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Genres of Visibility:

What does online engagement mean to fiction authors and readers, and what are the implications of those meanings for future research and design?

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Abstract

Since approximately 2007, musicians, authors, artists, and other creative professionals have increasingly been using online platforms such as social media to engage directly with their audiences. Hailed as an effective strategy for expanding market reach and retaining existing custom, it is fast becoming expected that fiction authors embrace online practices to foster authentic engagement with readers, whatever their career stage.

Whilst recent studies have uncovered some of the interaction dynamics between authors and readers at time-boxed literary events such as festivals and readings, online interactivity is a relatively new phenomenon yet to be studied. The impact and value of authors being online and nominally accessible 24/7 is still little understood. Trends in content sharing, online presentation, and the affordances of the platforms used can both vary and change rapidly. This makes it difficult to develop a clear and concrete picture of what authors do online, where, and how engagement with their readers manifests.

This thesis uses a hybrid empirical and theoretical approach to provide a rich account of how authors and readers experience engaging online. It draws on multidisciplinary theory and concepts to reveal significant insight into what practices authors follow when engaging online, and how readers interact with, perceive, and value those practices. It also reveals rich complexities in relational and environmental dynamics which impact interaction, and interrogates conventional understandings of how and why authors and readers choose to interact.

Findings are presented from two empirical studies:

- An inductive interview study with fiction authors and readers, which uncovers their experiences of interacting together through different online platforms.
- An interview study with readers, using a novel technique, which provides a rich account of how readers perceive and value authors' online practices, and interrogates how readers may respond to potential future changes to those practices.

The thesis contributes new integrated theory which delineates how authors' online engagement practices relate to a broader context of the Literary Field, literary practices, and commercial interests. It also introduces a novel interview technique, composed of methods from complexity theory and Human-Computer Interaction research. This technique was modelled to unearth important insight around how readers perceive the role of the author online, and to explore how readers (as the target market) may be predisposed to respond to changes in how engagement is mediated online. Lastly, through applying a practitioner-based model for mapping system complexity - the Cynefin Framework - the thesis offers an alternative framing from which to understand authors' online engagement practices as a specific business intervention, intended to produce several desired outputs for the benefit of authors, readers, and the publishing industry more broadly. This conceptualisation is used to discuss potential ways that online engagement may be appropriately monitored, evaluated, and managed to better support mediation between creative professionals and their audience.

Abbreviations

HCI: Human-Computer Interaction

YA: Young Adult Fiction

Glossary

Adjacent possible

'Adjacent possibles' is a theory introduced by biologist Stuart Kauffman (Kauffman, 1996) positing that biological systems morph by making incremental changes in their makeup. The theory has been adopted into Snowden's Cynefin Framework (Snowden et al., 2020) as a means to incrementally redirect a dispositional, Complex system to introduce stability, through trialling small changes and observing how those changes impact the system.

Agent

Agent is a term used to describe anything or anyone that interacts with a system – i.e., people (for instance, those who interact with the Literary Field), as well as processes, rules and technologies (Snowden, 2010a) that are internal to the system.

Author Online Presence (also see intervention)

Author Online Presence is a term introduced in this thesis, in chapter 6, to group together the different ways in which authors establish an online profile for engagement. The term is used to posit that by establishing an online presence is effectively an intervention into the Literary Field.

Barrier (also see boundary and constraint)

A barrier is a structure designed to inhibit access (e.g. a closed gate). Some can prohibit access, and others are used judiciously to manage access, and are used in conjunction with boundaries. Systemic barriers are non-physical inhibitions (sometimes combined with, or enhanced by physical structures) used to manage behaviour within a system (McArthur, 2016). Systems are managed using a combination of systemic barriers and boundaries, which together serve as constraints.

Boundary (also see barrier and constraint)

A boundary delineates the bounds, or limits, of something (such as a system). Boundaries may be physical and fixed, however it is also possible for them to be permeable, allowing things in and out of the bounds of a zone e.g. a system type in Snowden's Cynefin Framework (see below). Boundaries are used in conjunction with barriers and are a form of constraint.

Constraint (also see barrier and boundary)

Constraint is a term used in Snowden's Cynefin Framework, to describe structures (e.g. boundaries and barriers, see above) which create coherence in a system (Snowden et al., 2020). Constraints can be fixed, restricting behaviours to controlled, specific, allowable behaviours. Having no constraints at all can make behaviour random and confusing. Some constraints are guiding, by having flexibility to simultaneously restrict and enable behaviours. The constraints across the different system types (see below) in the Cynefin Framework are effectively on a spectrum of fixity, from fixed through to non-existent.

Cultural field (also see Literary Field)

Cultural fields (of which the Literary Field is one) is a term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) to describe different domains of cultural production (e.g. music, literature, arts). A field encompasses a series of institutions, rules, rituals, and conventions which constitute an objective, internal hierarchy (ibid.). Each field is positioned within a structured hierarchy of other fields – e.g. cultural, educational, political, economic (ibid.), and each have their own distinct characteristics and associated roles (see below), although there can be overlaps and appearances of similarity.

Cynefin Framework

The Cynefin Framework is a sense-making model created by Dave Snowden (Snowden et al., 2020), as a means to establish a retrospective understanding of the characteristics of a system under investigation. Initially developed in the 1980s, and re-iterated up to present day, the model is used to determine the level of order present in – or absent from – a system, to help decision makers (i.e. managers, stakeholders, researchers) to determine how best to manage within the system, based the typical characteristics of a system with a requisite level of order or un-order. The Cynefin Framework is constructed of five zones, including four types of system category, and an area which represents a state of not knowing which system is under observation.

Engagement (also see interaction)

The word engagement is used to describe shared interactivity between authors (and other creative workers) and their audience, through shared presence in online platforms. Engagement can be direct, for example through active discussion, or less direct, such as a creative worker sharing content or information which the audience can interact with through reading, liking, re-tweeting and more. Engagement also encompasses the commercial aspect of interaction online, as it can be designed to attract or grow an audience.

Frontstage and back-stage (also see Parasocial and Performative practice)

Front-stage and back-stage is a term introduced by Goffman (Goffman, 1971) to describe the behaviour people engage in when they think people can see them (front-stage) and when they do not (back-stage). Frontstage consists of behaving in a manner befitting to one's role. For authors (as it is used in this thesis) this typically means sharing in a professional way, often for example giving information about their work. Back-stage consists of more relaxed behaviour, truer to the self (ibid.). For authors here, this is used to describe more personal information sharing, such as talking about hobbies and personal lives.

Gatekeeper

A gatekeeper controls access to something. The term is predominantly used in this thesis to describe the current gatekeepers of access to literature and the Literary Field – publishers. It is also used to describe equivalent roles in other fields (e.g. record labels). It can also be applied to other entities such as booksellers and libraries, who also manage access to literature and literary culture.

Genre fiction (also known as popular fiction)

Genre fiction is a term used to describe fictional literary works which sit within a particular literary category, characterised through their style, form or purpose (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018), for example crime fiction; historical fiction; science fiction, young adult fiction. It is strongly linked to cultural industry and entertainment, and often framed as separate from literature due to elitist tropes which have often permeated beliefs around cultural production and consumption.

Habitus

The habitus is a term, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) to describe a person's or community's internalised understanding of what to expect, and how to behave, in a cultural field. Described as a feel for how things work, and one's position within the field, the habitus is transposable (i.e., it can influence actions and perceptions in another field or context) structured by social positioning (which is defined by distribution of capital) (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993), and interacts with the environment in which it is recalled.

Interaction (also see engagement)

Interaction is a word used to describe communication or reciprocal action between persons or things on each other (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). Primarily in this thesis, it is used to refer to communication or reciprocal engagement between authors and readers (or within author and reader groupings) as users of online technologies. It is also used to describe interaction with agents in the system, which can include other people, organisations, technological affordances, the environment, and boundaries and barriers.

Intervention

An intervention is the action of intervening (or interfering) in something to affect its course (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). In this thesis it is primarily used to describe the act of intentionally inputting into a system – e.g. by creating a new technology, process, practice, or policy to change the current system state, usually towards achieving a particular desired goal, or output. Defining the boundaries of an intervention helps to define the object of an evaluation – i.e., the intervention and its purpose can be known, and tested for effectiveness (Owen and Rogers, 2011).

Literary Field (also see Cultural field)

One of the cultural fields, the Literary Field refers to the field in which literary culture and product are produced, enacted, and interacted with. It is a conceptual space (see space) which exists in the relationships between agents in the field.

Literary System

The Literary System is a term I introduced in chapter 4 to describe two combined systems of production and mediation which are seated within the Literary Field: the Communications Circuit (Darnton, 1982) (which produces books, described in 4.1), and the Reading Industry (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) (which produces events, described in 4.3.2). The term also encompasses the places in which products and events are mediated physically (drawing on the concepts of Servicescape (Bitner, 1992) and place and space theory (Harrison and Dourish, 1996)). It is described as a retrofit application of order into the Literary Field to enable stability of process and to manage interactions.

Parasocial (see also Performative practice and Frontstage and back-stage)

The concept of parasocial (from the prefix 'para', meaning 'alongside', or 'independent from') relationships was introduced by Horton & Wohl in 1956 (Horton and Richard Wohl, 1956). It concerns the relationship between public-facing media figures (e.g. TV personalities, musicians, actors) and their audience ('spectators') (Horton and Richard Wohl, 1956). Unlike typical social relationships, these relationships rarely have direct, interpersonal social interactions, instead, communicating through one-way, formally mediated broadcasts (e.g. TV, radio) (Giles, 2002; Horton and Richard Wohl, 1956; Marshall, 2010).

Place (also see Space)

The concept of place in this thesis draws from Harrison & Dourish's (Harrison and Dourish, 1996) concept of space and place, which posits that a place is a physical location, shaped for, and by, a particular set of social actions. This differs to space, which is a more abstract territory – into a space, places can be built (however, often place can come first, as people learn from the connotations of the places they inhabit, and take this understanding with them into different spaces (Dourish, 2006b). In this thesis, the word is used to identify the specific physical environments used for enacting literary interactions (where places have been fit to enable interactions in the otherwise abstract space of the Literary Field).

Practice

The word practice refers to habituated or repeated activities performed – particularly ones which exercise the skills of a profession or trade (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018). A practice is not a unit of behaviour observable in isolation, as performing them always involve drawing on individual resources (e.g. values, attitudes, feelings, social relationships) – resources which have different meanings both to those carrying out practices, and to those observing them (Barton et al., 2000). Practices are shaped by social rule, contextual use, they are nuanced and changeable, and exist in the relationships between people and resources (ibid.). Therefore, their meaning can only ever be inferred, and never fully known (ibid.).

- Best practice

Best practice describes the phenomenon of there being one appropriate means to act, or practice to follow, to respond to something – i.e., there is a right way to do things. In this thesis, best practice is used to describe appropriate management in a Clear ordered system only.

- Exaptive practice

Exaptive practice is a term used by Snowden (2020) to describe existing capability and practices being radically repurposed and appropriated in new ways that are unique to the new, and ever changing context of a Complex system (Snowden et al., 2020).

- Good practice

Good practice describes the phenomenon of there being different appropriate ways to act in a situation, which are equally legitimate means to achieve a desired outcome. Good practice draws on past experiences and choosing from possible appropriate options. This is the form of practice most suited to management in a Complicated ordered system.

- Literary practice

Literary practice is used in this thesis to describe the varied practices that agents in the Literary Field (predominantly authors and readers, in this context) follow in relation to their role (or, in the case of authors, their trade). In the current context of online technology, literary practices are evolving rapidly, and so are not always discussed as fixed and fully habituated here, however the word is used when there are patterns observable within and between roles beyond individual foible.

- Novel practice

Novel practice is used in this thesis to describe the act of developing completely new ways to approach something, in situations where past experience cannot be reliably drawn on, due to an

absence of causality and/or constraint. Novel practices are used in Chaos un-ordered systems, as a means to create change – in any way possible – to introduce stability (Snowden, 2011).

- **Performative practice (see also Parasocial and Frontstage and back-stage)**

Performative practice refers to Goffman's (1971) theory around how public performers (e.g. celebrities, musicians, actors) manage their public image – creating balance between what they share about aspects of their backstage (i.e., details about personal life) and frontstage (i.e., professional communications) lives, through curating strategic ways of performing the self, in a manner designed to appear appropriately authentic, whilst also protecting identity.

Role

Role, in the context of this thesis, refers to different duties or status assumed or assigned to a person (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020) in a given cultural field. A role may or may not correspond with employment or occupation (e.g. the roles of author, reader, publisher, agent). In each cultural field there are distinct roles. Roles are associated with practices.

Space (also see Place)

The concept of place in this thesis draws from Harrison & Dourish's (Harrison and Dourish, 1996) concept of space and place, which posits that space is an abstract territory, shaped by, and for, a set of social actions. Space is sometimes viewed as a blank canvas, into which places are created by introducing physical boundaries (Dourish, 2006b), however there are ways in which place comes first, as people learn from the connotations of the places they inhabit, and take this understanding into other spaces – and also shape those spaces and create places within them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“The scariest moment is always just before you start. After that, things can only get better.”
On writing: A memoir of the craft (Stephen King, 2000)

1.1 Background to research topic

Discussing cultural works, such as books, music, and performance, is a fundamental part of social life. Over the centuries people have shared stories, discussed interpretations of their meanings and their personal reactions to them, and speculated about the creator of the work – what are they like as a person, and how does their work reflect on who they are. This curiosity extends beyond social conversations and into our individual decision making when choosing a creative work to indulge in. Scottish songwriter Momus (1992) once compared the experience of browsing for new music to buy in a record shop to that of the ‘Wood Between the Worlds’ – an imagined forest land in C.S Lewis’ Narnia Chronicles, where shallow pools of water served as portals to different worlds (Momus, 1992). Choosing between records, he explained, was like choosing someone’s universe to take home, and deciding between them went beyond judgements of fit to one’s tastes, to questions about the creator behind it (“How do the artists dress? (...) Where do they live, and what’s it like to live there?”) (ibid.). Intimate creative work sparks conjecture – particularly where the creator is not present in the moment the work is experienced.

In literature, perhaps more so than other creative fields, there has been a clear history of distance between author and audience. The stereotypical author is viewed as an isolated figure, who writes and disseminates their work through the printed book, which the (again, stereotypical) reader enjoys in the privacy of their home, alone. Historically, readers used to read books without ever knowing the name of the author behind it as it was standard practice to publish pseudonymously (Mullan, 2007). This invisibility fed gossip, excitement and speculation about the person behind a culturally popular work (ibid.), and when attribution later became customary an authors’ identity, beyond their name, maintained a certain mystique - often confined to a short biography or a photo on the back-flap of the book cover (Murray, 2018). As Murray observed, “it is the absence of the author which makes literature possible, yet powerful literature provokes a desire in readers to get closer to the author” (Murray, 2018, p. 52). The concealment of identity (fully or partially) has invited conjecture, and also afforded an element of control for authors, who had agency over what they shared of themselves, be

it for the purpose of maintaining modesty, for the enjoyment of encouraging readers' gossip, or for numerous other reasons, such as securing publication as a woman (Mullan, 2007)¹.

The visibility of authors today has changed significantly, and this has impacted the dynamics between authors and the readers who enjoy their writing. For decades, well-known contemporary authors have been featuring regularly in mass media (e.g. TV, interviews, articles), much like other public figures – their names and appearance no longer concealed or ascribed only through the book. These appearances are, effectively, one-way, mediated broadcasts (Marshall, 2010) continuing the sense of distance – physically, as author and reader are not collocated, as well as the 'enigmatic distance' (Beer, 2008) of celebrity and spectator, socially unknown to each other, and their true identities largely unknowable. Mass media broadcasts are typically limited to a select few superstar authors, with most authors largely out of sight, in comparison (particularly between books, when they are writing, which largely remains an isolated practice), although opportunities to see them have grown. Periodic events (e.g. readings, signings, festivals) facilitate physical collocation between a wide range of authors and readers. They also enable two-way exchanges as audience members can ask questions and get a response. A sense of distance still holds - the events are structured by 'gatekeepers' (Baym, 2012; Murray, 2015) (e.g. agent, publisher, interviewer), who use established and rehearsed protocols to carefully mediate the experience.

Now, online interactive technologies such as social media and forums challenge the status quo of structured distance further. Since the early 2000s it has become increasingly commonplace for creatives like musicians and authors alike - at all career levels and stages - to create and maintain an online, publicly accessible profile. Visibility has become the new norm, and the public can readily locate an authors' online presence and learn from what they share of themselves, reducing the need to speculate about them. This often happens in non-specialist, popular social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook (Skains, 2019) managed directly by the authors, but also specialist sites such as GoodReads or publishers' websites, where, for example, Q&As may be held (Murray, 2018).

Physically situated, gatekeeper-mediated author events still exist (and indeed have been growing in popularity and geographic spread (Murray, 2018; Weber, 2018)), and their influence has not dissipated. However, online, the traditional mediating structures afforded through physical collocation

¹ Even as recently as the 1990's, J.K Rowling was urged to use her initials, rather than her first name Joanne, out of concern that boys may not read a novel written by a woman (Driscoll, 2014)

are disrupted. Readers and authors now have the potential to directly interact and engage in bi-directional (even multi-directional) communications. This change offers potentially positive benefits: whether well-established or aspiring, all authors have nominally equal potential to communicate with both current and potential readers without the barrier of formal gatekeeping. This may benefit book sales, as authors can self-promote, but in addition it also presents opportunity for authors to develop greater understanding of their readers and how their work is received, and to support readers to learn about the author and the inspiration behind their work.

It could easily be assumed that online interaction is an extension to what exists physically in literary events. Yet the potential audience is changed – greater numbers, a wider geographical spread, and increased diversity. The way interactions are facilitated have also shifted, no longer confined to one-at-a-time questioning, physical affordances, nor mediated by a gatekeeper who can manage the experience for either side. I therefore argue in this thesis that in changing the scaffolding that facilitates interactions, the nature of what is exchanged in that interaction is also altered.

Although authors have been establishing online presence for some years, research into the phenomenon is still in its infancy and scattered across different disciplines, resulting in a limited understanding of how either authors or readers experience direct engagement. Where investigated, there has typically been an adherence to a text-, author-, or medium-centric approach (Murray, 2018) rather than observing the experiences of both authors and readers in context, from the perspective of social interaction. Indeed, a text- and medium-centric approach has dominated previous inquiry into the connection between authors and readers pre-internet, as focus has largely been on their interactions via the book – the authors message disseminated and interpreted (e.g. reader response theories – see 4.2.1) at a distance from each other. Direct interactions, outside of the book, have been largely overlooked across disciplines. With little to draw on from past understanding, there is now value to developing new theory to help understand digitally mediated engagement between authors and readers, and the new ways in which authors make themselves visible.

Studies of author and reader engagement have primarily been addressed by research fields such as literary studies, cultural sociology, cultural studies, print culture, publishing and book history (Murray, 2018). Now that they are using digital technologies for engagement, their experience now presents as a topic to investigate in the discipline of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). HCI investigates the

interaction behaviours of technology users. Authors and readers represent two user groups, each with different interaction needs from the same technology.

An interest in interaction with literature is not new to HCI. However, the focus in past HCI research has typically continued a perception of distance between authors and readers, and on their relationship to the book - whilst other disciplines have sought to move beyond this to introduce a more socially inclusive perspective. In previous HCI work, for example, readers have been studied in isolation from authors, in work geared towards supporting them to find books through development of search and browse technologies (e.g. Buchanan and McKay, 2011; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016; Makri et al., 2019), or the production of digital reading technologies (e.g. Pearson et al., 2012). Books (or digital texts) have identified as forms of information which people seek to acquire or interact with. A focus on written works as information has filtered into recent, emergent investigations into online engagement amongst authors and readers, with a predominant focus on facilitating readers in finding an author's online content (a new form of information), often overlooking the more relational experience of engagement.

The relevance of insight from either information- or text-centric perspectives, or of readers' search and browse needs, is limited in terms of what it can reveal about direct interactions between author and reader which are not limited to textual or information interests. Resultantly, there is a rationale for introducing social and cultural perspectives from other fields into HCI, towards developing new theory for understanding online interactions between authors and readers that better encompass the breadth of the experience – an important part of the motivation for this thesis.

My intention for this thesis was to contribute to ongoing discourse around the different ways in which authors present themselves online to an audience, and how their online presence and engagement practices, outside of the mediation of traditional gatekeepers, are experienced by both authors and readers. My approach was intentionally and explicitly multidisciplinary, building on knowledge from across parallel research fields, and integrating a range of relevant concepts and theories through an overarching HCI lens. My intent was to develop an integrated understanding of the dynamics between authors and readers when they interact together and the context behind those dynamics. With this, I sought to establish a framework for discerning how this carries when they engage and interact through online technologies and platforms (e.g. social media platforms, forums, websites).

My thesis presents a contextualised, empirically, and theoretically grounded account of how both authors and readers experience, perceive, and value interacting online, whilst incorporating an HCI perspective of their additional roles as users of technology.

I focused specifically on authors and readers of genre fiction - an important and buoyant literary domain which attracts a broad audience demographic, with many of its authors observably active in a variety of online spaces.

1.2 Overview of the research

In this thesis I built an understanding of the nature of online interactions between authors and readers: what practices authors follow, where and why, and how both authors and readers experience interacting through these practices in the digital spaces used. By interrogating this area, I offered a new perspective for future research to approach managing and designing online interactions for these users, and others with similar dynamics and needs.

I gathered empirical qualitative data from interviews conducted with authors and readers of genre fiction. Through the interviews, I uncovered the current perspectives of both user groups around how they experience interacting online, and gleaned insight into how this may contrast to their experiences of interacting offline. In HCI, it can be common to use interviews (and other data collection methods) to build an account of how a technology is experienced in relative isolation from the broader context of dynamics between users. For example, research may examine specifically how the users of a technology specifically interact with its affordances, why they use it, and then use this to identify pain points. This insight is typically then used to improve the design, to facilitate a smoother experience with it, to help users meet their interaction goals more effectively. However, for authors and readers, motivations for using online technology are embedded in a complicated context of culture and commerce, and the technology itself is not necessarily their focal interest or may be one of a range of different ways in which they interact. As Baym observed of musician-audience relationships (an industry with many parallels to literature), by asking creative professionals to directly interact with their audience in online spaces “we ask them to redefine a relationship that has been structured in a particular way for decades” (Baym, 2018, p. 6). As online mediums present both an additional and a changed form of interaction from previous, established means, it was important to focus on the bigger picture rather than to isolate technology-supported mediation out of context.

In exploring these different factors, I incorporated a mix of empirical and theoretical methods to explore author and reader interactions in the context of broad literary culture, previous interpretations of their interaction behaviour and needs, and the role of environment in shaping interactions. My approach provided substantial insight into the challenges of interacting in new online environments and identified contradictions with some of the conventional ways in which author and reader interaction has been understood before.

Authors' practices - particularly those creating genre fiction work - are tied to the commercial and production values of the publishing industry who support their work. The publishing industry serves to benefit from their success with an audience, as this can potentially attract income to the businesses involved, in turn. For this reason, I determined it was important to consider how my findings may be translated for direct use by the publishing industry, as there is scope for professionals involved in the author experience to develop direct support mechanisms for authors as they engage online, from the inside. The industry is also in a position to monitor and formatively evaluate the effectiveness of authors' engagement practices in meeting the needs of a market of readers.

One of the main ways that I did this was to analyse existing academic understandings of industry roles and practices (e.g. models of the system of production, and accounts of the provision of literary events) and integrated these into a conception of a literary system and its relation to the environment that its practices are carried out in. I built on my conceptualisation by applying a method derived from practitioner-oriented business fields (the Cynefin Framework) used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in a system, and I positioned the phenomenon of authors going online to engage with an audience as such an intervention. I used this framework to assess different structures of order and behaviour within that system towards determining how authors' online practices could be monitored, evaluated, and managed by industry professionals, to ensure that authors' workload is managed appropriately, and to determine the effectiveness of the interventions outcomes for the target market.

1.2.1 [Overview of the thesis structure](#)

I structured the thesis into two distinct, consecutive parts. In the first part (chapters 2 through to 5) I explored background literature into the motivations of contemporary authors and other creative professionals to use the internet to engage with an audience (chapter 2), and the context through which author and reader interactions have been understood and researched in offline, physical places

(chapter 4). I presented a series of diagrammatic models (chapter 4) to consolidate theories discussed in chapter 4 with my analysis from an empirical interview study (chapter 5). I used the models to establish a theoretically informed perspective from which to understand how author and reader interactions are shaped by the environment in which they are mediated. Through the models, I presented a concept I named the **Literary System**, which delineated key organisational structures involved in mediating literary interactions around the different outputs of the literary field (e.g. book production, events). My depictions of the Literary System provided a basis from which to compare physically mediated interactions with the means of online interaction discussed by my interview participants. I presented the study findings in chapter 5, and shared extracts from the qualitative interviews, which were held with authors and readers. I developed the models, conducted and analysed the study, and reviewed the background literature which scaffolded my theoretical work concurrently, as part of a cyclical, inductive, Grounded Theory method.

In the second part (chapters 6 to 8) I changed my approach. Firstly, I focused on the idea of what I had called the Literary System being a type of system in a literal sense – as a bounded network of interconnected processes. I used the models I had created in chapter 4 and developed them to include the online environments that participants had noted using in the previous chapter's interviews. These were predominantly third-party spaces (e.g. social media, forums), and thus I positioned them outside of the bounds of the Literary System, and examined a connected, symbiotic relationship of influence between them. I then discussed the idea of the Literary System being an infrastructure built into the literary field to facilitate certain processes and outputs. I positioned the phenomenon of authors going online to engage as an extension to that infrastructure – occurring in the literary field, but outside of the original bounds of the Literary System through the use of third-party spaces. I developed new models to explore this idea, to help consider the meaning and purpose behind authors engaging online, and how this is connected to the Literary System.

Next, I used a sense-making framework called the Cynefin Framework (Snowden et al., 2020), introduced in chapter 6) to reanalyse the work conducted in the first part of the thesis through a lens of system complexity. The framework derived from practitioner-oriented business fields and builds on logic from systems theory. I used the Cynefin Framework to consider the interconnected relationships which impact the Literary Field, and with it, the practices supported by the Literary System infrastructure. This helped me to identify the Literary Field (Bourdieu, 1996) as a Complex System

type, due to its internal characteristics and the dynamics within it. I identified that being a Complex System has consequences for how interactions within it may be managed – as not all system types benefit from the same management style or research approach. This discovery was a pivotal moment in the research, and I used this new finding to reanalyse the work from the first part of the thesis to better understand the various complex dynamics observable in the Literary Field which in turn influence how authors' and readers' online interaction practices evolve.

I next developed a novel, qualitative interview method which drew on a range of known HCI research methods and a method identified in the Cynefin Framework as best suited to investigating a Complex System. To test this method, I conducted a second empirical interview study with readers (chapter 7). I then concluded my work in chapter 8 by discussing a summary of the thesis' findings, their importance, and the implications they highlighted for improving support for authors and readers in online spaces. In this final chapter, I also appraised my approach to the research topic, and identified potential avenues for future research that could stem from my findings.

1.2.2 Contributions and beneficiaries of the research

The hybrid approach of empirical and theoretical work that I used in this thesis delivered significant contributions, which will be of interest to different audiences.

Firstly, I perceive the core intended audience of this work as the publishing industry and other related organisations (e.g. libraries, event organisers). Industry professionals have long been formal 'gatekeepers' mediating between author and reader, and their ongoing influence is observable in their behaviour (particularly that of authors) online. Industry professionals are well-positioned to help develop support mechanisms for authors, to help them manage and prioritise their workload, and to improve their current experience in online spaces. Industry is also in a position to understand market needs (i.e. readers), and to monitor the effectiveness of, and ongoing changes to, the patterns of practices which authors adhere to when engaging with their audience online.

Secondly, the work targets an audience of researchers with an interest in literature-related studies – namely the fields of Publishing Studies and the History of the Book. my work incorporates multidisciplinary theories and concepts into existing models of understanding the context of author and reader interactivity. It also presents new findings which contribute to ongoing discourse about

the impact of post-digital publishing, creation, and dissemination practices through its discourse around the ways authors engage online, and how this is experienced by both authors and readers.

Lastly, my work targets researchers in HCI and Computer-Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) with interests in three core areas. Firstly, those who study interaction behaviour around literary content, and between literary communities and individuals such as readers. Secondly, those with an interest in how asymmetric user groups use social media technologies (e.g. musicians, celebrities, business, and customer users) to interact either together or around information, towards their work in improving technology support. Thirdly, it targets those who are increasingly working with Complex Adaptive Systems, by addressing a call to incorporate complexity theory (such as the Cynefin Framework) into HCI methods towards researching and designing for systems which impact multiple users and multiple, parallel, interoperating systems (such as healthcare, e.g. Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018; Blandford, 2019).

The primary contribution of my thesis is a detailed, theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of how authors and readers currently experience online interactions - both as an extension to physically situated interactions (e.g. events), and as a standalone phenomenon. The contribution is made up of six overlapping sub-contributions as follows:

Contribution 1: [A model of the Literary System describing the influence of environmental affordances and interconnected agents on mediation between authors and readers, on- and off-line](#)

I presented a series of incremental, diagrammatic models which synthesized six complementary theories from across multi-disciplinary research, including:

- Darnton's Communication Circuit (Darnton, 1982)
- Dourish & Harrison's space and place (Dourish, 2006b)
- Fuller & Rehberg Sedo's Reading Industry (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013)
- Bitner's Servicescape (Bitner, 1992)
- MacArthur's Systemic Barriers and Boundaries (McArthur, 2016)

I chose the models through cross-comparison with my empirical research findings from the first empirical study in chapter 5. The series of models incrementally described the Literary System, and its use of environmental affordances to mediate interactions with literary products and culture (shown

in chapter 4). Later iterations depicted the relationship between practices derived from physical space, and mediated by physical affordances, to mediation in online third-party spaces (chapter 6). I then developed it further to describe how multiple variables (e.g. environmental, cultural, economic, social) impact the system in parallel, and how this impacts interactions within the system, and the literary field (in which the system is situated) more broadly, by virtue of being part of a Complex system (chapter 6).

Contribution 2: An empirically grounded account of how authors and readers of fiction currently use online social platforms to support their practices

I presented findings from two empirical, qualitative interview studies: in chapter 5 with both fiction authors and readers, and in chapter 7 with fiction readers only. My findings gave a descriptive account of how both authors and readers experience current forms of online interaction mediation. More broadly, they presented authors and readers perspectives on how online practices - particularly those followed by authors – meet their needs as users. I used the findings to delineate a number of different modes of practice that authors often follow online at present in order to be seen to engage with audiences, and to manage the experience of doing so. I referred to these practices as **Genres of Visibility** (chapter 8).

Contribution 3: A theoretically grounded description of the different forms of complexity and levels of order which characterise the Literary System and the Literary Field., along with an analysis of the implications of differing levels of order on developing appropriate strategies for researching and managing different online practices

I used the Cynefin Framework to posit that the Literary Field is a Complex System at its core and should be managed as such. I also identified that there are different levels of order in the Literary System which scaffolds practices within the field, and that different management approaches are better suited to the different areas. I provided a descriptive account of the varying levels of complexity and order observable in literary practices, and used this to consider how online engagement and interaction between authors and readers may evolve over time, and how it can be supported through awareness of the level of order in the system at a given time. I also used this to posit that in a Complex System, cause and effect is not applicable, and so the outcomes of any new online practice may not be predicted, and its outcome may not be as intended. In chapter 8 I make suggestions for managing

the phenomenon in a manner that respects the complexity of the field and system and point to a need for alternative approaches in future research.

Contribution 4: A novel qualitative interview method, based on composite methods from complexity theory and established HCI research

In chapter 7 I introduced a novel, probing, qualitative interview technique which I demonstrated with reader participants. To develop the method, I combined principles for experimenting within a Complex system (experimental parallel probing, (Snowden et al., 2020)) with established methods from HCI research, including parallel prototype design (e.g. Tohidi et al., 2006; Dow et al., 2010); cultural probes (Boehner et al., 2007; Gaver et al., 2004), sketching (Buxton, 2007) and a qualitative, loosely structured interview which drew on HCI evaluation methods (Oates, 2006).

My method involved positing hypothetical design ideas for changing how author and reader interactions are mediated, which I presented in the form of sketches of different platform designs. In each sketch, I demonstrated a mode of interaction which differed to current mediation methods. I used them to learn about how the participants would potentially react to change, and why a particular change may likely fail to meet their needs or expectations. I also used this discussion as a means to learn more about their experiences with current mediation, and their values as readers and users of online social media spaces.

Contribution 5: Broad implications for undertaking future research into author and reader online interactions, and for designing methods to support and monitor the ongoing effectiveness of authors' online practices

In chapter 8, high-level implications for future research into author and reader interactions online was contributed, based on findings from the two empirical studies, and reflecting on the argument that they exist in the context of the Literary Field, which is a Complex system. As a Complex system, there can be no absolute solution to issues raised in the research findings, as the field is subject to constant, fluid, and unpredictable change. Resultantly, I did not contribute design implications that can be taken directly into redesigning any existing online mediation platforms, or establishing a new future technology, as this would be an ill-fit approach in the context of high Complexity. Rather, the work contributed a reflection on findings to suggest areas for caution, and to highlight potential avenues for learning more about the design space, and to develop structures for monitoring changes over time.

Contribution 6: Explicit connection of interdisciplinary work from multiple fields into a centralised conception of the context and nature of the literary field and interactions within it

To develop the models of the Literary System, and to reposition that through the lens of system complexity, I combined a range of literature from across multiple disparate disciplines. These included the academic fields of the History of the Book, Publishing Studies, Socio-spatial theory, HCI, as well as academia-influenced business fields including marketing, systems theory, and a specific practitioner-led systems theory developed for business use. I identified new, clear connections between disparate theory, many of which have not been used together in previous work. This analytical and theoretical work helped to present a new perspective on literary practices to simultaneously amplify and contrast with prior understandings.

1.3 The involvement of the British Library

My research was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) UK as part of a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership between The British Library (BL) and The Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design (HCID) at City, University of London. The two institutions had an equal supervisory role for the duration of the work.

The initial premise of my PhD work was formed around a research proposal by the BL. They were interested to learn more about reader behaviour online and the role of social media and related platforms in facilitating interaction between authors and readers. Their interest came from a standpoint of wanting to better understand how opportunities to interact directly may influence readers' understanding of literature, and influence authors' when writing new fiction. The initial proposal was for me to build clarity around the online locations which host rich interaction between authors and readers, to explore opportunities for collecting and preserving the conversations they hold online. It was anticipated that preservation and conservation could be done through, for example, the UK Web Archive², for the purpose of creating and keeping a snapshot of contemporary literary experience that could be made accessible for future research. With this new knowledge, it was intended that my PhD research would inform the BLs future collection and preservation policies.

² A partnership – of which the British Library is a member - which collects millions of websites in UK domains, to preserve their content for future generations (see webarchive.org.uk)

Although the initial proposal was based on the BL's research interests, this was, first and foremost, a PhD thesis rather than a research project conducted on their behalf. Therefore, I used their initial proposal as a springboard to guide how I commenced the work, but it did not restrict the direction I took as I followed the data.

In the early stages, I sought to investigate how fiction authors and readers used online platforms and websites to interact, and to identify which were commonly used for rich interaction and dialogue – keeping in mind the BL's original premise. Quite quickly, my research started to reveal that clearly identifiable online spaces which consistently attracted rich interaction were not going to be forthcoming. Resultantly, I changed the trajectory of the work. This changed the outcome of the work for the BL, however it did not diminish its impact for them.

Rather than informing their collection and preservation policy, my work has instead helped to provide the BL with new insight into contemporary reader and author behaviour, and the influence of social media on literary practices. The BL is taking the findings of my work into consideration as they develop new strategies for providing future support for their users. How this will unfold is yet to be fully determined.

1.4 Chapter Summaries

For the remainder of this thesis, I followed the below structure:

Chapter 2: Background and related work

In this chapter I presented an overview of related literature into the context behind authors adopting online engagement practices. I identified that there is a movement towards adopting online engagement amongst other cultural works such as musicians, to attract attention directly, outside of their industry's more traditional production and dissemination mechanisms. I examined some of the known motivations behind the shift towards direct engagement and dissemination, and posited that for some, it may be a matter of necessity over choice. I argued that more research is still needed to gather direct accounts of authors' experiences, which have been lacking in much of the research done so far. Next, I discussed research into online author and reader interactions in platforms such as reader forums and digital writing platforms. There is a limited body of work in this area, and existing studies showed an overarching focus on interaction with text (book or digital content) or medium

(platform), and on the reader, without the author. To address the gap, I next reviewed work focused on how other cultural workers and public figures engage with their audiences in social media, and found that direct interactions and accounts from the public figures and creatives were under-represented in these areas too. Finally, I presented research relating to musicians and their audience online, and identified some likely parallels (as well as differences) to look out for in my own work into authors and readers in the forthcoming chapters. I concluded the chapter with a summary of the work reviewed and discussed the next steps I took in the thesis to address current gaps in knowledge.

Chapter 3: Methods and methodology

Here I presented an overview of the underlying methodology I used to conduct the thesis as a whole. I described my research methods and explained my hybrid theoretical and empirical approach. I provided an overview of the methods I used for the work in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, describing how they interconnect.

Chapter 4: Contextualising author and reader interactions

In this chapter I presented prior research around literary practices and their context, to help situate online interactions between authors and readers. First, I discussed Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1983) theory of the Literary Field, to position authors and readers as roles within the field. I discussed how interactions are determined by role, position, and discussed how the theory posits that habituated understandings inform actions in the field and are influenced by environmental affordances. I use this to posit that interacting in online spaces necessarily differs to interacting offline yet is likely also influenced by how people experience offline interactions.

Next, I described some of the prominent research which has framed interactions between authors and readers as mediated through, and motivated by, books. Then, I provided a basis for understanding the environment in which offline interactions occur - often mixed commercial spaces influenced by variables which are effectively external to the Literary Field. I then presented findings from observational studies of in-person author and reader interactions at festivals and events to highlight that these too, are mixed spaces. I used this to posit that online, an author's audience is mixed, their interests are varied, and the experience of interacting is impacted by the changed (online) environment. Finally, I concluded by presenting my model of the Literary System in an offline context, then summarised the chapter and introduced the next steps I would follow to further the research.

Chapter 5: Empirical study one: interviews with fiction authors and readers - exploring accounts of online interaction

In chapter 5 I presented the first empirical study I conducted: 12 loosely structured interviews with authors and readers. In this study I gathered accounts from both user groups about their experience of online interaction, including what online spaces and platforms they use to interact, how, and why. I detailed my study method, followed by the qualitative findings. I then concluded with an overview of the key points raised by my findings.

Chapter 6: Reframing the research problem as a system intervention using the Cynefin Framework

In chapter 6 I first revisited the Literary System model (from chapter 4) and expanded it to include online interaction spaces, to incorporate the information acquired in the first study. I reanalysed my earlier work through the lens of the Cynefin Framework, to position the Literary Field as a Complex system, with some aspects intentionally managed at higher levels of order, and other aspects – specifically author and reader online interactions – subject to an absence of constraints in social media platforms, which are Chaos systems by nature. I used evidence from chapter 5 to help identify areas in which different levels of order are observable, and discussed the implications of this reframing for conducting further work.

Chapter 7: Empirical study two - exploring readers' perceptions and values in relation to Author Online Presence

In chapter 7 I presented the second empirical study I conducted: 12 loosely structured qualitative interviews with people who enjoy reading fiction. Here, I described my novel research method which combined methods from HCI and the Cynefin Framework. I used the study method to discuss potential changes to the current practices authors follow when presenting themselves online to an audience, to learn about how the participants value and perceive authors' efforts, and to elicit more about their interests and needs as readers and users of social technology.

I presented my qualitative findings and highlighted connections with these and my findings from chapter 5. I then concluded with an overview of the key points highlighted by the findings.

Chapter 8: Discussion and conclusions

In this final chapter, I presented an overview of the work conducted in the thesis and discussed the contributions of the work. I discussed the key implications of my findings, posited ideas for how the work may be developed, and concluded with an assessment of the limitations to my work, and areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Background and related work: online engagement between authors, creators, and their audiences

“(…) authors have looked like other people even when they write (though sometimes their lips move, and sometimes they stare into space longer, and more intently, than anything that isn’t a cat); but their words describe their real faces: the ones they wear underneath. This is why people who encounter writers of fantasy are rarely satisfied by the wholly inferior person they meet.”
The View from the Cheap Seats (Neil Gaiman, 2016)

In this thesis I sought to learn more about the experience of authors and readers when they engage online: in part to understand more about how online technology mediates their experiences, and in part to learn more about their needs as users of online technologies. Authors have been using the internet to engage with their audience for a little over a decade, however the way they do it, where, and to what extent has been fluidly changing over the years as new platforms and ways of using them have evolved. Resultantly there is a dearth of prior literature accounting for how online engagement is experienced by authors and readers.

Research into the impact of online technologies on literary practices have been somewhat sparse and piecemeal, and distributed across the fringes of different disciplines such as book history, cultural studies, celebrity studies (Murray, 2018) and library and information sciences. This has made it difficult for knowledge to be shared, and parallels between different strands of research are not always readily identifiable, as unified terminology is often absent (ibid). Different disciplines also have different focal interests, and from different perspectives which can be a further barrier to knowledge sharing and coherence.

Specific to online interactions, there have been some, limited accounts of author’s experiences with engaging with an audience (both off-line and online) - sometimes written by authors themselves, which provide some relevant insight into author’s perspectives (Murray, 2018). More predominantly, there have been accounts of readers interacting online around literary content, either individually (e.g. Koolen et al., 2015), in collaboration with other readers (e.g. Mackey, 2001; Mirmohamadi, 2014) or whilst co-creating their own fiction works (e.g. Evans et al., 2017). These have, similarly, accounted for an understanding of the reader experience, as separated from that of authors.

Few studies have addressed digitally mediated practices in their broader context, or their importance from a social, cultural perspective (Murray, 2018). This is an understandable bias as textual artefacts - predominantly books - have long been the central product of the literary industry, the focus of literary research, and assumed

as the primary mediator between authors and readers, and the primary focus in any interactions between them. Resultantly, there is no clearly identifiable body of work that provides a direct, established framework or starting point for investigating the nature of interaction and engagement between authors and readers online.

I have used the words **engagement** and **interaction** in this thesis when describing the experience of authors and readers directly connecting with each other online. The two words are often used interchangeably, as they each essentially mean to reciprocally share an activity, communication, or interactivity. In HCI, the word interaction is most typically used to describe users of a digital technology when they use the features and affordances of the technology (i.e., they interact with it), as well as when they use a technology to communicate, in some way (be it actively through conversation, or more passively, with actions such as favouriting, liking, or sharing someone's content) – i.e., they interact with each other through a communicative act. In other fields which have studied the online activities of authors and other creative workers, the word engagement is used more commonly. They effectively mean the same thing, however the way the word engagement is used also implies a commercially oriented motivation behind an interaction. In relation to authors and creative worker, engagement also suggests that, by virtue of being present online, they are actively engaging with a participatory audience. I therefore switched between the two words throughout my writing. I used 'engage' when seeking to capture the commercial aspects of authors online activity, or to imply the sense that their visibility online is a form of broadcast for an audience to engage with. I used 'interact' where seeking to describe a more directly communicative act, conducted either through or with an online technology – e.g. conversations between author and reader.

As a new phenomenon, there is currently a limited body of work addressing the experience of authors presenting themselves online. To present current knowledge, I split my findings from literature into two chapters – here, in chapter 2, and chapter 4. In this first chapter, I discuss prior work into online engagement and interactions focused on authors and readers. I also include research into other creative workers where similarities of practice were apparent. Later, in chapter four, I address literature relating to the broader historical context of literary practices and culture, to provide a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of the nature of interactions between authors and readers.

