degli esiti del monitoraggio e della valutazione dei risultati di cui al periodo precedente. Il documento è trasmesso alle Camere. Per le attività preliminari e successive all'adozione del Piano d'azione, il Centro per il libro e la lettura, in deroga ai limiti finanziari previsti dalla legislazione vigente, può avvalersi di collaboratori esterni, conferendo, entro il limite di spesa di 150.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020, fino a tre incarichi di collaborazione, ai sensi dell'articolo 7, comma 6, del decreto legislativo 30 marzo 2001, n. 165, a persone di comprovata qualificazione professionale, per la durata massima di trentasei mesi.

Art. 3
Patti locali per la lettura

1. I comuni e le regioni, nell'esercizio della propria autonomia, compatibilmente con l'equilibrio dei rispettivi bilanci, aderiscono al Piano d'azione attraverso la stipulazione di patti locali per la lettura intesi a coinvolgere le biblioteche e altri soggetti pubblici, in particolare le scuole, nonché soggetti privati operanti sul territorio interessati alla promozione della lettura.

2. I patti locali per la lettura, sulla base degli obiettivi generali individuati dal Piano d'azione e in ragione delle specificità territoriali, prevedono interventi finalizzati ad aumentare il numero dei lettori abituali nelle aree di riferimento, per l'attuazione dei quali gli enti e gli altri soggetti pubblici di cui al comma 1, compatibilmente con l'equilibrio dei rispettivi bilanci, possono prevedere specifici finanziamenti.

3. Il Centro per il libro e la lettura, nell'ambito delle risorse finanziarie, umane e strumentali disponibili a legislazione vigente, senza nuovi o maggiori oneri per la finanza pubblica, provvede al censimento periodico e alla raccolta di dati statistici relativi all'attuazione dei patti locali per la lettura.

Art. 4 Capitale italiana del libro

1.   Al fine di favorire progetti, iniziative e attività per la promozione della lettura, il Consiglio dei ministri assegna annualmente ad una città italiana il titolo di «Capitale italiana del libro». Il titolo è conferito all'esito di un'apposita selezione, svolta secondo modalità definite, entro sei mesi dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge, con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, previa intesa in sede di Conferenza unificata di cui all'articolo 8 del decreto legislativo 28 agosto 1997, n. 281. La selezione avviene sulla base dei progetti presentati dalle città che si candidano al titolo di «Capitale italiana del libro». I progetti della città assegnataria del titolo sono finanziati entro il limite di spesa di 500.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020. Il titolo di «Capitale italiana del libro» è conferito a partire dall'anno 2020.

Art. 5
Promozione della lettura a scuola

1.   Le scuole statali e non statali di ogni ordine e grado, nell'ambito dell'autonomia loro riconosciuta, promuovono la lettura come momento qualificante del percorso didattico ed educativo degli studenti e quale strumento di base per l'esercizio del diritto all'istruzione e alla cultura nell'ambito della società della conoscenza.

2.   Al fine di promuovere la lettura a scuola, gli uffici scolastici regionali individuano, attraverso appositi bandi, nelle reti tra istituzioni scolastiche del medesimo ambito territoriale, di cui all'articolo 1, comma 70, della legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107, la scuola che opera quale «polo responsabile del servizio bibliotecario scolastico di ogni ordine e grado», di seguito denominata «scuola polo».

3.   Salvo quanto previsto dal comma 4, ciascuna scuola polo, avvalendosi delle eventuali risorse rese disponibili per l'attuazione dei patti locali per la lettura ai sensi dell'articolo 3, comma 2, nonché di quelle già disponibili a legislazione vigente, ivi comprese quelle concernenti l'organico dell'autonomia di cui all'articolo 1, comma 65, della legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107, può:

    a)   promuovere la collaborazione tra le istituzioni scolastiche della rete e quelle del territorio, con particolare riferimento alle biblioteche di pubblica lettura e alle altre istituzioni o associazioni culturali, al fine di promuovere la lettura tra i giovani. I relativi progetti possono essere realizzati anche con

l'utilizzo dei materiali delle Teche della società RAI - Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.a.;

b) organizzare la formazione per il personale delle scuole della rete impegnato nella gestione delle biblioteche scolastiche.

4. Ai fini dell'attuazione della lettera b) del comma 3 è autorizzata la spesa di un milione di euro per ciascuno degli anni 2020 e 2021.

Art. 6
Misure per il contrasto della povertà educativa e culturale

1. Per contrastare la povertà educativa e promuovere la diffusione della lettura, lo Stato, con le modalità di cui al comma 2, contribuisce alle spese per l'acquisto di libri, prodotti e servizi culturali da parte di cittadini italiani e stranieri residenti nel territorio nazionale appartenenti a nuclei familiari economicamente svantaggiati, attraverso l'istituzione della «Carta della cultura». I libri acquistati con il contributo statale sono destinati all'uso personale dei soggetti di cui al presente comma e non ne è permessa la rivendita. Le somme assegnate con la Carta non costituiscono reddito imponibile del beneficiario e non rilevano ai fini del computo del valore dell'indicatore della situazione economica equivalente.