I start this chapter with an overview of related literature into the context behind authors adopting online engagement practices and discussed the phenomenon of authors establishing an online presence as part of a broader movement amongst the cultural industries towards adopting modes of direct dissemination,

motivated by issues such as decreased earning potential through traditional modes of publishing and production (2.1). Next, I discuss research into interactivity amongst authors and readers, including platforms such as online reader forums and digital writing platforms. I then discuss studies around digital engagement at physical literary events (e.g. festivals) where authors and readers may engage around a shared experience (2.1.2), before then discussing overlapping research on other cultural workers and public figures in social media (2.2). Finally, I present work relating to the shared experiences of musicians and their audiences, to identify potential parallels (as well as differences) to support my own studies about authors and readers in later chapters (2.2.1). The chapter then concludes with a summary of the work overviewed, and of the next steps taken in the thesis to address current gaps in knowledge.

2.1 Authors and online engagement

Authors have been using online platforms to enable readers to engage with them directly since the early 2000s, and it has now reached the point whereby most contemporary authors now have some form of public-facing online presence. As a relatively new practice, however, the ways in which they engage online are still evolving, and there is not yet a strong body of research to provide a foundational understanding of how they experience doing so. This subchapter examines what has been learned so far about the motivations of authors for establishing an online presence.

Some of the most recent research on the topic stated that few authors have a significant web presence of their own, and that those who do, typically set up a website for informational purposes. These sites have been considered (“(...) fairly standoffish, one-way, setting-the-record-straight affairs, often outsourced to a web-design professional” (Murray, 2018, p. 12)). It has also been observed that they are often run by an author’s literary agent or publisher rather than the author themselves (Skains, 2010), and can provide limited opportunities for direct interactions between the author and the readers who visit the site (Murray, 2018). Not all author sites have been found to be solely informational in their content, however. Some provide blog posts, competitions and games (Skains, 2010). Some also provide mechanisms for participation and communication, such as a forum or a web-form to send the author a question or feedback (Skains, 2010)- often for readers to communicate together, and sometimes with the author joining in. Author websites have not significantly changed in format since they started to be used. Today, more authors use them than before, with many running the sites themselves rather than outsourcing to their agent or publisher, highlighting that some of the most recent research into engagement in these websites is out of date, as practices change so quickly.

What authors' websites offer and how they are managed varies between individual authors. The experience they offer is not consistent, and this is particularly noticeable in how they are used to mediate interaction between the author and their readers. Where forums are provided, for example, they may be used by readers only, and the author may not join in with conversation at all (Skains, 2010). Other authors do, however, and may be particularly active in the space. Sometimes authors make their responses to messages publicly visible, but typically they do not, and it is often unclear whether they see them at all (ibid.). Each website is seemingly managed at the individual author's discretion³.

Authors' websites have been largely designed for passive consumption, but today's authors are also now managing profiles on a range of online platforms designed for social interaction, including forums, YouTube, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media presence has become an expectation (Thomas, 2020), and their presence in these platforms creates opportunity to observe more participatory behaviour than may be evident in their independent author websites.

Online social media platforms are used by authors to engage with an audience more directly than is possible through the passive informational broadcast format commonly used on their websites. Authors use these platforms to share details about their work alongside aspects their personal lives (e.g. hobbies, beliefs) (Skains, 2019; Murray, 2018). Their motivation for being visible online in this way is largely understood as a means to draw attention to their writing (Skains, 2019) and to connect with their audience (Martens, 2016). What they do to draw attention, where they do it and how they do it varies, has been rapidly involving, and it is difficult to keep up with changes to their practices, as the platforms themselves, and the ways they can be used more broadly, change rapidly too. It has been suggested that authors, overall, are using social media platforms for numerous purposes, including building relationships with their readership by virtue of being visible and active:

Now, the author is engaged in one-to-many or even one-to-one real-time relationships with readers, providing updates on the progress of writing projects, plugging future in-store or media appearances, intervening in current political or cultural debates, passing judgement on the work of other writers (whether established or novice), and selectively endorsing, correcting, or otherwise mediating reader discussions of their work (Murray, 2018, p. 12)

³ Occasionally, expectations may be made explicit – for example, in Fantasy author Neil Gaiman's website (www.neilgaiman.com), there was - when I first started this PhD in 2016 - a contact form headed with the disclaimer that *'you can ask things here. Sometimes I answer'*. When he did answer a question (received privately through the closed web-form), he would do so publicly, and, as Skains (2010) observed, he can be particularly participatory and active when he does respond (Skains, 2010). Revisiting the site now (in 2021), this feature has been removed, and replaced with fan discussion forum.

Few academic studies have investigated how authors manage the experience of engaging online using these varied platforms. Current understanding comes largely from anecdotal evidence and discussions within the publishing industry. Podcasts and literary events, for example, have discussed the pressures on authors to join Twitter and Facebook, whilst simultaneously encouraging them to join, so that they may connect and form relationships with their online audience (Murray, 2018). There has been no substantial work in which author's own accounts about their experience online have been collated, or to determine how their experience is shared by, or meets the needs of, readers.

2.1.1 What motivates authors and cultural workers to engage online?

Developing an online presence is often posited as a clear benefit for authors, as it offers the potential to directly access and communicate with readers on a global scale (Murray, 2018). The more platforms they use, the more access is nominally enabled between them and their audience. This access – through being visible online - is posited as the key motivation for authors joining the fold, as visibility and attention are, effectively, a currency in contemporary cultural production (Skains, 2019).

Direct access is viewed as beneficial primarily because it provides opportunity for authors to connect with a market of readers “untrammelled by the potentially pesky agendas of publisher publicity departments (...)” (Murray, 2018, p. 11), and to bypass the need for having traditional gatekeepers such as agents and publishers to mediate both access and dissemination of their work (Deresiewicz, 2020) – as they have for centuries. By allowing authors to bypass publisher mediation, online platforms also offer the potential for new authors to make a name for themselves outside of the traditional channels (Skains, 2019; Murray, 2018), at a time where it is notoriously difficult to get a book deal and to make a living through print publishing. However, in parallel, it has been observed that authors have been increasingly encouraged to harness social media to make direct connections, because publishers, too, serve to benefit from the “cross-marketing, cross-pollination, and crossover readerships, [making authors] important contributors to publisher’s social marketing campaigns” (Martens, 2016, p.68). This calls into question quite how separated from publisher agendas authors online engagement practices may be.

The benefits of direct access noted above may ring true for many authors. However, their increased use of online platforms is happening against a backdrop of many other, interwoven variables and changes⁴ which

⁴ For instance, publishing houses have been absorbed by mergers and many restructured into conglomerations (Murray, 2015; Brown and Duguid, 2017); book advances and freelance writing fees have plummeted (Deresiewicz, 2020); authors have felt pressured to become an automatic success with their first book, or face being dropped by their publisher (Ramdarshan Bold, 2013) - if they can

impact the profession of authorship more broadly, and, in turn likely influence how they experience being online. Further, the internet is vast, with many popular social networking platforms, and there is an assertion that authors must try to be on all of them – both to be considered relevant, as well as to build a diverse audience to enhance their profile (Bold, 2016; Skains, 2019; Murray, 2015). This points to an undercurrent of struggle and necessity which may, above the desire to engage, influence authors' motivations to get online. It also indicates a potentially high workload across various platforms which may be difficult to manage alongside writing.

Other contemporary cultural workers (such as authors, musicians, artists) have experienced recent changes that impact their work, which help provide insight into the context behind authors' motivations to engage online. Across all cultural industries, cultural workers have been increasingly asked to work without pay, for exposure (Deresiewicz, 2020), by creating free content (particularly online) for attention (Skains, 2019). Attention does not pay the rent, nor cover the costs to produce their work (e.g. computer to write on, materials, or formal qualifications to build the necessary skills), and an increased demand for unpaid work puts these workers in a financially precarious position (Deresiewicz, 2020). The relevance of financial pressure has often been overshadowed, as Hesmondhalgh observed, by speculations about the new opportunities afforded by disintermediation (Hesmondhalgh, 2020) – i.e., their separation from traditional mediating structures. There are important questions left unaddressed about how creative workers will make money and sustain their careers, as new digital modes of production (ibid.), such as direct dissemination, and new pressures to make direct connections evolve.

Affording to live and affording to work have been identified as a key motivator behind cultural workers getting online, or, indeed, to adopt any new practice. After conducting an interview study with circa 100 cultural workers (including musicians, authors, and visual artists), Deresiewicz (2020) was struck by how consistently they discussed their incomes “not in yearly terms, like a salaried professional, not in hourly terms, like a worker with a steady job, but in monthly ones. (...) because they think of their expenses that way” (Deresiewicz, 2020, p.24), observing that most lived from pay cheque to pay cheque in the current economy, focused on paying their living costs (ibid.). Most funded their current projects, at least partially, with money made from their previous ones (ibid.). One of the novelists he interviewed stated that “if you decide to be a writer (...),

secure a deal at all (which is not easy), as there are inequalities in access, and “*failure is more common than success*” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). This impacts entrance into authorship. In the meantime, authors' income has plummeted, with those who have fifteen to twenty five year's writing experience seeing a 47% drop, and even greater for those with lesser experience (Deresiewicz, 2020). Resultantly, average earnings are well under the cost of living, at circa £11,000 pa (Bold, 2016; Combes, 2018), whilst in the meantime, the cost of living has risen, and many are juggling multiple part time jobs to support themselves (Deresiewicz, 2000; Gibson *et al.*, 2015).

you're sort of deciding to live a life where you don't want to buy things" (ibid., p. 84), yet the narrative of financial anxiety has often been overshadowed by the narrative that by having access through technology, anything is possible, and anyone can earn as an artist (ibid.).

The overwhelming narrative highlighted in Deresiewicz's interviews was one of cultural workers needing to make a living, and the difficulties faced by most in doing so. The imperative to survive, then, can be taken as integral to the choices an author makes when adopting new practices, and a significant influencing factor when they present themselves for engagement online. Whilst the decision to cultivate a public image is often posited as a prudent choice born from a desire to get close to their audience (e.g., Marwick and boyd, 2011; Skains, 2010), it may be likely that, for some, the decision is one of necessity, over choice - to attract a paying audience. Even those who work through a publishing house (rather than self-publishing or disseminating their work directly), are encouraged to get online and develop an ongoing relationship with their audience, on their own time and out of their own budget, to help ensure their work will sell once it is released (Deresiewicz, 2020).

At an influential 2009 music tradeshow focused on teaching musicians about connecting with their audiences to make a living, Baym observed there was a largely uncriticised, utopian vision touted (which is often repeated elsewhere across the cultural industries) about online communication providing an unfettered path to a sustainable career and secure income (Baym, 2018), as it bypasses the formal systems and their inherent limitations. Regardless of whether a creative worker was supported by traditional gatekeepers such as publishers and record labels, most were essentially self-employed freelancers, working to contract in a struggling market. Many were fatigued, overstretched, working overtime, yet were warned against verbalising their struggles. An air of positivity was expected because they are public facing (ibid.). The same discouragement from sharing negativity or struggles was also observed in a study of literary events (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013)). The requirement to portray positivity is likely to play a role in how creatives present themselves online.

Outside of the issues that motivate workers to engage, from within the cultural industries, there has also been a more general socio-cultural and economic drive towards using the internet and social media for business practices, which are also a likely influencing factor. Further, in the general population, social and civic lives have become increasingly dependent on digital technology, with online platforms used for many daily actions, e.g. accessing the news, reading blogs, keeping in touch with friends. The internet is where people find each other, their information, and it has become "where literary culture takes place" (Murray, 2016, p. 11), by virtue

of everything and everyone else being online. This points to a likelihood that authors are also motivated to build a presence in social platforms by virtue of it being an important space for social activity more generally.

At present, there is a very limited body of research from which learn about the motivations and experiences of authors, in relation to their online presence⁵. This section detailed some of the factors likely to influence their motivations and how they present themselves. Inference from looking at literature across the cultural industries was necessary here, as there was insufficient prior work to draw from in which detailed accounts have been gathered from authors to understand their specific experiences with doing so. There is a lot yet to learn, and the relevance of the motivations noted above need to be confirmed.

2.1.2 Readers engage online in proximity to authors and books

The work addressed above suggested motivations for engaging online, but did not explain what engagement looks like, nor how it is carried out. There is a limited body of work to turn to here too, however one avenue from which an understanding may be built is research into reader communities engaging around authors' shared content online, and around their books.

Several research projects have been conducted to assess how online platforms support literary activity amongst readers. Broadly, these have considered reader to reader interaction, around written work, and, in some instances, around the author. Most, as Driscoll noted (2014) have tended to focus on reader communities in platforms such as forums and fan pages, whereby large cohorts of readers may engage together to discuss written works they have already read. Others have focused on the activities of readers co-creating stories and art in response to a text (e.g. Curwood, 2013; Price and Robinson, 2016). In the platforms investigated, authors were found to join readers' discussions infrequently (and in some cases never did so). However, it could not be confirmed whether this meant that they do not engage at all, as it is possible that their presence in the platforms may be hidden from view (Skains, 2010). It is possible that authors may read the conversations held amongst their readers without participating (ibid.). As an author is not always visible in the platforms, these works did not offer substantial evidence of a shared experience of author and reader interaction. Their focus was primarily text-centric (i.e., focused on users' responses to the book or written

⁵ Anecdotally, I recently spoke to a researcher who asserted that Facebook was the social media platform most commonly used by authors – they had discovered this in a study they published approximately five years ago. When I conducted my first study (chapter 5) in 2017, authors I interviewed asserted that Twitter was the current favourite amongst their author peers. At that point in time, few authors used Instagram, however now, as I edit this chapter (in 2021), Instagram's service has altered, and it has gained popularity. Trends move quickly, and research publications take time - only as up to date as the day they were written.

work) or medium-centric (i.e., focused on how the affordances of the platform facilitate activity around a text) (Murray, 2018). This, as Murray observed, has been a shortfall in research across disciplines, as an overarching focusing on text and medium means there is a limited understanding of the social aspects (Murray, 2018) of online interaction. This shortfall has, relatedly, been observed in studies of platforms used in music, which have focused too much on the medium, and “not enough on other players within the system” (Hesmondhalgh, 2020, p.12).

In parallel to studies of reader communities, there is a strong and growing body of research looking at the experience of interactive community platforms in general, from a platform (i.e., medium-centric) perspective. Some have discussed readers communities (e.g. Mackey, 2001; Evans et al., 2017) and others have discussed similar communities, such as music fans (e.g. boyd, 2006). These works have investigated topics such as how community platforms provide a place for users to access community support in relation to their cultural interests (e.g. Campbell et al., 2016; Cohen and Hoffner, 2016; Gach, Fiesler and Brubaker, 2017); and on the role of the platforms and their users in moderating the environments (e.g. Thomas and Round, 2016). Others have looked at the use of amateur writing platforms in which anyone can write, to investigate the workings and experiences of collaborative writing technology (e.g. Leavenworth, 2015; Storch, 2005; Laquintano, 2016; Davies, 2017). These gave valuable information about the importance of community and interaction (such as the positive effects of connecting with those who hold similar interests) and highlighted some of the difficulties in mediating interaction in an online platform (such as managing behaviour in the absence of formal moderators). They also contribute to understanding new born-digital writing practices (i.e., writing practices that did not exist before digital technology). However, as the author - in the sense of the known, published author, rather than the amateur writer - is most commonly absent from the communities studied, this research provided limited insight into the experience of authors and readers interacting together. That said, one thing these studies did evidence is that not all online activity amongst readers requires the author or their traditional gatekeepers to be present, even when engaging with their content.

One study looked at how authors (via a survey which attracted a mix of 38 amateur writers and semi-professional authors) use social media, finding that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are popular, as well as others such as Goodreads for interacting with fans for ideas and feedback, but predominantly as a space for interacting with other authors, to build a community (Laing, 2017) in an otherwise isolating profession. The authors surveyed expressed an uncertainty of the benefits of social media in terms of the

outcome of engagement but emphasised the value of having access to other authors, and expressed that in general, communication with readers or fans was on a small-scale, and sporadic (ibid.).

One type of platform in which authors (traditionally published and amateur alike) and readers coexist is digital reading platforms such as Wattpad – an online authorship platform in which self-published, serialised works are shared directly on the platform. Here, readers' comments are facilitated in-line with the text, visible to other users – including the author. The platform's authors are predominantly amateurs who have not been published, however some known, published authors have used it too (Ramdarshan Bold, 2016), in addition to publishing through traditional print.

The platform relies on algorithms to promote stories to readers, creating 'hot' lists by genre and sorting by popularity (Dalton et al., 2016) and strongly encourages short serialised texts (Parnell, 2020). This means that known authors do not necessarily attract attention any easier in the platform than amateurs, as visibility is determined by algorithms (Dalton et al., 2016). Whether a matter of visibility or reader choice, algorithmic mediation may account for Bold's (2016) observation that out of the most popular one hundred and fifty authors in the platform at the time of her study, just seventeen were established, traditional authors, suggesting that they were not the main players in the platform (Ramdarshan Bold, 2016). Wattpad is designed for the experience of users who are both readers and writers (Thomas, 2020) - essentially targeting amateur creators. Research has focused on the majority user group of readers (some of whom write), despite the presence of other types of authors, including professionals, as co-users.

Focus has been, for example, on the role of reader users in the production of the text, through sharing their direct feedback; their contribution to a text's success through algorithmic data based on their activity, determining its visibility by boosting (or not boosting) a work in hot lists; or in how the democratising platform supports all users equally in becoming writers themselves (e.g. Bold, 2016; Parnell, 2020), and how guidelines are offered to support the creation of popular texts (Thomas, 2020).

Other studies have focused on how readers interact with the platform itself (e.g. Contreras et al., 2015); how they interact with specific stories within it (e.g. Mirmohamadi, 2014); or how activity on the platform is connected with a broader ecosystem of entertainment media (e.g. Parnell, 2020), as well as an ecosystem of mobile apps - alerting users with notifications and highlighting usability issues that impact the reading experience, such as poor feedback about one's location in the serialised story (Mirmohamadi, 2014) or adverts getting in the way of reading the text (Dalton et al., 2016).

Where connections with traditional publishing have been addressed, it has largely been in relation to publishers using the platforms to headhunt for talent (e.g. Phillips, 2014) or amateur authors use it as a stepping stone to gain their attention (e.g. Laquintano, 2016; Davies, 2017; Thomas, 2020) or to learn how to write (Thomas, 2020). The presence of authors already published through the royalty model has been predominantly overlooked, as has their experience of direct engagement with readers. Some evidence of how authors engage in the style of a broadcast was observed, such as making informational announcements (Laing, 2017; Mirmohamadi, 2014), apologising for upload delays, discussing their writer's block, and expressing that they will take into consideration feedback they have received, when producing future work (Mirmohamadi, 2014). As most writers on Wattpad are amateur, most of the studies shared here did not speak to the specific experience of published authors in interacting online. But the body of work did reflect that the mediation affords a personal touch that goes beyond sharing information and self-promotional content.

One study more significantly explored the author's perspective of using Wattpad, in which the researcher themselves created content on the platform, using a penname, and used the algorithms, demographic data, and reader commentary to intentionally inform their writing as a means of investigating the author experience of using the platform (Dalton et al., 2016)⁶. Their findings suggested that in-line reader commentary was largely used to share personal responses to the work, sometimes conversing with other readers about topics that were tangential to the story (e.g. recommender algorithms in Amazon), and otherwise giving words of encouragement to the author. This study provided a glimpse into how engagement with readers may be experienced by authors. However none of the studies explored here could provide a detailed account of why, how, and whether authors and readers interact directly online, and with Wattpad being a predominantly amateur space, they gave limited clarity into the experiences of published authors using online engagement to meet publisher expectations, or to generate income (as discussed in 2.1).

2.1.3 Author and reader engagement around literary events

One form of online literary interactions which offers opportunity to observe professional, known authors interacting on nominally equal terms with readers is online activity around book festivals and events. Since approximately 2010, literary festivals have been integrating digital outreach into their practice, which has

⁶ Book culture researchers Claire Squires and Beth Driscoll have also written a book, using a penname, in Wattpad ('The Frankfurt Kabuff' by Blaire Squiscoll) which was, in itself, a research work. However, to my knowledge, no papers have been published detailing what this activity taught them about the author experience in Wattpad to date.

included setting up accounts in primary social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) (Murray and Weber, 2017) to encourage engagement around the festival. An interview study across attendees of five physical festivals (in Australia and the UK) by Murray and Weber (2017) expressed that interconnectivity between audience members could be enhanced by the organisers or attendees using social media – e.g. live tweeting (Murray and Weber, 2017). Usability issues were observed amongst users who participated online (without attending the event physically) which acted as barriers to participation. For example, the chronology of posts on Twitter were visibly out of sync with the activity, or the timing of posts were anti-social to those in a different time zone (ibid.). The researchers also observed that digital festival engagement may not (despite appearances to the contrary) exist to serve user needs, but rather to combat criticism of festivals' failure to attract a broad audience or big-name authors from outside their geographical location (ibid.). This suggests that increasing audience access may not be the organiser's goal (ibid.), and that the mediated forms of engagement promoted by event organisers may be poorly aligned with the needs of the potential market – be it a market of authors, readers, event attendees, or of other users.

Another study that also looked at online festival engagement gave further insight into how Twitter, specifically, is used. Tweets relating to the Melbourne Writers Festival 2013 (identified by their use of the official festival hashtag) were collated and analysed by Driscoll (Driscoll, 2015) using a sentiment analysis technique and a corresponding survey to learn about the affective responses of the online audience to the festival. She found that most tweets relating to the festival expressed positive emotions, and that this positivity was most often linked to specific writers or sessions. Where emotions were more negatively expressed in tweets, she found this was used to create supportive links between audience and presenter (e.g. one tweet by a presenter, a journalist expressed anxiety - an emotion often considered as negative - about their upcoming talk, which was met with comradery from other users), or to express a shared disconnect with other audience members from a particular presentation (ibid.).

Overall, Driscoll found that users' tweets were polite, and did not criticise the festival on Twitter – however in anonymous survey responses, criticism was more likely (ibid.). This positivity and comradery echoes the findings in Dalton et al.'s Wattpad experiment (Dalton et al., 2016) mentioned earlier, and may suggest users' awareness of the public-facing nature of their tweets, or an adherence to community values in social platforms. It also echoes the observation of Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2013) noted in 2.1, that amongst authors, presenting positivity is broadly an expectation.

Although not subject to her analysis, I noted that amongst the extracts from the participants' tweets Driscoll (2015) shared, many comments were peripheral to the authors' performances, engaging with the atmosphere of the festival itself (e.g. commenting on the tasty food smells in Melbourne, where it was located). This reflected Dalton's (2016) finding that readers often discussed things tangential to the story, and tangential to the author.

These studies did not directly focus on the experience of interaction between author-performers and their audience, although both groups participated in tweeting in relation to the festivals and could respond to each other accordingly. One thing they revealed is that, much like in the fan forums and other platforms noted in 2.1.1 and in the studies of Wattpad in this section, a lot of activity amongst authors and readers is conducted peer-to-peer (i.e. reader to reader, and author to author). Interactions between readers may have been held in the presence of the author, but did not necessarily involve them. This raises questions about how interactive (i.e. reciprocal) the interactivity between authors and readers is, and whether communication is as sought as may be posited.

2.2 Parallels with the engagement experiences of other public figures

There is a limited body of work which can speak directly to the nature of how authors and readers experience interacting with each other online— either through separate accounts (i.e., of authors experience, and of readers' experiences), or as a joint, shared experience. However, work has been conducted into the experiences of other cultural workers and their audiences which offer helpful parallels to examine, as although their experience may not be identical to that of authors and readers, there are similarities.

There is a growing body of research focused on the use of social media by, and around, performers and creatives, such as politicians (e.g. Otterbacher, Shapiro and Hemphill, 2013), musicians (e.g. Baym, 2018), and celebrities, such as actors, or self-identified 'micro-celebrities' (e.g. A. Marwick and boyd, 2011). Some have sought to make direct comparisons between how these individuals experience engaging with an online audience to their experience of doing so with an offline audience, for example at performances and events, or through television broadcasts. One way this has been investigated is through a lens of **parasocial** relationships. The concept of parasocial (from the prefix 'para', meaning 'alongside', or 'independent from') relationships was introduced by Horton & Wohl in 1956 (Horton and Richard Wohl, 1956) to characterise the asymmetry of the relationship between public-facing media figures such as TV personalities, musicians and actors and their audience ('spectators') (ibid). Unlike typical social relationships, public figure and

spectator rarely have direct, interpersonal social interactions (Krause et al., 2018; Clark, 2015), instead, communicating through one-way, formally mediated broadcasts (e.g. TV, radio) (see: Giles, 2002; Horton and Richard Wohl, 1956; Marshall, 2010).

Now that multi-directional social interactions can be potentially held in online platforms, researchers have investigated whether – and how – the specific dynamics of a parasocial relationship may continue to be relevant online. For example, research primarily from psychology, celebrity studies and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) has investigated whether the dynamics are observable online (e.g. Tsiotsou, 2015; Kim and Song, 2016; Sloan and Quan-Haase, 2016; Hu, Zhang and Wang, 2017), whether fans online experience a one-way illusion of intimacy with the performer (as happens in offline parasocial dynamics) (e.g. Beer, 2008; Baym, 2012; Kruijemeier et al., 2013; Otterbacher, Shapiro and Hemphill, 2013) and how this illusion may influence positive (e.g. Thorson and Rodgers, 2006; Dunn and Nisbett, 2014) or negative (e.g. Garimella, Cohen and Weber, 2017; Rodriguez, 2017) affiliations with the performer as a result. These, much like the studies of online literary culture described in the previous section, focused on the audience, specifically, and similarities in dynamics were discovered. This suggests that there may be value in exploring how authors and readers have interacted prior to the internet, to help understand what is now observable online – an exploration which follows in chapter 4.

Some other studies took a performance perspective towards understanding what their online **performative practices** entail (e.g. Giles, 2002; Marshall, 2010; A. Marwick and boyd, 2011; Hu, Zhang and Wang, 2017). This work refers to a theory by Goffman which highlights the difficulties faced by public performers (e.g. celebrities, musicians, actors) in managing their public image – creating balance between what they share about aspects of their back-stage (i.e., details about personal life) and front-stage (i.e., professional communications) lives, through curating strategic ways of performing the self, in a manner designed to appear appropriately authentic (e.g. Goffman, 1971; A. Marwick and boyd, 2011; David Marshall, Moore and Barbour, 2015). The studies identified clear relations between how performers manage this online and offline, evidencing that online interaction is not entirely removed from the offline experience (an assertion that is later explored in chapter 4).

Other studies focused on the performer investigated the effectiveness of digital affordances in helping them to mediate their performative practices, revealing usability issues such as insufficient privacy settings to establish clear personal boundaries (e.g. Beer, 2008; Marshall, 2010; A. Marwick and boyd, 2011; Baym, 2012). Studies also revealed workaround strategies used by both audience and performer users to mitigate

such issues e.g. through filtering and grouping contacts (e.g. Hichang et al., 2018), and identified common problems worthy of consideration when designing support in future platforms, to better support the performers: for example, automating their content postings to lower their workload, as being online can be laborious (e.g. Labrecque, 2014). However, support suggestions such as automation have both advantages and disadvantages, as many users have been found to value a performer personalising their content (ibid.).

Successfully providing a personal touch in engagement is an important factor for an audience choosing to engage with a performer, and several of the studies named above have expressed this personal touch as a matter of authentic presentation. Authenticity, in this context, is often understood as being as close to the 'true' self (i.e., the back-stage vs front-stage, mentioned above) as possible (Ferchaud et al., 2018). It was found (in both online and offline contexts) that audiences respond positively when they think they are seeing the real person, particularly if they perceive a performer as sharing their personal values (e.g. Ferchaud et al., 2018; Jin, 2018; Driscoll, 2015). Successfully managing a seemingly authentic presentation is thought to attract new audience members, and help retain the loyalty of existing ones (Warr, Cockrill and Palmer, 2013; Ko and Wu, 2017), making it an important factor for performers and creative workers to consider. However, cultivating a sense of authenticity involves a careful balance of performative practices, as mentioned earlier, and oversharing (i.e. being perceived as too authentic) can be negatively received (e.g. Agger, 2012). What it means to be authentic, in this sense, is nuanced and subjective, and perhaps entirely in the eye of the beholder. There is unlikely a formula to consistently meet user requirements, yet it is likely to be a significant factor in establishing successful engagement.

These studies shared here revealed some commonalities which are highly likely to be applicable to the context of authors and readers in online spaces. For example there is an asymmetry between authors' and readers' visibility online – i.e., like performers, authors have the potential to attract large audiences, and be highly, regularly visible online to an extent that most users in online social platforms and spaces do not experience.

By being visible, authors likely must balance how they are perceived, through performative practices, and through curating a self-image that appears authentic, without oversharing. Further, managing communications or contact with a large audience is not easy, and the online social platforms used are currently designed with regular, peer-based user relationships in mind, rather than performer and audience dynamics. The studies mentioned here found that current platform designs do not sufficiently support performers and public figures to control mediation - either to manage the volume of attention they receive, or to protect their personal boundaries. These are also issues that authors are likely to experience.

Looking to this broad body of parallel work provides a useful basis for anticipating similar issues faced by authors and readers, in the absence of clear and direct accounts of their experiences. However, not all the findings from these studies are necessarily fully transferable, as the experience of authors and readers is unique to their own context within literary culture.

The studies described here provided useful insight into the experience of public figures and cultural workers when engaging online. However none present a detailed full account of their individual experiences, and where the audience's experience was addressed, it was from a viewpoint of their distance from the public figure (i.e., parasocial, one-way dynamics).

2.2.1 Insights from the experience of online engagement in popular music

One final area of research that can point to potential parallels with the experience of authors and readers online is musicianship. Music has attracted significant research attention in response to how musicians have been adopting online technologies. This has largely focused on streaming services such as Spotify, which do not speak directly to type of interaction experience addressed in this thesis. However, a small number of studies collated detailed accounts from both audience and musicians about the experience of interacting online, offering a useful basis for comparison.

The music industry was amongst the first to be significantly upturned by the internet, as digitized music and peer-to-peer file sharing and piracy enabled audiences to create and distribute music for themselves⁷. Income generation was impacted, and various changes have occurred in the industry as a result. One significant change was an increased reliance on ticket sales for gigs, and merchandising - as an alternate income stream to bridge the gap from lost album revenue (Lesser, 2018). Partly as a result, the brand image of musicians became an asset (rather than their music alone), and self-promotion activity increased, to attract people to their gigs and merchandise (ibid.). Musicians took to the internet for self-promotion, and this led the way for other cultural workers to appropriate online social communications platforms for engagement (Marwick and boyd, 2011).

⁷ When this happened, the centralised control of the recording industry was derailed (Baym, 2018), resulting in a fall in global revenue from \$39billion to \$15billion between 1999 and 2014 (Deresiewicz, 2020). The music industry reacted with a transition to streaming services to combat illegal downloads (e.g. in Napster - see e.g Warr and Goode, 2011) and, resultantly, lowered their prices in attempt to remain buoyant in an environment where free content reigned (Deresiewicz, 2020). Album sales plummeted, third party platforms like Spotify started taking a cut from profits, and this all impacted the proportion of generated income shared with (and the ownership rights of) the artists creating and performing the music (Lesser, 2018). Similar impacts of technological change have influenced publishing, and in particular, author income, showing a strong parallel between the two creative industries.

When MySpace was launched in 2003, the platform was intended as a generic social media platform for peer-peer user connections, to compete with platforms such as Friendster (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Musicians appropriated MySpace and used it in an entrepreneurial manner - to promote their bands, to advertise VIP passes for their gigs, and to reach their fans (ibid.). MySpace observed that this was becoming a prominent use of their platform and contacted local musicians to see how they could support them, over time developing their platform design in response to musicians' needs (ibid.). A distinct population formed around bands, and users were observed as connecting with each other around and through bands' profile pages (ibid.). This bears similarity to the reading communities observed in the studies noted in 2.1.2, predominantly interacting with each other rather than with authors.

After Myspace, musicians were at the forefront of the later move to use new, alternative social media platforms as they were created, such as Twitter (boyd and Ellison, 2007). It was observed that musicians have led the way as new trends have emerged, and authors have followed behind them (Skains, 2010; Murray, 2015), adopting social platforms a year or two later, seemingly alongside other businesses also incorporating online engagement practices. As musicians were earlier adopters of online platforms, there has been research in the area which provides some (albeit limited) insight into the dynamics between musicians and their audiences in online spaces, and, importantly, reveals some of the support needs of musicians – which may also reflect on the support needs of authors.

For example, an observational study of activity in MySpace around a specific popular musician (Jarvis Cocker) observed that, although users connect via a shared interest in a musician, his direct participation was not essential (Beer, 2008). This showed a clear parallel between the studies discussed in 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, and further highlighted that a 'perception of proximity' (Beer, 2008, p. 232) rather than necessarily direct interaction with the artist may be a priority for users of the platform⁸. However, although the users were seen to predominantly connect with their peers around the musician, rather than directly with the musician, Beer observed that the musician interjecting, at least intermittently, was essential as it gave a sense that their page was alive and active (ibid.). This suggests that a perception of proximity and personal input may be important towards being perceived as authentically engaging.

An interview study with musicians by Baym (2018) revealed that keeping up with maintaining different platforms (and an impetus to be on them all, as is the case for authors) was daunting for musicians, and

⁸ A desire for proximity was also observed in a study of authors' and readers' use of Goodreads (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo, 2019)

demanded a lot of additional labour and skills (e.g. relational labour, entrepreneurial abilities, technical skills) that had not previously been required in the role of musician (Baym, 2018). These new forms of labour are largely unpaid (Baym, 2018; Deresiewicz, 2020), suggesting that managing an online presence may result in stress and a feeling of pressure.

Maintaining online engagement was described by the musicians Baym interviewed as an endless task, which could be unsettling, stressful, fear inducing and sometimes also boring (Baym, 2018). However, in keeping with the creative workers interviewed by Deresiewicz (2020) (noted in 2.1), the threat of poverty in an unsustainable economy was ever-present in the musicians' accounts, and was a clear motivator for their efforts to engage, viewed as a necessity of survival (ibid.). This supports the position that necessity, rather than choice, is likely a significant motivator for authors establishing an online presence for engagement, which must be taken into consideration when developing an account of their experience in interacting online.

Baym (2018) shared several recommendations based on her interview findings to improve musicians' situation online, as follows, some of which are likely applicable to the context of author needs:

- to improve mediating support and resources (something absent if managing their own workload, without formal gatekeepers) and to minimise the “rel[iance] on their ability to make friends” (ibid., p. 199) to conduct their work
- to better enable them to participate on their own terms and determine for themselves how intimate they are willing to be with their audience – without the fear of monetary loss if they choose to establish clear boundaries. Many do not actively choose to form online relationships or share back-stage information, but it is expected, and this is problematic
- to make the online environments safer, and ideally validating, to ensure their effort feels appreciated.

These recommendations indicated that the experience of musicians (and thus, most likely authors too) in presenting themselves online to engage with their audience is not the utopian ideal it is sometimes posited to be (as noted in 2.1), and they are not necessarily afforded the luxury of choice, due to financial concerns.

Her recommendations also suggest that musicians require specific support in using platforms to engage- not just to ensure smooth interactions, as an HCI approach may typically seek to address, but also to protect their wellbeing. Whilst authors' will likely have different, context-specific needs to musicians, it is reasonable to assume that wellbeing, safety, and protection of boundaries will be pain points that authors also experience when engaging with their audience online.

2.3 Summary

Although authors have been establishing an online presence for engagement purposes for at least a decade, there is still a very limited body of research to explain how they, and their readers, experience this. It has been expressed as a choice that authors make due to the potential benefits that engagement can bring such as attracting an audience, potentially increasing their visibility and thus their popularity, and helping them to gain a better understanding of how their work is received, through direct feedback. However, studies in parallel fields have suggested that there is an underlying pressure behind their motivations, relating to difficulties in generating income through traditional publishing and production methods. Further, although one of the benefits to directly engaging with an audience is a potential escape from the pressures of publishers' agendas, there is also evidence that publishers actively encourage their engagement, as they too serve to benefit.

Where there have been studies into how online platforms and websites are used by authors and readers (as well as other cultural workers and their audiences), it appears to be commonplace, firstly, that the research has focused on the reader or audience perspective, and their experience using the platform to engage with each other, rather than on interactions between reader/audience and author/cultural worker. Where there has been some focus on the interactivity between them, it has been broadly observed that readers and audiences interact with each other around the cultural workers profile, and that the presence or active participation of the author or cultural worker in their exchanges is not always necessary.

However, in keeping with understandings from physically situated interaction opportunities, there is a preference for some level of personal interjection from the author or cultural worker, and audiences respond well to them presenting themselves in a manner which appears authentic (yet measured, and not overly personal).

Related to authenticity, where interactivity has been observed, there has been a tendency for both audience and cultural worker to share positive commentary and to avoid negativity, perhaps due to the public-facing nature of their content. It is possible that the performative practices of public figures (described in 2.2) may have some bearing on audience members too, in the online context, as they participate visibly in public spaces. Further, in these observations, it was noted that not all interaction (through commentary and messages) pertains to the author (or cultural worker) or their work – some may be peripheral, relating to tangential topics that audiences wish to discuss together, or comments about the environment in which a physical event is taking place. As such, not all interactivity amongst authors and readers online is likely to be directly related to

the written book, despite a prior focus on the centrality of text in previous research (which was noted in 2.1 and is explored further in chapter 4).

By looking at parallel cultural domains in the absence of a clear and concise body of work about authors and readers, it became possible to draw out potential issues that need to be addressed when considering the experience of authors, in particular, such as their ability to protect their personal boundaries, supporting them to engage on their own terms (with less pressure to do so), and to ensure that they feel safe in the platforms, in line with their new visibility and, thus, exposure.

Finally, by looking at research relating to musicians specifically, it became apparent that authors have been, at least partially, following in the footsteps of musicians as they adopt new online practices. This suggests that monitoring changes in music may present a useful avenue for anticipating issues and changes that could impact on authors and readers too.

In this chapter I highlighted a range of implications that are likely to impact authors and readers in online platforms. However it is important to next develop an account of specifically how they experience online interaction, to build a clearer picture of what practices are currently followed, and how they address the needs of authors and readers as users.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

“Don’t worry about the bits you can’t understand. Sit back and allow the words to wash around you,
like music.”

Matilda (Roald Dahl, 1988)

In this chapter, I detail the approach I took to conducting this research. First, I explain the overarching methodology behind my work (3.1), and my rationale for the method I chose which developed over time, in response to my findings (3.2). Then, the scope of the research is described (3.3), followed by an explanation of how I cross-analysed theories from interdisciplinary literature in chapter 4 to produce explanatory, theoretical models of the Literary System to put author and reader interactions in the context of physical, literary mediation (3.4). Next, I describe how I inductively collected empirical, qualitative data concurrently with a review of the literature in chapter 4 (3.5). Next, I introduce the Cynefin Framework, which was used to reanalyse the work in chapters 2 to 5 under a lens of complex systems theory (3.6) and describe the novel approach I used to conduct a further empirical study, in response to the new systems complexity framing I had developed (3.7). Finally, I discuss the ethical and legal considerations followed for each empirical study (3.8).

3.1 Research methodology

I did not conduct the research in this PhD according to a linear structure, although it was presented as such in the thesis. Rather, I undertook data collection, analysis, and the review of literature concurrently, with each feeding into the other in a continual cycle of re-conceptualisation and revision. Sometimes I developed ideas over time, and sometimes, no matter how long they had been percolating for, or how far I had taken them, I abandoned them in the light of new information. Chapters were repeatedly rewritten, restructured, replaced with new concepts, and continually reworked over the years as my perception of the data, and of the research problem itself, evolved. The act of writing has been an integral part of my analysis process, and I consider this thesis, as it currently stands, to be a snapshot in time, as it has only ever been (and only ever can be) as up to date as my understanding was at the time of writing. There is much left to learn about this new research territory, and I have enjoyed having opportunity to explore it.

In the beginning, I had assumed that my work would follow an empirically driven model, as it is the typical structure in my research field (HCI), and computer science more broadly. In other words, I would conduct a

literature review to foreground an incremental series of empirical studies, the results of each study directly feeding into the next. I started the research with this model in mind, but over time, it evolved into something of a hybrid model. Part empirically-driven (i.e., based on empirical, qualitative interview data), part scholarly book (i.e., drawing on a host of existing research which is discussed in detail and interwoven to develop an insightful narrative), and part theory-driven (i.e., extending existing theories to create new theory, which interacts with the empirical evidence) (drawing from the descriptions of different theses models in Petre and Rugg, 2010).

This hybrid approach made the writing more difficult to structure, leading to debates with the supervisory team over the years about the positioning of sections and chapters. However, whilst tricky, I believe the approach allowed me to be more faithful to my findings than an attempt to adhere to the initial expectations, for tradition's sake, would have been. That said, whilst my process was non-linear, my writing has been structured as such, to make it more accessible to those who read it, and to better align with the formatting expectations of an empirical thesis as anticipated in my discipline.

Reflecting on their own experience of qualitative work, Braun and Clarke recently expressed that “insight and interpretation are not one-off of singular processes. These build, shift, and morph with time. Indeed, we as researchers shift and change, and the context shifts and changes, interpretation moves. (...) there is value in giving data time and space “to breathe” and for our interpretations to roll around and develop” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 34). Time has been a central tool in this work, and through it, both my research and I, the researcher, have changed. When I started this work, my understanding of research paradigms and what it was to have a methodology was limited. What I knew was that there was very little understanding of how, or why, authors and readers interact online and so a part of role of this thesis would be to scope out the problem. This told me it would be necessary to involve authors and readers – the end users of the online technologies I sought to investigate – to gather their personal accounts. Without giving a voice to their individual motivations for and experiences in using the technologies to interact, it would not be possible to truly gather a clear picture of the rich, complex variables that influence either user group. I therefore anticipated using qualitative methods in the empirical work, most likely from a mix of interviews and observational studies, as varying, individual accounts from across two different types of users would be neither generalisable nor quantifiable.

My decision was essentially pragmatic, however my worldview is in keeping with an interpretivist paradigm – I did not seek to test a priori theory, as this was a new phenomenon that had not yet been sufficiently

theorised. Rather, I sought to generate explanatory theory, as the work developed, through inductive data gathering and by analysing the data to generate meaning from observable patterns (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). I perceived that there would be no single truth, as meaning is socially constructed - there will always be different potential meanings to any given phenomenon, as meaning is influenced by how individuals perceive, and interact with, the world and others.

I also acknowledged my own, reflexive role, as researcher, in the construction of meaning in my analysis, and the influence of my approach and presence in how participants shared their perspectives. I found Braun & Clarke's work on reflexivity helpful in making peace with this, and in recognising that this does not negate the rigour or validity of my process (Braun and Clarke, 2020)- rather, it is a strength. The rigour was in the cyclical process, and the constant triangulation to check for internal integrity and consistency.

To quote fantasy fiction author Neil Gaiman:

If someone tells you what a story is about, they are probably right. If they tell you that that is all the story is about, they are definitely wrong. Any story is about a host of things. It is about the author; it is about the world the author sees and deals with and lives in; it is about the story itself and what happens in the story; it is about the people in the story; it is polemic; it is opinion. An author's opinions of what a story is about are always valid and are always true: the author was there, after all, when the book was written. (...) but an author is a creature of her time, and even she cannot see everything that her book is about. (Gaiman, 2016)

In working with qualitative data, findings cannot be generalisable. There will always be potential rival explanations, there will always be different ways to gather the data, and every researcher will gather, and elicit, something slightly different from participants. But I have worked hard to ensure that my own interpretation is justifiable, and as closely aligned with those of my participants as can be possible.

3.2 Research method - overview

I approached the research initially from an HCI perspective, considering authors and readers as users of a given technology, or set of technologies, and seeking to generate insight from their accounts to consider how their needs, as users could be better supported – either through redesigning existing technology, or developing a novel new system. I conducted an initial, short literature review to gain a broad familiarity with the 'geography of the subject' (Dunne, 2011) - i.e., what online platforms were known to be used for engagement around literature and authors, and what their purpose was. As there was little literature available, I next

conducted a brief scoping activity, turning to internet searches to try and locate what platforms were popularly used by authors, and then exploring a range of platforms mentioned in various articles and blogs to get a feel for how they were used by authors and readers alike. In doing this, I found that there was no clear, consistent means in which authors and readers interacted. Practices differed across individual authors, around their individual books, across writing genres, forums, social media platforms, and even between author websites. Where I found evidence of interaction, it was typically in the form of 'likes' and 'favourites', or words of praise. Rich dialogue about a text or the meaning behind it was seemingly scarce, but sometimes it happened. It was not readily possible to establish patterns in where I could find it recurring. I therefore deemed it logical to initiate an inductive, qualitative interview study (chapter 5) to gather first-hand accounts from the two user groups about what they used and how, and to ask them about examples in which they had interacted, to better understand what that meant to them. This was a classic HCI and user experience research approach, and essentially medium-centric (i.e., focused on their experience of a range of potential platforms).

I approached the interviews with flexibility, adopting my strategy for inquiry by following the participants' lead. I loosely followed a Grounded Theory method (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), looking to the various adaptations of the theory by different authors to get a feel for how it would work. I compared the characteristics of Grounded Theory to Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), knowing that the approaches bore similarities, but chose to follow neither rigidly, and to instead follow my own instincts as I conducted the work. Instinctively, I used approaches that naturally aligned with Grounded Theory, such as concurrent data analysis, constant comparison between data, diagramming, memoing (Sbaraini et al., 2011; Corbin and Strauss, 2015) and gathering new literature to triangulate against as I started to generate hunches about the meaning behind participants' accounts. The inclusion of literature as part of my analysis process, to help create meaning and to develop explanatory theory (through the diagrammatic models produced in chapter 4 and developed later in chapter 6) were also closely aligned with a Grounded Theory method. My approach of using my writing as an integral part of the analysis, however, was closer to guidance from Thematic Analysis, although still in keeping with Grounded Theory principles.

As my work progressed, I found it increasingly necessary to build an understanding of how authors' and readers' online interactions fitted with broader literary culture, and the established ways in which interactions are mediated off-line, for example in literary events, to frame the findings in my empirical study, and reason about their significance. Trying to understand online interactions isolated from a broader context was not going to be enough. In searching through the literature I found that there were gaps in this knowledge too. As

the work progressed, I began to question two aspects of knowledge from prior literature: first, some of the things that appeared to be taken for granted as truths such as conceptualisations of what it is to be a reader, and second, the assumption (both in research and more anecdotally, in publishing circles and articles about writing) that the opportunity to interact online is a clear benefit to authors and readers, and is something they desire. My search for design implications hinged on interaction being a positive thing that both authors and readers needed, yet participant accounts were revealing that interacting online was riddled with complexities and contradictions, and did not always fulfil expectations – theirs, or those assumed to theirs. This made it difficult to know how to take the research forward.

I tested different theories and frameworks for understanding community interaction behaviour against the data (e.g. Communities of Practice (e.g. Eckert, 2006; Scarso and Bolisani, 2008), Knowledge Networks (Hildreth, 2004), Activity Theory (Engeström et al., 1999), Actor Network Theory (e.g. Couldry, 2008) to see if any could give clear insight into how authors and readers relate to each other. Here I hoped to both narrow the scope of the research (as the interview study had opened a breadth of possible avenues to follow) by finding a clear focus, and to see if I could build on previous knowledge to develop an explanatory theory of behaviour, specific to my research context, towards a full Grounded Theory. However, I determined that rather than focusing on trying to explain the experiences and behaviours of authors and readers (for which there could be no single explanation) it would be more helpful to consider why assumptions about the benefits of interacting online did not always transpire, and whether this meant that the problem itself is being looked at in the wrong way.

This led me to the Cynefin Framework – a sense making model designed to support decisions by identifying what kind of problem one is dealing with in the first place (an overview is provided in 3.6)⁹. The framework is derived from practitioner-oriented business fields, rather than from an academic field, although it has roots in multidisciplinary academic research. This was appealing, as the topic of this thesis – authors going online to engage with an audience – has ties to industrial practices, and I hoped to find answers through the framework that could be directly translated into real-world business objectives. Applying the framework was essentially

⁹ I encountered this framework whilst studying for a Graduate Certificate in Education, alongside the PhD (which I was fortunate to be granted funding for by the AHRC, through their development funding initiative for students under their Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme). The course, firstly, taught me the importance of clearly defining a system or intervention to evaluate its effectiveness, which led me to consider how undefined the boundaries of my own research topic were, as authors appeared to perform all manner of practices, and across different platforms online, without centralised control. This led me to question what authors were seeking to achieve by going online, and what the outcome of their efforts were. Without understanding what something is, it is not possible to evaluate its effectiveness. The Cynefin Framework was introduced in the course and chimed with me as I immediately recognised that different levels of complexity and order influenced authors' online practices. Its consilience with Bourdieu's theory of practice was also compelling.

a pragmatic approach – placing the research problem itself, and how best to address it, at the centre of my inquiry (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and considering what method would work best for it, rather than assuming a continuation of my previous qualitative approach was the most appropriate. This said, however, the model itself is also complimentary to a Grounded Theory approach (explained in 3.5), and I believe that through incorporating the Cynefin Framework into my process, my methods continued to meet the key principles of a Grounded Theory.

This shift freed-up my thinking around the problem, and I developed a more experimental, mixed method approach for the next study (chapter 7). I continued to focus on qualitative empirical data, but this time I recruited readers only. Whilst there is more to learn about authors' experiences, I felt there had been a strong consistency across their accounts in the chapter 5 study, enough to give me a solid impression of what they do online (in broad terms) and why. There are far more readers than there are authors, however, and I wanted to learn more about their varied accounts, and, in particular, to speak to more who would not be considered bookish, in the traditional sense. I had a further rationale for this focus – readers are generally considered to be the author's target market when engaging, and as such, are who authors seemingly address themselves to in online communications. I wanted to assess whether authors' efforts were indeed aligned with readers' needs, or if there were ways that their resources could potentially be put to better use. In many ways, I treated this study as a continuation of the last, still focused on exploring user experiences, and generating additional new insight from a broader set of participant accounts towards a fuller picture of the user experience.

Although applying the Cynefin Framework was pragmatic, my overarching interpretivist perspective remained, and I cross-compared the qualitative data from this study against the previous dataset and the contextualising literature, to provide a rich, deep description of participants' experiences.

3.3 Research scope

The Literary Field is extremely broad, and different forms of writing attract different audiences with different values. There has been a tendency to assume informational and intellectual needs when translating reader behaviour into platform design (discussed in chapter 4), with a notable gap in understanding readers' more affective needs and interests in literature, beyond intellectual gain. Partly to address this under-representation, I chose to focus on Genre fiction (also known as popular fiction). Genre fiction is a term used to describe fictional literary works which sit within a particular literary category, characterised through their style, form or purpose (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018) e.g. crime fiction; historical fiction; science fiction. It is

closely linked to industry, production and entertainment (Gelder, 2004). A perceived dichotomy between high- and low-brow writing has long existed. At one end of the spectrum, literature has been framed as being made and valued for its artistic merit, often considered elite and rewarded through prestige (Bourdieu, 1996), unsullied by commercial influence. This work has been positioned as literature proper. At the other end, work has been framed as being made for popular entertainment for a mass audience, rewarded through sales (Bourdieu, 1996) – work such as popular genre fiction. This polarisation has manifested as an internal conflict in the field, and literary categories dividing readers (and authors) according to their tastes and values continue to persist today. It also permeates how literary practices are discussed and understood, feeds into how the roles of author and reader are conceptualised. It has contributed to divisions in social class (DiMaggio, 1982; Miller, 2006) and a notion of authors aligned with ‘high’ literature as geniuses (Driscoll, 2014), contributing to divisions within roles. It is also observable in behaviour in the literary field (e.g. Buchanan and McKay observed readers in a bookshop performatively distancing themselves from popular fiction books and those who read them, signalling their value alignment (Buchanan and McKay, 2011a)). Acknowledging the influence of this dichotomy is therefore crucial to understanding interactions in the field.

Contemporary academic scholarship has worked to challenge a historic focus on literary works aligned with high-brow values (Driscoll, 2014) by attending to genre fiction and other popular writing forms such as fan fiction and mass-authored works online (Murray, 2018). This contemporary work has also shifted some focus away from the writing itself as the central point of interest, onto the social cooperation which occurs between the authors and readers who engage with it (Fletcher *et al.*, 2018). There has also been significant interest in the driving role of genre fiction in prompting change in post-digital publishing, given its global reach, spread across market niches (Driscoll *et al.*, 2018) and high growth.

My decision to concentrate on genre fiction adds to this body of work, and simultaneously serves to challenge an ongoing focus on elitist tropes around literature that I found to be active in contemporary work from my own field of HCI. In some HCI studies specifically into reader behaviour, for example, there has been an intentional exclusion of readers who align with popular works (e.g. Trager, 2005; Buchanan and McKay, 2011b), thus potentially overlooking their needs when designing technology for searching and browsing books. There are areas of study with a more inclusive outlook (e.g. a focus on online fan fiction or digital comics), which is encouraging, and also some greater recognition of broader reader interests and behaviours (e.g. Makri *et al.*, 2019). However, there has been a clear missed opportunity to learn about how readers discriminate between texts, content, and opportunities to interact with literary culture. Genre fiction readers

have been identified as having significant skills in discriminating between texts from a broad array, and are highly selective and adept at tailoring their choices to fit their individual preferences (Hemmungs Wirtén, 1998). These skills are likely pivotal in online platforms, where content offerings are vast.

Genre fiction authors and readers use a broad variety of different online technologies to interact in different ways, and I was determined to speak to both authors and readers to generate a composite perspective of how online technologies mediate the two user groups. This domain choice therefore provided an opportunity to gather rich and varied accounts from an enthusiastic range of participants.

3.4 Contextualising author and reader interactions (Chapter 4)

As I explained in 3.2, the first empirical study was inductive, preceded by a short and minimalistic literature review which was used to give an initial idea of what work had been done around author and reader interactivity online, specifically, and to identify the types of platforms used. During the first study (in chapter 5), I conducted a more detailed review of a broader set of multi-disciplinary research, in parallel to, and as an integral part of, analysing the study data. In chapter 4, I presented this literary review (the scholarly book part of the thesis (Petre and Rugg, 2010) mentioned in 3.1) to contextualise authors' and reader's online interactions within a broader context of literary practice, alongside theories of how interactions between them have been understood. I also presented multi-disciplinary work to describe the role of environmental factors in affording mediation, which also influences the types of interactions that can take place.

I ended this chapter by presenting a series of diagrammatic models, used to consolidate different theories from cross-disciplinary literature. I created the models as a starting point from which to develop a theoretical understanding of the links between mediation, environment, and the different organisations and individuals involved in mediation interact with each other. I used them to posit that through changing the environment (i.e., moving from physical mediation to online mediation) changes interaction behaviour. I further developed the models in chapter 6, in response to the interview data in chapter 5, and the re-analysis through the Cynefin Framework in chapter 6.

3.5 Empirical interview study 1 (Chapter 5)

Chapter 5 details the first empirical study I conducted in the thesis, in which I interviewed six authors and six readers to discuss their experiences with interacting together online in relation to fiction writing.

3.5.1 Participant recruitment

Between April and June of 2017, I conducted loosely structured interviews with twelve volunteer participants, six of whom were authors, and six of whom were ‘readers’. I interviewed six participants in person, using private, pre-booked meeting rooms at The British Library and City, University of London. The other six were interviewed face-to-face through a Skype video call. All participants spoke, and were interviewed in, English, and eleven of the twelve were EU citizens: nine based in the UK, two in Europe (Spain and Germany). One of the readers was based in the USA but had lived in the UK in recent years and was familiar with British literary culture. Of the author participants, all who had published through the royalty system had done so in the UK.

All participants self-identified as regular users of online technologies to interact around genre fiction and volunteered to participate on this basis. I conducted recruitment through the following methods:

- Direct referrals through professional and personal networks, including links with the British Library.
- A call-for-participation advertisement (see appendix A2) posted in social networking platforms Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. I shared criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the advertisement, to allow for self-selection in alignment with what was sought from the sample. Authors who volunteered to participate were asked to share what genre they wrote in, to further support sampling.
- As the study progressed, I used a snowballing method, leveraging retweets and direct referrals by the participants and through professional contacts.

There were some challenges to recruiting participants in both groups. For readers, the definition of what it is to be a reader was a recurring issue, with some volunteers unsure whether they read enough, for example, to be considered a ‘reader’. There was a similar uncertainty around eligibility based on their view of what it means to interact online, and whether they did so frequently, or to a great enough extent to be eligible. Individual discussions were held to answer their questions, and to put their minds at ease (and this feedback was used to reconsider the recruitment method in the subsequent study). Recruiting authors was a particular challenge for a range of different reasons, including:

- fear of negative consequence if they spoke out against their publishers (e.g. despite assurance of anonymity, some were wary of being ultimately identifiable).

- an expectation that an interview would automatically lead to publicity, contrary to the university's ethics requirements of anonymity, which some desired.
- difficulty arranging interviews via their 'gatekeeper' – thankfully aided by my association with the British Library.

Specific details about the participant demographic can be found in chapter 5.2.1.

3.5.2 Data collection and analysis

I collated and analysed the interview transcripts as a combined dataset, to build an overall picture of their user experience interacting online. I expected some aspects of their experiences to be similar, however also anticipated differences in their needs, perspectives, and experiences. To manage this, I started the study by interviewing author participants only, to build a picture of their collective experience, before proceeding to include readers. This was a pragmatic choice to minimise potential confusion in concurrently analysing their accounts. I later ran interviews with both authors and readers in parallel. The first authors I interviewed were recruited solely for their alignment with inclusion/exclusion criteria shared in the advertisement, which had been kept purposely broad. As patterns became apparent across accounts, I considered volunteers (from both user groups) on a case-by-case basis from a small surplus of potential candidates, to determine whether they would help to enrich the data collection. For example, after speaking to two historical fiction authors, I chose a science fiction author over other historical fiction volunteers, towards building a more representative sample of the Genre Fiction author experience, and to minimise bias towards a specific genre subset. Similarly, I chose authors who used different online platforms to help consider differences (and patterns of use) between the platforms. I conducted desk-research when recruiting authors against these additional criteria where it was possible – by looking to see if they had a publicly visible online presence, and if so, where. This was not possible for readers, but details were shared where volunteers contacted me to discuss their eligibility to participate. This additional information contributed to my development of a theoretical sample of participants by choosing volunteers not just on exclusion/inclusion criteria, but on what “concepts, their properties, dimensions and variations” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990 p. 420) could be enriched in the dataset.

My intention was to recruit and interview until achieving a point of ‘information power’ (Malterud et al., 2016) – i.e., when I reached a point that it was clear that an adequate breadth of accounts had been gathered to provide rich insight (ibid.) - rather than to fulfil a pre-determined number of interviews. I felt that this was achieved after speaking to six authors and six readers, however I kept an ongoing list of reserve participants

to call upon if any further questions were raised in the final interviews or in the ongoing analysis, that would benefit from more data to address.

I conducted the analysis in parallel to data collection, using a cyclical Grounded Theory-based method as described above. Further specific detail about the analytical process, and the study design and procedure, can be found in chapter 5 along with the data findings, analysis, and discussion.

3.6 Critical reframing through the Cynefin Framework (Chapter 6)

In response to both the data from chapter 5 and the literature collated to support analysis (chapter 4), I reanalysed the findings by applying the Cynefin Framework. The Cynefin Framework is a sense making model developed by researcher David Snowden in the 1980s, during his time working at IBM. The name comes from the Welsh language word Cynefin (/kə'nevɪn/ kuh-NE-vin/) and does not have an equivalent in English. Translated literally, it means **habitat** or **place** as a noun, and **acquainted** or **familiar** as an adjective (Snowden, 2000b). Yet the word has a deeper meaning: it describes the bi-directional relationship between our environment and our upbringing, community, and shared history (Snowden, 2000). It is what we know and where we know it, and all the things that led to that sense of knowing. The concept of Cynefin, Snowden explained, describes the sense that a person is rooted to many different contexts which profoundly influence who they are (e.g. culture, religion, geography, history, landscape etc.) and how they behave - yet a person can only ever be partially aware of these influences (ibid.), as they are innate and embedded in us. There are strong parallels between Bourdieu's habitus (explored in chapter 4.1) and the Cynefin, which Snowden has acknowledged and used in his work:

[It is Bourdieu's] conceptual thinking about the relationship between our external and internal worlds which I find so helpful (...) the interplay between the objective social world and structure and the subjective world of the individual through the process of habitus[,] which **implies the embodiment of the external world into the being of the individual[,] into a set of taken for granted ways of acting in the world** which provide both pathways for doing and seeing[,] and ways of not seeing and knowing that which is external to my experience – sound a bit familiar? Yes a set of concepts which relate to the ideas behind Cynefin as a concept in the Welsh language' (Snowden, 2010b, my own emphasis in bold, and commas in brackets [,] added for legibility)

The close connection between the Cynefin and the habitus (an aspect of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, detailed in chapter 4.1) attracted me to choose this model for the analysis, as I observed that the complexities of dynamics in the habitus and the Literary Field more broadly fit well with several concepts in this sense-

making model. The Cynefin Framework is used to analyse systems in which humans (and thus their understanding of the world), operate. It takes into consideration how people and other agents in the system interact and is used to analyse the impact of those varied interactions on the system itself. Despite its name, the Cynefin Framework is not a categorisation model, to be applied deductively to data, rather it is a sense-making model, intended for establishing a 'retrospective coherence' (Snowden, 2010a, p. 224) of a system involving social actions, whereby patterns could not have been anticipated prior to intentional observation and analysis. Thus, data collection proceeds the application of the model, and the model is used to help understand the data. This made it a complimentary method to incorporate into my overarching inductive, cyclical Grounded Theory approach to the analysing my research, at a point where I had collected interview data and found patterns in it which could not have been anticipated – making it an appropriate time to apply the Cynefin Framework.

3.6.1 The Cynefin Framework model

The Cynefin Framework was developed by Snowden from Complexity Theory and Systems Design research as a tool for analysing systems. The framework was used to posit that all systems are different, and so cannot be approached (e.g. to implement an intervention) with the same reasoning, logic, or method. Rather, the chosen approach to evaluate, manage or intervene with a given system must be appropriate to the specific system type under evaluation (Snowden, 2000a). The model defines five categories from which a system may be understood. Understanding which category a system best aligns with can help determine how to manage it. The types of system are categorised according to their inherent levels of order and stability, and corresponding strategies for handling the system are recommended accordingly (Snowden et al., 2020).

Visually, the model looks similar to a classic 2 by 2 matrix categorisation model, but with five, rather than four, zones (see Figure 1 below). However, although the system types are, essentially, categories, Snowden stressed that the framework is not to be used top-down prior to data collection like a classic matrix typically would be, because without gathering data first, the multitude of variations and influences on a system cannot be reliably captured, and subtleties between the types may be missed (Snowden, 2011). The model should be used at a point where patterns of social action in the system have already been identified and recognised in data (ibid.) and then used as a reference point to determine what those patterns mean from a systems perspective. The Cynefin Framework is particularly well-suited, in Snowden's opinion, to exploring a system which is undergoing a period of change (Snowden et al., 2020)– much like the context of the Literary Field (see 4.1).

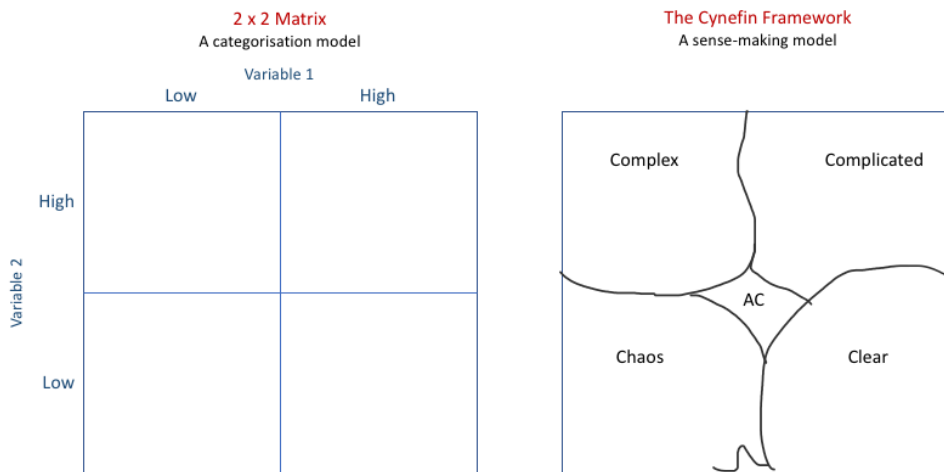


Figure 1: Classic 2x2 Categorisation Matrix vs the Cynefin Framework

The illustrated model of the Cynefin Framework is formed of two basic systems categories: **ordered** systems on the right (of which there are two- **Complicated** and **Clear**), and **un-ordered** systems on the left (**Complex**, and **Chaos**). These account for four of the framework’s five zones. The level of order is determined by how a system constrains (or facilitates) the actions of an agent within it. An agent, in this context, meaning anything that acts within the system – i.e., people (as with Bourdieu’s use of the word in the Literary Field), and also processes, rules, technologies and more (Snowden, 2010a). Determining whether a system is ordered, or un-ordered helps determine the approach appropriate for acting in it. The approach is different for each system type and, in general, using the wrong approach in a system can result in problems. The term ‘bounded applicability’ (Snowden et al., 2020, p. 16) is used to describe this fit of specific methods to specific types of system – i.e., the methods are applicable within the boundaries identified. A system deemed to be ordered requires a different means of assessment, inquiry, approach to risk, and management strategies for decision making and action taking to what is required in a system deemed to be un-ordered (Snowden, 2011).

The fifth zone in the model is added called AC (Aporetic or Confused), which is the starting point from which most enquiries begin. To be in the AC is to be in a state of not knowing which of the four types of system is under observation, and thus not knowing how best to approach it (Snowden et al., 2020).

Details of how the model can be used to analyse data, the features, and implications of each type of system, and the appropriate strategies for each is explored in detail in chapter 6.

3.6.2 Outcome of using the Cynefin Framework

I used the Cynefin Framework to draw comparisons between the different system framings documented in the model with the findings from study 1, and the contextualising literature I collated during the analysis of that study. By introducing the Cynefin Framework at this point, I was effectively re-analysing the data, as well as reassessing the thesis topic itself. I conducted the reanalysis work between approximately February and July 2020. How I used the Cynefin Framework, and the results of the cross-comparison against my research findings is explained in detail in chapter 6.

By determining what type of system the Literary Field may be classified as, it became possible to assess why interaction between authors and readers online does not produce the outcomes it is assumed to in a repeatable, consistent manner: the findings in chapter 5 had revealed, for example, that although (as seen in 2.1) building an online profile is assumed to attract new readers yet authors did not believe readers were their audience, sales did not consistently rise in-line with an increase in their online audience, and communication from readers was sporadic and piecemeal (in keeping with Laing's (2017) study, mentioned in 2.1.2), with no clear pattern of outcome.

In brief, through the work in this chapter I determined the Literary Field itself to be a Complex system, but that certain practices within it are operated within other system types, as they are more ordered (in the case of the Literary System) and lesser ordered (in the case of the online platforms used by authors to engage with readers, described in chapter 5). The rationale for how I came to this understanding is explained in chapter 6. By identifying the system type, it became possible to take useful aspects of the recommended strategies for investigating a Complex system, and apply them in next study plan, thus approaching the work from a new and better aligned perspective.

3.7 Empirical study 2 (Chapter 7)

Chapter 7 describes the second empirical study, in which I interviewed twelve readers using a novel qualitative technique, to discuss their perceptions and understandings of authors' engagement practices online.

3.7.1 Participant recruitment

Between October and December 2020 I conducted loosely structured interviews with twelve volunteer participants who self-identified as people who enjoy reading fiction. I recruited two participants as a pilot test,

however I decided to include one of them (with their consent) in the final total, as their session had been run in full and to the same degree of detail as the main participants who followed them. Ten of the participants lived in the British Isles, one in the Republic of Ireland, and one in Canada. I recruited participants through a call-for-participation advertisement (see appendix B2) posted on Twitter, and also advertised in a blog post published on the British Library's Digital Scholarship website (see Butler, 2020). The link to the blog was also shared across Twitter and Facebook by colleagues at the library.

I detailed basic criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the advertisement to allow volunteers to self-select, however I kept the scope for inclusion intentionally broad. I avoided using the classification of 'reader', instead requesting volunteers who enjoy reading fiction, for two reasons – first, to try and encourage a broad range of applicants and to minimise potential concerns about eligibility, and second, to avoid falling into the trap of using outdated categories of readership (an issue detailed in chapter 4.2.2) which could inadvertently exclude many potential, important volunteers from choosing to participate, and lead to biased data.

My call for participation received an unprecedentedly high number of volunteer applicants. I considered all who volunteered considered equally eligible for recruitment, and so took no specific measures were to tailor the sample. I recruited from the list of volunteers through contacting them chronologically, in the order their expression of interest was received. Specific details about the participant demographic can be found in chapter 7.2.1.

3.7.2 Data collection and analysis

I conducted the interviews using a novel technique in which I showed them images of potential future platform designs, to explore ideas and to test hypotheses about what might be popular in the future (drawing from a mix of predictions by industry experts, and on commentary from participants in the previous study – see chapter 7.2.4 for details). The technique I developed drew from a combination of HCI research methods and a technique specifically recommended by the Cynefin Framework for investigating in a Complex System. The method involved sharing sketches of hypothetical platform designs, which represented different, small changes from the current ways that authors currently use online platforms to engage (based partly on the findings from chapter 5, and partly on predictions made in the music industry about the future trajectory of online engagement methods). I used the sketches as probes for discussion: to find out why they would not work (rather than testing them to iterate and improve the ideas), and to find out more about the participants'

current perceptions of the value of online engagement as it is currently presented. Full details of the study design can be found in chapter 7.

I predominantly analysed the qualitative data I had collected after concluding the whole study (in contrast to the parallel collection and analysis method I had used in the previous study). I cross-compared this data to that of the first study to identify similarities and differences in patterns, to help develop analytical categories. I effectively considered this study to be an expansion of the first study, in accordance with the cyclical analytical approach I conducted across the thesis. I did not seek to recruit a specific number of participants, however a cap was determined (twenty-five maximum), to manage the volume of the dataset. I chose to stop recruiting when it reached the point that rich insight and recurrent patterns were visible in the data. I kept several additional volunteers on stand-by in case, further to analysis, there were conflicts or gaps in the data that I could address and clarify by conducting additional interviews. However, I did not consider this necessary, as I judged the data I had collected from the twelve participants to be sufficient in line with the criteria for achieving information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The method I developed incorporated key aspects of a strategy identified in the Cynefin Framework as most suited to a Complex system. I explain the connections and how different methods were combined to design the study in the methods section of chapter 7 (after the explanation of how the Framework was used, in chapter 6) in full. In chapter 7 I also detail the data collection process I followed.

3.8 Ethical and legal considerations in the studies

Behaving ethically is always important when involving human participants in research, and I considered how to ensure my methods were ethical before, during and after the interviews in both studies, and throughout writing up the thesis. Most of these considerations were the same across both empirical studies, however there were individual differences between the two studies, which I explain here. Copies of relevant documentation relating to ethical considerations can be found in the appendices – for study 1, see appendix A1 and for study 2, see appendix B1.

In the first study, I met all volunteers in person. I judged that thanking professional author participants with a small monetary incentive (due to budget limitations) might not have been considered favourably, and so determined that giving them a small gesture of thanks would be more appropriate. Therefore, I provided snacks and drinks at each interview and remunerated the reader participants in the same way, based on a principle of fairness. For the second study, I determined that the most ethical way to remunerate would be to

offer a form of payment for participants' time and gave everyone (excluding the pilot participants) a £20 Amazon voucher. This decision was, in part, because participants did not attend the second study by virtue of their profession, making a small monetary incentive more appropriate than before. More prominently, I came to this decision due to the new circumstances of the global coronavirus pandemic (in 2020), as I was conscious that people were graciously giving me their time during particularly difficult circumstances, as well as using their own internet connection and devices to do so. Further, I had taken time to reflect since my first study and believed that remuneration was the more ethical approach when requesting help with a study, more broadly¹⁰.

3.8.1 Forms and communication

For both studies, I obtained formal ethics approval from City, University of London's Computer Science Department Ethics Committee before commencing (see appendix A1 for study 1, and B1 for study 2). For the first study only, I submitted an amendment for approval later, to expand the scope of recruitment. Initially I had chosen to focus on historical fiction and young adult fiction only, but during recruitment I realised that the work would benefit from expanding on this to include readers and authors of a full range of genre fiction.

I sent a study-specific information sheet (appendices A3 and B3 respectively) to each participant at least one week in advance for them to read, then also read it aloud to them and discussed it at the start of the study session before proceeding, to ensure their understanding.

All participants were asked to review and sign a consent form, and I informed them that their consent to participate was voluntary, and could be withdrawn at any time (before, during or after the interview) without them being penalised in any way. I advised them that, if requested, any data collected about them would be destroyed and excluded from the study. I gave each participant a copy of the form to retain for their records, which included details of who to contact should they have any questions after the session (see appendix A for study 1, and appendix B for study 2). For both studies I requested each participant's specific consent through the form, to allow the use audio recording. For each study I requested consent for context-specific requirements (appendices A4 and B4), e.g. consent to take photos of shared materials in study 1, and consent to use a third-party platform (Zoom – via a university account) for study 2, which was conducted remotely.

¹⁰ If I were to conduct the first study again, I would likely re-address the approach I took, to determine whether there were a better, and fairer way manage incentivisation across the different participant groups.

I conducted all communications with the participants prior to the studies using a university email address and ensured that I sent all emails individually (to preserve their identity).

3.8.2 Data storage and handling

The physically signed consent forms and responses to a demographic questionnaire from study 1 (appendix A4 and A5) were kept in a locked filing cabinet to prevent others from seeing names or other personally identifiable data. I assigned all participants a unique coded identification number and kept details of any link between their name and unique ID number in one place only – a password protected excel spreadsheet, saved on an encrypted hard drive. In study 2, I collected all forms digitally, and stored them as above, using an encrypted drive and password protected spreadsheet (appendix B4 and B5).

All audio data and written transcripts from the interviews in both studies were stored on an encrypted drive, password protected, with names removed. These were also backed-up on an additional encrypted external hard drive with password protection, which was locked in drawer when it was not in use. All audio files were deleted from the recording equipment once transferred to the computer to transcribe, and the same procedure followed for all photographs taken. I kept personal participant information (e.g. on the demographic questionnaire) separately from their transcripts, in keeping with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (ICO, 2021).

3.8.3 Identifiable data

When transcribing the audio, I took careful measures to remove all identifiable data to protect the confidentiality of each participant. This was particularly pertinent for author participants, many of whom were known public figures, putting them at higher risk of identification. Examples of the types of data I considered to be ‘identifiable’, and employed measures to deidentify, include the following in Table 1 below:

Identifiable Data Type	Approach to Anonymisation
Names: e.g. of the participants and of any friends; family; acquaintances; business associates; organisations; or online connections named during interview.	Participants own names were replaced with pseudonyms. Any other named entities were replaced with anonymised placeholders, e.g. [publishing house] or [agent] where useful to maintain for the flow of the narrative. In most instances, they were [redacted] or deleted.
Place names: e.g. such as participants hometown, place of birth; or towns visited for festivals and events; names of specific festivals and events.	Where a town was named, it was replaced with e.g. [town visited] or [birthplace] or redacted from the quote.
Bibliographic or identifiable data about an author participant's book: e.g. titles, series names; character names. Caution was taken too, when transcribing information about the book of another author, who the participant had personally interacted with, to avoid revealing identifying links to the participant's identity through association with another known figure. This consideration was also employed where an author discussed the activities of specific fan or reader communities with potentially identifiable characteristics.	Where useful to maintain the flow of the narrative, such data was replaced with e.g. [book title] or [main character]. Otherwise, it was [redacted] or deleted.
Any details that pertained to the plot of book which could identify the author, regardless of the avoidance of names and titles.	These were generally superfluous to the study, and as such were [redacted] or deleted.
Where photos were taken, identifying physical features, e.g. faces, birthmarks, scars, or tattoos.	No photographs were used in this report, however, should this change if useful for future writing or publications, they will be edited to remove potentially identifiable features.

Table 1: Approach to Anonymising Participant Data

It is sometimes possible that an author may be recognised by their authorial 'voice', and I recognised that there was a risk that someone reading extracts I shared from author participant's transcripts could potentially recognise them by their manner of speaking or turns of phrase. I therefore took extra caution to avoiding using quotes that may have been particularly identifiable. I believe the measures taken would make it difficult to identify any given individual.

When writing up study 1, I chose to use pseudonyms instead of the ID numbers I had created for the participants, to ease the flow of the narrative, and to give a more human feel to the study. I also felt, at the time, that using pseudonyms would help to establish that author and reader participants were not treated as two opposing groups, but rather a holistic dataset across user groups. I perceived that the codes I initially gave them inadvertently emphasised a separation between authors and readers in the writing, e.g. A1 for an

author participant, and R1 for a reader participant. Since changing to use pseudonyms, I ensured that, again, any link between their pseudonym and their unused ID numbers were confined to the protected spreadsheet, and away from their real names or any other identifiable information.

For study 2, I chose to revert to using ID number codes. In part, this was because all participants in the study were readers this time, and thus needed no differentiation. My decision was also in response to ongoing debates in research circles about the ethics of using pseudonyms vs codes (for example, whether pseudonyms may potentially reinforce cultural or gender assumptions (Allen and Wiles, 2016), and the complications whereby a participant chooses their own pseudonym (Ogden, 2012)). The most ethical approach to naming conventions can be a difficult matter to resolve, and I felt that codes were the better way to proceed going forward, to avoid introducing potential issues. I considered reverting back to codes for study 1 in the final editing of this thesis, to unify my approach across the two studies. However, papers had already been published from study 1 using the pseudonyms, and I also thought it important to be candid about my internal debate about the issue, and the way I had conducted the work.

Finally, in the first study I referred to the participants according to the pronouns he/his and she/hers, as all participants had self-identified as either male or female. In the second study I chose to instead use they/their, to avoid over emphasising gender norms (although all participants did identify as male or female here too). This decision largely related, again, to my reflection on how my previous use of pseudonyms may have reinforced gendered bias.

Chapter 4: Understanding online interactions between author and reader in relation to a broader context of literary mediation

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it harmonizes, and what it usually makes is the devil’s music.”

11.22.63 (Stephen King, 2012)

In chapter 2, I explored literature pertaining to engagement between authors and readers (alongside other creative workers and their audiences) online. In some of the research looking at online interactivity, comparisons were drawn between what is mediated online and what is mediated offline (for example, evidence of a continuation of parasocial relationship dynamics, observed in studies discussed in 2.2). Further, motivations for authors and other creative workers to get online to engage with an audience pertained to changes in the dynamics in their industry which instigated a drive to depart from traditional methods of publication, production, and dissemination, to direct dissemination to generate income.

I identified in that chapter that there have been limited detailed accounts collated from either author or reader, to help understand how online interaction and engagement is experienced within, and between, their groups. I sought to address this in the first empirical study, which is presented in chapter 5, by conducting a qualitative interview study to gather first-hand accounts from both authors and readers. During that study, participants’ accounts highlighted the importance of building a better understanding of the context within which online interactions are situated, rather than looking at their interactions within online technologies as a new, isolated phenomenon. For example, author participants made references to changes in the publishing industry, and to differences between interacting with an audience online, and interacting with an audience offline. Reader participants talked about differences between speaking to an author online and offline. Resultantly, I turned to a breadth of cross-disciplinary literature to develop a foundation for understanding the contextual background, to help identify how online interactions fit alongside, and in response to, broader literary practices. This chapter presents that work, which was gathered as part of a cyclical, analytical process alongside data collection (as presented in chapter 5).

During the initial, high-level review of literature that I conducted before my inductive empirical study (discussed in 3.2), the literature I identified predominantly discussed the motivations between authors and readers for interacting as being related to readers’ desire to learn more about authors, in order to help them contextualise and interpret their books, and for authors to learn about how their books are received, and to gain direct feedback about their work, which can help them with their future writing. During the interviews

(chapter 5) it became clear that these things were not key to their motivations. This led me to question where the assumption came from, and what else is known about the purpose of interactions between authors and readers. I therefore also looked at literature to build a contextual understanding of how the relationship between authors and readers, and thus their interaction needs, have been perceived in prior research.

In this chapter, I present literature pertaining to the broad context of literary practices (to situate online interactions, the significance of environmental affordances in mediating interactions (to help compare differences in offline and online mediation), and literature detailing how interactions between authors and readers have been understood prior to the internet (to learn more about what is known of their motivations, and the nature of their interactions).

The work I present in this chapter formed part of my analytical work in chapter 5 and introduces the theories and models I used to develop a theoretical, diagram model of the Literary System, seen at the end of this chapter, and developed further in chapter 6.

Firstly, I discuss Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1983) theory of the Literary Field to explain that to be an author or a reader is to have a role, within the context of literary practices, and to discuss the influence of environmental affordances, role status, and a habituated understanding of how to act in the field influence interactions (4.1). I used this to posit that interacting in online spaces is necessarily different to interacting offline yet is likely influenced by prior (and parallel) offline experiences. Next, I describe prominent research which has framed interactions between authors and readers as mediated through the book and the publishing industry, and about how the book has been perceived as central to their motivations for interacting (4.2). Then, I discuss how feedback has been considered the primary purpose of interaction between authors and readers, whilst interaction between readers (without the author) have been more socially driven (4.2.1). I then reflect on how a perspective of book-centricity (and later, with the internet, information-centricity) may have contributed to the paucity of research into the social context of author and reader interactions (4.2.2). Next, I explore the environments (such as bookshops and festivals) in which interactions are typically mediated and how these are often mixed environments, catering to a variety of market needs in addition to literary needs (4.3 and 4.3.1). I then present the Reading Industry, as defined by Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2013), to describe the organisations involved in mediating authors and readers at physical events (4.3.2), before detailing studies that have observed these physical opportunities, sharing their insight about how authors and readers experience interaction in place (4.3.3). Here, I observed that readers are not always the author's audience, and highlighted difficulties in mediating between author and a large, mixed group (which I correlated to likely

difficulties in online spaces). I then conclude the chapter by introducing a diagrammatic model of the Literary System, which combined theories from across the chapter to describe the parties involved in mediation, and the use of physical space to mediate between them, as a foundation for understanding how things have now changed, with the introduction of online mediation.

4.1 The Literary Field: the context for literary interactions

In this section I explored core concepts from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1996), who developed theory from which to understand the different forms of cultural production (e.g. art, music, literature) and how relationships between the people involved are mediated in context. His work was originally developed to help explain relational dynamics in a physical context, yet continues to be used to examine relational dynamics in the current context of digital media (although it has been noted that it cannot fully account for it) (e.g. Driscoll, 2014; Murray, 2018). This theory is useful in helping to identify that authors' and readers' use of online platforms to interact are seated within a broader context of literary culture, and, resultantly, how the ways they behave online are likely influenced by established, offline practices.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977) posited that peoples' understanding of how to navigate a cultural domain, such as literature or the arts, is developed incrementally from childhood in accordance with their exposure to it, how they are taught to understand it, their family and social backgrounds, educational experiences, and other factors such as broader cultural attitudes and social context (ibid.). The cultural domains are referred to as **fields**, which encompass a series of institutions, rules, rituals, and conventions which constitute an objective hierarchy (ibid.). Each field is positioned within a structured hierarchy of other fields – e.g. cultural, educational, political, economic (ibid.).

Within each, there are field-specific **roles** (i.e., a duty or status assumed or assigned to a person (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020)), some of which correspond with employment or occupation), for example author, reader, publisher, agent. In each field, there are field-specific roles, associated practices, and behavioural expectations (Bourdieu, 1996), each distinct, and autonomous from the other fields (Bourdieu, 1977) (i.e., an author is a role in the Literary Field, but not the field of music). However, there can be overlaps (e.g. a reader may also be a listener) and appearances of similarity (e.g. a publishing house and a record label may be similar in role and have similarities of practice).

Recognising a field's corresponding roles, practices and expectations influences how a person navigates that field – i.e., when they recognise that they are engaging with the Literary Field, they will draw on embedded

knowledge of what that means, and thus how to behave (ibid.). Decisions on how to behave are not so much conscious as they are instinctive and unconscious – people develop (beginning from childhood) an internalised feel for how things work, what to expect, and their own position within the field. This is called the **habitus** (Bourdieu, 1983)¹¹. The habitus, is defined as a set of relational **dispositions**, which generate behaviour and perceptions **durable** throughout life, **transposable** (i.e., it can influence actions and perceptions in another field or context) and **structured** by social positioning (defined by distribution of capital) (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). The habitus is relational and embodied, interacting with the environment in which it is recalled (ibid.).

The cultural fields are dynamic (Driscoll, 2014) spaces, subject to change as those who inhabit them interact both together and with the field itself. The fields in themselves are not physical (rather, they are conceptual, existing between people, in their interactions), however the field's dynamics are observable and enacted when people come together in a physical setting (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015), and those physical settings are used to support particular actions (the physical settings used for interactions in the Literary Field will be explored in more detail in 4.2).

The habitus people develop to navigate the Literary Field's physical settings is likely, since it is transposable, to influence how people now approach literary interactions in online platforms such as social media. However, it is not fully transposable, and so will likely differ in the new context, interacting differently with the affordances of the non-physical environment. It is also likely disrupted by the dynamic interaction of different entertainment forms and activities of other cultural fields present in online platforms, e.g. the practices and activities of celebrities, businesses, musicians and more who also use platforms such as social media in tandem to authors and readers. The interconnectivity of previously differentiated groups and activities has been described as a "collapsed context" (Boyd, 2006, p. 16), and effectively necessitates that the habitus be reiterated.

The roles in a cultural field are relational to each other and are not equal in terms of status. How a role is positioned amongst other roles is contingent on possessing capital - Social Capital, Cultural or Economic (Bourdieu, 1996) - which is not distributed evenly. Some forms of capital are assumed, and others are acquired formally (e.g. certifications, or being employed formally in a role) (ibid.). Having capital effectively means

¹¹ The habitus bears similarity to the concept of *mental models*, often used in HCI to explain how people interact with a technological system according to a priori beliefs and previous exposure or experience (Preece *et al.*, 2015). However, mental models are used to explore an individual's cognition, whilst the habitus has sociological and socio-spatial roots, and relates to individual and shared understandings, as created in context.

having a position of power in the field (Bourdieu, 1996). The unequal distribution of power can lead to struggles in the dynamics between the roles, as people try to affirm their position, or seek recognition and affirmation (Driscoll, 2014). In the Literary Field, for example, writers may struggle to gain the status of Author - a mark of prestige, denoting authority in the field, indicating that one has “made it” (Skains, 2019, p. 1) and is being paid to write commercially, removed from the rank of aspiring, freelance, amateur (ibid.)¹². To gain author status (in the Royalty Publishing paradigm – a term used to describe the dominant, traditional print model of publishing work (Laquintano, 2013; Skains, 2019)) they must be anointed by a publisher’s recognition – an authority figure, gatekeeping writers’ access to authorship. Online, direct dissemination challenges this notion, however royalty publishing continues, and so too does their power in the field. Affirming one’s position in the field can be dependent on various factors, and those factors may fluidly change, as they are influenced by changes in context and environment. Context constantly evolves, and so the struggle for affirming identity and status never settles. For this reason Bourdieu referred to the Literary Field as the “field of struggles” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312) as the constant struggle is a characteristic of the field.

Some of the colliding struggles that impact a field may be external, e.g. tied up with politics, privilege, the economy and more. This likely accounts for some of the shared experiences observed between the different cultural fields, such as the similar difficulties faced by musicians, artists, and authors alike in making a living, and their resultant uptake of online technologies to secure sales – as discussed in 2.1. These struggles are visible because new technologies and alternative means of producing work have come into focus, challenging the dominant models – i.e., the context has changed.