2. La Carta della cultura di cui al comma 1 è una carta elettronica di importo nominale pari a euro 100, utilizzabile dal titolare, entro un anno dal suo rilascio, nei pagamenti per l'acquisto di libri, anche digitali, muniti di codice ISBN. Ai fini dell'assegnazione della Carta di cui al comma 1, nello stato di previsione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali è istituito il Fondo «Carta della cultura», con una dotazione di un milione di euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020, da integrare con gli importi ad esso destinati ai sensi dei commi 3 e 4 del presente articolo. Con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, di concerto con il Ministro dell'economia e delle finanze, da emanare entro novanta giorni dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge, sono definiti i requisiti per l'assegnazione della Carta e le modalità di rilascio e di utilizzo della stessa, nei limiti della dotazione del Fondo di cui al periodo precedente.

3. Sono conferiti al Fondo di cui al comma 2 i proventi derivanti da donazioni, lasciti o disposizioni testamentarie di soggetti privati, comunque destinati allo Stato per il conseguimento delle finalità del Fondo.

5. Per i fini di cui al presente articolo, le imprese possono destinare alle finalità del Fondo di cui al comma 2 parte del proprio volume di affari, senza effetti ai fini delle imposte sui redditi e dell'imposta regionale sulle attività produttive. Le imprese che destinano alle finalità del Fondo almeno l'1 per cento del loro volume di affari sono autorizzate ad utilizzare un logo del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali che certifica il loro impegno nella lotta contro la povertà educativa e culturale.

6. Gli importi destinati alle finalità del Fondo di cui al comma 2 ai sensi dei commi 3 e 4 sono versati all'entrata del bilancio dello Stato per essere riassegnati al Fondo medesimo.

Art. 7
Donazioni librarie

1. All'articolo 16, comma 1, della legge 19 agosto 2016, n. 166, dopo la lettera d) è inserita la seguente:

«d-bis) dei libri e dei relativi supporti integrativi non più commercializzati o non idonei alla commercializzazione per imperfezioni, alterazioni, danni o vizi che non ne modificano l'idoneità all'utilizzo o per altri motivi similari».

Art. 8
Modifiche alla legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, in materia di sconti sul prezzo di vendita dei libri. Relazione alle Camere

1. Il comma 2 dell'articolo 1 della legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, è sostituito dal seguente:

«2. Tale disciplina mira a contribuire allo sviluppo del settore librario, al sostegno della creatività letteraria, alla promozione del libro e della lettura, alla diffusione della cultura e, anche attraverso il contrasto di pratiche limitative della concorrenza, alla tutela del pluralismo dell'informazione e dell'offerta editoriale».

2. I commi 2, 3 e 4 dell'articolo 2 della legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, sono sostituiti dai seguenti:

«2. La vendita di libri ai consumatori finali, da chiunque e con qualsiasi modalità effettuata, è consentita con uno sconto fino al 5 per cento del prezzo apposto ai sensi del comma 1. Il limite massimo di sconto di cui al primo periodo è elevato al 15 per cento per i libri adottati dalle istituzioni scolastiche come libri di testo. I

limiti massimi di sconto di cui al primo e al secondo periodo si applicano anche alle vendite di libri effettuate per corrispondenza o tramite piattaforme digitali nella rete internet. I limiti massimi di sconto di cui al primo e al secondo periodo non si applicano alle vendite di libri alle biblioteche, purché i libri siano destinati all'uso dell'istituzione, restando esclusa la loro rivendita.

3. Per un solo mese all'anno, per ciascun marchio editoriale, le case editrici possono offrire sul prezzo di vendita dei propri libri uno sconto maggiore del limite di cui al comma 2, primo periodo, ma comunque non superiore al 20 per cento del prezzo apposto ai sensi del comma 1. L'offerta è consentita nei soli mesi dell'anno, con esclusione del mese di dicembre, stabiliti con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, da adottare, in sede di prima attuazione, entro sessanta giorni dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge. L'offerta non può riguardare titoli pubblicati nei sei mesi precedenti a quello in cui si svolge la promozione. È fatta salva la facoltà dei venditori al dettaglio, che devono in ogni caso essere informati e messi in grado di partecipare alle medesime condizioni, di non aderire a tali campagne promozionali.

3-bis. In uno dei mesi individuati ai sensi del comma 3, una sola volta all'anno, i punti di vendita possono offrire sconti sui libri con la percentuale massima del 15 per cento.

4. Sono vietate iniziative commerciali, da chiunque promosse, che accordino sconti superiori ai limiti previsti dal comma 2, anche nel caso in cui prevedano la sostituzione dello sconto diretto con la consegna di buoni spesa utilizzabili contestualmente o successivamente all'acquisto dei libri sui quali sono riconosciuti».