Understanding the interwoven nature of role, field, habitus, environment, and the power struggles that can occur in times of change is valuable when observing authors and readers in online platforms. The environment in which interactions are mediated has changed (i.e., it is not physical), and this influences the other factors. Changes in roles have already been observed (e.g. anyone can be a writer on a digital platform, see 2.1.2), but a continued distance between authors and readers online may be, at least partially, explained by their relational powers in the field more broadly (i.e., royalty published authors are still seen as authority figures,

¹² That prestige is bestowed by the publishing industry also marks a change in the field, as during the 16th and 17th centuries, for example, having a book published in print was considered a low-status activity and ‘*certainly not something that a serious writer ought to be proud of*’ (Warwick, 2002 p.16). Back then, it was considered better for an author to distribute their work amongst a small, elite group of peers, in direct opposition to commercial distribution. This changed in the 19th century, however, as having a book published in print became synonymous with legitimacy, professionalism and authority (Woodmansee, 1984).

as royalty publishing continues to function, and as authority figures, parasocial dynamics may be observed (as discussed in 2.2)).

The relationships between author and reader roles online cannot be understood in isolation from how roles have been (and to an extent continue to be) understood previously, offline. It is important to understand the dominant narratives that have underpinned role perceptions to date to consider where they have translated or mutated online, and where there may be strong contrasts and change. The habitus used to navigate roles is transferable, and so past understanding will be brought into the new context. However, the habitus will also be different, as the new context and ways of being in online platforms influence peoples' understandings of their place, and how to act, and introduces new roles.

Next, the way the roles of author and reader have been perceived to interact is explored.

4.2 Communications Circuit: book as mediator

The printed book has been pivotal to our understanding of how authors and readers interact, within and between their roles. Their roles and associated status have been clearly delineated (Ezell, 1999; Ramdarshan Bold, 2016), and the book has been viewed as serving an important function in mediating between them. The relationship between their roles, and the purpose of any interactions between them, has historically been perceived as indirect, centred around the printed book. This view has influenced the way in which the roles of author and reader have developed and has also dominated how they have been studied.

In the illustration below Figure 2 I represented this division as a perceptual boundary line between authors and readers. This line can sometimes be perceived as impermeable, as direct access to each other is mediated and highly controlled rather than open. This boundary is not literal as in reality authors are, invariably, readers, and readers may often be writers – separated by role perceptions only.

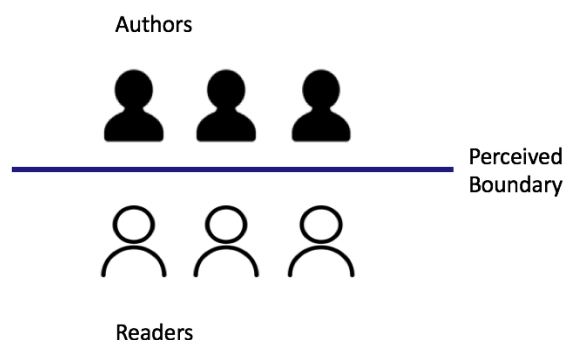


Figure 2: Conceptual, impermeable boundary separating Authors and Readers

This perceived separator is evidence of previous contextual changes in the Literary Field, as before mass printing, texts, e.g. social manuscripts, were often co-produced in collaboration between author and reader (Ezell, 1999), and before this, co-created verbally through an oral tradition of storytelling. In other words, the boundary separating their roles and status was previously much more blurred. Contemporary authors and readers have recently become nominally equal ‘users’ of online platforms. Digital writing platforms and other means of self-publishing are enabling more people to publish their writing; and authors are becoming highly visible online, potentially recognisably by their persona outside of associations with their books. This suggests that the boundary between the roles is again being disrupted, triggering identity struggles (as identified in 4.1).

Since print publishing, the book became widely considered the key mediator between author and reader – and typically also the focal interest behind any interaction held outside of the book itself (explored in 4.2.1). The publishing industry has played a central mediating role, by managing a books’ transition from author to reader, and also through gatekeeping what literature is supported (and by what authors) and produced in order that readers can access it (Miller, 2006). This industry is not publishing houses alone – rather, it is a network of contractually connected stakeholders who work collectively to produce and distribute books. ‘The Communications Circuit’ Figure 3 was created by Robert Darnton (1982) to depict the different entities involved in production and distribution in the publishing industry, and to illustrate how they collaborate within a production chain (Darnton, 1982). This model has been pivotal to current academic understanding of literary mediation between author and reader with the book at its centre (which is explored in 4.1.2).

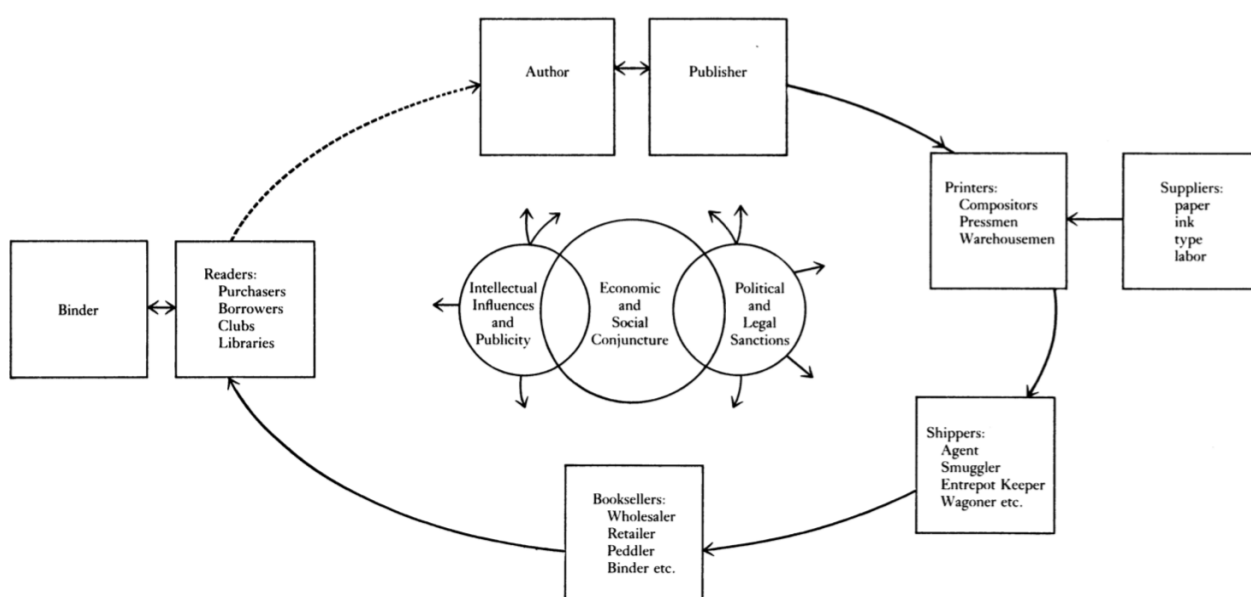


Figure 3: Darnton's Communication Circuit (1982)

At the start of the chain (at the top of the model) is the author, whose thoughts are translated into written words. In collaboration with the publisher, these words are moved down the chain to be translated into printed characters – a chain which relies on various connected, external organisations (suppliers) to provide paper, ink, and other required materials to produce a physical manuscript. The printed book is then passed to shippers for distribution, booksellers for sales, and ‘readers’ (which here, also includes libraries and clubs which can provide access for readers) as the end-destination of the chain (Darnton, 1982). In the centre, external influences such as economic and social change are inferred, to acknowledge that contextual change can impact the circuit (ibid.) - in keeping with Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of dispositional changes described in 4.1.

The Communications Circuit illustrates a publishing supply chain based on 18thC publishing practices, as this was Darnton’s own area of scholarly interest. In the 1980s, around the time the model was created, author Peter Ginn described publishing as “the ultimate mature industry” (Deresiewicz, 2020, p. 153), barely changed since the paperback revolution. Since that time, some practices have significantly changed as context and technology have developed, and the shape of the industry continues to rapidly evolve today. The Communications Circuit model has been adopted and updated by contemporary scholars to illustrate a range of these changes, for example, Murray and Squires revised it to illustrate changes to agents involved in the chain (Figure 4 below), as well as versions to depict digital and self-publishing practices (Murray and Squires, 2013). The updated models bear strong similarities to the original, suggesting that contemporary practices are still perceived in a similar way, although there are now various additional means of mediation outside of the publishing chain which are not portrayed in the models.

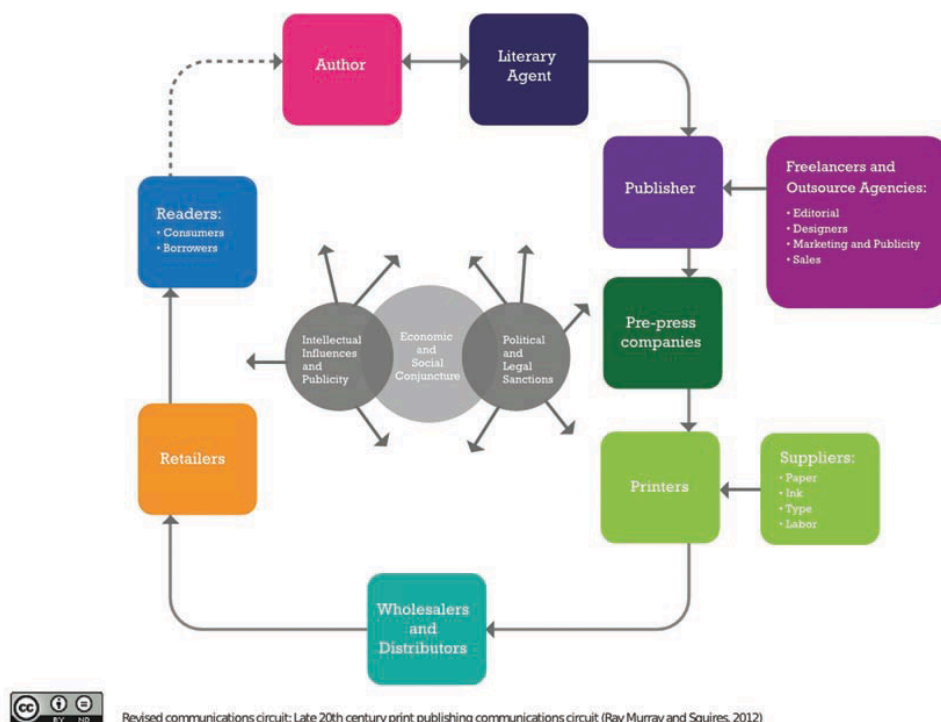


Figure 4: ‘Revised Communications Circuit’ - Ray Murray and Squires, 2012

More than a supply chain, each version of the Communications Circuit model depicts a social system of networked ties between different mediating people and organisations, and the book itself (which I will refer to as **agents**, to encompass that they can be individuals, groups, or mediating artefacts, all of which play particular roles in context). All of the relationships in the network are oriented towards the book. Authors are depicted as a part of the chain however, as Hesmondhalgh observed, authors have creative autonomy over what they write, but less input as to how the text is processed and marketed once out of their hands and in the tighter control of the reproductive circuit (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). This suggests that authors external to the circuit – inputting their book into the system, whilst operating under the role of ‘author’ (as allowed by the gatekeepers – publishers), but otherwise effectively independent from the circuit, as a person occupying a variety of other, external roles. Interestingly, it also depicts readers as estranged from publishers and authors (Martens, 2016), suggesting that they too, may be outside of the circuit, despite being its end users.

The separation of the author as a person from the author as a role (and similarly for readers) is valuable to consider when looking at their engagement practices online – in terms of how they manage front-and backstage presentation (as posited by Goffman (1971), discussed in 2.2), and their struggles to protect personal boundaries (posited as a potential issue, on account of musicians facing this problem – discussed in 2.2, and also seen in the forthcoming findings in chapter 5).

Although the models are intended to illustrate relationships between agents in the system by showing clear linkages, the connection between author and reader is not clearly defined as the others are, outside of their relation to the book (physical or digital) itself. A more direct tie between them is inferred by a dotted line, which completes the chain. The dotted line was intended to represent a feedback channel, through which readers can provide commentary and critique to authors after reading the finished, published work – feedback which is combined with an author’s own experiences, as a reader themselves, and influences their next book (Darnton, 1982). This connection is inferred, rather than clearly defined, to acknowledge its existence without explicating it (*ibid.*) – likely because communication between author and reader was viewed as occurring outside of Communications Circuit, and thus beyond the remit of the model.

It is possible that the dotted line was not defined due to the blurred nature of the boundary between authors and readers, as Darnton suggested that feedback is somehow transmitted through thoughts, rather than any tangible form of mediation (Darnton, 1982; Pecoskie and Hill, 2015). Yet the feedback channel presented by the dotted line has not been clearly explored elsewhere to determine what it entails, suggesting that the centrality of the book may have eclipsed the human connection between author and reader in perceived importance. There is an implication here that the purpose of the channel between author and reader exists to facilitate future book production (i.e., through feedback), rather than any other potential motivation for direct interaction, such is the centrality of the book in this purview, and the common assertion, as Smith (1995) observed, that the book always stands between authors and readers, as bridge and barrier (Smith, 1995).

The Communications Circuit manages that barrier by facilitating dissemination yet cannot provide a basis for understanding the nature of interactions between authors and readers, either off- or on-line, outside of the book. Social media has been said to provide a means of now “solidifying the dotted line” (Murray and Squires, 2013, p. 5), giving a place from which to explore it. Indeed, online tools such as Wattpad (see 2.1.2) and forums in authors’ websites (2.1) provide functionality to support feedback from reader to author (in keeping with the dotted line inferred by the Communications Circuit), suggesting that, outside of this model, feedback has been identified as a priority to support. Yet in chapter 2, online reading communities were found to interact around books and with each other, with limited (and as Laing noted, sporadic (2017)) feedback to, and interaction with, authors direct - and the same held for other cultural workers and their audience.

It is valuable, then, to explore how the feedback channel has been conceptualised and mediated, to determine where this prioritisation comes from, and why it does not appear to produce consistent interactions in online platforms at present.

4.2.1 The feedback channel: book as focal interest in interactions

Although the relationship between author and reader used to be participatory, reading and writing have since come to be viewed as solitary acts. This view has become prevalent in how some disciplines have understood literary practices (Trager, 2005), overlooking the rich social context in which they happen. It could be argued that the participatory nature of past reading practices naturally incorporated a direct feedback loop between authors and readers, or creators and their audience. The status quo changed, but the human desire to connect did not, and so more formalised means of mediation have been reintroduced to account for the loss.

From childhood, we learn to read through parents and teachers reading aloud (Jones, 2016), students read together in a classroom, people lend books to each other (Marshall, 2009) and reading in groups at all ages has been part of human history “for as long as there has been reading” (Hartley, 2002, p. 1). People have always enjoyed talking about stories, and even in the early days of print, it was commonplace for readers to share their reactions to a book through printed mediums, visible to authors (often passively, rather than explicitly shared with them, as Darnton’s (1982) dotted line suggests). One famous, early example which is helpful towards understanding the nature of the dotted line feedback channel was Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela* - first published in 1740 and often referred to as the first commercially printed novel (Fysh, 1997). Readers in those days wrote reviews, which were published for others to see, and expressed their responses to books abundantly through poems, paintings and parody stories (Yost and Wang, 2010; Keymer and Sabor, 2005) – creative output which today may be defined as fan fiction, or fan art¹³. Richardson’s novel stirred wide public controversy, for a number of reasons (details in Keymer and Sabor, 2005), which in turn attracted a lot of public attention and high volumes of feedback, from both supporters and strong critics of the work - abundant enough to “rival the kitsch and clutter of any Barnes & Noble during the Harry Potter marketing frenzy” (Barchas, 2008, p. 167).

¹³ Fan art and spin-offs were considered the norm at that time. It was even considered ‘natural law’ that anyone had the right to reproduce any book. This centred ownership as an issue to address, largely to combat problems with piracy, when mass print took hold (Woodmansee, 1984). It was so normal that Richardson also include a fan’s poem in one reprint of his book (Brean and Bouveur-devos, 2007).

Outside of the published reactions, much of the readers' responses to books in this period of time were shared through social chatter, without the involvement of the author (Keymer and Sabor, 2005) - although sometimes it may have been overheard by them, particularly in the cases of those whose kept their identity anonymous (Mullan, 2007) as was still commonplace in those days.

Richardson's example is famous as he intentionally reconstituted his text in response to the feedback, making significant changes to each subsequent re-print of the novel (Yost and Wang, 2010; Keymer and Sabor, 2005). This shows a clear example of Darnton's feedback channel in action (as Richardson wrote during the same era illustrated by the original Communications Circuit model). Soon after that time period, contact between authors and readers become shared less publicly, through fan mail mediated by gatekeepers such as journalists and literary agents (Leavis, Q.D, cited in Murray, 2018). This suggests that, although the dotted line continues to be depicted in updated versions of the Communications Circuit model, it had already fundamentally changed alongside the new practices associated with mass print.

The function of interaction in the feedback channel depicted in the Richardson example is two-fold. From a formal perspective, it can (whether directly sent to them, or passively read by them) inform an author about how their work or book has been received, which can potentially influence their future writing. Feedback has been used to support serialised fiction, in particular (Dix et al., 2016) and is reflected in the social writing platforms described in 2.1, such as Wattpad, where in-line threaded commentary is encouraged (Mirmohamadi, 2014; Ramdarshan Bold, 2016) to provide up-to-date, direct information to the author once their work has been read. Secondly, the feedback channel provides an outlet for self-expression and social sharing amongst readers – an opportunity to discuss works they had read and also to gossip about the author: gossip, in itself, being a form of social cohesion that relies on the absence of its subject (Marshall, 2010) (i.e., the absence of the author). Again, this function of the feedback channel is reflected in the use of (perhaps in contrast to that intended by the design) current online platforms, where conversations are observable **around** an author and their work (2.1).

This may suggest that from an industry perspective (and, perhaps, from the author's) the book is central, yet for readers, the focus may be more social. If this is the case, then a focus on enabling feedback in social platforms (solidifying the dotted line) may overlook key reader needs and motivations and may lead to their observable behaviours being misinterpreted. This highlights the need to speak directly to readers to gather their accounts of how online mediation is valued and perceived.

4.2.2 Book centrality has consequences for how contemporary readers' support needs are perceived and researched

The feedback channel between author and reader points to a clear, logical and commercial benefit to authors, as it can potentially help them with their work (although it is also argued that many authors are keen to maintain agency over their own work (Ramdarshan Bold, 2013) and writing to meet a market's desires may not be wanted by all, as it was with Richardson). However, readers do not necessarily seek to provide assistive feedback. In general their motivations appear to be more socially aligned. As Skains (2010) observed, readers do not generally read with the intention of altering or contributing to the text- rather, they read for their own experience, and make their own interpretations of the text during the process (Skains, 2010). This agency in interpretation has not always been centred in literary theory.

Dominant in the 1960s to 1980s, a school of literary theory often referred to as Reader-Response Criticism observed that, whilst the author may create a text, readers, too, play a part in shaping it – through their interpretation of its meaning (e.g. Barthes, 1967; Aarseth, 1994; Shillingsburg, 2006). When reading a text, readers apply their own experiences, contexts, personal beliefs and thoughts to interpret it through a lens of their own understanding- i.e., they are not just consumers (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) at the end of a supply chain. The theory posits that author may desire their work to be understood in a particular way, but once passed to readers it is no longer in their hands to control - the reader defines its ultimate meaning, whether consciously or unconsciously (Barthes, 1967; Aarseth, 1994). A reader's interpretation may differ to that intended by the author, but as Shillingsburg (2006) noted, readers commonly hope that the two are closely aligned, and so may often seek validation to confirm this (Shillingsburg, 2006). Readers often check their understanding by seeking trusted and alternative viewpoints to calibrate against, (Mercier and Sperber, 2011) such as reviews. The author's own viewpoint - as the primary authority, outside of the readers, over a book's meaning – is particularly valuable (Murray and Weber, 2017). Author interviews, broadcasts, public readings (etc.) are a valuable source from which readers can check their understanding of a book (Murray, 2015), and this has been positioned as a clear justification for providing opportunities for authors and readers to interact.

Reader-response has been criticised for “reinstat[ing] text as its primary object, even as critics strive to lend interpretative agency to the reader” (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013, p. 38), as although it appears focused on the agency of readers to interpret, and to build on that interpretation through calibration, the book is still central, and the purpose of interaction with the author is positioned as a tool to support a somewhat academic

deconstruction of the book. This is removed from the reader's personal experience of the book as human, social beings (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) – which is ultimately where their interpretative experience stems from.

This repeated focus on the text or book, and getting the interpretation right, has roots in a historic perception of reading as a serious, solemn activity (Trager, 2005) to be done in silence and with self-discipline (Collins and Boyarin, 1996). If done the right way, reading has been believed to have the capacity to “enlighten individuals and lead to social progress” (Trager, 2005, p. 187) under this lens. There are links here to capital and status, whereby some readers (those who do reading ‘right’) are perceived as having higher status than others (those who do reading ‘wrong’). In keeping with this division, there is a stereotype of the bookish reader– someone disposed to being enthusiastic, serious and studious about their reading (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020) and engaged in reading as a solitary practice. Not all readers fit this narrow prescription, and reading is enjoyed for many reasons other than intellectual goals. But those other readers and their alternative goals have historically been overlooked, and in some areas a bias towards the bookish and on intellectual goals persist. This bias may go towards explaining why, beyond the Communications Circuit, there are no models to explain how, and why, authors and readers may interact together outside of the book.

It is also important to recognise a potential continuation of this historic bias, as it could have a profound impact on how digital and online technologies are designed to support interactions around reading. For example, in several HCI studies focused on understanding readers' search and browse behaviour in bookshops and libraries to help develop digital platforms, there has been an intentional focus on bookish readers to the exclusion of others. Some have been dismissed as “non-readers” (e.g. Buchanan and McKay, 2011, p. 270) or “secondary readers” (e.g. Trager, 2005, p. 191), for not meeting the ordained stereotype of what it is to be a reader. More than a value distinction, this has resulted in a literal (whilst seemingly pragmatic) removal of those readers from observations, to focus on the designing for the needs of only the bookish. For Trager (2005), for example, ‘primary readers’ (the bookish) were observed and interviewed in-depth, with ‘secondary readers’ invited to converse, in less depth, solely as a counterpoint for better understanding the primary group. Interestingly, their data found that the ‘secondary’ readers discussed their chosen reading materials with each other more than the ‘primary readers’ did (ibid.), suggesting that to assume they are disinterested in reading is a fallacy.

The continuation of this dichotomy in contemporary research is not surprising, as researchers have turned to existing definitions (e.g. Nabokov, 1980; Lemish, 1985; Emre, 2017) to qualify their user groups, as a matter of good practice. Alternative conceptualisations of readership have scarcely been theorised, making it easy to accept what has been established – likely a subconscious, rather than conscious bias, or a matter of bounded rationality (Brown and Duguid, 2017), as there is a tendency not to re-evaluate what is known unless it becomes necessary as a result of contextual change (Polites and Karahanna, 2012), and once attention is drawn to the need to re-evaluate.

In recent decades, online technologies have initiated a significant change in context, however books have been posited, by the fields who seek to design support for literary practices, as a form of information for which search and retrieval mechanisms need to be designed, to enable readers (or rather, users) to find them, read them digitally, and also to ensure their preservation (e.g. Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016). This has contributed to a gap in knowledge about readers' non-informational needs (Oksanen and Vakkari, 2012). Tackling search and retrieval issues is both understandable and necessary – particularly as written content is no longer confined to printed medium, and often ephemeral (Marshall, 2018). However, information has been placed at the centre of some recent investigations into online social platform use, with information-seeking theories used to interpret behaviour in, for example, fan forums and digital reading platforms (e.g. Worrall, 2015; Price and Robinson, 2016), which may be appropriate from the perspective of ensuring strong navigational facilitation in the platforms, but fails to support social motivations for using them.

A focus on information creates a similar gap in understanding to a focus on the book – it overlooks the experience of authors and readers as humans in interactive spaces. It also presents a risk, as online platforms may resultantly be built for informational needs, and for a bookish minority, without consideration of the majority user. This may potentially create obstacles or exclusion, in addition to continuing a poor understanding of the social context of online discourse. A tight focus on information, Brown and Duguid suggested, is far too reductive, and could be considered a form of social and moral blindness (Brown and Duguid, 2017), overlooking other really important things.

In this chapter so far, I have presented literature which situates authors' and readers' interactions within a literary context and have also identified work pertaining to how their interactions have been mediated, along with perennial perceptions of what is mediated between them, and why. In 4.1 (when discussing the Literary

Field) I noted that interactions in the Literary Field are influenced by the environment in which they are enacted. In the next part of this chapter, I discuss the role of the environment, and look at examples of interactions between authors and readers in their physical context.

4.3 The physical environments of the Literary Field

In the previous sections, I described how interactions between authors and readers are typically perceived as mediated through the book, with the exchange of some feedback in written form (e.g. reviews, letters, threaded commentary). However, as Weber observed, “literary culture is not constrained by the format of the traditional codex book” (Weber, 2018a), with interactions occurring both outside of the book, directly between people, as well as in parallel to, or apart from, books. An example of this was presented in chapter 2, in which readers were observed in online platforms commenting about tangential topics (as seen in studies of Wattpad, 2.1.1) or about their experience of a literary event and its environment (e.g. the study of Twitter usage in relation to literary events, 2.1.2), rather than focusing purely on the literature supported by the event.

In 4.1, Bourdieu’s concept of the Literary Field was explained to highlight that interaction behaviour, practices and roles are bi-directionally related to the environment and the context in which they are enacted, making discussions about the environment unsurprising – it is an integral part of the literary experience. However, through the lens of the Literary Field, all activities effectively pertain to literary culture whilst, online there is a contextual collapse (boyd, 2006a), wherein different fields and external social realms intermix without clear delineation.

The literature I reviewed in 4.2 portrayed interactions between authors as primarily mediated either through the book, around it, or, when outside of it, still specific to the book. However, even offline the spaces that people collocate to discuss and reflect on what they read tend to be mixed spaces, and the act of reading associated with different domains of life (for example, people often read at home, which is infiltrated by a variety of external influences (Barton et al., 2000)).

In this subchapter, I explore the physical environments used to mediate interactions within the Literary Field in literary-centred environments, and highlight that, although Bourdieu’s conceptualisation may suggest that the field exists separately from other fields, there has been a contextual collapse in the specific spaces it uses for some time. As a result, I argue that contemporary readers and authors are accustomed to (and thus their habitus is informed and shaped by) mixed environments and interests, and so their interaction behaviour will

likely never be entirely focused on books in isolation. I also discuss the organisations involved in mediating physically situated interactions (the Reading Industry), in parallel to the Communications Circuit.

4.3.1 The contemporary bookshop is a hybrid environment

In contrast to Darnton's (1982) speculation that interactions between authors and readers occur through an intangible transmission of thoughts (4.2), there are specific places which are designed to mediate author and reader interactions in-person. The observational studies from HCI research mentioned in 4.2.2 identified a key opportunity to learn about readers' interactions – in the places they gather, such as bookshops and libraries, to find books.

The use of outdated definitions of the reader role (i.e. 'secondary', 'primary', 'non-readers' and bookish, 4.2.2) to analyse readers' behaviour in these contemporary spaces is notably ill-fit to the environment because, as Deresiewicz observed, those definitions pre-date the very existence of the environments (Deresiewicz, 2020) themselves. Bookshops have provided a place to socialise around and with books, aligned with customer tastes and preferences, for centuries (Hartley, 2002). Many contemporary bookshops - particularly chains and 'mega-bookstores' (as observed in the HCI studies noted in 4.2.1) - are designed specifically to provide a broad social experience, promoting entertainment over serious, close reading, to cater for a broad customer demographic (Miller, 2006). Larger stores and some contemporary libraries now provide services such as coffee shops, merchandise (Trager, 2005) (e.g. magazines, music, stationery), and community activities such as author events, book groups, literary themed parties, and even musical performances (Miller, 2006).

These contemporary environments may be classified as **Servicescapes** - a term used in marketing literature to describe the physical setting of an organisation which provides in-house services, in which the interior is articulated through design to support and direct consumers behaviour as they engage with the service (Bitner, 1992). The literary Servicescape is specifically designed to support particular behaviours based on their target market, each with their own location-specific "cardiac rhythms" (Carrión, 2018, p. 55) of opening times, book display formats (ibid.) schedules of events and more, which serve as cues to inform how consumers interact with their services¹⁴.

¹⁴ Predominantly in this thesis, I refer to Servicescapes in relation to commercial bookshops. However, some contemporary libraries (e.g. academic libraries) draw on a service provider approach and have specifically used Servicescape concepts from marketing in their spatial design. Some such libraries may offer commercial goods (e.g. coffee) and not-for-profit services (e.g. student workspaces) in addition to providing access to resources. Recent research has looked at libraries specifically through the lens of the Servicescape (e.g. Mei, Aas and Eide, 2020), and the term can be considered appropriate to these types of library environment. Notably, books are also

Intentional design interventions are used to facilitate a desired search and browse experience as customers interact with their books (Miller, 2006), and also to direct particular social behaviours – for example, providing comfortable soft chairs to encourage customers to sit and read with a coffee, or using wooden seats to discourage them from doing so for too long¹⁵. Different values are designed into the space to encourage particular ways of interacting with other people: for example, independent and specialist bookshops may design their space and display their books in a way that encourages asking for help, to encourage customers to speak to their staff and to build a sense of community by providing opportunities to engage (Miller, 2006). Others, such as many larger chain stores, tailor their design to promote self-service and to minimise encounters with staff and other customers (ibid.) – for example, by using navigational cues such as signage to support the customer in finding things for themselves; by using a homogenous design across multiple chain stores so that they will know, from past experience, how to navigate a store; and by displaying popular books prominently, so that customers may “bypass the opinions and judgements of the bookseller” (Miller, 2006, p. 60) and make independent choices. These intentional design features inform navigation, and therefore the habitus.

One benefit to large and chain bookshops minimising encounters is that it makes the shop more accessible to a broad market – those who want to converse with staff can, and those who do not may serve themselves (ibid.). As an environment like this is designed to cater for varied needs, there can be no primary or secondary reader¹⁶, at least in theory, as the environment is designed to welcome different interests. Books are not the only focus of these Servicescapes– they also promote a blended, immersive, and varied experience (Lehmann, 2020) across different services. This may suggest that the dichotomy of readers displayed in some recent studies of these places may not only be exclusionary, but also inaccurate, as those deemed secondary readers are the natives for whom different services are designed.

Readers who use these spaces are accustomed to engaging with literature simultaneously alongside other services, drawing on knowledge (or their habitus) from different domains. This mixed habitus has been observed in how readers use the spaces, for example drawing on different entertainment media to navigate

commonly sold in other retail spaces, such as supermarkets (Squires, 2007) some of which may also be Servicescapes, but with a primary focus on other goods or services (amongst which books are included).

¹⁵ A Barnes & Noble outlet in New York, for example, reportedly chose to switch from armchairs to wooden seats to make their shop less comfortable, in order to change customer behaviour: customers who took advantage of comfortable seating to read did not buy the books as frequently as the chain store wished (Miller, 2006). This sort of design intervention is common in Servicescape design methods (for more about the common socio-spatial design mechanisms, see Bitner, 1992).

¹⁶ although such sentiments are certainly not gone –in observational studies, customers have been observed actively distancing themselves from commercial literature (e.g. by holding a book away from themselves and vocalising their distaste) and from the readers viewed as enjoying them, displaying an ‘us vs them’ attitude (e.g. Trager, 2005; Buchanan and McKay, 2011).

books, such as seeking a novel after seeing the movie adaptation (e.g's. in Buchanan and McKay, 2011; Mikkonen and Vakkari, 2016; Makri et al., 2019); seeking the recipe book that accompanies a TV chef's program, or finding books that were reviewed on Oprah or Richard and Judy (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013). Readers, then, are more than readers, even when they are in the environments of the Literary Field – and this is important to remember when observing what they do online.

The literary Servicescape can be viewed as a **place**, using the definition of Harrison & Dourish (Harrison and Dourish, 1996), often used in HCI research. A place, the researchers posited, is a physical environment, shaped for, and by, a particular set of social actions. In contrast, a space is a more abstract territory, into which a place can be built (ibid.). Using this definition, it could be posited that Bourdieu's Literary Field is a conceptual, abstract, space, and the literary Servicescapes such as bookshops and libraries give it form, by providing strategic places for its agents to interact. There is a bi-directional relationship between the field and the associated environment, in both theories (Bourdieu (1982) and Harrison & Dourish (1996)), whereby the space (Literary Field, existing in relations) and place (Servicescape, existing physically) influence each other.

In the online platforms used by authors and readers today, such as social media, the affordances of place familiar to contemporary readers - such as a clearly identifiable location, signage, and architectural design affordances to facilitate desired behaviours – are lost, and this likely impacts their experience. Many platforms are hosted by third-party organisations (for example Twitter, MySpace, Facebook), rather than by known literary organisations, as is typical with libraries or bookshops. It is possible that this makes it difficult to know where to find, and how to recognise, literary activity online, unless orientating cues are made clear.

However, by considering the hybrid nature of the literary Servicescapes that many contemporary readers are familiar with, it may be likely that, when using online platforms, many will already associate literary culture with other cultural mediums. This could mean that they may not explicitly recognise authors' online practices as observably separate from those of other public figures and creatives, as their experiences and understandings are likely to accept (and perhaps even seek) a blended, hybrid experience. Recognising the influence of factors external to the Literary Field is important in understanding the experience of contextual collapse online.

4.3.2 The Reading Industry: mediating around the book

There have been studies which observe how readers interact in Servicescapes, primarily to determine how they locate books, but with some insight as to how they also interact with other customers (e.g. Goodall, 1989;

Trager, 2005; Buchanan and McKay, 2011; Cunningham et al., 2013; Carrión, 2018; Makri et al., 2019). These have focused on readers (and, in particular, 'bookish' readers), as a separate user group to authors, and with a primary focus on the book (i.e. they have been text- and information-centric, as discussed in 4.2.2). As I mentioned in 4.3.1, many contemporary literary Servicescapes also offer scheduled events as part of their service. These events offer opportunity to learn about how authors and readers interact together in a literary environment, and can provide insight into why they do so, beyond the informational and intellectual, book-centred needs addressed in the research explored in this chapter so far.

The term **Reading Industry** was introduced by Fuller & Rehberg Sedo (2013) to describe a collaborative network of institutions and organisations who produce, organise, and promote literary events. In their work, the researchers focused on what they termed Mass Reading Events (MREs), described as social and economic, structured events focused on the intersection between contemporary cultures of production and popular culture (ibid.). This included large public-facing productions such as festivals and TV literary review shows. Although MREs were their focus, the conceptualisation of the Reading Industry is also useful in understanding the parties involved in producing other events in the Literary Field - large and small - which mediate interactions in environments (like Servicescapes) where the line between literature and popular culture (e.g. entertainment, film, TV) is blurred.

While the Communications Circuit (4.2) focuses on connecting books by individual authors to individual readers, the Reading Industry connects individual authors to a collective audience of attendees. Like the Communications Circuit, the Reading Industry describes a network of disparate organisations, connected to each other with different levels of directness, closeness of tie, and formality. The network consists of various organisations, such as publishers, book sellers, libraries, and education institutions. Unlike the Communications Circuit, some, but not all, have a commercial, profit-oriented focus (e.g. publishers, book sellers) (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013). Others' interests may be not-for-profit, e.g. they get involved in event production to educate (e.g. libraries, education), to entertain (ibid.), to celebrate literature, or to promote a social, literary culture (e.g. OBOCs) or cultural tourism and economic development (ibid.), in which authors may be one form of attraction amongst many (e.g. Booktowns- see Driscoll, 2018). The book remains central to this system, yet the focus of the Reading Industry is not necessarily on books so much as interaction around, and adjacent, to them.

In Figure 5 below, I have illustrated the different outputs of the Reading Industry. The use of coloured squares in the diagram builds on those used in Murray and Squires' (2013) updated Communication Circuit models

shown in 4.2 (Figure 4, p. 64), to depict that, like the Communications Circuit, there are different networked organisations involved in the Reading Industry system. The squares are in different sizes and overlapping to differing extents to illustrate that the organisations differ in scale, and are not connected in a clear, linear chain as seen in the Communications Circuit. Four key outputs are produced and mediated, as described by Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2013), namely: books (as some are directly involved in, or members of, the Communications Circuit, and are focused on promoting books), events, education, and entertainment (tangentially aligned to the book).

A dotted boundary line around the organisations illustrates the Servicescape, in its various forms (e.g. different types of bookshops, libraries) in which their events and products are typically made accessible. Unlike the conceptual boundary separating authors and readers (as depicted in Figure 2, p. 61) - which has also been incorporated into this model, on the left of the image - the line in this diagram is dotted to show that it is a permeable boundary: authors and readers may cross it to enter and leave (in-line with approved access e.g. ticket arrangements, opening hours), and by crossing into the Servicescapes they adopt their roles, and encounter each in accordance with them, at the events hosted¹⁷.

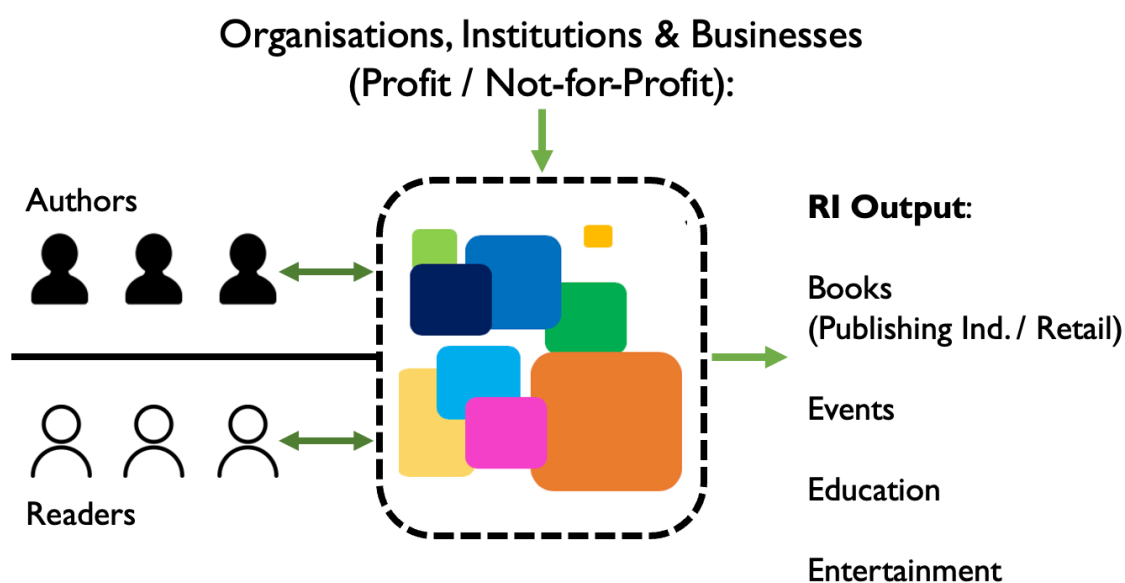


Figure 5: The Reading Industry as mediator in place: an adaptation of Darnton’s (1982) and Murray & Squires’ (2013) depictions of the Communications Circuit, and Fuller & Rehberg Sedo’s Reading Industry (2013)

¹⁷ It was noted in 4.2 when discussing Darnton’s (1982) Communications Circuit, authors, and readers (i.e., people) are effectively positioned outside of the system, unless acting within the bounds of their roles.

Literary events provide a time-boxed, mediated opportunity for authors and readers to interact in person (and, in the case of mass media events such as TV production, for readers to interact by watching an author's broadcast). The events therefore mediate author and reader, outside of the book. Some events are hosted directly by Reading Industry organisations e.g. many bookshops hold a regular schedule of signing events (Miller, 2006). Others may appropriate third party venues – e.g. festivals in temporary locales, which, for the time they are required, effectively function as Servicescapes as, typically, they support multiple services - e.g. drinks, (Murray and Weber, 2017), different styles of events (ibid.), different social seating areas (Weber, 2018) and merchandise (e.g. Tote Bags - (Dane, 2020)).

Depicting the relationship between the Reading Industry and their provision of a physical setting is useful when considering online interactions which may be hosted in platforms run by third-party organisations (e.g. Twitter, Facebook). This becomes a useful lens from which to consider that by using online platforms that are not controlled by either the Reading Industry or the Communications Circuit, mediation is disrupted – and this leaves authors and readers outside of the recognisable, routinised affordances, and the protection that designated physical places can offer.

Literary Events are mediated by the Reading Industry using physical affordances, which have a bearing on the experience of authors and readers within them, which is explored next.

4.3.3 Literary festivals and events: mediating around the book in physical places

Literary events such as festivals play an important role in establishing a book's value and success, and in promoting the author themselves to a potential readership, as they facilitate direct, face-to-face engagement, and provide a tangible, public space in which authors and readers can engage (Weber, 2018; Ommundsen, 2009), and are geographically accessible, hosted by most major cities (Murray and Weber, 2017; Driscoll and Squires, 2018).

Although they support promotion, events do not necessarily make a significant difference to an author's overall book sales¹⁸, and also do not always generate enough to cover costs, with festivals often not paying the author

¹⁸ As author Terry Pratchett (2014) noted – in this case referring to signing events at book stores – promotional events have a minimal impact on the larger picture, yet attending is the *done thing* in a literary world associated with entertainment and prestige: *thing* in a literary world associated with entertainment and prestige:“(...) on the face of it there is not a lot for the author in a signing tour, and the more popular the author, the less there is. If it's going well, it's exhausting; if it's going badly, it's exhausting and frustrating and a lesson in humility. I'm not certain it sells that many extra books; it simply means that books sold in that town will be sold mostly at this one shop. It doesn't hugely affect the bestseller list (...). Of course, there are pluses, but these tend to be for the shop (if it sells a lot of nice shiny books) and the publisher (who consolidates a relationship with the shop or the chain). (...) We do it sometimes because we're bullied, we're vain, we've always done it, we have a vague sense that it's the right thing to do, a few of us like it in some strange way and – to borrow from

for their labour (Driscoll, 2014). This suggests that the real value of an event is something other than marketing, likely tying into the idea that attention is a currency (as observed by Skains, (2019), see 2.1), achieved through being visible to an audience.

Potentially, events can provide readers an opportunity to access authors in-person, to learn about their background and the inspirations behind their work, feeding into the reader's interpretation of their writing (in keeping with the text-centric reader-response theory and feedback channels described in 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Seeing an author in person can also have a humanising effect, by virtue of it being a live, direct exchange (Weber, 2018). For authors, events can enable direct opportunity to gain feedback from readers (again linking to 4.2.1) and to give something back to them are posited as motivators. Ultimately, being in the same place, and able to interact face-to-face offers (in principle) opportunity for connection.

There have been useful studies of literary festivals in recent years. Since the 1980s, literary festivals have grown in scale and popularity, and have become highly visible aspects of literary culture, hosted by most major cities around the world (Driscoll and Squires, 2018; Murray and Weber, 2017). This has not been matched by a significant rise in academic analyses to understand their nature (Murray, 2018) although a substantial body of work has nonetheless been developed in recent years (with some published during the writing of this thesis e.g. Mulvihill and Shea, 2019; Driscoll and Squires, 2020). In these studies, group categorizations - i.e., of separated authors and readers - have generally persisted (Driscoll and Squires, 2020). There has also been a predominant focus on the reader experience, over that of the author. However, these approaches have provided useful insight, regardless of any limitations.

The following pages describe the consolidated, key findings from these studies which are most relevant to this thesis and the online context. These include descriptions of the authors' experiences and their motivations to attend events; the methods through which mediation between authors and readers is supported; and the experience and motivations of readers (and other audience members) to attend festivals.

- **Author experience**

For authors, attending a festival can generate prestige (Driscoll and Squires, 2018), for both their own image, as an author, and for their book (Driscoll, 2014), through attracting attention. Celebrity authors are desirable

another branch of the entertainment industry – we feel that however much work you do in the recording studio, it's not rock'n'roll until you take it on the road" (Pratchett, 2014 p. 43-44).

attractions, and festivals (as well as bookshops) negotiate schedules around them to ensure they secure them¹⁹ (ibid.). Visibility, for authors at all levels, is essentially posited as their reward for participating. However, despite this perception, the insufficient impact on book sales and the frequent absence of monetary payment can contribute to a “professional dissonance in being asked to voluntarily contribute their symbolic capital to a commercial, sales-oriented sphere” - (Driscoll, 2014 p. 158) amongst authors. This dissonance can also be accompanied by an anxiety about public exposure (Driscoll and Squires, 2018), as there is a need to manage their self-presentation carefully (as was discussed in 2.2, in relation to Goffman’s front-and back-stage information sharing, and performative practices (Goffman, 1971)).

The author’s role at a festival event is, in general, as a literary persona, “vested with ‘authority’” (Weber, 2018, p. 24), present to discuss their work. Some authors are accustomed to performing to a public audience, and fewer still possess the requisite level of fame required to be a public-facing figure in mass media broadcasts (Murray, 2015).

Murray & Weber (2017) noted that there has been a long-running criticism of festivals forcing introverted authors to become public performers, assessed on their ability to please a crowd rather than the merits of their writing (echoing Baym’s (2018) comments that musicians need to be judged less by their ability to form relationships online, in 2.2.1) however, many authors, Murray & Weber argued, enjoy public speaking as they are professional communicators by definition (Murray and Weber, 2017). Not wishing to discredit the belief that authors may feel discomfort, as this has been well documented, Murray and Weber instead suggested that the performance issues they face may bear similarity to those faced by others such as actors (ibid.) (this comparison was also supported in the literature in 2.2).

The festival audience can be mixed (which I address shortly) and the goals of the Reading Industry organisations involved in producing the events can be multiple and contrasting, which has led to reports of authors experiencing significant uncertainty (Skains, 2019) about their role at the event. It can be unclear whether they are there to network with other authors, to build profit through promotion of sales, to develop their profile and status, to enrich the experience of readers (ibid.), or a mix of these goals, making it difficult to know how to manage their performance appropriately.

¹⁹ Celebrity authors may need to be booked a year in advance, and venues must demonstrate a solid track record in hosting successful events if they are to secure them – for bookshop events this leads to a perception of bias towards chains and large publishers with the capital to compete for them (Miller, 2006). For festivals, a globally ranked schedule exists (albeit an informal one, in the heads of authors and publishers, rather than a literal list), and new festivals seeking to enter the circuit cannot encroach on an existing, known-festival’s chronological slot (Murray, 2018)

All of these experiences relate to engagement, broadly, and are likely highly applicable to authors' experience of using online platforms.

- **Mediation between author and audience**

Although it is anticipated that authors and audience may make a direct connection at events, establishing personal, direct and open relationships with a mass audience is not realistic (Marshall, 2010), and so the way they interact is highly mediated. Studies of festivals and mass reading events have observed that authors talk about their work and life, and audience members can ask questions (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013; Weber, 2018) directly, but that this is typically facilitated by seating the audience in silent rows, with the author at a distance on the stage, rather than the two groups mingling freely to determine their own interaction behaviours. This arrangement has been observed as creating a barrier, which leaves little room for audience members to communicate or establish common ground with the author (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013). These arrangements are also facilitative - minimising disruption to the audience's viewing experience (Weber, 2018), and used alongside other formal, 'ritualized' (Baym, 2018) protocols, such as ticket purchase, expectations of silence, a need to raise ones' hand to ask a question (Weber, 2018) which together concurrently enable and limit access to the author, as a means of maintaining order.

The success of these formal interactions depend on all attendees adhering to the expected protocols and to fulfil their roles: i.e., the author must give an engaging performance, and the audience must listen attentively, and behave appropriately (Weber, 2018). The author is present and accessible, but simultaneously they are an authority figure who can only be accessed by audience members through strict mediation. Whilst a form of interactivity, some audience members were observed as becoming disengaged as they silently watched an author, evidenced by fidgeting and yawning (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013). The removal of these barriers could be an attractor to online, direct interactions.

Some of the protocols and physical arrangements are used as **barriers** – i.e., they are structures designed to inhibit access (much like a closed gate) – in this case, access of audience to author. Some inhibit access (e.g. unless invited, the audience must not mount the stage, they must stay in the seated area), and others to manage access (e.g. hands up to ask a question, one at a time). Some are physical, and some are social, or a combination, and they either encourage or discourage a certain behaviour²⁰. Other protocols serve to delineate

²⁰ Social and spatial barriers are a concept used in architecture and space design, as well as design principles for Servicescapes, such as the use of comfortable vs uncomfortable furniture previously mentioned. A good outline of Servicescape design principles and the

boundaries – they indicate the bounds, or limits, of something. For example, the seated area is the approved zone for the audience to use; the event itself is bound by its scheduled time; the event is in a physical space and only those with tickets may enter. The words barrier and boundary are often used interchangeably, but it is useful to differentiate here, as there can be some fluidity between them. For example, the audience are prohibited from asking questions during the bounded time in which the author speak. However, once the author has finished speaking, asking questions is no longer prohibited – boundaries shift, and questions are facilitated through putting hands up, and someone being chosen to speak. This inhibits everyone else from talking at the same time. These examples can be referred to as **systemic** boundaries or barriers – symbolic features that “create a culture of impenetrability” (McArthur, 2016, p. 108), such as policy, rule, regulation, permissions, cultural expectations and responsibilities, used to govern access (ibid.). Some are imposed, but some are perceptual - people self-police according to how they perceive appropriate behaviour. These expected behaviours and protocols rely on attendees being able to read the space and act accordingly.

Boundaries and barriers are important interaction mediators, and help to inform people how to behave, and what to expect (informing the habitus, as discussed in 4.1). They are used in Servicescapes (as seen in the examples of bookshop seating in 4.3.1) and the events held in them to create a container in which specific forms of interaction can occur, in an orderly manner. Without them, there can be no order, and this is a point to consider when observing the affordances of the online platforms now used by authors and readers, where highly mediated, systemic barriers and boundaries which manage appropriate distance are not present.

- **The audience’s experience**

The decision to use the word **audience** rather than reader in this section so far has been a pragmatic and intentional one, as it has been found that not all attendees fit the role of reader as it has been conceptualised thus far. People attend for many reasons, and the roles they embody during attendance can be varied.

In one study that investigated the audience demographic of literary festivals, they were found to be a mixed group– typically older, female, middle class, and more than half being writers themselves, with the leisure time and disposable income to attend (Ommundsen, 2009). Another study described some attendees as “cultural event tourists” (Stevens, 2011, p. 145), whose motivation to attend were not necessarily related to the authors or the books, but rather the enjoyment of a cultural event. Some events also attract a specifically

use of barriers can be found in Bitner’s work (Bitner, 1992). More can be learned about socio-spatial principles in architectural spaces in disciplines such as space syntax and proxemics (Bafna, 2003; McArthur, 2016).

professional audience – e.g. a children’s book event may attract children’s book authors and publishing professionals for the purpose of networking rather than attracting young readers who would read the books (Schoenmakers, 2007) - and this may likely be intentional in the design of the event. The varied demographic of attendees does not match the classical definition of a reader. However, it may be appropriate to assert that most attendees do indeed read, as readers are more than just readers (as noted in 4.3.1) and are accustomed to hybrid environments. It is likely that the users who engage with authors in online platforms may also be motivated by a range of interests, and in relation to a range of different roles they embody, beyond that of reader.

As Driscoll observed, people’s motivations to engage with literary culture are individual, intimate, even emotional – “not simply intellectual” (Driscoll, 2015, p. 861), as suggested by theories such as Reader Response, explored earlier. Interview and survey findings by Weber with festival attendees found that personal reasons to attend included a desire for affective engagement, professional motivations, intellectual pursuit, cultural development, social connection, entertainment, escape from daily life, and even political expression (Weber, 2018). The majority “have a complex and multi-layered engagement with literary culture, often in a professional context [which] is an essential determining factor for their perspective and their experience” (Weber, 2018). A passion for reading could certainly be a drive too, as can a desire to feel part of a community of like-minded people (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013), and some (as suggested by the traditional purview discussed in 4.2) appreciate seeing an author to support their interpretation of a book: to better understand the author, how they work, the background of the book and to clarify their understanding of the plot (ibid.). This evidences that orientation around the book, as seen in reader response theory (4.2) can be a valid motivation – however it is far from the only one.

Whilst this body of research does not fully explain the experience of authors and readers at literary events, there are key points identified that may also speak to their online experience:

- Authors may not know how to behave in the environment if the rationale for being present and engaging with the audience is unclear,
- Authors may not know how to behave if the audience demographic is undetermined,
- Authors may fear exposure, particularly if the audience demographic is unverified,
- An audience member may be interested in the engagement for reasons other than those traditionally associated with readers (e.g. feedback and interpretative support),
- Direct communication between an individual author and a large audience is not realistic or practical,

- Barriers, boundaries, and protocols serve to manage interactions, and may differ, (or those the Literary Field habitually uses in physical places may be absent), in online platforms.

In 2.1 I observed that using online platforms for author and reader engagement is often viewed as beneficial as it removes barriers to interaction by enabling a broad, global audience to connect. However, this recent research into literary events and festivals may suggest that, as Hesmondhalgh observed, opening up to an online audience may simultaneously disrupt some of the advantages to holding localised events, such as a collocated community (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) and familiar, mediating structures.

4.4 The Literary System: a model for understanding mediation in place

This section presents a composite model I developed in response to the literature in this chapter, and the upcoming empirical study in chapter 5. The model depicts the system which serves to mediate interactions between authors and readers, in different ways. This system (which I have called the Literary System) is shown to provide a physical place within the Literary Field, which facilitates a tangible setting in which authors and readers can interact. This model is developed further in chapter 6 in response to the findings of the first empirical study, to show how the online environment has extended the model.

Figure 6 below builds on Figure 2 (the conceptual boundary between author and reader p.61) and Figure 5 (the Reading Industry, p.76) to depict a barrier between authors and readers, which is mediated by the Literary System. The agents involved in mediation – the Communications Circuit (Darnton, 1982; Murray and Squires, 2013), which mediates the book, and the Reading Industry (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) which mediates activity around the book such as events – are consolidated in the model, represented by a single grey square. The networked ties between them are complex and varied, and this has been simplified for the purpose of legibility in the model.

Together the agents of the two systems, and the Servicescapes (as described in 4.3.1) in which their services (mediation of books, information, and author) are made available, are encircled by a dotted boundary line, used to indicate that together, they form a mediating system. The dotted boundary surrounding the agents and Servicescapes (i.e., the Literary System) is dotted to indicate that it (unlike the conceptual boundary between authors and readers, to the left of the system and outside of it) is permeable: agents such as authors and readers may enter and leave the system by crossing the boundary.

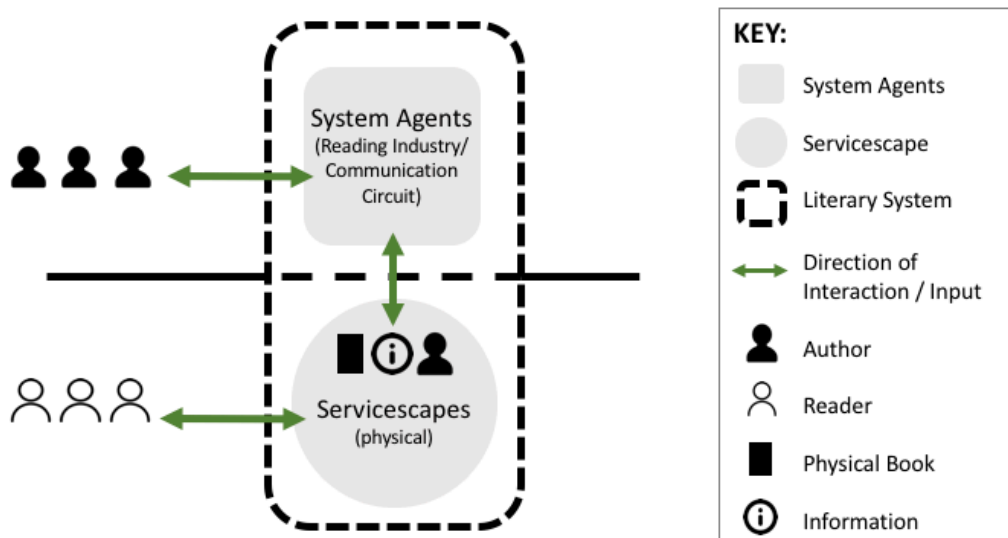


Figure 6: Literary System offline in place [A]

The permeability also represents that the system is influenced by, and also a part of, the Literary Field, and echoes Bourdieu’s position that the Literary Field is “singularly porous and ill defined” (Driscoll, 2014, p.12) on account of the fluidity of roles and continual influence of external variables from other fields and broader contextual factors. The Literary System in this model provides a place in which the Literary System may be observed, and the two influence each other bi-directionally. The Literary Field itself – a concept which exists between agents, rather than a locatable system – is not depicted in the model, however all agents and the Literary System are a part of it. The Literary System provides a designated place, in the abstract space of the Literary Field (drawing on Harrison & Dourish’s (1996) work, detailed in 4.3.1).

Authors and readers are positioned outside of the system, as discussed in 4.2, yet they are within the Literary Field. They and may enter and leave (depicted by green arrows) accordingly, when engaging in their roles of author and reader. Authors do so through interacting with the system agents, who mediate their book, and their access to readers through organised events. Readers access directly into the Servicescape to engage with the different services (book, information about book and author, and the mediated author at an event) available to them. Authors and readers, as with everything in the Literary Field (4.1), are influenced by external factors. How they enter, and how they interact with the system once inside, is dependent on their status and role. Entry and interactions in the system are also dependent on systemic barriers, boundaries, and protocols (e.g. opening hours, ticketing, seating arrangements – as described in 4.3).

By incorporating physical concepts into this model, authors and readers are ascribed a more active role than was depicted in the Communications Circuit – no longer passively connected through a mediated production

chain. Readers do not wait for a book to be distributed to them, rather they have agency to enter, circulate, choose, have encounters, and to leave (by adhering to system protocols and behavioural expectations).

By incorporating Servicescapes into the model it also becomes visible that those who enter can also engage with various other services (e.g. drinking coffee, watch an event). These additional services are external to the Literary Field but are embedded in the expectations of the habitus developed, and thus key to navigation in the hybrid environment. The incorporation of physical concepts in the model also highlights that not all literary activity occurs within the bounds of the Literary System – i.e., once a reader takes a book home, exiting the Servicescape, their activity cannot be seen. If they share the book with peers, this cannot be tracked, and the actions they take before choosing to enter (e.g. checking book reviews, seeing an advert for an event on Twitter) are also effectively invisible to the system, and thus the organisations within it.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced four key areas of related research to help determine how mediation between authors and readers has been understood, and to help determine what is mediated, and how, in an offline context. This review of literature was conducted during, as part of the analysis of, data collected in the first empirical study, detailed in the next chapter.

From these areas (summarised below), I synthesised six key theories (the Literary Field, the Communications Circuit, the Servicescape, Space and Place, the Reading Industry and Systemic Boundaries and barriers – highlighted in bold below) into a theoretical model I called the Literary System, to provide a basis for understanding the relationship between offline practices and the online interactions investigated in this thesis. The areas covered were as follows:

- Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) (4.1) was used to situate interactions in the **Literary Field**, and explored how roles are relational, interaction behaviours are informed by the habitus, and all facets are interrelated with their context, including the physical environment in which they are enacted. The habitus is transposable, and thus knowledge from offline interaction environments likely influences how authors and readers interact in online environments. However, it is not fully transposable, and I argued that it is also likely that the users' habitus in online spaces differs, somewhat, from that developed offline, to account for the specific experiences of the online contextual collapse.

- **Darnton's Communications Circuit** (Darnton, 1982) (4.2) (and the contemporary updates to the model (Murray and Squires, 2013)) depicts a production chain through which books are produced, commonly used in academia to position the book as the central mediator between authors and readers. The model identifies connected organisations involved in mediating the book and infers (without exploring) a feedback chain existing directly between authors and readers, which is managed externally to their system. The feedback chain was explored in 4.2.1, and found, again, to seemingly situate the book at the centre of interactions, although motivation amongst readers appeared more socially driven. A bias towards book or text-centricity in author and reader interactivity was further explored in 4.2.2, and I pointed to a possible continuation of this bias in digital mediation (in the form of information-centricity) which may be obstructing a focus on social motivations for interaction.
- The bookshop was posited as a **Servicescape** (Bitner, 1992) (4.3.1), to explore the use of physical places (linking to a theory of **space** and **place** (Harrison and Dourish, 1996)) to mediate literary interactions, in a hybrid environment used to support a mix of literary and non-literary interests (as well as mixing commerce and culture). This section explored the use of physical affordances to support and direct interactions between people, and with the environment itself (which can influence the habitus they develop). I used this work to posit that 'readers' have interests beyond literature and are accustomed to mixed environments that provide a range of services beyond literature itself. I propose that this acceptance of a hybrid environment in the habitus likely carries into users' expectations in online environments.
- **The Reading Industry** (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) (4.3.2) was introduced to describe a network of organisations who arrange literary events in which authors and readers can interact in-person, outside of the book. These events provide a physical setting (which I positioned as Servicescapes) and offer opportunity to observe authors and readers, collocated. I explored studies of literary festivals in 4.3.3, revealing that a mix of boundaries and barriers are used to manage interactions (in keeping with the Servicescape, and also a concept of **Systemic boundaries and barriers** (McArthur, 2016) from socio-spatial theory). I shared some of the key findings from research into literary events that were most likely to be relevant to online mediation. This highlighted that literary events attract a mixed, broad audience, motivated to interact with authors and literary culture for a variety of reasons that fall outside the remit of the book-centric motivations associated with 'readers'. Catering to a mixed audience, alongside inconsistent purposes for hosting events, were seen to cause difficulties

for the authors in attendance, as it complicates their performative practices and can also create anxiety. I used this work to suggest that a broad, mixed audience is likely online, and not all may engage with online profiles and content for traditional bookish reasons. I also posited that the clear systemic boundaries and barriers which mediate interactions are likely to differ online, and this may cause complications.

By building a broader understanding of how interactions between authors and readers have been understood, mediated, and how they exist in the context of the Literary Field in this chapter, I have established helpful insight for better understanding (and anticipating) what is experienced when authors make themselves visible online. By looking at research that has observed offline interactions, it has been possible to identify parallels with the studies of online interactions, shared in chapter 2. For example, readers (or audiences) have long discussed literature together, without necessarily involving the creator in their discussion, although the creator may encounter their views, and a feeling of proximity to the creator can be important. Making themselves visible and accessible to a large audience can cause anxiety and uncertainty for authors and creators, and it also requires clear barriers and boundaries to help manage potentially large-scale interaction.

This work has strengthened my position that online interaction behaviour cannot be understood in isolation from offline interactions and experiences, which is in keeping with the concept of the transposable, and fluidly changing, habitus identified by Bourdieu (1977).

Although it is likely that the research shared here and in chapter 2 highlight several factors which influence authors' and readers' experiences online, it is important to speak directly to them to learn from their direct experience, as research into offline mediation, and into the experiences of other types of cultural workers and audiences, cannot be fully transposable to the specific circumstances of online author and reader interactions. In the next chapter, I present my first empirical study (conducted in parallel to the work in this chapter, and much of the work in chapter 2), in which twelve authors and readers were interviewed to find out more about their experiences, and about where, how, and why they interact together online.

Chapter 5: Empirical study one: interviews with fiction authors and readers - exploring accounts of online interaction

“The art goes from the artists’ lips or pens to the audiences’ ears and eyes. But in order to share directly, the artist still has to leave the garret and head down into the bustling marketplace, and that’s the catch: the marketplace is where you have to deal with people. To many artists, people are scary. (...) [but] it’s about finding your people, your listeners, your readers, and making art for and with them. (...) if your art touches a single heart, strikes a single nerve, you’ll see people quietly heading your way and knocking on your door. Let them in. Tell them to bring their friends up. If possible, provide wine.”

The Art of Asking (Amanda Palmer, 2014)

In this chapter I detail the first empirical study of the thesis, conducted in 2017, in which twelve participants (six authors and six readers) were interviewed about their experiences with interacting together through online technologies²¹. This study was conducted in parallel to reviewing the literature in chapters 2 and 4, using an inductive Grounded Theory approach, as explained in chapter 3. First, I detail the motivations for the study (5.1) and the methods used to design and conduct it (5.2). I then describe the findings from the qualitative data using quotes from participants to support the narrative of their accounts (5.3). Finally, the findings were analysed and discussed, followed by considerations for next steps in the research, based on the analysis (5.4).

5.1 Motivation for the study

Interaction between fiction authors and readers has traditionally been mediated formally, by traditional gatekeepers such as publishers and agents. Sometimes this has been done through a feedback channel (discussed in 4.2.1), or through collocation at events such as book signings and author readings, where a mix of behavioural protocols and physical affordances are used to support mediation (discussed in 4.3.2).

In recent decades, authors have created their own websites, which allow for mediated messaging. Increasingly they are also taking to online social platforms (e.g. forums, digital writing platforms, social media) through which readers and audiences can communicate with them, outside of the formal system (discussed in 2.1). Further to a high-level review of existing literature, I observed that little was known about how online interaction mediation is experienced by either authors or readers, nor a clear account of what websites and platforms are used. I therefore chose to conduct this study to gather direct accounts from both authors and

²¹ Contents from this chapter were taken, in part, from Butler et al. (2018).

readers, as without understanding their perspectives it is not possible to understand how well current online mediation supports either group.

I designed and conducted a qualitative, semi-structured interview study with authors and readers of genre fiction. I chose this specific subset of literature as it attracts a broad demographic of readers, and many authors and readers of genre fiction are visibly and regularly active in online spaces. Further, it is an area of literary interest which has been previously under-researched in HCI, due to a hitherto focus on intellectual and informational needs and practices (discussed in 4.2.2).

Initially (when this work began, in 2017), my motivation behind this study was to gather a rich account of the experience of disintermediated interactions between authors and readers online to identify barriers to effective interaction, and opportunities for improving interaction support – i.e., to make it easier for them to interact together in the future. As the analysis of this study, and the analytical work across the thesis progressed (using a cyclical, analytical approach), I learned more about their experiences and context. Resultantly, my focus on identifying specific opportunities to improve interaction mediation between them lessened, as more important issues were raised.

Therefore the analysis of the data presented in this chapter became focused on better identifying what interaction means to authors and readers (rather than on barriers impacting their ability to interact), and to find out what needs to be supported from their perspective.

The findings in this chapters provide an overview of interactivity amongst authors and readers in online platforms of different kinds, according to participants' accounts. It contributes a rich, foundational understanding of the interaction experiences of both authors and readers, as users of online technology.

5.2 Methods

I conducted a qualitative interview study with twelve participants who self-identified as fitting the target population of this study – authors and readers of genre fiction, who use the internet to interact together online. Each recruit to the study participated in a loosely structured interview, in which they were asked questions about how they interact together online, what platforms and websites they use, their motivations for interacting, and their experiences of doing so. Their experiences with the specific, chosen platforms were also discussed.

This section builds on the method overview in chapter 3.5, describing the participants recruited (5.2.1), and a detailed account of the study procedures and materials used to conduct the research (5.2.2). The last section (5.2.3) describes how qualitative data was collected and analysed.

5.2.1 Participant demographics

I recruited authors and readers, over the age of 18, through a mix of referrals, snowballing, and advertisements on networking sites commonly used by literary communities. This included popular, non-specialist social media and social networking platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and Tumblr), and specialist, literary-centric sites (GoodReads, Wattpad) (see 3.5 for details of the recruitment process, and Appendix A for a copy of the advertisement used).

Although I considered authors and readers as two user groups, I treated them as equal users of technology in the analysis overall. The intention was to build a greater understanding of their shared experience, rather than to separate their accounts and to make direct comparisons. However, I anticipated there would likely be some differences in their motivations and experiences in some respects by virtue of their role (e.g. authors may be online as part of their profession). I approached all participants with equal curiosity and openness and did my best to keep any preconceived assumptions I may have had about the experiences of either group from influencing the interviews, which were participant-led.

A total of twelve participants were recruited, as follows:

- Six genre fiction authors (mean age 50): three male ('Steve'; 'John' and 'Adam') and three females ('Helen', 'Sue' and 'Jess')
- Six genre fiction readers (mean age 30): five females ('Debbie'; 'Gemma'; 'Anne'; 'Sarah'; 'Lauren') one male ('Karl').

I used pseudonyms for the participants throughout this chapter to protect their identities (as discussed in 3.8.3). All were adults, aged 21 to 63 (average 40), and self-selected based on the criteria for voluntary participation in the advertised call-for-participation (appendix A2). Figure 7 below illustrates the participant demographics, including age, pseudonym, and the specific fiction genre(s) that they primarily write (authors) or read (readers). For authors, it also gives a high-level overview of their experience level as an author, and whether they have been published by the royalty publishing system.

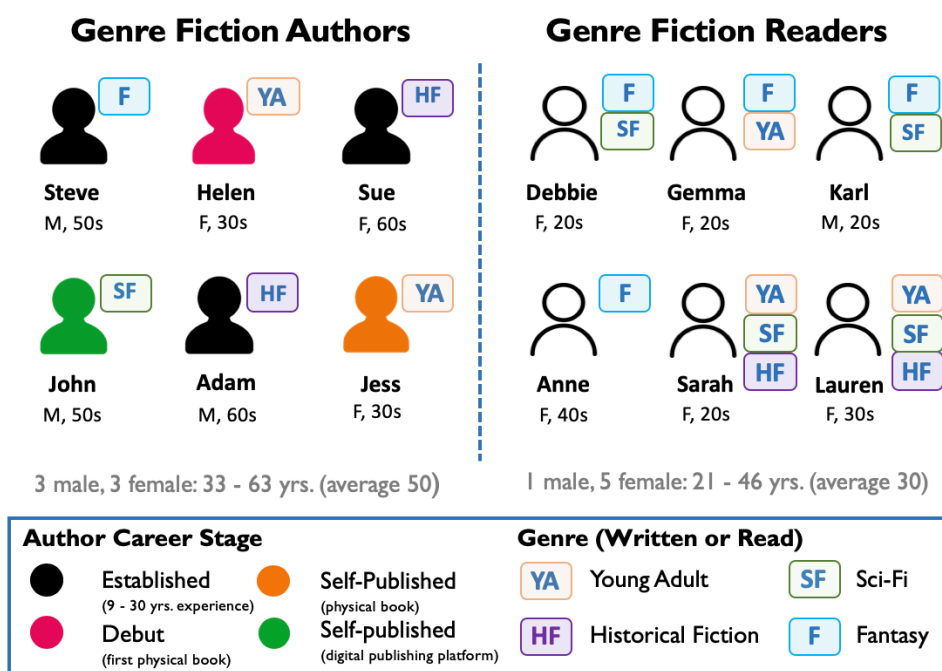


Figure 7: Participant demographic study 1 (Authors and Readers)

- Author participants

All authors participants wrote genre fiction, in the sub-genres of Science Fiction, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, or Fantasy. Four (Steve, Helen, Sue, Adam), at the time of the study, had work published through the royalty print publishing system, as the primary mode of disseminating their work. Writing was their primary profession through which their main source of income was generated, and as such, I refer to them as trade authors²² to indicate that being an author and generating commercial sales is their profession. Their individual experience as trade authors ranged from one year to over thirty years. Some of the four were very well-established in their field (e.g. more than one had had their books televised), necessitating particular caution to protect their identity in this study. All of the trade authors had a publicly accessible Twitter profile, with some having a large online audience of between 10 - 30k followers²³, and therefore a potentially rich experience of audience interaction.

²² A term used by one of the study participants to self-describe which I understood to be commonly used in the industry.

²³ The average number of followers for an established trade author participant (involved in several industry-based committees and groups) was described as circa 3-4k. All four of the participants either met, or exceeded, this range.

The remaining two authors were recruited specifically to provide alternative and additional experiences to those of the trade authors. John self-published directly online using an online writing platform and had had no experience of royalty publishing. Jess had varied experience: first, she self-published digitally through an online writing platform like John, then published in print through royalty publishing, and had most recently transitioned into self-publishing- again in print format.

Of the six authors, three managed (either currently or previously) a promotional website of their own, but predominantly used generic social media sites such as **Twitter**, **Facebook**, and **Instagram** to interact with readers. Some noted more indirect and anonymous interactions with readers through platforms such as **Tumblr** (e.g. through observing posts written by fans about them and their work in the platform, using a pseudonym to preserve their identity). John had social media accounts, but only used the digital writing platform on which he published to directly interact with his readers.

I purposely recruited authors at different stages of their career and with differing personal experiences of publishing formats, anticipating that their interaction needs and practices may differ, dependent on their relationship to – and perceived status within - the Literary Field. I anticipated that their perceived status may influence the scale of their interactions with readers (e.g. a high-status author may have a larger audience, or a different experience engaging with them than those who have a smaller audience), as well as the nature of those interactions.

- **Reader participants**

The six reader participants used a range of online technologies to regularly interact with authors and literary communities. Their primary choices were **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **GoodReads**, **Tumblr**, **Reddit**, and **YouTube**. Their reading tastes were varied and individual, however all enjoyed reading genre fiction regularly, with the majority also reading broadly across fiction and non-fiction.

Gemma was recruited as she also ran a BookTube²⁴ channel on YouTube, offering a valuable opportunity to learn not just about her experience as a reader, but also as a micro-celebrity in literary circles, who interacts with a large audience of readers. Again, due to her public-facing position, extra care has been taken to de-identify her in the findings.

²⁴ The unofficial name given to a collection of YouTube channels where books, and things related to them, are discussed – including content such as reviews and revealing the covers of new books.

5.2.2 Study design and procedure

The interview study was loosely structured, to allow the participants' accounts to lead the direction of enquiry. Based on the scoping exercise conducted previously (as noted in 3.2.2), I identified broad sensitizing topics to guide an otherwise open, participant-led discussion. The topics identified included:

- how the participants experienced and engaged in interaction, either within or between groups: i.e., authors and readers, readers and readers, authors and authors.
- participants' motivations for interacting online (again, within and between groups).
- participants' use of current technologies for interactions: what platforms and websites they used; what they used them for; pain points; desired functionality; workarounds (electronic or otherwise) used to account for gaps in mediation.
- for author participants: how feedback, commentary, dialogue, and other information obtained through the opportunity to reach readers has impacted the development of their ongoing and future writing²⁵.
- for reader participants: how access to engage with authors directly online, through whatever means, influenced their approach to, or understanding of, literature.

I prepared a list of questions based around these topics, which were tailored to accommodate variance between authors and readers (see appendix A 6), however, these questions did not dictate the interviews. Rather, I used them as occasional prompts, in the infrequent instances that the discussion lost momentum. The interviews were led by the participant's accounts and questions arising from the discussion. This was an important part of the study design, which I planned to be inductive. I encouraged participants to describe their experiences openly and prompted (occasionally with reference to the pre-prepared questions) them for more information when a remark seemed worthy of deeper exploration. Overall, conversation was fluid and participants had a lot to share, making my planned questions largely redundant. As the study progressed, I introduced some questions based on my analysis of previous participants' accounts, to test potential leads and correlations. Sometimes those leads were exposed to be specific to the individual's experiences rather than shared (at least by these participants), and others led to identifiable patterns of behaviour.

With each participant, the study followed the same procedure:

²⁵ N.B. As this study was conducted in parallel to the literature review, my initial approach assumed informational needs as per the research from my field. This focus changed during the process of the study, and a change in my perspective is reflected in the recruitment process of the subsequent study in the thesis.

- An Information Sheet (see appendix A3) was emailed to the participants at least one week before the interview, in a personalised email, to ensure they understood its purpose and how the study would be conducted. This Information Sheet was then read out loud and discussed on the day to ensure their clear understanding prior to commencement, and to give opportunity to ask any questions.
- A consent form (see appendix A4) was then reviewed and signed in duplicate once agreed, with one copy given to the participant to keep for their records.
- Participants were asked to complete, verbally, a brief demographic questionnaire, detailing their age, gender, and the genre(s) of fiction they write or read, and interact in relation to online.
- Audio recording commenced, and a face-to-face interview was conducted, lasting approximately forty-five minutes.

To conclude, I asked participants if they had any questions, or more information to share, and thanked them for taking part. The audio recording was then stopped.

5.2.3 Data collection and analysis

Materials and devices for data collection

All interviews were audio recorded using a university laptop, and a dictaphone as back-up. Sometimes the laptop was used for participants to show me examples of their past interactions, and other times they showed me on their own device. I took a digital camera to each interview in case any interesting examples were worthy of capturing for later analysis and consideration (although ultimately no photos were used in the final write-up of this thesis). I deleted all recordings, audio or visual, from devices once they had been stored securely (as detailed in chapter 3. 7.2). Six interviews were conducted through Skype, in which I asked the participants to share any examples of publicly accessible interactions that would support the discussion by verbally directing me to the website they were talking about on my own browser (to minimise disruption through directing them to share their own screen).

Data collection and transcription of audio for analysis

At the start of each interview, I invited the participants to talk about how they interacted around fiction, and which online platforms and websites they used. How they responded determined how the interview proceeded, with further questioning generally used only to prompt for more information around what they had stated (e.g. "What [do] you get out of seeing a little more of [an author's personality]?"). Many of these

questions were to check my understanding of a statement, or to elicit a deeper understanding through probing (e.g. “what did you mean by (...)” or “did you feel it was important [to] (...).”). If I was not familiar with a platform, technology or website being described, I asked them to show me- either on their own device or, if preferred, on my university laptop, whilst taking care not to allow this to disrupt the flow of their account (e.g. by noting it down and re-raising at a more opportune moment). I used open questions to avoid leading participants’ responses, and to encourage them to expand, and share reflections on, their answers. I avoided interrupting as they spoke, encouraging them to speak freely and fluidly. I reminded them that their identity would be kept anonymous, and that they could request for any comments to be omitted from the report, helped to ensure an open, honest dialogue. I found that many of the authors exhibited a sense of release at being able to talk about some of the problems they have faced online, where ordinarily they are expected to maintain a resolutely positive attitude at interviews, often publicly shared for promotional purposes.

I transcribed the audio recordings as immediately as possible after each interview, and before conducting the next one. Transcriptions were written in full, and verbatim, including, as faithfully as possible, any utterances (e.g. 'umm', 'err', etc); pauses (shown as '...'); incomplete sentences; and colloquial language (e.g. 'gonna' or 'y'know'). Where utterances were repeated multiple times, this could disrupt the legibility of their intent, and so I omitted some of the instances, taking care to still maintain the integrity of the flow of their speech (e.g. 'Like. Like... like I... like (...)’ would become ‘like... like (...)’).

Concurrent data collection and analysis

Following, loosely, a Grounded Theory methodology (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) (as described in 3.5.2), I conducted the analysis in parallel to collecting data. This method helped to inform my subsequent interviews, as I could feed-in questions and cues from the previous findings, to test hunches and to iterate both the analysis and my line of enquiry. I took notes and memos both during and immediately after each interview, and during the transcription and analysis stages to record my thoughts, questions, and possible correlations as they came to mind²⁶. I also tested evolving codes and categories through integrative diagramming, in keeping with Grounded Theory methods (Sbaraini et al., 2011; Corbin and Strauss, 2015) using sketches. The sketches proved an integral part of the analysis process, helping to link codes and ideas; to discover patterns; and to reconceptualise ideas, and some were evolved into diagrams as presented in my conceptualisation of the Literary System, in chapters 3 and 6. Sketching also helped to support discussions

²⁶ I also did this constantly for many months during the process of analysing through writing and cross comparing the findings to literature, e.g. on the bus, whilst watching Netflix, and even in the bathroom on a waterproof pad!

with my supervisors for their opinions as they helped me to illustrate and discuss my ongoing findings. The process of writing-up also played a significant role in the analysis, which I also did concurrently - and in a cyclical process throughout the thesis.

I generated categories and codes in response to the incoming data. The coding process was not used solely to confirm concepts, but to also disconfirm them where they fell short, and revise them in relation to new incoming information. I tested ideas in a theoretically playful manner (Charmaz, 2014), and made constant comparisons to ensure their internal validity, making iterative revisions accordingly. I sought not only to confirm dominant patterns in accounts, but to identify individual outliers and absences of patterns to find alternative, or enriched meanings. For example, all authors described similar practices when posting content online: detailing new releases and upcoming events; sharing photos of themselves at promotional events; sharing articles related to their genre (e.g. a Historical Fiction author may share a history article); or promoting the work of another author. This displayed a clear pattern of action. From this, I could question when and why they did so, to test the consistency of the pattern, to check my interpretation, and to discover discrepancies and differences between participants, and their practices. This helped to identify that the type of information they posted at a given time was dependent on the production stage of their work. If there was no new book to promote, they would share other forms of information to maintain visibility (such as the shared articles, rather than promotional material). Knowing more about the pattern, I could ask them more probing questions to gain depth of understanding, and also to learn from outliers and also variations to the pattern between participants, to improve theoretical density (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

I integrated a review of literature²⁷ into my analysis (as described in 3.5.2) – a process I found important in supporting (and dispelling) the assumptions I was forming as I analysed data, and which helped me to understand participant accounts within a wider cultural context, historical antecedent and organisational climate (Charmaz, 2014). I found it particularly helpful to read around the influence of the publishing process on authors, as this shed light on some behaviours and descriptions which I could not understand without this additional context, or by looking at the online experience in isolation. Taking the publishing process into consideration was also helpful in understanding, for example, the influence of systemic timing on their

²⁷ It is often expressed that, in Grounded Theory methodology, existing literature should be ignored entirely. However, this is a misinterpretation – it is only at the start that a literature review is discouraged, to minimise the influence of preconceived ideas, frameworks, hypotheses and theory, which could detract from the authenticity of the inductive work (Dunne, 2011) – allowing space for the researcher to articulate their own ideas (Charmaz, 2006) and to support reflexivity and theoretical development (Henwood and Pidgeon, 2006). Glaser, in particular, actively encouraged integrating a literature review into the analysis process, effectively treating literature as an additional data set towards building an integrated theory (Glaser, 1998).

behaviour (e.g. setting up Q&A sessions in line with book release dates), which was constrained and guided, for example, by how long it takes to release a book.

Gradually and cyclically, I refined evolving concepts, and reviewed literature in parallel to support the process. This improved the density of the analysis, and helped abstract it from individual participant experiences, to start developing an overarching framework for understanding the experiences of authors and readers.

5.3 Findings

In this section, I provide a thick description of the research findings, incorporating direct quotes from the participants' accounts. The findings were grouped under themes, each building on the last, incrementally, to present a linear narrative through the findings. The narrative begins with the accounts of authors, and how being visible online fits with their professional needs. The accounts of readers were gradually interwoven into the narrative (from 5.3.5 onwards) to present the accounts of both user groups concurrently.

This subchapter begins by exploring the motivations behind authors' being online (5.3.1); followed by the specific online practices they follow (5.3.2); how they manage the balance of sharing personal and informational content (5.3.3), and how they manage some of the costs this additional labour entails (5.3.4). It then proceeds to discuss a fear that by not being online, they may risk becoming effectively invisible (5.3.5), contrasted with the readers' perceptions of an author not being online. Next, assumptions that interaction behaviour supports sharing feedback and asking questions (as discussed in chapter 4.2) are explored (5.3.6), followed by an exploration of the role of authenticity in supporting interactions (5.3.7). Then, I detail some of the difficulties associated with online visibility (5.3.8). Finally, the chapter ends with conclusions about the findings, and positions the next steps in the research (5.4).

5.3.1 Professional imperative to be online

The key motivation of the author participants to interact online was to market their books. This practice was not new – self-promotion had always been part of the job of an author, even before the internet. Fantasy writer Steve explained that self-promotion was associated with publishers having limited funding to promote on their behalf – particularly for paperback releases:

All the publicity budget goes on the hardback release (...) paperback, sometimes you get err, a poster campaign, but you don't get like a trip, they don't send me around the country for the paperback, right. They don't do a big push." (Steve).

The authors often coordinated with other authors in their genre to arrange events for themselves, in the absence of publishers funding or arranging them on their behalf: "I was very lucky I got a big book deal so I had a tour and got merchandise and I got kind of help, but if you're smaller and, certainly going forward, you arrange your own conferences and like arrange events and things" (Helen). Books can take a long time to proceed to print and reach the shelves once written (e.g.: "I sold in the February of the previous year and then suddenly it was announced it was coming out a year later" (Helen)), and promotional events were periodic, aligned with the publishing system and most frequently planned around release dates. Historical Fiction author Adam expressed that being willing to do events was more important today than ever before, to ensure the book is visible - as publisher's budgets (and thus their ability to promote it) have diminished:

You always have to be willing to do events [but] in the digital technology age it's much, much more important. (...) publishers have limited budgets, even the big publishers, so they might take your book on, but they might not have any money to promote it at all. So you've got a choice, you know! Either you do it or nobody does (Adam).

Beyond promoting the book, being visible as an active participant in online self-promotion and content sharing was also considered an important step to securing a book deal with a publisher in the first place. Some authors perceived that publishers considered their number of followers and levels of online engagement when deciding whether to invest in their books. Jess, for example, had struggled to get an agent or publisher for quite some time. She chose to put her work on a popular digital writing platform, hoping that by building an engaged audience there she could evidence her popularity and commercial viability, towards reaching her goal. After doing this she attracted an agent and subsequently ceased writing for the digital platform:

My experience is that publishers come to you when you're already doing all this! Like when they see you are doing it and making a success of it, then they go, OK, well we'll be interested in that. (...) [so when my book on the digital platform] got about half a million hits (...) that's when I wrote to an agent, two agents, and they both said 'yes' because they saw I had generated interest and I had readers" (Jess)

Outside of writing, Adam worked for an organisation who provide support to authors. Through his experience in this role, he too had come to believe that publishers use online engagement metrics at acquisition meetings:

Even if you've done lots of books and become quite successful [your editor] will go to what's called an acquisitions meeting [which] is literally everyone sitting around saying 'what shall we acquire for our list next year?' (...) and they will all look at that book as a possible commercial enterprise - 'cause that's what publishers are - and they will say, you know 'here's the outline, or here's the book or here's a sample', 'yeah I really like it actually (...) let's just have a look at the figures' and someone will open their laptop and

say '[their] last book only sold [x number]' . And then someone else says (...) 'he's great, you know! Happy to do social media, festivals, commercially cooperative, you know, not difficult at all' and they go 'Oh! That's ok!' (Adam)

Regardless of whether these perceptions were accurate, all the authors interviewed expressed a feeling of obligation to be online. For some, this was because they had been encouraged by their publisher, and for others it was because they had observed other authors doing it. Gaining publisher support for a book is hard, and even those with decades of demonstrable success acknowledged job insecurity, and a need to work hard to be noticed (e.g.: “the thing about the creative professions is you're actually continually pitching (...) - every time you write a new book, it's a new job.” (Adam)) – effectively authorship was described as self-employed work, paid according to contract. Securing a deal for a debut book was particularly hard and putting in the work to acquire online followers in advance helped to signal value to potential publishers: “my experience is that publishers come to you when you're already doing [social media] (...) and making a success of it” (Jess). Adam explained that there are, informally, bandings which categorise authors in accordance with their number of Twitter followers, which are used towards assessing whether to take on an author’s writing to publish through the royalty system: “there are bands. (...) some people [have] under a thousand [followers on Twitter]. All the writers I know, we're on the two and a half, three and a half, four thousand. (...) And then there are other people (...) who've got very high profile, and they've got 50,60, 70, 80 thousand. And then of course, your [J.K.] Rowling” (Adam). Being visible online, then, as Adam explained was “another statistic which says something about you” which could help to secure contract income. Adam went on to note that if an author’s following expanded significantly or quickly, this would raise eyebrows amongst other authors, as a potentially suspicious tactic.