3. Decorsi dodici mesi dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge, il Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, di concerto con il Ministro dello sviluppo economico, con il Ministro dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca e con l'autorità di Governo competente in materia di informazione e di editoria, con riguardo alle rispettive competenze, predispone e trasmette alle Camere una relazione sugli effetti dell'applicazione delle

4. disposizioni dell'articolo 2 della legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, come modificato dal presente articolo, sul settore del libro.

5.   All'articolo 3 della legge 27 luglio 2011, n. 128, sono apportate le seguenti modificazioni:

   a)   il comma 3 è abrogato;

   b)   alla rubrica, le parole: «Relazione al Parlamento» sono soppresse.

Art. 9 Qualifica di «libreria di qualità»

1.   Al fine di promuovere un ampio pluralismo culturale ed economico nonché di accrescere la qualità della lettura, è istituito, presso il Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, l'albo delle librerie di qualità.

2.   Nell'albo delle librerie di qualità sono iscritte, su loro domanda, le librerie aventi i requisiti stabiliti dal decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali di cui al comma 4. L'iscrizione nell'albo dà alla libreria il diritto di utilizzare il marchio di «libreria di qualità».

3.   Il marchio di «libreria di qualità» è concesso al punto di vendita e non all'impresa. Esso ha validità di tre anni, rinnovabile, a domanda, per il successivo triennio, previa verifica della permanenza dei requisiti per l'iscrizione nell'albo.

4.   Con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, da adottare entro sei mesi dalla data di entrata in vigore della presente legge, sono disciplinate, senza nuovi o maggiori oneri per la finanza pubblica, le modalità di formazione e tenuta dell'albo delle librerie e sono stabiliti i requisiti per l'iscrizione nell'albo. L'iscrizione è riservata alle librerie che esercitano in modo prevalente l'attività di vendita al dettaglio di libri in locali accessibili al pubblico e che assicurano un servizio innovativo e caratterizzato da continuità, diversificazione dell'offerta libraria e realizzazione di iniziative di promozione culturale nel territorio. Nella definizione dei requisiti, si tiene conto dell'assortimento diversificato di titoli offerti in vendita, della qualità del servizio, delle attività di proposta di eventi culturali, dell'adesione ai patti locali per la lettura di cui all'articolo 3, ove attivati, e della specificità del territorio.

6.   Il Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali provvede all'attuazione del presente articolo nell'ambito delle risorse finanziarie, umane e strumentali disponibili a legislazione vigente, senza nuovi o maggiori oneri per la finanza pubblica. Il Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali pubblica l'albo delle librerie di qualità in una pagina dedicata e facilmente accessibile nell'ambito del proprio sito internet istituzionale.

Art. 10
Incentivi fiscali per le librerie

1.   Al fine di potenziare le attività commerciali che operano nel settore della vendita al dettaglio di libri, l'autorizzazione di spesa di cui all'articolo 1, comma 319, della legge 27 dicembre 2017, n. 205, è incrementata di 3.250.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020. Ai fini dell'attuazione del presente comma è autorizzata la spesa di 3.250.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020.

Art. 11 Abrogazioni

1.   A decorrere dal 1° gennaio 2020, sono abrogati:

    a)   il comma 318 dell'articolo 1 della legge 27 dicembre 2017, n. 205;

    b)   il decreto del Ministro dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo n. 227 del 3 maggio 2018.

Art. 12
Copertura finanziaria

1.   Agli oneri derivanti dagli articoli 2, commi 6 e 7, 4, comma 1, 5, comma 4, 6, comma 2, e 10, comma 1, pari a 10.250.000 euro per ciascuno degli anni 2020 e 2021 e a 9.250.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2022, si provvede:

    a)   quanto a 5.250.000 euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020, mediante corrispondente riduzione delle proiezioni dello stanziamento del fondo speciale di parte corrente iscritto, ai fini del bilancio triennale 2019-2021, nell'ambito del programma «Fondi di riserva e speciali» della missione «Fondi da ripartire» dello stato di previsione del Ministero dell'economia e delle finanze per l'anno 2019, allo scopo parzialmente utilizzando l'accantonamento relativo al Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali;

    b)   quanto a 4 milioni di euro annui a decorrere dall'anno 2020, mediante corrispondente utilizzo delle risorse derivanti dall'abrogazione disposta dall'articolo 11, comma 1, lettera a);

    c)   quanto ad un milione di euro per ciascuno degli anni 2020 e 2021, mediante corrispondente riduzione del Fondo di cui all'articolo 1, comma 763, della legge 30 dicembre 2018, n. 145.

2.   Il Ministro dell'economia e delle finanze è autorizzato ad apportare, con propri decreti, le occorrenti variazioni di bilancio.

Art. 13
Decorrenza dell'efficacia

1.   Le disposizioni della presente legge si applicano a decorrere dal 1° gennaio 2020.

La presente legge, munita del sigillo dello Stato, sarà inserita nella Raccolta ufficiale degli atti normativi della Repubblica italiana. È fatto obbligo a chiunque spetti di osservarla e di farla osservare come legge dello Stato.

Data a Roma, addi' 13 febbraio 2020

MATTARELLA

Conte, Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri

Visto, il Guardasigilli: Bonafede

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