The importance of being present online in social media – particularly Twitter - for the benefit of employment was emphasised and appeared to be a stronger motivator than audience connection (as is typically assumed to be a primary goal). There was an imperative for authors of children’s or Young Adult fiction to build an audience of followers on Twitter too, even though their readers may be either too young to join social media, or, as a demographic, favour other platforms (e.g. Instagram was described as the platform most used by the Young Adult reader demographic). Adam and Sue had both written books for children and explained that some of their followers were teachers and parents, rather than children, who would sometimes contact them on behalf of a child or class. These guardians were not considered to be representative of their online follower demographic, however (and on the rare occasion a ‘friend’ request came from a child, Adam explained that he and other authors treated this with caution, and generally would not reciprocate).

All of the authors were followed on social media by a confluence of audience-types, but there was a general perception that their followers were primarily industry professionals, rather than readers. These assumptions were not evidence-based, as it was repeatedly expressed that it is not possible to tell who the online audience is. Rather, it appeared that assumptions may have been based on absence of evidence that they were readers. For example, Helen saw no clear correlation between Twitter follower numbers and sales, suggesting to her that her followers were not readers (or, rather, paying customers buying the books):

I know that I do have followers where they seem like genuine readers who are fans of me, because they will tweet at me and say 'I really loved your book' or they'll tag you in stuff and you'll get followed, (...) But I think there's lots of readers who aren't using the internet, or don't follow you in that way, (...) certainly when you look at the sales and you look at your Twitter following, like, Twitter is tiny versus the sales, so it's clearly got to be... and it's impossible to know who your demographic is. So the ones on Twitter tend to be the ones who are somehow professionally connected. (Helen)

Further, industry professionals were representative of who the author participants themselves followed and shared exchanges with. Although an author's online engagement looked, on the surface, to be intended for the benefit of readers, and they each expressed that reader engagement was their primary motivation for using social media, all of the authors gradually revealed that actually, much of their effort online was concentrated on industry professionals. This suggested some cognitive dissonance around their motivations and perspectives of the value of being online.

They offered different explanations for this incongruence. One angle was that targeting professionals helps to support sales, as professionals have access to influence the readership: “[My profile is] a world of kind of people involved in [books]. Writers, editors, illustrators, teachers, librarians, reviewers... and I was conscious of that (...) they buy books and they give it to people” (Adam). Another explanation was for networking and expanding their professional and personal support network – e.g. making connections with other authors, who worked for the same publishing house; or wrote for the same genre. This provided a sense of community. It was also suggested that an audience of professionals could be an unintentional result of a bubble effect, as people follow those they know and work with, and then connect with their connections, resulting in an audience of people with professional ties. Within that bubble, Helen suggested, was an audience largely disinterested in her book-related posts, rendering her efforts as having a limited impact:

Everyone [is] just following each other, it's not like you're bringing this to anyone. Because all of the people who are following me who aren't interested in the book stuff just ignore those tweets anyway. Non-book Twitter will just engage with me in other

things, and it's just taken as read, so you're not really reaching another audience other than all of the same people. (Helen)

Maintaining an online presence could be a lot of work (which is unpaid), but it was perceived as commercially necessary, regardless of any uncertainty about the audience demographic. Adam viewed complying with the expectation to be online as a way of showing he was a cooperative team player, describing it as an addition, essentially, to his CV, evidencing his soft skills. However, some of the participants with less industry experience than Adam did not express the same level of understanding of the professional contribution of online visibility, describing it as a peculiar yet unavoidable practice which did not discernibly improve book sales or observably attract readers, making its value difficult to comprehend (e.g.: "it's a weird game we all play" (Helen). Some found enjoyment in it, and others struggled.

In addition to being a functional requirement of the profession in the royalty publishing system, there was a broader, commercial imperative to be visible online, because this is simply how contemporary professionals market themselves:

We live in an age where everything [is] public. And if you don't have some kind of public [profile], you're invisible. You are completely invisible. So if you write a book and you don't get some kind of profile - and that's entirely up to you, it's not everyone's kettle of fish to be on social media - then unless that book is a word of mouth hit and the publisher promotes it and you become a big name (...) the easiest thing is to get as much profile as you can and that raises you (Adam)

Not being visibly online was viewed as potentially damaging in a highly competitive market.

5.3.2 Online promotional practices

Asked to describe how and where they interact online, the authors shared that they primarily used social media to post updates about their work, and to self-promote. At some stage, all had created their own website for this purpose, but had found the upkeep difficult - particularly as technology advanced. For Steve, this made it necessary to hire external support to create and host his site:

I went to some website designers to design my new website (...). There is a certain expectation now that your website will be updated [regularly] I thought... writing... no, (...) pay someone else (...) which is something you can do when you're a successful writer. (...) I used to be good at [doing it myself], but the technologies have just passed me. (...) I could knock up, y'know, not a bad website in HTML (Steve).

Having an individual website was considered important even if more effort went into maintaining their social media, as it could help readers to find them by making it easier to search for the author in Google. Further, it gave the authors some agency over curating their own professional image, by offering readers readily accessible, official information rather than their search leading them to third party sources:

The minute I started really doing Facebook and Twitter I stopped using my website. And you can probably tell- the last time I updated it, it's got to be 3 years ago (...) [I've] talked to other authors and partly you feel that you have to have a website, because if people look you [up on Google] all sorts of things come up (...) it's nice to have one that is likely to come up at the top which says the things you want to be said about you (Adam)

Using social media, specifically - primarily Facebook and Twitter²⁸ - was actively encouraged by some publishers and agents in addition to having an official website. But encouraged or not, it was also a popular choice for other reasons: e.g. social media was easier to update than a website; they were already using it to connect with their family and peers; and that the platforms were perceived as commonly used by other genre fiction authors, and thus the place to be. They expressed a perception that they should try to use all platforms where possible, but that the effort this entailed was high. In general, they therefore chose to concentrate their efforts on a select few platforms: “you need to be on, like, all of them, but it's just, like, deciding how much energy you're gonna spend on which platform [and] not to spread yourself so thinly.” (Jess).

Their efforts were often distributed across different platforms, but they appeared to have developed a unified approach within the platforms themselves, based on what other authors do, and on the affordances of the platform (e.g. in Instagram, they would take a photo of their book, attractively displayed, as this was common practice in this highly visual platform). When they had a new book release, all of the author participants would market it on their preferred social media platform(s) to raise awareness. They would also promote any events they were attending, for example a signing or panel talk (offline), or a Q&A (online).

Activity around a book release is of limited duration, and so most of their online activity was conducted between releases, while they focused on writing their next book. Prior to the internet, authors would not have been visible for much of this stretch between releases. With no book to promote, they explained it could be difficult to know what to do online. They described often filling this time by either sharing information relating to their work - e.g. updates about their work in progress; editions released in another country, or a new edition of an older book was published: “re-print. New edition. Foreign sale.” (Adam). Debut author Helen suggested

²⁸ At the time of the study. Practices change fluidly and rapidly, as mentioned in chapter 2.1.

that she shared this sort of information simply because everyone else was doing it too, rather than because perceived that there was value in doing so: “I’m not sure whether it drives sales or not or...you do feel because you see everyone else doing it, you have to, you know you get your foreign edition, you take a photo of it, you say 'hey it's my German book birthday today!'”(Helen). However, Adam, the most seasoned of the writers, saw it as a much more conscious, pragmatic choice to raise his profile. He did not expect promoting a translated edition of his book, for example, to be of specific interest to many of his followers (who may not speak the language in question), but did so to exhibit his capabilities and writing successes, for the attention of industry professionals:

I don't have a Serbian audience [on social media] but it comes under the heading of 'raising your own profile in the business'. (...) I'm followed by quite a few agents, editors, y'know- and they look at that (...). Not all writers do have their books sold to foreign publishers. But if they do, shout it from the rooftops, 'cause next time there's that acquisitions meeting (...)"[he]'s also the kind of writer whose book sold six foreign editions! [it's] been sold in 30, 40 countries around the world!", y'know it's part of... it's kind of an extended digital CV, really. (Adam)

If they had no news of their own to share, they shared other fiction-related information. Helen, for example, was asked specifically by her publisher to promote things on her publisher’s behalf, such as the work of other authors under their imprint, their upcoming curated events or promotions: “you are asked to do things like (...) ‘can you tweet once a day about this special edition book’, ‘can you share this competition’.” (Helen). Others would retweet the achievements of other authors (with or without publisher encouragement) or share articles that may be of interest to followers (e.g. a history article from a historical fiction author) to help promote writerly activity, in broad terms, and to present “a nice positive profile” (Sue) of both themselves and of their genre. This was presented as collegiate behaviour, either to boost how they themselves are perceived (e.g.: “I’m also seen to be promoting a colleague's work that has nothing to do with me.” (Sue)), or to give a genuine show support - particularly as they understood how hard it is to be in the authoring business:

[if an author reveals their new book cover] online, you will retweet and say 'congratulations, oh my god this looks amazing!' Just 'cause, I mean, partly it's just a nice thing to do, because books are hard work to write and even if it's not your personal taste (...) you know how difficult it is to get a cover you like (...) you retweet it, you say it looks fantastic (..) (Helen)

The promotional practices they described were in general not targeted towards a particular market of readers, but some were certainly aimed towards industry professionals. In part, this may be because it is difficult to know who readers are – and this has always been the case. Steve’s publisher hired an external marketing

company to try and determine who his readership was, to help plan a targeted marketing campaign, however their investigation was inconclusive:

They came back with a PowerPoint presentation (...) and basically their first slide [said] 'who reads [his] books?' I thought 'Yes! Who reads my bloody books?!' and they said 'well it's both men... and women!'. (...) and basically, they went through, and the answer is - 'course it's not exactly helpful - [that] I have a very diffuse demographic. (...) it sells well evenly to everyone, which of course is no help (...) for running a marketing strategy.
(Steve)

He suggested that, at least in part, this difficulty related to readers' often sharing books with each other ("and the whole family's reading them, which drives the marketing people completely nuts, OK. But it is a sign that what basically happens is that people lend my books to people.")- activity which could not be tracked by the industry, as it falls outside of official sales demographic data.

With a similarly limited understanding of who makes up their online audience, the practices they described appeared to largely be formulaic, untargeted and, ultimately, a generic activity in raising professional profile, rather than evidence of successful connectivity with a readership. This gives rise to questions of the value, for authors and readers, of these time-consuming new practices.

5.3.3 Balancing front-stage vs back-stage

Publishers may ask authors to start using their pre-existing, personal social media profiles such as Twitter or Facebook for business purposes, rather than them setting up a separate, professional account. Their personal accounts becoming professional changed their relationship with a platform, as it could no longer be used in the same ways as before, due to the broader, less personal audience: "there is expectation that if you're using the internet already, you are going to use it to promote the book. And you do feel like it's no longer a place where you just chatted about things you're interested in" (Helen). It could also impact their online connections – for example, Adam had connected with a friend of his wife on Facebook, who he had met in person, however his use of Facebook for self-promotion led this person to stop following him online: "people I know, a guy [my wife knows], he says 'I'll add you as a friend on Facebook' and within 2 days he said 'oh, I'm sick to death of this! This stream of stuff, what is all this?'" (Adam). Adam also described some situations where sharing too much of his back-stage life at times (e.g. photos of his family) had caused arguments with his wife. In another example, Helen felt she was no longer able to use the platforms to discuss her passion for books, as her opinions were given more weight than before, and could impact her career if negative:

I feel like I'm missing out on really good book chat on the internet where you can get into the nitty gritty or just say purely subjective opinions about what you absolutely hated and you wanted to throw the book across the room, but you know that book is really popular and it would be, politically and career-wise... just why would you do that. And before I felt much less watched online, so I would just (...) have that conversation. So I definitely feel I'm missing out on that (Helen).

Whether a debut author or one with a long-standing career, transitioning from using personal social media accounts - something previously considered fairly private – using them for work purposes could be jarring.

Equally, if an author did not already use social media before becoming an author, then building up personal and work networks from scratch could still be complex to curate. Friends, for example, may still choose to start following them. Being online necessitated difficult decisions about how best to conduct themselves, to negotiate a confluence of personal and professional contacts, alongside followers who were strangers to them, and there was no clear guidance available to help them manage this. They described needing to behave professionally and to avoid confrontation, alongside a need to balance what they shared to mitigate potentially alienating any of the different audiences.

Helen said that she felt obliged to present herself in a positive light at all times (e.g.: “there’s sort of an industry standard that you don’t complain or explain in public about stuff that’s gone on, and particularly to readers”) - in part, to meet her publisher’s demands (“you feel like you have to keep up the front of 'great news!' and 'I'm working!' and (...) present this false idea that everything's wonderful, and your publisher will encourage you to do that a little bit, particularly like when the book comes out”), but also because she was astutely aware that everything she shared online was public-facing, and reflective of her as a professional. It required a shift in mindset, particularly in the platforms she had used before her book debut, which were still associated with her ‘personal’, social connections: “it quickly becomes this formalised thing because your publisher gets hold of it, shares your name and readers find it. So, whether you like it or not- it's still your personal thing, but it's a weird confluence of work and personal” (Helen). This suggested a loss of agency in controlling her own personal boundaries.

Some of the authors described developing a brand identity to help manage the problem - effectively drawing an invisible boundary line between their professional persona and the person they are in private. This was difficult, however, as being an author was an inseparable part of their identity. As YA author Jess explained, the boundary between Jess (the author) and Jess (the person) was not clear cut:

It's hard to get the balance (...) they tell you that you have to create a brand, don't they. Which isn't really in line with what you are as a human (...). So it's like deciding do you choose to be, you know, this happy person, upbeat, because that's what your books are like? (...) Or do you [be] the person that you are, and sometimes you don't have a good day (...)? (...) [my author life] is very similar to my actual life because, you know, I'm obsessed!

Not all participants shared Jess' approach. Steve, for example, said it was important for him to stay grounded in reality and to be himself - because writing fiction meant that he already had the personalities of multiple characters to remember, and making another for himself would be too much to manage. He believed that many of his fellow fiction writers were also keen to maintain their own identity when not working on their book, as so much of their time was spent focused on fictional worlds:

I can't be bothered to remember who I'm supposed to be! It's bad enough trying to remember all of my characters, without having to try and pretend I'm someone else while online. (...) It's very easy to lose your identity as a writer [as] we spend most of our time in our own heads making shit up. (...) So I think quite a lot of writers that I know are quite strongly committed to being themselves when they're not [writing fiction]... [and] find it difficult to hide behind a personification when they're online. (Steve)

As such, he had resolved to be himself online ("I'm just me and they can like it or lump it"), but nevertheless proceeded with caution. For example, he avoided talking about controversial topics online:

You have to be aware that if you are successful [and] you've developed a certain amount of fame. (...) [a] lot of people know you and they do care about your opinions and stuff, so you have to be therefore careful about what you say. (Steve)

Whether choosing to use a brand persona or not, ultimately all the authors made efforts to avoid controversy, as was prudent as a public-facing authority figure. Regarding the general difficulties faced with knowing what to share, they largely strove to enjoy being publicly visible as best as possible, whilst being judicious in what they shared and simultaneously protecting their professional image.

It could be difficult being constantly accessible online. Steve explained that his past experiences with performing at science fiction conventions had made speaking to fans online in social media less of "a shock" than it may for some, as he was used to "meet[ing] fans and talk[ing] about your work with them" (Steve). He noted, however, that at conventions there was always a "green room" to rest in, as authors were there as "an attraction" – only available to the audience for a set, short period.

Another complication that arose in social media was that, in those platforms, posting self-interested, promotional content could be considered anti-normative and inappropriate – particularly by personal contacts (e.g. friends and family). As such, they tried to minimise potential annoyance. Historical Fiction author Sue, for example, alternated the frequency of her promotional posts, to strike a balance between self-promotional and social content: “I try not to self-promote too much, but I do. (...) maybe 1 in 10 will be like a self-promo. (...) I think it annoys people if you self-promote too much (...) I sense it.” (Sue). Similarly, Helen would try to promote her work covertly, by self-consciously burying it in a more general post - almost like a subliminal message. For example, she described posting on Instagram about her new paperback proof by taking a photograph of it next to a fanzine she had also happened to receive in the mail. She then wrote about fanzine in the accompanying text caption, hoping that her proof would be noticed in the photo without her needing to draw explicit attention to it:

I got sent my paperback proof cover the other week and it happened to arrive with a book I'd bought and a fanzine I bought, so automatically you kind of... [I] hash tagged it: #bookpost, #bookstagram, #fanzine (...) and it draws people to you, and it means that I was secretly showing off that, while really just being like 'no, just casual guys, it's a book post'... look! Buy my book, buy my book! (Helen)

Adam, despite receiving criticism from his wife's friend about his Facebook use, was unperturbed, as he felt that self-promotion was necessary, and that people could choose not to follow him online if they disliked his content. However, even he tried to play down self-promotion as he was concerned it would be perceived as begging (or “panhandling” (John)) for attention. He did this by using humour to make it more palatable – a popular strategy, particularly amongst the male author participants:

I like making people laugh, and (...) you get a much better reception if you put on something saying, 'I'm really sorry, you know, but I seem to have written another book, and here it is'. You know it's kind of very British [like] that 1950's 'terribly sorry' you know (...) it's self-promotion, but in a palatable way. (Adam)

He explained that often, this humour was self-deprecating, because it helped him deal with discomfort around self-promoting: “[I] feel a little bit... uneasy, in a very British way, where I continually, y'know, bang on about myself.” (Adam). Not all of the authors were naturally inclined toward putting on a performance in public, as they needed to online, and could therefore find it wearying: “(...) quite tiring, because by definition, most writers are introverts” (Steve). This was in addition to the stress of managing the profile and keeping it up to date, which was time-consuming.

Beyond sharing content relating to literature (their own or more broadly), the authors described using social media to discuss other matters, such as politics or social issues. For some, this was done consciously with the knowledge that having a large audience could boost the visibility of an important cause: “(...) if I see something I think ‘yeah, I quite want other people to see it as well’. And some of it is, you know, you are supporting causes. So you know, Grenfell tower, I just retweeted everything. There was an online auction for Grenfell Tower, brought in a lot of money (...) I don’t see why you shouldn’t link it to Facebook” (Adam). Overall, however, their accounts suggested that they did so as a matter of personal expression – arguably using the platforms as other users do.

Whilst being online could help secure a book deal, there was little evidence to support that authors promoting their books online via their personal social media accounts leads to increased sales or readers. But not being online was perceived as potentially damaging to what is essentially already a precarious career. Adam explained that the stress of having to do promotional work on top of writing can be “wearying”, can lead to insecurity, and can feed a “dark feedback loop” whereby authors self-promote to ease their concerns, but do not get the “right reaction” that promotion is supposed to bring – i.e., sales and a broader readership.

5.3.4 Managing additional labour costs

Sharing things on social media was considered a low drain on resources in comparison to other ways of sharing content to maintain visibility and professional buoyancy. It was unpaid labour. However, alternatives such as writing articles and blogs, for example, were more time-consuming, and typically did not pay either. There is a general expectation that any content online should be free, and some activities that authors used to do for additional income (e.g. writing book reviews) could no longer be relied on to pay, now that they were online, as stated by Adam:

Most writers struggle. The online thing is there's huge opportunities to write and blog, but you don't get paid. (...) there's a dark side to digital for the creative businesses, y'know (...) and a general sense in the world that err, if it's online, it should be free. And everything we do ends up online in one way or the other. (Adam)

In some instances it may help to secure a publishing deal, although inconsistently. YA author Jess, for example, had started out her career by writing a regular blog. This helped her to gain a followership yet did not secure her a deal. She next moved to use a digital social writing platform to produce serialised work for free, as an alternative strategy to get noticed, and, ultimately, to attract publisher attention, and with it, income: “I did it because I wanted to get noticed and have a readership, and I got that. I got the agent. I got the publishing

deal” (Jess). This strategy worked, after which writing lengthy pieces without payment became a poor use of her time. She also suggested that writing was a drain on her creativity, detracting attention from writing books, where her creative energy was most needed:

I took my blog so seriously back then, (...) I used to write it every week without fail, I wouldn't go out on the weekend if I hadn't done my blog, kind of thing, y'know? (...) The thing is... I guess... I'm trying to write more challenging books now. the book I've just written has got, it took me a long time. (...) I kind of had to finish it to know what I had written, and then go back and see if I had to organise the chapters more. (Jess)

Historical fiction author Sue still wrote regular guest blogs about history but found fitting it in around writing her book could be “a bit of a chore”. Steve’s publishers discouraged him from writing anything other than his book, suggesting that they did not want him to be distracted – even by social media. However, he considered engagement with social media necessary regardless, and hired a PA to manage his Facebook account. He did not enjoy Facebook, finding it time-consuming and demanding of his attention, so outsourced the task of managing it to his Personal Assistant, as he believed it to be the most important of the social media platforms for getting information about releases to those who wanted to know: (“a lot of people get their information from Facebook, and it's the easiest way to tell people when books are coming out”. He managed his own Twitter, account, however, finding it more enjoyable to use, and the interactions more lightweight in comparison:

Twitter's great. You follow and unfollow people. It's wonderfully impersonal (...) with 'follow', you don't expect the same kind of reciprocity, you just shoot out these 140-character long sentences into the void and sometimes they come back and sometimes they don't, and you don't think “oooooh, my baby!” which [people] do in Facebook. They get very invested in Facebook (Steve)

Social media was easier to manage, but sometimes writing an article could have a more observable impact on sales: “I wrote a piece [for a magazine, and] when that came out it did have an effect on sales, because it had a link to it at the bottom, and it went everywhere and so people follow through” (Helen). Similarly, anything containing a link to their work, such as an interview or article, could cause a brief spike in sales if it was retweeted on Twitter. Having something retweeted by another high-profile person on Twitter (an author, celebrity, or other public figure) was therefore very attractive to the authors:

It has an impact on sale, and people have seen that directly. So I'm published by [publishing house], and in the UK they publish [another author] who is obviously a huge

name (...) and if she tweets about the book, they will go on Amazon and [see a clear increase in sales] (...) (Helen)

The impact on sales when a high-profile user re-tweeted was short-lived, and it happened irregularly. But there was a consensus that it was exciting when it happened (e.g.: “if someone like [a famous author] ever retweeted, I'd be like 'woah! (...)'” (Sue)), and sometimes they hoped for it:

[if] they like it and retweet it (...) to 50,000 people- am I gonna complain? No I am not. And that's part of, you know I'm perfectly happy to admit that when I do it, a part of me is thinking 'you know if so and so retweets it, wouldn't that be brilliant'. If they don't, that's fine too. (Adam)

Authors considered it necessary to promote themselves online. However, this was largely done to build their profile or to secure future work, rather than to directly market for sales. There was a shared hope expressed, however, that attracting retweets and shared links to their work - particularly from other authors with large followings – a positive impact on sales may be attained. This inspired hope and offered potential value to an otherwise seemingly inefficient marketing practice.

5.3.5 Authors fear invisibility, but readers do not always need to see them

Across the author participants with experience as trade authors, a recurrent sense of anxiety was expressed that by not being online, they could be easily overlooked in a competitive market which could be damaging to their career. Some expressed this invisibility as a legitimate risk, but Adam, who had many years of experience as a trade author, believed it to be a form of paranoia – expressing that authors worry about taking time off for fear that “people forget who you are”. Yet he recognised this as a form of paranoia because, that realistically, readers may not actually notice if they took a break, stating that “You'd probably go straight back in where you were before”.

Some viewed the likelihood of becoming invisible as proportionate to their success – i.e., an author who became very famous (several referred to the example of JK Rowling) could spend less time online without their readership abandoning or forgetting them during the quiet periods where they had no new book to promote. Big enough to be well-known, and big enough to attract generous media coverage upon book release. Maintaining an online profile in the hope of reaching celebrity status – i.e., high visibility, in the public eye - was expressed by some as a motivation for making the effort, as achieving such high status could minimise the need to continually self-promote. It could gain them media coverage by mainstream media, enabling them to focus less on online promotion, giving them more time to focus on writing. None of the author participants

truly expected this would happen to them, but there was a lingering hope (perhaps akin to the hope of winning the lottery):

I think Harry Potter's a case in point actually. You know '97, this kind of world was [emerging]. Now I have a feeling that part of the success of Harry Potter (...) was to do with online presence. And you know, word of mouth is multiplied by an almost infinite effect. (...) [And] I think it's a really great thing, 'cause it kind of exploded. And [I] love the idea of things going viral (...), it's probably never going to happen to you, but a really good way of keeping yourself going is sort of raising your professional reputation within your own world. (Adam)

The view that celebrity authors are less likely to be forgotten was reflected in the comments of readers, some of whom mentioned hearing of a new release by Philip Pullman (author of the popular fantasy series 'His Dark Materials'), despite him spending little time online, and despite several years having passed since his last release. Pullman's forthcoming book had recently been promoted by mainstream media, through bookshop newsletter emails, shared on social media, and several of the reader participants noted, without prompting, that they had encountered it:

Yeah, I think I saw something on Facebook even (...) So his new book is coming out, but I don't think he is very active, err, online (...) he's one of the authors people take an interest in even if they aren't into reading that much, because (...) he's kind of such a known name. (...) and I think his last book came out quite a few years ago so this is kind of something exciting (Gemma, a reader)

Steve explained that not all authors are able to take advantage of media coverage, even if they do become highly successful, as certain media channels do not promote all genres of fiction equally: "science fiction authors [is] a despised genre. It never got publicity. (...) I remember the BBC you could practically hear their toes curling at the word 'science-fiction'". A globally acclaimed author himself, his own agent has repeatedly tried to get him an interview on Radio 4 or on the Richard and Judy show, for example, but to no avail: "they won't have me on Radio 4. I've told [my publisher] they will never get me on Radio 4 until [either] I get a TV series, or (...) I get really big in America. Then (...) I'll be on Saturday Review or something. (...) they won't have me on, despite the fact that I sell very well." (Steve), which he felt was related to a historic viewpoint of Science Fiction being perceived as low brow, despite evidence of its popularity.

Without mainstream media support, the authors expressed a sense of expectation that they be online promoting themselves. They also expressed a sense of fear that, if they stopped, even for a short period, their invisibility (as they could often perceive it) may damage their career.

Despite their fears and the problem of asymmetry between genres and status, it was clear that, overall, they were encouraged by any positive attention they attracted through their online efforts: “that kind of buoyancy you get, particularly from people reading as you’re writing it, it’s really fantastic. It’s a big buzz. (...) I’m sure for big named authors that’s what keeps them... functioning.” (Jess).

In contrast to their fear of becoming invisible if they did not post online continually, reader participants appreciated that writing “does take time” (Debbie), and they expected quiet periods between books, respecting that they were likely busy. They also did not need continuous updates. They described checking for updates at periodic intervals on the author’s website, often using their experience of how often a given author tends to release a new book to guide how often they would look, or doing so when seeking inspiration at a time when they want a new book: “there’s some other authors that I really like the books and I wanna see a continuation of the world, but writing books still does take time so it’s not like I’m checking their websites every day” (Debbie).

Ultimately, the readers were not always reading, seeking out book related content, or interested in hearing from authors. They also were not usually ready to read a new book at the point of publication. Some followed Reddit threads about books, for example, or followed authors in social media so that they could encounter interesting books on occasion. They would also intentionally search for recommendations or discussions around books (typically amongst other readers) online, in platforms such as Reddit, Tumblr, or a fan forum, e.g. LiveJournal for the sci-fi readers. One reader commented that publisher websites sometimes shared useful content too, however this was not consistent across publishers, and visiting publisher sites was not raised by the other participants: “My favourite publisher website [has] really good features, and they (...) introduce new books [and have] interviews with the authors just before something comes out” (Lauren). Books that looked interesting, however they were discovered, were typically noted on a list (e.g. spreadsheet, Amazon wish list) or purchased and shelved to read later – when they were ready to read it. An author’s (or, perhaps more accurately, the royalty publishing system’s) timing did not always suit their own availability to read, or to engage with content and activities.

Engaging with an author’s content on social media tended to be a casual encounter with their content whilst looking at the platform for other reasons. Their accounts strongly suggested that the contents that authors were sharing - particularly in-between releases - was largely of limited interest. Partly this was because it did not often direct them to a book at the time they wanted to get one, but also, importantly, because it was difficult to discern the information in their social media feed – it would get lost in the noise of other postings (e.g.:

“your feed just gets flooded by other things” (Debbie)) or may not be seen at all (e.g.: “[Facebook is] very selective in what it lets you see, so (...) they don't always feature in your timeline (...) so therefore you miss things” (Anne)). Also, finding other online activities such as author interviews or Q&As could be a matter of chance encounter, and easily missed, as, unlike in physical spaces, advertisements were not always clearly visible: “when I go to Waterstones, if there's a sign saying there's someone coming to sign books, I'll see if I'm interested. But I tend not to look at those things online” (Anne).

There was a uniformity to how physical events were produced and advertised, that was not always matched online, which directed expectations:

The theme or the title of the panel will tell you what it's really going to be about, from 'women in power' to 'female protagonists' to 'underhanded characters' or 'what can literature tell us about the current political climate' and so forth. All those types of things either in the title or... the set of authors, you kind of know what their latest books are, what type of thing they're trying to get at (Karl)

Some of the readers followed authors they enjoyed in social media, but it was repeatedly asserted across their accounts that they would be more likely to go to the author's website if they wanted to hear about a book, rather than social media, because it was the easier way to find out about a new release. Expectations of what to find on the website were relatively consistent and informational: “[it's] “less effort to just go to their website” (Debbie)). It was also noted that social media postings were not collocated with the book – a link would need to be followed, e.g. to Amazon, meaning that obtaining a book necessitated additional steps.

For some, however, seeing an author in social media could help to remind them of that particular author when browsing in a bookshop for something to read.

5.3.6 The feedback channel online

Some of the reader participants were regular social media users and engaged with the profiles of authors they enjoyed reading by following them in at least one platform. The others did not frequently use social media, or did not have accounts, but occasionally used social media to look at an author's profile. All of the readers would also look at an author's individual website to check for updates about releases –the easiest place to find clear information.

Although an author's online profile is expected to lower barriers to engagement, the reader participants rarely, if ever, contacted authors directly. Based on the assumptions of the value of a feedback channel, I asked if

they had ever given, or wished to give, feedback to an author about one of their books. Each shared the opinion that a professional author would unlikely seek amateur critique (e.g.: “if you were an author and you really had a book to tell, you, like you might need help structuring it etcetera, but you wouldn't need the internet to tell you what to write about” (Lauren)), and that furthermore, it was not their place to advise an esteemed expert:

I think it's probably because of the pedestal that I put them up on! (...) [if invited to critique] someone like, say, Philip Pullman, I'm thinking 'blimey, I wouldn't- you know FAR more than I ever could, so there's no WAY I would- and I say it again - DARE to give YOU advice!' because I think, you know, older and wiser and knows his craft (Anne)

The type of feedback author participants reported receiving was typically praise and thanks rather than critique, which was warmly welcomed but relatively infrequent. This was in keeping with reader participant's descriptions. Sometimes the authors would reply, and other times they deemed it unnecessary: “Yeah, I don't have to respond to every... if I like their answer, I might give them a little heart” (Sue).

Authors reported that often, there was no apparent need to answer a question asked in a public online platform (e.g. forums, as well as social media), as readers would answer each other (e.g.: “most of the time, the fans tell each other what something is” (John)). It is common for readers to commune to discuss the author, their work, or around them, through related topics (e.g.: “they have very erudite discussions on things like [the sciences]” (Steve)), and the author participants did not feel they needed to interject in these spaces, although would sometimes participate as an observer.

Asked if they ever had questions to ask an author, for example to enhance their understanding of the book, the reader participants shared that, even if they participated in a Q&A session, they did not necessarily know what to ask (e.g.: “you're kind of under pressure to ask a question and when you can't think of anything, so you just write something [very] general” (Gemma)) unless they happened to have a pressing question that had been playing on their mind. For those who had contacted authors before through an authorised channel such as a Q&A or forum discussion, it had been more helpful to ask questions after reading the book, rather than at the point of release when they had not yet read it (as is often the point at which opportunities are mediated). Then, “very specific” (Karl) content-related questions could be asked, the responses to which could be valuable to their understanding of concepts in the book.

In keeping with the readers not knowing what to ask, some of the authors commented that readers only tended to ask them the same, generic questions: “how did you get your idea for your book'- there are a lot of

standard questions” (Sue). This issue seemed to contribute to a perception – amongst both user groups – that improved or increased opportunity for richer dialogue was not desired. Timing appeared crucial to meaningful interactions. Opening up to questions at the point of release meant that readers hadn’t necessarily had a chance to read the books, and therefore did not know what to ask. Leaving it too late may also be problematic: “When I haven't read it myself, I'm like, yeah, I don't want to ask a question about it or a book I read maybe 5 years ago” (Gemma). Asking outside of set times, or in boundaryless online events where large numbers of users could ask questions, readers did not anticipate authors would likely answer them anyway, potentially wasting time on both sides: “they probably haven't got time to read it all and why would I waste my energy fruitlessly” (Anne). There could be value in reading their responses to other readers’ questions, however (e.g.: “I'm always after knowing (...) the things I don't know to be taught. And I, if I don't know the questions to ask, I'm also sometimes relying on the people who **do** know how to ask those questions so I can learn, so next time I know what questions to ask as well.” (Karl)). Yet threaded messages could also present a barrier to finding discussions around specific topics or things of interest to the readers. It could be hard to use the search facility to see if something specific was discussed (e.g.: “there might be lots of ways of asking a question” (Karl)), and time-consuming or awkward to “scroll up and down” (Karl) through many messages, for example, some of which may be arguments between users, rather than valid insight. Authors may also answer days, or weeks later, unlike the time-boxed Q&As at physically situated events. This made it necessary for readers to return at later intervals if they were keen to see their responses.

One thing that could entice rich interaction between the authors and readers in social media was where an author solicited their audience’s help or opinion. For example, if the authors did not know a piece of specialist knowledge that was important to their writing (e.g. writing about characters set in a particular town, and they do not know details of a local tradition, or local dialect) they would post a question for help on social media. Twitter, in particular, attracted high response levels, sometimes almost instantaneously:

You often get half-way down a page and go 'what's that called?' and it's very useful for, y'know, a 'quick, quick! What's the [word] for that?' (...) and Twitter's almost instantaneous, you can get it within half an hour (...) and the more geeky a subject is, the more fast people will come in (Steve)).

This could yield answers that would otherwise be difficult to find through, for example, a search engine, and this engaged collaboration was enjoyable for both the authors and their audience.

5.3.7 Readers value authenticity

Although the reader participants did not require authors to be online for their own needs, there was a shared perception that it was expected in contemporary times that they would be. Their accounts suggested that they assumed authors did so (and needed to do so) specifically to keep their readers and followers engaged. None expressed any awareness that some of their content may be intended to address another type of audience, such as industry professionals. Engaging with their readers was described as a nice thing for authors to do (e.g.: “It's kind of nice that they actually take the time to share with their followers or readers to keep them activated and (...) interested in you” (Gemma)), and some of the readers enjoyed content such as updates on work-in-progress, as it could feel like a cooperative, human connection: “you [feel] that you are writing the book with them, because you're always awaiting [this] new announcement” (Gemma).

However, most were disinterested in seeing an author’s online activity outside of things related to the book, in particular if an author shared a lot of back-stage information about themselves: “I mean, I read their books, that doesn't necessarily mean I want to know what they eat for breakfast! I'm not really a rabid fan” (Debbie). That said, even where the information the authors shared may have appeared very intimate, author Helen observed that this was a perception rather than necessarily reality, as most protected their private lives closely: “most of the writers I know don't share anything private really, but it seems like you are because 'I'm at this party, and here's a selfie, and a picture of my cat' but you wouldn't know where we live, or our relationship status” (Helen).

Where an author managed the balance of front- and back-stage well – particularly where their effort was perceived as authentic – this could positively influence how readers viewed them, and potentially also encourage them to buy more books: “it's given me a fondness for Robert Rankin that means I might buy things that I wouldn't have otherwise” (Anne). However, done badly – especially if something they said or did went against a reader’s personal values – could have a negative impact, and potentially dissuade them from purchasing any more of their work in the future: “I don't wanna attach my heart-blood to somebody, or somebody's work, when [they seem a bad person] (...) there's loads of other things I could be reading” (Lauren).

Often, readers preferred to engage with other readers, rather than with authors’ content – particularly where it could be construed as marketing-focused. Sarah, for example, who ran a BookTube channel on YouTube, had observed that the readers who watched her content were disinterested in seeing authors on the channel

– they were more interested in seeing her. On occasions that she or her fellow BookTubers had interviewed an author, far fewer people watched the content, compared to the volume of views normally attracted:

I feel like everyone always assumes that everyone's interested in [author interviews]. (...) instead of asking me to talk about a book on my channel they'll ask me 'do you want to talk to the author?'. And very often I just have to go 'no- I'm just not very interested, and the people aren't going to watch it', and I do think that most publicists think that an interview on my channel would be the ultimate thing. I'm like 'no, it's literally the worst thing!' (Sarah)

Some of the readers commented that, overall, their interest in an author and their online content was casual. They were aware that some authors have avid fans (e.g.: “just like the kind you'd see maybe for a musician or an actress” (Debbie)) but in general, they were more interested in books than an author as a personality. A distinction was made between fans and readers, by both the reader and author participants: “fandom is not the readership” (Steve). Enjoying someone's work did not automatically equate to a fanatical attachment to, or interest in, an author or their work. This, perhaps, influenced perceptions of who followers were online. Author Steve, for example, had a large followership on his social media accounts, yet had concluded that most were not readers - despite a probability that many likely are, given his high sales figures – but believed he could identify the fans amongst the crowd: “I suspect [I have] about 15 active fans, and about 50 to 100 lurkers (...) I suspect [my readership is] not following me!” (Steve). His account suggested that he tried to determine who his followers were by comparing them to event attendees that he had met in person, which had given him a clear picture in his mind of the kind of people attracted to his books. Most followers, as far as he could see, did not clearly fit the template persona he had constructed: “I'm not saying [my readers aren't] out there on the internet even as we speak! But I suspect they're not following me” (Steve).

By meeting in person, it was easier to validate a person and their intentions, and this was valued by both the author participants in their accounts of their varied audience (e.g.: “People who have met you, you know, they're the best ones” (Jess)), and the reader participants in their accounts of authors: “[It] can be difficult [to get] a guide [online] (...) if a person's funny in person it can give you some sort of understanding of what, really, they're trying to get across (...) online” (Karl). Validation could facilitate the exchange of symbolic capital – be it for fostering positive affiliations (e.g.: “(...) if there's someone I really like and I'm trying to show 'I REALLY like your material' (...) I try to give them enough to show I understand, but enough that I recognise this is not the place or the forum [for] this” (Karl)) or more (potentially negative) distancing from others (“people would ask questions which are childish in an aspect (...) [and the author] would give you this biting answer which

may give a... a chuckle to some of the audience, but again, that's this kind of knowing chuckle that 'jeez, he really thinks you are an idiot" (Karl), both within and between author and reader roles.

This may suggest some difficulties in evaluating a persons' authenticity online – for both user groups - and the value of physical, visual cues when in who to approach and how, which are not afforded in online spaces.

5.3.8 Difficulties with asymmetric visibility

Authors are an anomaly in the online platforms, in that they are expected to share their identity, whilst other users may choose what to share of themselves. Some of the readers, for example, preferred to use a pseudonym, or avoided sharing a photo of themselves in their profile page. That said, one of the reader participants noted that sometimes, particularly in Q&A sessions in forums, it was not clear whether the author's user profile responding to questions was truly the author themselves, or if it was an agent or personal assistant doing so on their behalf:

It tends to be style. Some authors are very flowery... poetic with their tone (...) [so] you get that knowledge of 'this doesn't seem like how they normally do things' (...) so the fan forums will know when the author is actually answering or isn't, and I don't know [what] magic they have, a personal connection to the author? But sometimes they'll go 'oh, that wasn't the author who answered that [as] he wasn't in the country, he was away on holiday (Karl)

Difficulty in verifying the identity or motives for engagement of other users could be problematic. Whilst having fans was generally affirming, sometimes the authors (and, notably, the female authors in particular) would receive contact that violated their personal boundaries, and could be disturbing, e.g. through excessive contact (e.g.: "he's always retweeting" (Sue)); excessive interactions with their content (e.g.: "[liking] every single picture (...) and tag[ging] over and over again" (Helen)); abusive messages; or deeply personal, concerning messages. When this happened, they felt a duty of care to respond sensitively, yet ill-equipped to address problems:

Ostensibly it was just asking for a signed book, but it actually went into details about her mental health problems, (...) abuse (...) as an author [you're] not trained to deal with that, but you are accessible online, so (...) I try to respond sensibly, but you're not trained to sort of give advice (Helen)

Their accounts suggested that the authors, overall, perceived their online audience as a mix of real-world peers; a select few fans; and a mass of strangers following them for unknown reasons. Some described

looking up a user's profile to try and work out who they were, if they received contact (e.g. a direct message, comment, or tag). Where they could not verify a follower's identity or intent, they generally resolved to "tar everyone with the same brush that some of them really are a bit mad! Or a bit weird or obsessive" (Helen) and avoid engagement unless it was clear that it was positive. They did not feel empowered to stop unwelcome interactions as, e.g. tool privacy did not always enable it: "I've tried to block him, but [he] still comes through" (Sue)); or a particular platform did not afford it ("on Twitter you can kind of post 'hey guys, don't do this' (...) whereas Instagram, your feed is just your feed" (Helen). Ultimately, they resigned to accepting unwanted attention as part of the job, and a risk native to being on the internet. Responding to unsolicited contact could become either a drain on their time, or potentially damaging to their career if the interaction became negative.

Even where people online did not engage directly with them, several of the authors were acutely aware that people discussed them and their work online. Sometimes they wanted to see it, and sometimes they hoped to avoid it, and felt anxious when tagged, for example, into a negative review of their book. Sometimes Steve would use a pseudonym to "ego surf" comments about him, by searching for his name or setting up alerts to notify him when he had been mentioned. Helen described constant inner-battle to avoid compulsively checking commentary and reviews, as it could be demoralising to see negativity, but also damaging if she addressed it inappropriately:

You can't respond to bad reviews because when authors have done that it goes horribly, horribly wrong. There was a particular story in *The Guardian* a couple of years ago written by [an author who] was getting these bad GoodReads reviews, so she checked the user name and she went down the Google rabbit hole (...) and she ended up stalking this woman to her house (...) we've all got that sort of slight crazy bit in the brain where you want to respond (...) and you just have to not. And it's so frustrating that you just have to ignore it all. (Helen)

Her example referenced author Kathleen Hale, who in 2014 (by her own account) controversially responded to a negative review by obtaining a reader's address, and then challenging them in-person for orchestrating what she perceived as a targeted 'catfishing' attack, having misconstrued the reviewer's use of a pseudonymous online profile (Hale, 2014). This suggests that, although some users may use pseudonyms as a prudent means to protect themselves from potential risks online, it could exacerbate their invisibility to authors, who were highly exposed, and less able to protect themselves.

Reader Gemma had similarly witnessed a friend receive abuse for criticising books, and had stopped writing reviews herself:

(...) has got a lot of hate for his sites on books and for calling out problematic books (...) but I don't think many authors kind of want to get into these discussions because they fear that they will lose readers if they say something, or [I] think, even if they see it, they mostly try to stay out of it (Gemma)

Overall, the participants from both user groups avoided writing negative reviews, as they did not want to upset an author who might see it – usually out of empathy, but also, in the case of the authors, to avoid damaging their career.

5.4 Summary and conclusions

The findings in this chapter provided detailed accounts, from authors and readers, of their experiences in using online websites and platforms to engage.

In keeping with research shared in 2.1, authors participants described increasingly using online social platforms – especially social media platforms Twitter and Facebook - to make themselves visible to readers. Most had their own dedicated website, to provide information, but were moving away from keeping them regularly updated – in part, because they required significant labour to keep up to date, whereas updating online social media was comparatively easier to manage. In part, they also perceived that readers preferred updates in social media, because they are already using those platforms. However, in contrast, the reader participants reported that keeping up to date through following an author on social media was difficult, and they often preferred being able to access a website, containing a restricted set of book-focused information, to support them in finding out about what an author had written.

Although online engagement may appear to be directed towards an audience of readers, the authors described their decision to manage an online presence as being related to their profession: in response to expectations that they do so, and to raise their professional profile amongst industry professionals who could support their work (and, thus, their ability to generate income). Visibility to industry professionals could assert their commercial viability and evidence their ability and willingness to engage (helping them to secure a book deal) and help them to reach readers through association with those professionals (for example, if booksellers and librarians were to engage with their online content, and other authors to retweet their content to raise its visibility). There was also an underlying hope expressed that by raising their profile online, a level of status may be achievable by which the authors would be able to step back from being online at all, as high-status authors are supported by mass media marketing, and are more visible to a broad readership.

A lot of their content was assumed to be predominantly of interest to industry professionals, however there were difficulties in identifying the remainder of their (often large) audiences in social media. As online engagement did not always correspond with an increase in sales, and as they received limited messages and questions about their work, it was generally perceived that the audience was not readers – but instead, a mix of a small subset of fans, and other users, whose interest in following them could not be identified. This perhaps suggests a cognitive dissonance, as it is unclear who – if not readers – the broader audience may be.

In keeping with the research shared in 4.3.3 (festivals and events) and 2.2 (creative workers and musicians online), uncertainty about who their audience was could create problems in managing their profile, and in appropriately balancing the forms of content they shared (i.e., the balance of marketing and of sharing their personal interests). Sometimes it could also cause problems with maintaining their personal boundaries. Getting their performance ‘right’ was particularly complicated, as most used their personal social media accounts as public-facing, meaning that friends, family, and personal acquaintances were also in the audience. On balance, meeting an audience in person was easier to manage, as opportunities such as events are time-boxed (unlike social media, where they are constantly visible), and the audience can be seen, making it easier to identify their motivations for engaging with the author.

As being online is expected, the authors described feeling a need to be on all platforms, and to be visible frequently. Without always having a book to promote, this led to creating specific practices to accommodate visibility, at different stages of production. A fear of becoming invisible, if they did not maintain their profile regularly, was shared. However, in contrast, reader participants accepted that writing takes time, and they did not require that authors always be visible – rather, they would search for updates as and when they wanted to get a new book and based on their past experience of a particular authors’ regularity of releasing new materials. In general, the readers had limited interest in seeing promotional content, or in authors sharing too much back-stage information, regularly. That said, all enjoyed being able to engage with the online profile of an author whose work they enjoyed, and where an individual author struck the balance right, for their individual interests as readers, and was perceived as sharing authentically, this could support positive reactions (in keeping with research findings shared in 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.2, and 2.2.1).

Whilst this study began with an assumption that meaningful, two-way interactions would be shared between authors and readers as a result of the new opportunity that online mediation presents, authors rarely received contact from readers. When they did, it was, in general, words of encouragement, rather than feedback (as suggested in the work around the feedback channel in 4.2.1 and the reader response theory in 4.2.2). Where

readers asked them questions (for example in an online Q&A), the questions tended to be generic, leading to an assumption by authors that increased interactivity was not desirable for either party. In discussing this with reader participants, it was revealed that timing was often an issue – opportunities for questions were typically presented at a time where they had not yet been able to read the book. As for providing feedback, they did not feel it was their place to critique an author's work directly to them, although thanking and praising them was viewed as more appropriate.

The work presented in this chapter highlights that the dynamics between authors and readers online are complex. The initial premise assumed that authors and readers are using the internet to meaningfully connect with each other, and that this brings clear, positive benefits on both sides. This assumption is based on a presumption of linear causality – i.e. if an author establishes themselves online, readers will find them, and resultant outcomes will proceed. However, the findings in this chapter challenge this premise, as assumptions about their motivations for interacting online, and the outcomes from doing so did not correlate clearly with the accounts of the participants.

Presenting opportunity for connection through online technology does not eliminate barriers between authors and readers in itself, as not being able to directly connect is not the only limit to communication. There are interpersonal, relational barriers, some of which are impacted by online affordances (e.g. issues controlling personal boundaries where the technology does not readily facilitate self-protection; navigating threaded messages), and many of which, more broadly, either exceed, or even pre-date the technology (e.g. readers not knowing what questions to ask, due to a mismatch between their own personal timing and that of the royalty publishing system; fear of judgement by others, if asking a question deemed to be unintelligent).

Interactions online are not the same as they are offline, as the context is new. Authors, for example, described adopting specific online practices to manage their visibility in the new context. In table 2 below, I have listed some of the practices described in the findings that authors use when presenting themselves online (labelled in the table as 'outwardly visible practices'), and the desired (causal) outcomes that these practices were inferred, during the interviews, as intended to achieve ('desirable intended outcomes (inferred)'). I also highlighted overarching motivations behind their practices, from which particular outcomes were hoped, less explicitly ('overarching desirable outcomes'), and some of the performative practices (a term coined by Goffman (1971), described in 2.2) the author participants described adopting in attempt to manage their self-presentation, to balance the different needs of their mixed audience, and to protect themselves from negative, undesirable and unintended outcomes.

Outwardly Visible Practices:	Desirable Intended Outcomes (Inferred):
Sharing public updates and information about their work	Promote own work for attention and sales Maintain readership / Attract new readers
Retweeting, sharing, and promoting the work of other authors	Give support to other authors Appear collegiate and commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile)
Retweeting, sharing, and promoting their publisher's initiatives	Appear commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile) Raise the profile of their publisher
Responding to questions and comments from online audience	Reward readers and audience Engage with attention (rewards author) Promote own work for attention and sales Appear commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile) Maintain readership / Attract new readers
Highlighting social causes (e.g. charity, world event)	Use public profile to raise profile of/generate attention for cause (e.g. for fundraising)
Overarching desirable outcomes:	
Secure work and/or income Obtain a level of attention which may potentially enable author to step back from the above and focus on their writing.	
Performative Practices:	
Limit frequency of posts (in particular promotional content) Caution with sharing opinions, comments, and self-identifying information Cultivate a brand image Maintain positivity, and avoid negativity Covert and subtle marketing (e.g. hidden with humour, or in an image)	

Table 2: Inferred practices and outcomes

When technology changes or is newly introduced, it is common for organisations to sediment their systemic practices onto existing technology, in what Fountain (2001) referred to as a “plug-and-play” (Fountain, 2001, p. 18) style, rather than to assess the impact of a change, and this typically leaves deeper structures and processes undisturbed (ibid.). Technology has been evolving quickly, and the Literary System has needed to act quickly to respond at times. Resources are limited, and so incorporating existing third-party spaces has offered a pragmatic solution to keeping up with a cultural momentum to get online. However, in doing so, unresolved, pre-existing issues (such as the history of distance between authors and readers, and the mismatch of timing in offering opportunities for Q&As) have become more clearly visible, and, in some cases, perhaps even exacerbated. The participants’ interviews highlighted issues with interacting that are both pre-existing and new – a part of the Literary Field, but also of the new, contextually collapsed environment in which boundaries are not clearly delineated, as they may be in the physical places that formally mediate offline interactions. With this information in mind, to redesign (or to create new) online platforms to smooth over barriers to interaction would be to ignore the important, systemic issues that have been raised here.

Not all of the desirable outcomes that author participants implied they were seeking from online engagement were notably, or repeatedly obtainable. This prompts questions about what being online does achieve, and whether, in its current format, it addresses the right needs: particularly as the reader participants did not express a strong preference for authors to be online, and as authors did not see clear tangible results (e.g. increased sales) from being online.

To understand why online interactions between authors and readers did not occur in-line with the initial assumptions made at the beginning of this study, I determined it would be valuable to shift the focus of this research. In the next chapter, I therefore reframe the research problem of this thesis from a perspective of system complexity, using the Cynefin Framework.

Chapter 6: A critical reframing of the research problem as a system intervention using the Cynefin Framework

“It has been said that everything everywhere affects everything else. This may be true. Or perhaps the world is just full of patterns.”
Wings (Terry Pratchett, 1990)

In this chapter, I reflect on the work conducted in the thesis so far to posit a new perspective from which to understand the circumstances of online interaction and engagement between authors and readers.

Firstly, I extend the model of the Literary System presented in 4.4, to include online mediation spaces (6.1). I then reflect on the findings from chapter 5 to question the purpose of interaction online in the context of the Literary System, and what it is intended to achieve. To do this, I reconceptualised the phenomenon of online interaction as a retrofit input into the Literary Field’s infrastructure, as a vehicle for achieving multiple goals for system agents. I use this critical reframing to question the applicability of causal logic (6.2).

Secondly, I introduce the Cynefin Framework – a sense-making model used to achieve retrospective coherence after collecting data and identifying patterns. I used this framework to consider whether an absence of clearly observable causality in my findings from chapter 5 may point to the Literary Field being identifiable as a Complex system – a system type in which causality cannot be observed without hindsight (6.3). I next describe, in brief, each type of system depicted by the Cynefin framework (6.3.1) and how I used my understanding of the framework to re-analyse the work in this thesis (as well as the epistemic positioning behind how I had conducted the work) (6.4).

Through the analytical work described in this chapter, I posit that the Literary Field is a Complex system, but that there are also aspects of order observable in its component parts. From this position, I next analysed the research again to explore how fluid changes in the Literary Field may constitute as boundary transitions between different levels of systemic order, to discuss the ebb and flow of stability within the field as external forces influence its trajectory and growth (6.5). To conclude the chapter, I discuss the value of this new framing of system complexity in furthering the work in this thesis.

6.1 Online mediation in relation to physically situated systems

In chapter 4.4, I contributed a diagrammatic model (Figure 6, p.84), which depicted how author and reader interactions are mediated in, and through, physical places. The model – which I called the Literary System – consolidated theories from the literature in chapter 4 to describe literary mediation. This included mediation of the book, and of events adjacent to books, which afford opportunity for authors and readers to interact in physical collocation. The theories I incorporated into the model were informed by my analysis of the findings from the empirical study of chapter 5. Developing the model was, in itself, an important tool in conducting the analysis, as it helped me to identify clear differences and clear links between meditation and interaction practices on- and off-line.

In the previous part of this thesis I identified that contemporary authors primarily use third-party environments online such as social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr) and forums (e.g. LiveJournal) to engage with an audience. Two of the author participants interviewed in chapter 5 had also used an online digital writing platform (e.g. Wattpad – a platform explored in the literature in 2.1.2) for born-digital creation. Some of the reader participants noted that they also used (albeit less frequently) online platforms run by Literary System agents such as publishers to interact with online author output (an opportunity also highlighted in the literature in chapter 2.4.1).

I further developed the model of the Literary System from chapter 4 in Figure 8 below. To build on the earlier version I added online environments run by agents of the Literary System, positioning these as online Servicescapes, run in parallel to their physically situated services. In doing this, I placed them within the boundaries of the Literary System as they are specifically hosted and mediated by the system's agents. In 4.4 I discussed how the boundaries of the system are crossed via physical Servicescapes – accessed according to role agreement (e.g. authors enter the Literary System through agreement with agents such as publishers within the bounds of their role as 'Author', and readers also enter the system in their role as 'Reader'), as well as access according to physical affordances. In the updated model I showed that online, in system-mediated Servicescapes, books (in digital form – be it an eBook or a digitally mediated sale of a physical book), information about the author and information about their books are mediated and made accessible for readers to navigate. The presence of an author themselves is also mediated through the system-mediated Servicescape arranging opportunities such as interviews and Q&As. Like their offline counterparts, these service offerings are accessed according to role and affordance (in this case, digital affordances, in contrast

to the physical affordances such as doors, opening times and other physically articulated cues used in physical Servicescapes).

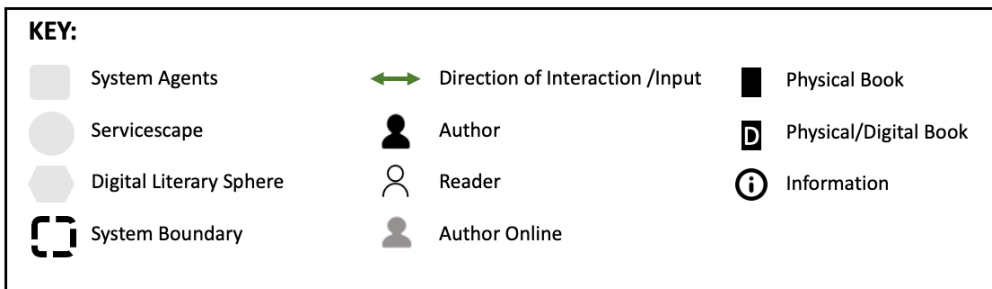
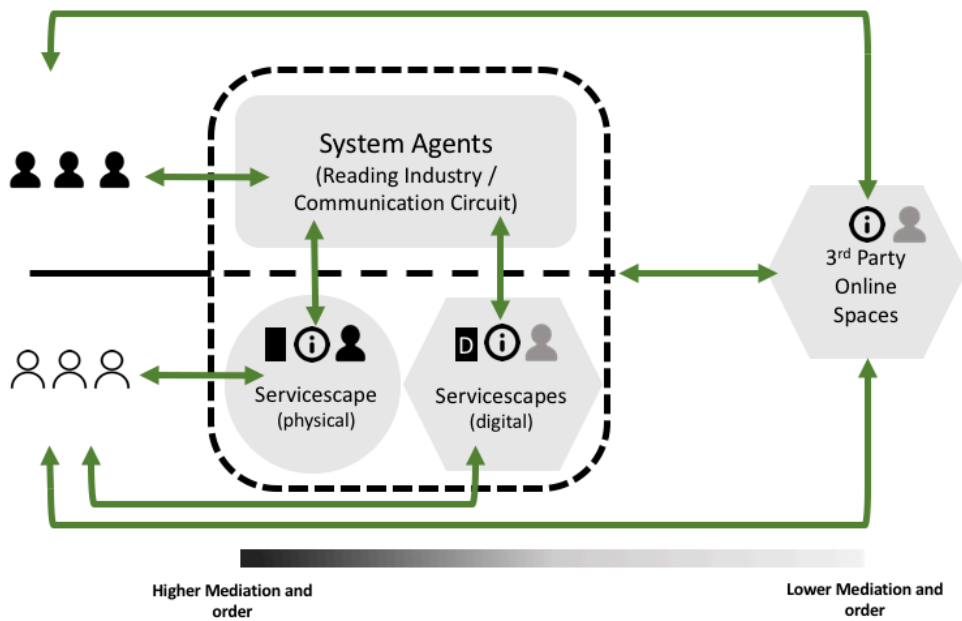


Figure 8: Literary System offline and online, in relation to third-party online spaces [A]

I also added third-party online environments to the model here, to incorporate the evidence from Chapter 5 that most online author activity occurs outside of system mediated, designated Servicescapes. I positioned these third-part environments (or, spaces) outside of the system boundaries, on the right-hand side of the model. By depicting them as external to the boundaries, this highlighted their distance from the formal mediation and affordances of the Literary System – and with this, its control.

I further depicted this distance in the spectrum of mediation and order from low to high, at the bottom of the model. With this spectrum I indicated that system agents in the Literary System have the most control in the physical Servicescapes (where the spectrum line is darker) - which were intentionally designed to facilitate

their service offerings. Conversely, the Literary System has the least mediating control in the third-party online spaces (where the spectrum line is a lighter hue), which were not designed by - or for - its service offerings.

Using green arrows, I indicated that authors and readers may access each other directly in third-party online spaces, bypassing Literary System mediation. However, these arrows showed a bi-directional relationship as authors and readers are influenced by the third-party spaces – an influence that can impact their habitus, and in turn, their roles as author and reader. Finally, I used another arrow to show that there is a bi-directional relationship of influence between the Literary System and these third-party spaces. Whilst third-party spaces are outside of the boundaries of the system, activities within them (e.g. author practices, summarised in 5.4) are influenced by the system (e.g. encouragement from publishers to use them, 5.3.1) and, in turn, the system is influenced by activities and practices in the third-party spaces (e.g. the adoption of trends).

An important difference between third-party online environments and system mediated Servicescapes is that in third-party spaces the book is not typically collocated with the author's online presence or other literary activity. Rather, to find a book being discussed or promoted online, users must follow external links away from that space to obtain it (e.g. to search in Amazon, as noted in 5.3.5). It is likely that this impacts the interactions held. More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, the use of third-party online spaces outside of Literary System mediation puts the onus on authors to self-mediate their presence. This includes determining and managing their own decisions about what practices to follow, how and where (without clear guidance in place). It also means they must manage their own personal boundaries and visibility (e.g. through making judicious choices about what content they will share (5.3.3) and how frequently), and use their own security settings, individually, to mediate approach behaviours (5.3.8).

With this updated model I situated online interactions in the context of the Literary System (and thus, the Literary Field). In the next section I considered what the practice of authors interacting in third-party spaces achieves, given the discrepancies revealed in Chapter 5 between assumptions of the practice's intended purpose and its observable outcomes.

6.2 Causal logic of the intervention of author's online presence

In figure 8 above, I depicted the third-party online spaces used for interactions between authors and readers as parallel to the Literary System. In previous chapters of the thesis, I identified that numerous third-party online spaces are used, such as a range of social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), forums (e.g. Reddit, LiveJournal), and some more literary-focused platforms (e.g. Goodreads). These are not centrally

governed, and feature different affordances, attract different audiences, and were designed for differing means. Together, these collection of third-party spaces form an **infrastructure** (i.e., a substructure or foundation (OED, 2021)) which supports authors to participate in a variety of engagement practices outside of the pre-existing, physical infrastructure created within the Literary Field. No infrastructure stands in isolation – rather, as Leigh Star (1999) observed, all infrastructures are installed onto an existing base, and inherit both the strengths and limitations of that base (Star, 1999; Eve, 2020). The base infrastructure of the Literary Field and the Literary System thus influence the new, online infrastructure. With this in mind, it is helpful to consider the phenomenon of online engagement less as an extension to what is mediated in the physical world, seated in parallel (as the model in figure 8 may visibly suggest), and instead as a specific **intervention** into the system: i.e., a retrofit input into the Literary System intended to fulfil an additional service (or produce an additional output). Online engagement, then, can be considered atop of the existing infrastructure, rather than alongside it per se.

In chapter 2.1 I discussed research which had found that authors are encouraged to adopt online technologies to engage with their audience. In part, this is to help them function (and generate income) in parallel to traditional modes of production – an alternative to the base infrastructure. Yet it is also encouraged by publishers (see Martens (2016), 2.1.1 and 5.3.1), evidencing links to, and influence from, the base infrastructure and highlighting that authors being online has the potential to benefit the system as well as the individuals themselves.

This framing offers a new angle from which to consider what purpose the new infrastructure and the literary practices it supports serve. Previously, the concept of authors using the internet to engage has been fairly abstract - they use multiple platforms for multiple purposes, and there are no clear boundaries delineating what is done where and under what circumstances. Delineating these platforms' connection to the Literary System make it easier to evaluate what they support and how effectively this support is, in its current form.

The intervention into the system (put in very simplistic terms, to provide a starting point for considering its role) is authors establishing an online presence, so that readers may find them and interact with them. This is depicted in Figure 9 below, which shows '**Author Online Presence**' being input into to the Literary System, for the desired, resultant output of 'Barrier Disruption' (i.e., breaking down the barriers between author and reader).

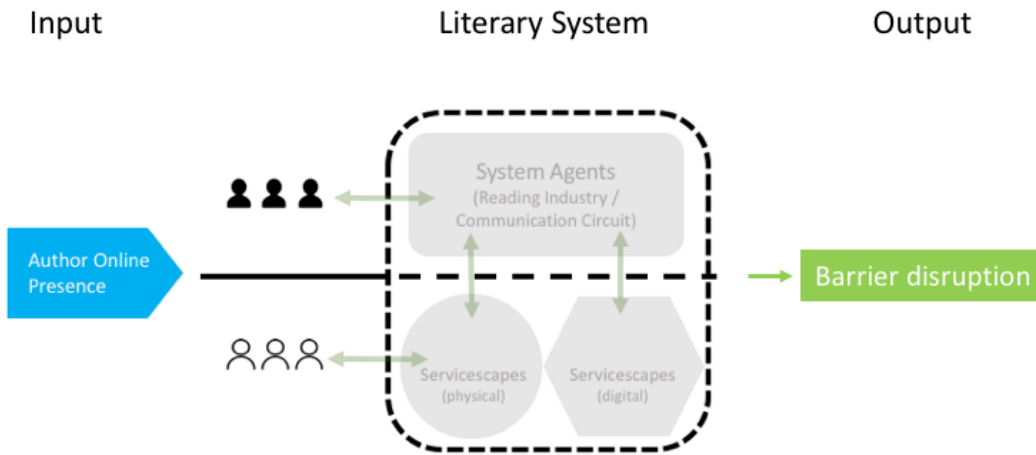


Figure 9: Intervention (author online presence) into the Literary System [A]

This simplified diagram essentially depicts a **causal path** – i.e., a direct connective pathway from the input of X (online presence) to the output of Y (barrier disruption). Understanding cause and effect is often central to scientific research²⁹, which seeks to determine the outcome of an event or phenomenon, i.e., does X cause Y. Things are rarely straightforward, and we cannot generally argue that Y must follow X, as this cannot be observed – we can only observe whether or not X is followed by Y (Punch, 2014).

Although it was not a scientific experiment, there was an extent to which I approached the study in chapter 5 with an underlying causal assumption (albeit unconsciously). I had anticipated that the barrier between authors and readers had been disrupted (albeit imperfectly) by the introduction of Author Online Presence, and that this had resulted in rich interactions between authors and readers, which I expected to find evidence of. From this standpoint, I had anticipated that learning more about how those rich interactions were experienced by authors and readers would make it possible to assess how effective current technology is in supporting their interaction needs. However, it was difficult to evaluate this effectiveness, as the outcomes of Author Online Presence (as I since defined it) did not match my initial expectations, as rich interactions were not commonplace – i.e., Y did not follow X.

Ordinarily, if an intervention were intentionally designed, say, for a specific organisation, such as the introduction of a new service, the intervention would have clear boundaries and associated processes. This

²⁹ Punch observed that seeking causality is deeply ingrained in our culture and way of understanding the world, far beyond the realm of science (Punch, 2014). We often approach life by doing something in the hope of achieving a specific outcome, and this cultural worldview may go towards explaining why there are certain assumed outcomes expected of author and reader interactions, and why authors persevere with practices that do not observably achieve those outcomes.

boundedness makes it possible to assess the intervention's effectiveness and to adjust accordingly. For example, had I set out in this research to investigate engagement with authors' content and online events in a specific publisher's website, there would have been a clear, single locatable space to observe, site-specific affordances to evaluate, and likely a definable audience demographic to determine, each with the clear knowledge that they were actively engaging in a literary place. However, authors create profiles online in a wide variety of third-party spaces, each of which mediates through different affordances, for different audiences, and with differing behavioural expectations. Without defined boundaries, it is not quite possible to know what author presence online is as it is not uniform.

The figure above showed barrier disruption as the primary intended output of the intervention. Yet there is an expectation, as chapter 5 uncovered, that authors use different online platforms for a variety of different practices, e.g. sharing promotional information for their own work, the work of other authors, promoting their publisher, engaging in Q&As and more, beyond disrupting barriers to access. By being online, authors are expected to raise their own profile, the profile of their publisher and other authors under their imprint. To maintain current readers and attract new ones too. There are also the less concrete hopes of the authors themselves that by doing all of these things well, they may secure more paid work, and if they do really well (as with the example of J.K Rowling in 5.3.5), they may be able to secure mass media attention, which may potentially enable them to step back from doing any of the above, and to focus instead on their writing. I detailed these desirable outcomes in table 2, in 5.4. All of this would suggest that there are multiple causal paths applied, at least informally, to Author Online Presence, whereby X must not only result in Y, but also Z, M, P and more, and that each desired outcome is anticipated to have a (positive) knock-on effect on other factors, and other agents. This is before even considering the needs and motivations of readers, to whom Author Online Presence is primarily assumed to be directed towards.

In reality, and beyond the overly simplified terms shown in Figure 9 above, Author Online Presence is a complicated, interwoven phenomenon, and thus not at all easy to evaluate. Resultantly, it is also not easy to determine the effectiveness of the technology which mediates it, as what is being mediated has not yet been clearly defined.

One thing that the study in chapter 5 revealed which can move the research forward is that causal links between the intervention and various outcomes (even those unintended, and unplanned) are neither generally nor repeatedly observable. Following in the footsteps of J.K. Rowling, for example, no matter how precisely her steps may be matched, cannot guarantee an author the same success she enjoyed (As Martens (2016)

observed, the level of hype Rowling achieved was “serendipitous, and is difficult – if not impossible - to artificially fabricate” (Martens, 2016, p. 58)). Further, efforts to balance front- and back-stage presentation cannot ever provide the perfect balance sought by all who engage with an author’s online profile. There is no formula. This may suggest that attempts to locate, or to understand desired outcomes under causal logic may not be appropriate in this particular system.

If causality is not observable, then it is likely that this research needs to be approached with a different perspective if the intervention of Author Online Presence and its impact on the Literary Field is to be understood. To explore this possibility, I used the Cynefin Framework – a sense-making model (introduced in 3.6.1) which considers causality and its alternatives in a system - towards building a new lens from which to analyse Author Online Presence.

6.3 The Cynefin Framework: not all systems are causal

In chapter 3.6.1 I described a brief introduction to the Cynefin Framework: a sense-making tool designed to help determine the type of system being observed to help investigate and manage activities within it, such as an intervention. The framework is intended for use after data collection - once patterns in human action have already been determined - to help make retrospective sense of the data. Applying it at this stage of the thesis was therefore an opportune means to better understand the work conducted so far. I used the framework as a pragmatic tool for exploring decision making in a system in which the dynamics are fluid, changeable, and uncertain.

The model struck me immediately as helpful for understanding the Literary System and the Literary Field, which, as Bourdieu (1983) described, are in a constant state of struggle and change (see 4.1), yet also subject to restrictions (such as the imperative to be online, despite unclear outcomes, seen in chapter 5). In the following sections, I described the basic premise of the Cynefin Framework³⁰, detailing the characteristics it attributes to different system types, and the corresponding approaches posited for managing each one (6.3.1). Next, I described the boundaries separating different system types in the framework, which I used to posit

³⁰ Snowden has been reiterating the Cynefin Framework continually since 1999. Some of his early work was published academic papers, but the more up-to-date versions are more typically found in piecemeal blog posts on his company website (cognitive-edge.com), videos and podcasts, as he has most commonly been using the model for industry application, and teaching about it through paid courses (resultantly leaving much of the work behind a paywall). The descriptions of the model and its characteristics in this chapter were taken from an amalgam of his resources from across the 20 years. The depictions used here represent the most recent iterations of the model that could be found. Fortunately, late 2020 saw the 20th anniversary of the model’s creation, and a book was released. The writing here has since been cross-checked against the book to ensure that what has been presented here is accurate, and in-line with current thinking.

that the Literary System – including the intervention of Author Online Presence – is frequently in a state of transition between levels of un-order and order (6.3.1).

6.3.1 Types of systems in the Cynefin Framework

The Cynefin Framework (Snowden et al., 2020) is composed of two basic system types, split into four: **ordered** systems on the right (of which there are two- **Complicated** and **Clear**), and **un-ordered** systems on the left (**Complex**, and **Chaos**). In the middle is a fifth area, the **AC** (which stands for **Aporetic or Confused** – terms explained below), which represents a state of not knowing which of the four system types is under observation. The AC is split into two levels of unawareness (ibid.).

Each system type has specific characteristics which make it retrospectively recognisable. These characteristics relate to the level of order in the system, and how that level of order is observable in agents in the system. Agents, in this framing, can mean anything that acts within the system: people (as used previously in chapter 4 and the model of the Literary System), as well as processes, rules (Snowden, 2010a) and more – e.g. technologies.

Each category of system is impacted by **constraints**: essentially structures (boundaries, barriers) which create coherence in the system (Snowden et al., 2020). The constraints across the different types of systems in the Cynefin Framework are effectively depicted on a spectrum from fixed to non-existent. Fixed constraints that are always the same make for predictable, repeatable behaviours, and restrict less desirable behaviours (Snowden, 2010a). Having no constraints at all can make system behaviour random and confusing. Having constraints that allow for flexibility means that sometimes they restrict behaviour and other times they enable it (ibid.). The use of constraints is reminiscent of the use of barriers and boundaries, discussed in chapter 4, which help to manage literary interactions at events – some restrict access to an author, and some support it. Online, as previously discussed, mediated constraints are significantly changed (and, as far as physical constraints go, such as seating arrangements – are absent).

For each type of system in the Cynefin Framework there are corresponding strategies - a **decision model** (Snowden et al., 2020) - for exploring and making decisions about how to manage each system type appropriately. Below in Figure 10 I depicted an overview of each type of system, their associated decision models, and the rationale behind those management strategies, followed by a short description of each system type and their characteristics.

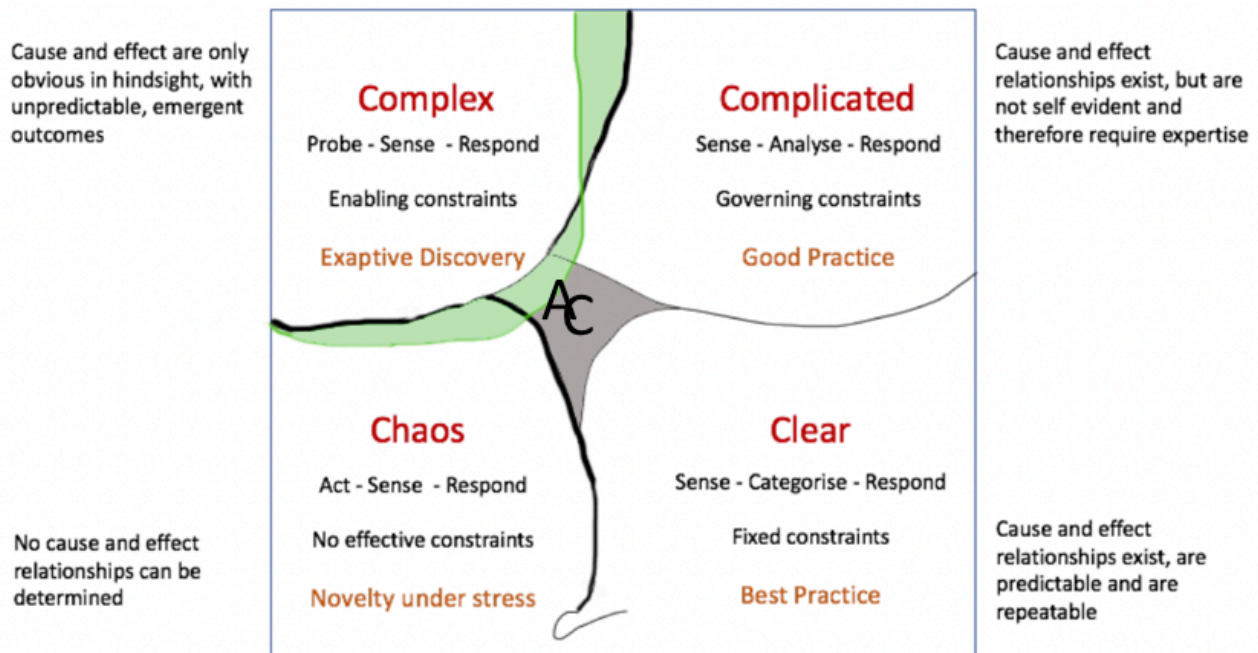


Figure 10: The Cynefin Framework (Adapted from Snowden, 2020) [A]

- **Ordered Systems (Complicated and Clear)**

In an ordered system, there is stability. As things are stable, there is a clear, observable relationship between cause and effect, and so the behaviour of an agent can be readily predicted. By determining the causal relationships observable here, it is possible to predict future behaviour in an ordered system – i.e., how an agent will respond when X happens. This makes it possible to direct behaviour (e.g. by introducing standardised operating procedures) to produce a desired effect, or outcome. Essentially this means it is known that in an ordered system, if X is done then it follows that Y will happen, because things are stable and predictable. To create an alternative outcome (i.e., to make Z happen), variables can be modified accordingly.

There are two levels of order in the framework (Complicated and Clear), which differ according to how easily identifiable causal relationships are. The level of order in a system impacts how it must be approached and managed.

- In **Clear Order**, cause and effect is clear to see to any reasonable person observing it, and to everyone involved in decision making (Snowden, 2011). It is determinable in advance, and it is repeatable. In a Clear Ordered system it is easy to look at the situation under investigation and agree on standard procedures to act on it– i.e., there is a single, known, right way to achieve X, and it can be identified by referring to best practice (Snowden, 2019d). To offer an example, some countries drive on the left, and some on the right (Snowden, 2010b). To decide which side you must drive on, you can check the

rules of the country you are visiting to see which rule they follow (left or right), and then act on this knowledge - there is only one correct choice in a Clear Ordered system (ibid.). Notably, Clear Order is the only system type in which **best practice** (i.e., one right way to do things) is a legitimate strategy. Using best practice in another type of system where cause, effect and action are more difficult to define (and thus the outcomes cannot be easily predicted) can be problematic, and in some instances dangerous (Snowden, 2011). The **constraints** in the system **are fixed**, and thus they restrict variations in behaviour.

ii. In **Complicated Order**, there is an underlying causality which is repeatable and detectable. However, unlike in Clear Order, the causality (and thus what to do to achieve a desired outcome) is not self-evident (ibid.). Rather, to determine what to do about something in a Complicated system, the situation needs to be assessed either through known analytical methods or expert analysis – i.e. **good practice** applies here (Snowden, 2010b). The **constraints** in this type of system **are governing**, rather than fixed – i.e., they guide action, but do not force a single set procedure. If best practice (i.e. an assertion that there is only one solution) is forced upon this system type, instead of good practice, it can cause conflict (ibid.).

- **Unordered Systems (Chaos and Complex)**

i. In a **Chaos**, un-ordered system, there is no stability. The agents of the system are numerous, and as there is no ordered structure they are **unconstrained** by the system, meaning their actions are random and unpredictable (Snowden, 2010b). There is no relationship of cause and effect here, so outcomes cannot be predicted. As such, efforts to apply rigid order (i.e. best practice) will fail – it will not produce the desired outcome. A Chaos system is always a transitional state (Snowden, 2011) – i.e., it cannot be maintained, as it is in constant flux. If a system is in Chaos, Snowden asserted that we must act quickly to try and move out of it, to transition the system into a more desirable system state (ibid.) To take action in a Chaos system requires using **novel practices**, as past experience cannot be applied due to the absence of pattern, causality, and constraint (Snowden, 2010b). It does not matter what is done about a system being in Chaos, so long as something is done to change it to move out of Chaos. More nuanced decisions about stabilising the system happen later once change has introduced some level of order (Snowden, 2011). The use of the word novel here does not refer to innovative, intentionally designed practices, rather it refers to doing something new, quickly, to initiate change under stress.

- ii. In a **Complex** system, agents, constraints and actions are multi-threaded, interconnected, and inseparably woven together (Snowden et al., 2020). Myriad social, cultural, economic and other variables are each evolving in parallel over time, colliding together and producing different, unpredictable effects on each other and on the system (Senge, 2006; Rabaey, 2016). Most human social systems are Complex, continually adapting to changing context (Snowden, 2010a). Complex systems are defined by their patterns of connectivity rather than their structure (Uribe and Jimènez, 2020) or level of order. Constraints in a complex system are light and they enable, rather than restrict, behaviour and evolution (Snowden, 2020a). A Complex system is very sensitive to small changes (Snowden, 2010a), and cannot return to an equilibrium state once change occurs. This makes behaviour and outcomes unpredictable, and a relationship between cause and effect can only be understood here retrospectively, if indeed it is present at all (Snowden, 2010b).

Rather than causal, this system is **dispositional**, meaning that agents and variables are “disposed (but not pre-disposed) to evolve in some directions but not others” (Snowden, 2011, p. 142). Neither best practice nor good practice can be used effectively, as the system state is always new. Instead, **Exaptive Practices** apply, i.e., existing capability and knowledge may be radically repurposed, appropriated in innovative ways that are unique to the new and ever-changing context (Snowden et al., 2020). Although behaviour is unpredictable, it is possible to develop a “**retrospective coherence**” of a Complex System (Snowden, 2010a, p. 224): i.e., to understand, retrospectively, why agents in the system behaved and responded to change as they did, through stepping back and looking at the system after the event (ibid.) and observing the impact of different interactions that occurred.

- **AC (Aporetic or Confused)**

The **AC (Aporetic or Confused)** is the position that most observation of a system starts from: it is the state of not yet knowing what type of system is being observed. The AC is divided into two states of uncertainty (see Figure 11 below). Firstly is the **Aporetic** (meaning to be puzzled, or at a loss (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018)) state, whereby a decision maker knows that there is an issue to be addressed in the system under observation but does not know what, or why, that issue is. In other words, they do not know what sort of problem they are looking at, because they do not know what sort of system they are looking at (i.e., is it ordered, un-ordered) and thus, how to address it (Snowden, 2019d). Secondly is the **Confused** state – whereby a decision maker is confused about the current system state but also

unaware that there is any confusion. This means they do not know what the state of the system is, and they also do not know that there is something to be confused about (ibid.).

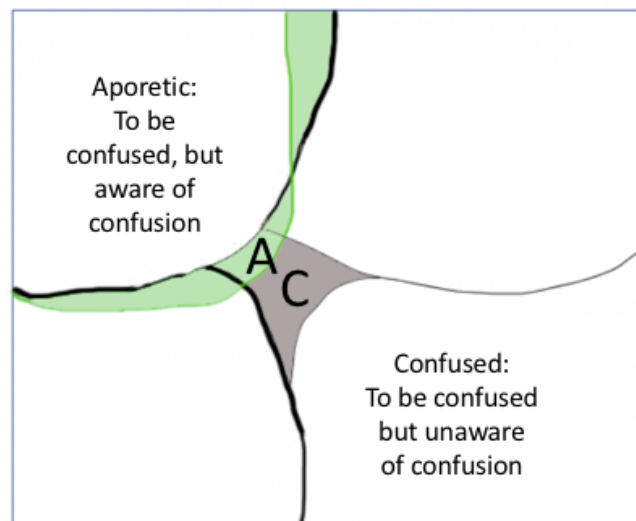


Figure 11: The AC domain (adapted from Snowden, 2020)

Once clarity has been achieved the AC zone is exited, and appropriate action can be taken according to system type.

The core function of the Cynefin Framework is to help decision makers (e.g. researchers, organisations) to recognise what type of system they are dealing with so that they can progress from an AC state of not-knowing and take appropriate steps to manage it effectively. This is done by applying the appropriate decision model (i.e. best practice, good practice, etc.) to the situation towards introducing positive change into the system.

6.4 Applying the Cynefin Framework to the thesis

In the chapter 5 study I had initially intended to identify ways in which interactions between authors and readers could be better supported through technology design. During the interviews it became apparent that modifying technological barriers to more smoothly mediate interactions between them would not be appropriate at this stage. It was unclear whether the mediation of direct communications between them was what actually required support. Further, an interpersonal distance continues to exist between authors and readers despite disintermediation. This distance could not be explained by technological affordances, making it unclear what I was observing. At this point (to refer to the Cynefin Framework) I was in the Confused state of not knowing.

The high levels of interconnectivity between different variables in the Literary Field suggests that – as with most human, social systems (Snowden, 2010a) – the Literary Field is likely a Complex system, and therefore dispositional rather than causal. However, some aspects of what I defined as the Literary System (4.4) suggest that there is clear, repeatable order used to manage processes within the Literary Field. The Communications Circuit, for example, produces books (often standardised, batch or mass produced, identical artefacts (Brown and Duguid, 2017) - a process which requires high levels of repeatable order). The Reading Industry uses clear, recognisable boundaries and barriers to manage interaction at literary events. The Servicescapes which are used as a physical interface for accessing the output of both these parts of the Literary System use ordered cues and systems to mediate access. This may suggest, then, that the infrastructure built atop the Literary Field to mediate practices and production may not be described as Complex systems but are instead Ordered. This realisation left me in the Aporetic state of knowing there is an issue, but not knowing what type of system is under observation.

In 6.2 I produced a simplified depiction of online engagement between authors and readers as an intervention into the Literary System, which I called Author Online Presence – a retro-fit infrastructure built atop of the existing perennial system (i.e., the Literary Field and the Literary System). This infrastructure is sedimented into online third-party platforms, which enable authors to establish an online presence to attract audience engagement. The practices associated with Author Online Presence do not establish clearly observable patterns of repeatable output. This sets it apart from the patterns of repetition and causality observable in the other infrastructures in the Literary System (i.e., the Communications Circuit producing books, and the Reading Industry producing events). Yet despite differences, it is clearly tied to those systems. It therefore appears that there is a complex blend of order and un-order at play across the different components of the Literary Field.

6.4.1 Complex dispositions in the Literary Field

In the summary of the Cynefin Framework's system types in 6.3.1, I explained that a Complex system is dispositional rather than causal – disposed to respond to occurrences in the system in certain ways, yet subject to the influence of constant, fluid, parallel changes due to the interconnected nature of the different variables within and around it.

Dispositions are also central to Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualisation of the Literary Field, described in chapter 4.1, with the habitus (with which people navigate the field and the interactions within it) defined as a relational

set of dispositions which generate behaviour and perceptions (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). The use of the word dispositions in Bourdieu's conceptualisation appears to refer to dispositions in the psychological sense, i.e. "the natural tendency or bent of the mind, especially in relation to moral or social qualities; mental constitution or temperament; turn of mind" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). However, his description of the interplay between the habitus, the agents within it, and the physical environment in which it is enacted (see 4.1) are in keeping with a broader definition of the word disposition, which is used in the Cynefin Framework. Here, a definition of dispositions introduced by Mumford (2010) is applied to describe an innate, embodied propensity to behave in a particular way under particular conditions (Mumford, 2010; Snowden, 2015a). Under the right conditions, something behaves as it is disposed, in a "more or less regular" (Mumford, 2010, p. 2) way. For example, under the condition of gravity a sphere may roll down a hill, as it has an innate propensity to respond to gravity in this way (Mumford, 2009). However, if something stronger than gravity interferes at a given moment, its propensity to roll may be blocked (Mumford, 2010, 2009) (e.g. a rock may blockade its path downhill). The disposition to roll is not absent in this scenario – rather, the change of conditions (the rock) was not conducive to the sphere's innate disposition (to roll) to manifest (Mumford, 2009). In a similar manner, different external forces act on the agents in a Complex system constantly, and those forces are multiple and interwoven. Sometimes this can work with the dispositions of the agents, and sometimes against. This interpretation of dispositions is central to understanding a Complex system.

To help envision the dynamics in a Complex system, Snowden posited the example of a flat surface on which there are small iron discs surrounded by magnets (Snowden, 2015a). If the magnets are equidistant from the discs, and their magnetic strengths are equal, the opposing polarities of the magnets balance equally and so produce no visible effect on the discs. The discs remain still, at the centre of the magnetic field. If one magnet changes strength, position or polarity, the position of the iron discs change in response. The iron discs are disposed to either be drawn to, or retreat from, a magnet, depending on its polarity and strength. If there was only one magnet acting on the discs, and its properties known, the behaviour of the iron discs in response to its magnetic force could be predicted. But if there are multiple magnets with unknown properties which also change in parallel in either strength or polarity, the movement pattern of the iron discs cannot be predicted (ibid.).

This is reminiscent of the Literary Field, in which people are generally disposed to behave in particular ways according to their habitus, yet multiple variables can change and act on the field at once, resulting, as Bourdieu

(1983) had observed, in a constant struggle for stability. An example of external forces acting upon the field and changing the path of its agents is the varied, intertwined conditions (some of which were observed in 2.1) which led to digital modes of production and, with it, the drive towards cultural workers such as authors engaging online – departing from the routinised course (royalty publishing) in response. Returning to the iron disc analogy, an individual iron disc acted upon by one magnet may return to an equilibrium state if the magnet is removed (i.e., it would go back to being still). In a Complex system, such as the field of multiple magnets, intertwined dispositions and variables mean that a return to an equilibrium state is not achievable. This is in keeping with the characteristics of the Literary Field, under the continual impact of external and internal changes - the ever fluid “field of struggles” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312).

In the Literary Field there is a symbiotic relationship between field, habitus, and environment, and when any of them change (as a result of new input or change), so too do the others in a ripple effect, just like a Complex, dispositional system. If the Literary field is Complex then causal relationships cannot be expected, which may go towards explaining the absence of repeatable patterns in Author Online Presence, seated within it. This would also help to explain why online interactions cannot be identical to those mediated offline, as the changed environment changes the other interconnected variables of the Literary Field (i.e., role, habitus), as well as the external variables which impact it.

In my description of Complex systems in 6.3.1 I noted that causal relationships are not observable but can be recognisable in hindsight. With the magnets, patterns can be explored with hindsight based on knowledge of their pre-disposition to either be repelled or attracted to a magnetic force, and then consider the specific forces they were exposed to determine causal relationships behind their resulting movements. The findings in chapter 5 provided some evidence of causal relationships which were not initially self-evident, but, like the magnets, could be explored and potentially understood with the benefit of hindsight. There have been some examples in this thesis pointing towards a causality only determinable with hindsight, again in keeping with the premise of the Literary Field being a Complex system. But as I have already discussed, there are areas in the Literary System infrastructure where causality can indeed be expected, suggesting that not all aspects of the Literary Field are managed within Complex.

6.4.2 Order in the Literary System

The Literary System (introduced in 4.4) consists of networked organisations, collaborating towards a shared goal (of producing books or events). The Communications Circuit within it relies on order and predictability, which is necessary for manufacturing a mass-produced, widely distributed commodity – of which, books, it has been argued, are the oldest example (Brown and Duguid, 2017p. 45). Processes may vary internally between different publishing houses and their network of organisations in the chain, but there is a recognisable standardisation across the industry, to the extent that Duguid's (1982) contribution, based on 18th Century practices still resembles contemporary reiterations of the model.

Processes that can be repeated and standardised (some, perhaps, automated) may be managed in Clear Order, according to best practice (i.e., one right way to act). Clear order is particularly well-suited to mass production. However, Clear order is also inflexible, and so some aspects of the Communications Circuit may likely be managed as a Complicated system, according to good practice and mutual agreement, to allow for necessary flexibility.

Both the Communications Circuit and the Reading Industry, depicted in the Literary System, are composed of different networked organisations. These organisations each differ in scale and in business model, and each have their own resources, costs, accountability, and agency over their own internal practices – which Carter et al. (2015) explained is a characteristic of all supply chains. Whilst collaborative agreement enables the stability and order required to facilitate a shared output (e.g. books or events), there is a vulnerability inherent in such a system as, if one organisation changes (e.g. they go out of business, significantly change their internal business focus, or fail to meet a contract), this can impact the others. Due to this interconnected (co-)dependency, Carter et al. posited that all supply chains are Complex systems, observing that the cohesion at their centre comes at a cost - a continual struggle between and within the organisations as they seek control and deal with changing context (“the supply chain as a network operates as a complex adaptive system, where every agent grapples with the tension between control and emergence” (Carter, Rogers and Choi, 2015, p. 6).

If supply chains are Complex, this would suggest that, in turn, the Communications Circuit and the Reading Industry are rooted in a Complex system – human social systems subject to fluid change, and to the influence of multitudinous external factors such as broader societal, cultural, economic, and political variables impacting on the agents involved. Yet they serve to create order, retrofit in the Literary Field, to enable repeat practices (and with it, commerce). When any variable acting on the Complex system changes, everything else is impacted in turn, and a chain reaction – often only recognisable in hindsight - can occur. Examples such as the introduction of new technology (external to the field), for example, have changed production and practices

(e.g. eBooks, online dissemination) within the field. This would fit with the premise that some aspects can be managed in Clear order, but others in Complicated order to enable flexibility in the face of change.

It has taken time and negotiation to establish these ordered systems – as it does to develop any infrastructure, as order is built upon past structures, and change is introduced incrementally (Star, 1999). In the case of the Communications Circuit, it took almost 300 years for Europe to transition fully to printed books once the printing press had been developed (Skains, 2010). Changing one thing changes other things (e.g. print publishing impacted the roles in the Literary Field, see 4.1), and the establishment of order in the Complex Literary Field have been gradual, evolutionary and have never quite settled (or likely ever will, as Bourdieu (1983) portended, as flux is a characteristic of the Literary Field). This suggests the state of a system is not static, and there can be transitions between different system types. Transitions between system types is explored shortly, in 6.4.3.

6.4.3 Chaos in Author Online Presence

As I identified in findings from chapter 5, Author Online Presence is typically conducted in third-party spaces such as social media, rather than designated environments controlled by the Literary System (see 6.1). In his early iterations of the Cynefin Framework, Snowden referred to social media as Chaos systems, because the connections within them are messy, fragmented and multitudinous, behaviour in them cannot be predicted, and their conditions are highly dynamic and vulnerable to change (Snowden, 2010b). However, despite their unpredictable nature, recent decades have seen an overwhelming cultural drive to use them for a range of business, social, and information purposes. Thus, later work on the Cynefin Framework has suggested that they are instead, somewhere at the boundary between Complex and Chaos, as their users rapidly introduce order (much like the patterns of practices established by authors participants in chapter 5 to enable them to share different types of content to remain visible between book releases) to make the platforms usable³¹. There is a human tendency to seek order, but also arguably an operational imperative to do so when using a space for business practices.

³¹ In literary terms, taking practices to where the people are, on social media, is reminiscent of bookshops being moved to out-of-town shopping centres, particularly in America, when travelling by car gained popularity, and the town centres bookshops used to be established in lost footfall (Miller, 2006). In broader, cultural terms, there is consilience with Richard Florida's work on the movements of the Creative Class (Florida, 2004) – particularly when we consider that musicians paved the way to social media and others followed. There is also arguably a link with the actions of the ancient Greeks and the agora – whereby an open public space was gradually adapted to accommodate set places to facilitate specific social actions. Both formats had their problems (Sennett, 2018) Stepping back to look at the bigger picture of how humans make places for social action can help build retrospective coherence to understand the workings (and perceive causality, with hindsight) in a Complex system.

Some implications of uncertainty and unconstrained behaviour associated with a Chaos system were evident in the interview findings in chapter 5. For instance, unlike a literary event for which admission can be managed through ticketing, authors online can attract very large audiences whose (as noted in 5.3.8) identity, and motivation for engaging with an author, may not be verifiable. There were difficulties in protecting personal boundaries (e.g. an author may be tagged repeatedly, or receive unwelcome contact), and some authors resolving to perceiving all contacts as a potential threat (5.3.8). Without appropriate constraints, interactions cannot be effectively managed, and this can lead to a poor experience.

Some of the behaviours described in chapter 5 also highlighted efforts to introduce stability and predictability to what would otherwise be Chaos, and this can be positive. However, there was also some evidence in the interview data to suggest that in some ways, overly restrictive rules were being applied which hindered the flexibility necessary to deal with changing circumstances. For example, the possible use of Twitter follower numbers at acquisition meetings (5.3.1) and the compulsion for authors to be online constantly (5.3.5) to combat a fear of invisibility. Applying tight restrictions in an un-ordered (Chaos or Complex) system has the potential to cause problems, and points to a need to ensure that the intervention of Author Online Presence is managed in a manner befitting to the nature of its current position between Chaos and Complex.

The Cynefin Framework is helpful to identify the characteristics of a system. However, the observations in this section suggest that a system state is not static, or that it can be multi-layered. There is a human propensity to seek meaning and order to support our understanding (Snowden, 2017a) and our ability to carry out actions and address needs. Where there is uncertainty, order is instilled to manage it. Therefore, observing order in the Literary System is likely, as Snowden (2017) posited more broadly, reveals more about human nature than it does of the qualities of a system under investigation (Snowden, 2017a). It is likely that the Literary Field is a Complex system at its core, yet order is being retrofitted to support practices. The Cynefin Framework is not intended to be used as a one-off process, because systems change over time, and the varying order observable here provides an example of this happening. It is possible to lose awareness of a system's state as change is gradually introduced, and perspectives may "need resetting from time to time" (Snowden, 2010b) to see if the system has fundamentally transitioned into another state (i.e., order has increased or decreased) to ensure it is being managed and observed using the appropriate strategies. It is reasonable to propose that developing an awareness of the Literary System and Author Online Presence over time would help to respond to, and support, changes that impact it over time.

6.5 Transitioning order through infrastructure in the Literary Field

The Cynefin Framework is valuable for better understanding a system which is undergoing change. When impacted by change, a system (or aspects of it) can transition between different levels of order, and thus between the different system types in the Cynefin Framework. This transition can happen either intentionally or unknowingly, and it is important to maintain awareness of the system state to use appropriate management strategies to address any issues resultant from change.

In her investigation of evolving, contemporary literary culture, Driscoll (2014) observed that the Literary Field has been in a period of transition for some time (Driscoll, 2014). Contemporary literary culture has roots in the practices of the past but is also moving away from it into new ways of being (ibid.). She called this phenomenon the Middlebrow, which she described as a “a deep-rooted, widespread cultural formation, with an influence that extends to the present” (Driscoll, 2014, p. 8), which is relative to past literary structures, rather than removed from them. She argued that the Middlebrow is defined by fluidity and continues to develop, as a movement, in response to broader socio-cultural development (2014). This is in keeping with the perspective that the Literary Field, as a Complex system, does not reach an equilibrium state, as it is continually acted upon by external forces. It also highlights that the Literary Field is in a transitional state³².

Transitions between different system states are central to the Cynefin Framework. The boundaries between the different systems in the model have come to be understood as having particular characteristics (similarly to the system types themselves) that act in different ways, dependent on the system types they bound (Snowden, 2019d, 2019c). Figure 12 below depicts the boundaries separating the system types. A thin, grey line, separates Complicated and Clear, to represent that both are ordered, and a transition on this side of the model is a matter of internally changing the level of order rather than a movement into a new system type (Snowden, 2017). The thicker black lines depict a more definitive border crossing between systems, for example a movement from Complex into Complicated crosses a thick line, and represents a full change from un-ordered Complex, into ordered Complicated (ibid.). The hooked line at the bottom of the image between Chaos and Clear represents a specific, important area of the model called the **Catastrophic Fold** (Snowden, 2019a). This is intended to look like a wave, to depict that a crossing from Clear into Chaos can be sudden, as if caught in a wave at sea, and can be perilous as it represents a sudden (and total) loss of control (Snowden,

³² Notably, Pires Franco (2014) wrote that: “if there is one thing the history of the book has shown us, it is that books, writing, publishing, and reading are not static; rather these things evolve – in tandem – with cultural, social, economic and technological changes. Expecting the book to persist ‘as we know it’ seems equivalent to asking for time to stop and for books to remain forever crystallized in their current form” (Franco, 2014, p. 45).

2019a). It is possible for a system to stay at the borderline between Chaos and Clear for a long time, as in a highly ordered system, the impact of external change is not always noticed until it is too late. This boundary is called the **Complacency Zone** (Snowden et al., 2020), as complacency can lead to chaos.

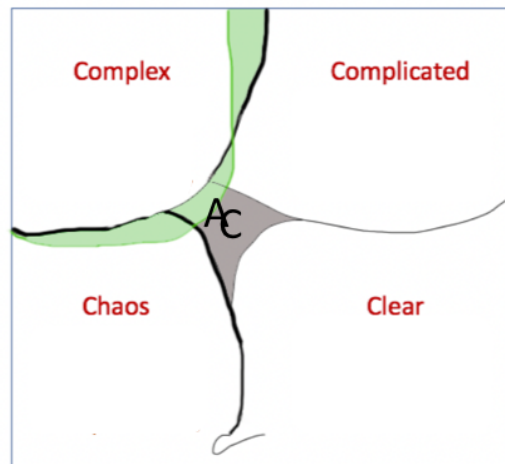


Figure 12: Cynefin Boundaries, adapted from Snowden (2019 a and b)

The green band drawn around the edges of Complex represents **Liminal Zones**. The word liminal (meaning ‘on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations’ (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020)) indicates the transitional nature of crossing into, and out of, Complex. The word was chosen as it carries a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty – even trepidation before committing to leave what is known, and to grow (Snowden, 2019a). Crossing a liminal zone into another system type changes not only the system, but the agents within it and their behaviour (ibid.). There is a suspension in time as a liminal zone is crossed, as options are held onto before making a commitment to change (Snowden, 2017). The uncertainty is a response to changing circumstances – in contrast to the uncertainty of the AC zone – and the knowledge that change is occurring.

The different characteristics of each boundary, and the direction in which they can be crossed (which can differ depending on the system type) are described in full in Appendix C.

I posit that Driscoll’s (2014) depiction of the Middlebrow movement is befitting with a view that the Literary Field is in a transitional state between levels of system order. More specifically, I posit that the literary practices within the field are frequently in the liminal zone between Complex (the natural state of the Literary Field) and Complicated. The fluidity of the Complex Literary Field and the various interconnected variables impacting on it are met with the human propensity to seek stability through order. This is likely also compounded by the imperative for the businesses connected to the Field to survive.

It is possible to spend a long time in the liminal zone, as crossing into order takes time, and can require numerous iterations as things change, destabilise, and new actions are taken to continue on the path (Snowden, 2019a, 2011) – just as Driscoll has observed in the Middlebrow. The right momentum is needed to push beyond the liminal zone over the boundary into Complicated (ibid.). Snowden noted that the liminal zone between Complex and Complicated is an area ripe for experimentation to find out what might work to stabilise a given situation (Snowden et al., 2020).

In figure 13 below I depicted the Literary Field as situated in the Complex system area of the framework. Aspects of the field (the Communications Circuit and the Reading Industry which constitute the Literary System) represent infrastructures that have been built atop of the Literary Field to enable (and stabilise) particular literary practices (as noted in 6.2). I used arrows to depict that, over time (potentially even over centuries) processes have come together to create order, transitioning those aspects from Complex into ordered. Some processes are managed in Complicated after the transition into ordered, and some may be moved into Clear order.

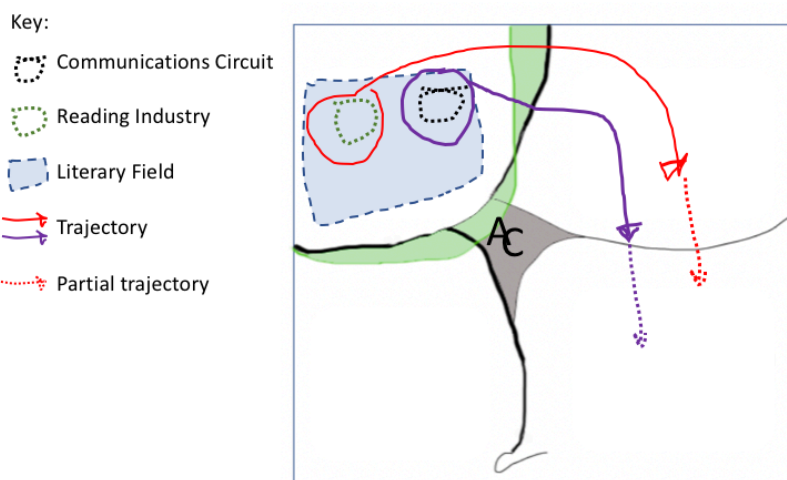


Figure 13: Suggested trajectories of the Literary System (Communications Circuit and Reading Industry), from Complex to Ordered

The figure, as it is drawn, suggests that the movement from Complex to Clear has been linear, however this is an oversimplification. Transitioning from Complex to Complicated takes time, trial, and error, and it is common to spend a significant period reiterating within the liminal border territory, as different forces (e.g., changes such as new technologies, economic structures) impact on the trajectory of the disposition towards order.

During the transition, I posit that the habitus changes and so do roles, as well as the Literary Field itself, due to the interconnected, dispositional nature of the Complex system. In figure 14 below I expanded on the sketch to show that now, online spaces are being used as an additional new infrastructure to support new practices through Author Online Presence. As the interviews in chapter 5 identified, these are often these are social media platforms, outside of the control of the Literary System agents, run by third parties. As described in 6.4.3, social media is considered to be at the border between Complex and Chaos. Therefore I expanded the bounds of the Literary Field in the figure into the liminal zone between Complex and Chaos – because online platforms such as social media have become “where literary culture takes place” (Murray, 2016, p. 11) (as noted in 2.1.2).

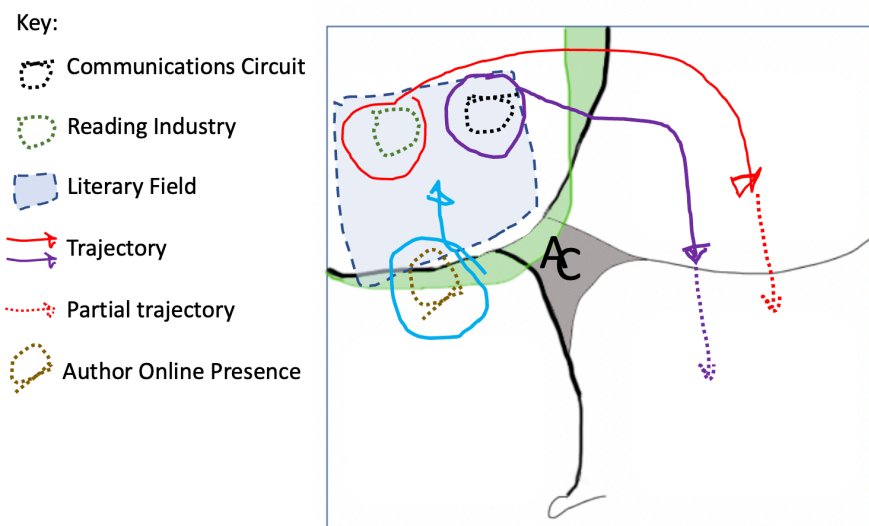


Figure 14: Author Online Presence and the Literary Field expanded into Chaos

I posit that, as a new phenomenon, Author Online Presence is not currently in the transitional state between Complex and Complicated as other aspects of literary culture may be. Rather it is navigating the liminal boundary between Chaos and Complex.

As Author Online Presence is comprised of multiple practices (identified, at least provisionally, in the table in 5.4 based on interview findings), it is possible that some practices may benefit from stabilising order so that they may ultimately be managed in Complicated over time, but that others may be best managed within Complex. How change will occur over time, however, cannot be predicted due to the dispositional (rather than causal) nature of a Complex system such as the Literary Field, as well as the unconstrained, unpredictable nature of the Chaos system which it is currently straddling.

In recent iterations of the Cynefin Framework, Snowden (Snowden, 2019b) described the three most common pathways taken through the liminal zones between Complex, Complicated and Chaos. These are depicted in Figure 15 below.

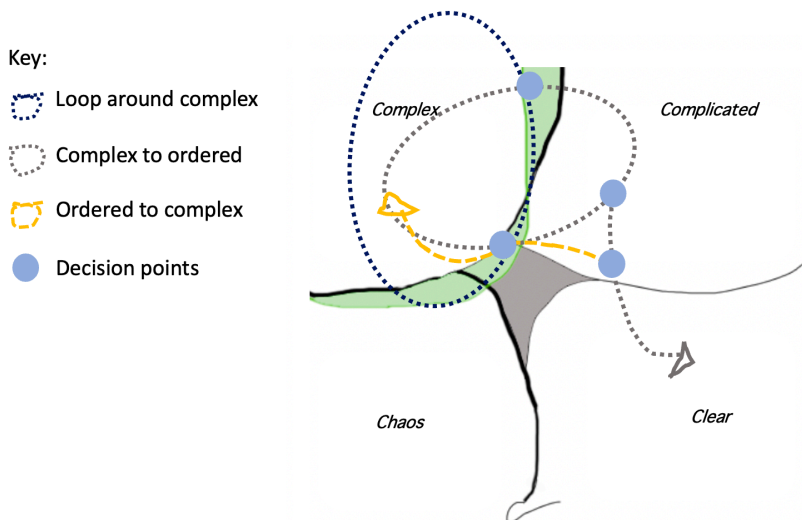


Figure 15: Dynamics in the liminal zones of the Cynefin Framework (adapted from Snowden et al., 2020)

The grey dotted loop shows the desirable, typical path of iteration between *Complex* and *Complicated*. This trajectory may continue to loop through the liminal zone as change occurs. From *Complicated* (so long as there is awareness of the current system state), there can be flexibility to allow for change. This may result in a return into *Complex* for a period, followed by a transition back into *Complicated* further to reiterations and introducing stability (ibid.).

The four blue dots represent decision points about which course to follow (i.e., points to look at the system state and determine whether a crossing has occurred or can occur). The blue dot nearest to the boundary between *Complicated* and *Clear* shows that, if something is sufficiently stabilised, it may be appropriate to move the system into *Clear* order. At that decision point, it could also be determined that a reverse action (in response to changes occurring) to re-join the main loop (via the yellow line) may be wise, if there is not enough stability to warrant the shift into higher order (Snowden et al., 2020; Snowden, 2019b).

The figure also shows a second trajectory pathway (a dark blue dotted line) whereby the system may circle around *Complex*, through all surrounding liminal zones, but never settling into an ordered state, as stability is not possible at this point (ibid.). Snowden (quoting writer and architect, Ann Pendleton-Julian) referred to

this trajectory as a “living in a white water world” ((Snowden et al., 2020, location 1241) as there is no certainty, things change quickly and unexpectedly, and the system frequently edges into Chaos.

I propose that the trajectory of Author Online Presence is currently aligned with this white-water world trajectory. Authors’ practices online are created in the infrastructure of platforms which are, by nature, unordered Chaos systems. Through establishing repeat and recognisable practices, or by adjusting privacy settings (5.3.3), authors (and other users) work to introduce stabilising conditions. This can lead the system towards a Complex state – still fluid and highly influenced by change, and vulnerable to change and a need to develop new engagement practices in response. It may also lead certain practices towards Complicated, in which greater routine and predictability can be established. There is an element of trial, error, and reiteration when creating practices in Social Media environments, in keeping with a transition through a liminal zone. This helps to position Author Online Presence as more than an infrastructure, per se (although considering it in this way helps to visualise it). Rather, it is a product of dispositional forces – sometimes oppositional, sometimes working together to harmonise – ever fluid and unpredictable.

The drive to create stability is not necessarily resultant of an awareness of Chaos – some may be behaviour driven by the habitus and what is understood of the regular ways in which people act in literary contexts. Behaviours from this root would be neither accidental nor randomly varying - rather they align with expectations and accepted rules and regulations learned from the literary context (Barton et al., 2000). Practices are taken for granted (ibid.) and are unconsciously and instinctively instilled in the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Online, authors may establish certain practices to follow suit, through observation of literary behaviour by others in context, and this informs the habitus anew.

All trajectories in figure 15, as proposed by Snowden (2019, 2020), cross through the AC, as losing awareness of the system state as things change can become inevitable due to the changeable nature of dynamics. The dotted blue line (the loop around Complex, which I propose is relevant in Author Online Presence) crosses the point of AC which meets the boundary between Clear and Chaos – the Complacency Zone, and this may be indicative of some of the struggles currently at play in online interactions.

6.5.1 Internal struggles as a challenge to transition

One of the characteristics of the Literary Field, as I discussed in 4.1, is an interplay between power structures (and status differentials associated with role) which lead to a struggle for affirmation and validation of agents’ roles (Bourdieu, 1996). As I explored in Chapter 4 there has been a long-standing resistance to change in

fractions of the Literary Field, and a tendency towards hierarchical thinking: e.g. the idea of primary vs secondary readers (4.2.2) and also of high- and low-brow literature aligned with a battle between cultural and commercial values (Bourdieu, 1986)). This has, at times, manifested in the maintenance of processes and practices that no longer serve the fields' agents, yet preserve the status quo:

For most of the previous century, book professionals have despaired over the archaic and inefficient systems in place for joining a book with the individual who might want to read it (...) [with consistent] calls for the entire book distribution system to get itself more in step with contemporary business practices (Miller, 2006 p 10).

Hierarchical thinking is linked to bureaucracy (Weber, 1978), which relies on a well-defined system of stratification to create order, and indeed to survive. Bureaucratic thinking rapidly developed in response to the industrial revolution to control decentralised, complex operations (Weber, 1978; Fountain, 2001) – timing closely aligned with the emergence of mass print production. Bureaucracy has been associated with the royalty publishing industry, and self-publishing methods positions as a move to subvert its controls (e.g. Bold, 2016; Driscoll et al., 2018; Levey, 2016). Clear ordered system thinking in the Cynefin Framework is associated with bureaucratic thinking, and it can be problematic because, as Snowden observed, bureaucratic thinkers tend to resist (or even fail to observe) change. This can stagnate potential growth, or worse, lead to a crisis through the application of overly rigid constraints (Snowden, 2010b). Overly rigid constraint can potentially push a system across the catastrophic fold and into Chaos (ibid.). In lesser extremes, rigid constraints act as an oppositional force upon a system's dispositions, influencing how it behaves and its trajectory.

The Complex nature of the Literary Field makes it fluid and changeable, but associated bureaucracy tends to be inflexible. Aspects of the power structures in the Field have remained relatively stable over time (i.e., publishers are still gatekeepers to the field and arbiters of literary value), but changes to them can lead to resistance (as seen in Millers' (2006) quote above), and at times this has been observable.

As Weiss noted of systems informed by hierarchical concerns, “a considerable amount of ineffectiveness may be tolerated if a program fits well with prevailing values” (Weiss, 1993 p. 98). This describes complacency, which, as explained at the start of 6.5, can result in a gradual tension that leads to a breakage, which can lead to chaos. Tension can often go unnoticed, as people are good at finding workarounds and presenting the appearance that things are working well, even if they are not (Snowden, 2011):

Humans are, to use a wonderful Scottish dialect word, canny: they find ways around problems, they learn to conform on the surface while taking a more naturalistic approach behind the facades of formalism (Snowden, 2011, p. 136)

It is possible that, where author participants in chapter 5 described behaviours such as persevering with online promotion as if they are marketing to an audience of readers despite sensing that it does not increase sales, we are seeing evidence of workarounds and (largely) unspoken tensions resultant from an overly stringent expectation that authors be, or behave in a particular way, online. This could make this a performance of conformity (Suchman, 2000): authors signalling to the industry professionals that they are actively engaged with readers online as is expected of them, with a limited awareness of whether the readers are indeed engaged.

If this assessment is accurate, then some aspects of the system (i.e., the part in which social media activity is incorporated into acquisition meetings as a statistic) may be in the Complacency Zone territory, and this needs to be identified and managed accordingly.

I therefore extended the trajectory around Complex, detailed in figure 15 in the previous section, to account for possible dips into Chaos across the catastrophic fold, that may occur due to activity maintained at the Complacency Zone between Clear and Chaos. This was depicted by a red, dotted line in Figure 16 below. I did this to indicate that there is a possible risk if the struggles of authors in managing online engagement continue to go unaddressed, as their performances of conformity may: “enable the system to work despite itself, disguising the failure until the system breaks catastrophically” (Snowden, 2010a, p. 225).

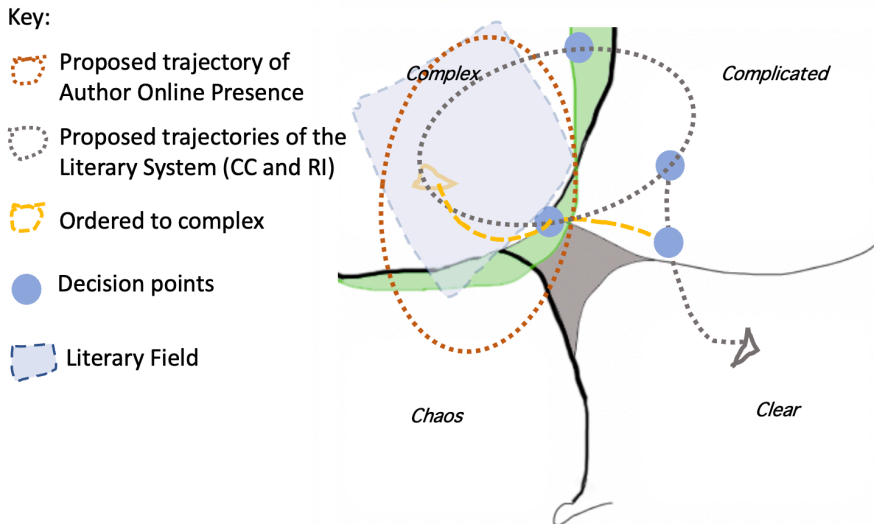


Figure 16: Proposed trajectory paths of the Literary Field, and the systems of the Communications Circuit, the Reading Industry, and Author Online Presence (each an intervention in the Literary Field) [A]

6.5.2 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the Literary Field as an infrastructure created within the Literary Field to facilitate particular actions (i.e., the production of books and events). To help look at online interactions from a new perspective, I posited that Author Online Presence (the act of authors setting up online profiles for engagement) is an intervention (or input) retrofit in the Literary System to facilitate a new set of actions - an infrastructure in itself, which is primarily based in third-party online platforms, outside of the direct control of the Literary System. I then used this perspective to question what the purpose of Author Online Presence is, and why a relationship between the intervention and the outputs it produces does not appear to evidence causality.

Next, I introduced the Cynefin Framework, and cross-compared the findings from chapter 5 and the literature from chapters 2 and 4 to posit that the Literary Field is, at its core, a Complex system, and as such causal logic does not apply. It is, instead, a dispositional system, subject to fluid, parallel impacts from changing dynamics from within, and outside of, the system. From here, I observed that the Literary System represents order, retrofit into the Complex Literary Field to enable specific procedures to be managed as ordered systems (in Complicated and Clear order), and observed that a transition into order can take a long time and many reiterations before it can stabilise. I used this to posit that the Literary System has spent much of its time in the liminal zone between Complex and Complicated, in keeping with typical trajectory pathways of change

between the system types as posited by Snowden (2020) and with Driscoll's concept of the Middlebrow as a transitory movement.

I posited that Author Online Presence – a part of the Literary Field, and an input into the Literary System – is currently supported in platforms such as social media, which is a system considered to be at the border between Chaos and Complex. This has extended the Literary Field – through Author Online Presence - into the liminal zone between Chaos and Complex. From here I argued it is possible that, due to strong control emanating from the Literary System, the management of Author Online Presence may at times teeter into the complacency zone between Clear and Chaos, rather than remaining static in the liminal zone between Chaos and Complex. If this is the case, it is important to recognise it to manage it accordingly to avoid collapse through over-constraint and poor awareness. I then argued that, more than an infrastructure or intervention, Author Online Presence is also a product of dispositional forces acting upon the Complex system.

Conceptualising the research through this framing provided a new perspective from which to understand online interactions between authors and readers within context. This new perspective was important to glean because if the Literary Field is Complex, then to manage (or indeed research) it using either best practice or good practice would be unsuitable and could potentially introduce over-constraint (and, resultantly, Chaos).

If I had acted straight away on the pain points identified in the chapter 5 study (as I had originally planned) towards designing new supportive structures (through technological affordances) for authors and readers in online platforms, I would have potentially limited the system dynamics' potential for growth. Approaching the problem by designing at this stage may even introduce new problems, perhaps resulting in a “replacement tyranny” (Snowden, 2016) - no better, and perhaps even more problematic, than the current system state (ibid.). This makes it important to build awareness prior to design. At this stage, we are not in a position to design new constraints.

There is still more to learn about the dispositions in the system as, whilst Bourdieu's (1996) work on the Literary Field may be well-established, it speaks to the offline experience and cannot fully be transposed to explain the dispositional dynamics present online. It is also important to respect the fluidity of the system dynamics at play – particularly where they can be a mix of Complex and Chaos, as is likely in social media platforms.

By identifying the Literary Field as a Complex system, it becomes possible to redirect my approach in this thesis to help learn more about it using a system-specific decision model (i.e., strategy). For managing and

investigating activity in a Complex system, this is to **probe**, **sense** and **respond** (Snowden, 2010b). This decision model carried out as follows: to **probe** by instigating multiple safe-to-fail experiments (i.e. experiments whereby the outcome will not be destructive, can readily be reversed or changed and, once observed, can provide a useful learning point), in parallel to each other, with the understanding that any change introduced can have a knock-on effect on other variables (Snowden et al., 2020).

The dispositional, highly influenced, and changeable nature of a Complex system means that presence of a researcher (or any other agent who intervenes) becomes another variable which impacts it. This means that any diagnostic test on the system is effectively an intervention in itself (ibid.) and so should be handled with awareness of its impact. By doing parallel experiments rather than one sole experiment, a range of possible outcomes can be observed. From this, any new patterns that become evident in response to the change can be monitored, enabling one to **sense** what is happening, and **respond** in a manner that can amplify positive outcomes, or dampen unwanted ones (Snowden et al., 2020).

With this specific method for engaging with Complex system research, I next developed a new approach to collect more qualitative data about the dispositions in Author Online Presence, to learn more about it.

Chapter 7: Empirical study two - exploring readers' perceptions and values in relation to Author Online Presence

"We demand rigidly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty!"
Vroomfondel in the Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Douglas Adams, 1980)

In this chapter I describe the second empirical study of the thesis, conducted in 2020, in which twelve participants (all self-identified as people who enjoy reading fiction) were interviewed using a novel technique. My technique combined methods from HCI research with the probing decision model recommended in the Cynefin Framework for inquiry in Complex systems (described in brief in 6.5.2. A fuller account of the method and its rationale is provided in 7.2.2).

Firstly in this chapter, I detail my motivations for the study (7.1) and described the rationale behind the Complex system decision model I appropriated. Here, I explain Snowden's concept of using adjacent possibles (Snowden, 2015b, 2016) as a means to learn about the system. I then describe the adjacent possibles that I chose to test for this study, and my rationale (7.1.1). Next, I describe the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. For this, I first detailed the participant demographic (7.2.1), followed by a description of the methods I combined to design the study technique (7.2.2). I then described the specific design of the study procedure itself, including the materials used to conduct it (7.2.3) and the process for data collection and analysis (7.2.4). I then described the findings from the qualitative data using quotes from participants to support the narrative of their accounts (7.3). Lastly, I summarise and discuss the findings, drawing conclusions from the study.

7.1 Motivation for the study

Authors and readers can choose from an array of online platforms to potentially interact with each other, outside of formal mediation channels. At the start of this thesis, I had anticipated finding evidence of rich dialogue being held between them as a result of these new opportunities. However, human relations always take time to develop, and interactivity between authors and readers is influenced by numerous, parallel, dispositional factors - many of which may serve to hinder interactivity - by virtue of being situated in the Literary Field - a Complex system. With consideration of the interconnected complex dynamics at play, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is understandable that the participants in my previous study (chapter 5) discussed a range of tensions and difficulties which impair interaction between them online. However, this

could not have been fully appreciated without firstly identifying those tensions, and then reanalysing them to determine that they are a product of dispositional, Complex system dynamics, as determined in chapter 6.

Permitting access through online platforms is not enough, in itself, to support authors and readers to communicate directly with each other online. In physical spaces, constraints such as seating arrangements and signage are used to mediate interactions between authors and readers (McArthur, 2016) at events in strategically designed places, and even there, there are difficulties (discussed in 4.3.3) in mediating between an individual author and a large audience. Equivalent structural constraints are largely absent in the social media spaces they currently use online, and there is the potential that audiences (albeit virtual rather than physical ones) are larger and more diverse than at events.

At the point of conducting this study, Author Online Presence is being primarily managed by authors themselves, and it is dispersed across an infrastructure of different websites and third-party platforms. Many of these spaces are unconstrained social media platforms, which I identified in chapter 6 as systems at the boundary of Complex and Chaos, and thus highly unpredictable and vulnerable to constant, sudden, parallel changes.

The spaces they use are unconstrained, and so too are the practices they follow, which are numerous and continually evolving, making them challenging to manage (e.g. in 5.3.1 a participant explained that they had previously built their own website in HTML, but now that technology had changed, they no longer had the skills to do this for themselves). Due to the Complex and Chaos dynamics impacting on their efforts in Author Online Presence, it is unlikely that the patterns they currently follow will stabilise – rather they are likely to continue to change, fluidly and repeatedly.

I conducted the study in this chapter to re-visit the conversation with users of Author Online Presence, to learn more from their direct, experience-informed accounts, in light of the new framing I established in Chapter 6. Primarily, I collated more data to build on the evidence shared in chapter 5, towards building a clearer picture of how Author Online Presence is experienced, whilst incorporating the perspective of it occurring in the context of a Complex system (bordered with Chaos, when in social media).

As the majority users involved in interactions with and through Author Online Presence, I wanted to learn more about how readers, specifically, engage with, and perceive, the practices that authors have developed and (at the time of the last study) conduct online. I sought to learn about what aspects of the current state of Author Online Presence work for readers, and which, perhaps, do not. I also wanted to explore how the

readers would respond to changes if they were introduced to current practices, to start building a picture of how they are disposed to act in the face of intentional design intervention in the future.

I developed a qualitative approach for the study which combined tried and tested HCI research methods with the method of probing in parallel (from the Cynefin Framework, noted in 6.5.2). My study aims were to:

- Better understand the role of Author Online Presence, by more clearly defining its component parts (i.e., the different practices followed by authors online, as recognisable by readers)
- Learn more about reader needs and values, to help prioritise which author practices are currently effective, with a view that, where they do not work, it may be possible to reduce authors' workload in those areas in the future
- Learn about how readers may respond to change if authors were to follow alternative practices, to, again, find out more about what they value (and how they are disposed to act when faced with change)

Through conducting this study, I developed new insight about the online design space, by observing (and thus sensing) how participants respond to change (hypothetical rather than real – for reasons explained in 7.1.1), to next consider how to act upon this knowledge. This followed the decision model strategy of Probe – Sense – Respond, appropriate to Complex systems (as introduced in 6.5.2).

7.1.1 Nudging and adjacent possibles

Whilst social media platforms are at the boundary between Complex and Chaos systems, the Literary Field (in which Author Online Presence is effectively situated) is a Complex system. Practices emerging in Chaos also typically transition across the liminal zone into Complex, rather than directly into an ordered system such as Complicated (following the looped trajectory path depicted in 6.5.1, figure 16). I therefore chose to approach the research as a Complex problem in this study.

The strategy for intervening (either through research or management) in a Complex system is to **probe** with parallel experiments, to step back and **sense** the patterns across the system to bring retrospective coherence, and then to **respond** in a way that either amplifies behavioural responses in the system that are positive, and dampen those that are negative (Snowden, 2010b). In this study, I sought to conduct the first part of this process – to probe with parallel experiments, then to sense the patterns through analysis. In the next chapter (chapter 8) I reflected on the findings to suggest potential ways that future research may act to respond on the data, towards amplifying positive findings, and dampening negative ones.

The rationale for parallel probing (rather than conducting a single experiment at a time, in a linear fashion) is to try out different things at once, with the understanding that whatever is changed in a Complex system impacts its agents and changes the systems dynamics. By testing multiple changes at once, patterns of reactivity can be gauged in a way that they could not if only one thing was altered. This opens up possibilities to determine how to gently nudge (Snowden et al., 2020) the system gradually towards a more desirable state (ibid.). In a Complex system it is never possible to predict a desirable end point, due to its interconnected, fluid dynamics. But by identifying things that are problematic, more tests can be conducted to try and gradually introduce stabilising patterns, without committing to a particular goal. Ultimately, the approach of probe, sense and respond is intended as a cyclical, incremental process.

The future for Author Online Presence is not known. Author's practices, the platforms, and the habitus of their users are changing continually. As Martens (2016) observed (having interviewed a publisher in her work), the rapidly changing nature of social media has made it impossible for publishers to plan their marketing budget, as it is impossible to know what will be popular even two years into the future (Martens, 2016). However, to leave Author Online Presence to continue in its current state would be to leave authors (in particular) to fend for themselves under conditions that have been identified as problematic.

Because a Complex system is dispositional, Snowden urged that steps taken to introduce positive change should be small, rather than radical (Snowden, 2016). One way he recommends to do this is to seek **adjacent possibles** (Kauffman, 1996) - a term introduced to explain biological evolution, whereby a biological system morphs incrementally. A creature doesn't, for example, suddenly grow wings. Rather, its body changes slightly, in a manner that is close to the current reality (a nearby, i.e., adjacent, possibility), taking a small step beyond the boundaries of its biological makeup. The change is tested in the world, and if it works, the creature evolves through another small step, adjacent to its new and current biological system state. Gradually, step by step, the creature evolves (Snowden, 2015b, 2016). Wings are not the goal, biologically, but they may be the outcome. Equally, the result may be something else entirely, depending on what worked along the journey as changes were tested, and in relation to the context at a given time. The process of biological adjacent possibles is a gradual morphing, rather than an intentional design process towards a particular end. In a system undergoing constant change and influence like the Literary Field, incremental change is a valuable pathway to an improved system state.

The concept of adjacent possibles can be equated, Cynefin experts have posited, to the act of using steppingstones to cross a river:

The intent or direction is to cross the river. We are not aiming for a particular spot (in contrast to the idealist approach of engineering a bridge to a specific point on the opposite riverbank). We start from a place on the near side where there are reachable steppingstones (adjacent possible), and every time we take a step, new options become visible that we couldn't see from the starting position. Sometimes we need to take a chance and take a step without seeing the next stone; we sense or feel our way forward. It is a purposeful and emergent and evolutionary journey firmly rooted in the present, not an engineered approach rooted in an idealized future that may never come about (Blignaut, 2020).

Whilst the future for Author Online Presence is unknowable, there has been a pattern in the past whereby authors and other creatives have followed in the footsteps of musicians, when it comes to adopting new online practices (as identified in 2.2.1, in which I explained that musicians took to MySpace ahead of other users, and later turned to social media, and were followed by others). This pattern may have been accidental rather than by design, and may also not repeat again (due to Complex dispositional dynamics and the absence of repeated self-evident causal patterns in a Complex system or in Chaos). However, given the parallels between findings in chapter 5 and those of the experiences of musicians online shared in chapter 2 (such as that of Baym, (2018)), the possibility of authors following in the footsteps of musicians in the future is a worthy starting point for identifying ways to explore readers reactions to change³³. I therefore looked to predictions of the future of music to identify adjacent possibles to test in this study, for incorporate into my probing experiments.

In music, online crowdfunding platforms and direct artist-to-fan subscription services, such as Patreon and Kickstarter (Regner, 2020; Hesmondhalgh, 2019) have gained traction in recent years. Predictions have suggested that the industry is likely to evolve further towards subscription models like these (e.g. Ingham, 2020). Such predictions may prove inaccurate (as the field of music has parallels to the Literary Field, and is likely also Complex), but this prediction makes a useful starting point an adjacent possible to experiment with.

As crowdfunding and subscription platforms have existed for a few years, they have already attracted research attention. Therefore, various support needs in those models have already been identified, offering a useful comparator for the findings in this study. This research also helped me to consider potential issues when interviewing my participants (essentially acting as informal sensitising topics). For example, it has been observed that there is a need to support musicians to connect to an audience of interested fans, rather than to a mass audience of unidentified followers - as happens in the current, mass-connectivity model in platforms

³³ It also fits with patterns of movement identified by Richard Florida in his work on the Creative Class (Florida, 2012)

such as social media (Baym, 2018; Deresiewicz, 2020). It has also been observed that income from current crowdfunding and direct subscription services is highly skewed, with the majority of artists on them attracting a small number of paying patrons, whilst a popular minority attract significant gains from a larger audience (Regner, 2020) – an imbalance that needs to be somehow addressed.

My findings in chapters 4.3.3 and 2.2 identified some difficulties in managing audience sizes, and also some issues concerning follower numbers and a bias towards high-status authors. Therefore I chose to explore subscription models as part of my probing experiment, to expand on those previous findings.

To reiterate, the use of adjacent possibles and probing, parallel experiments, is not to test ideas to then refine them later. Rather, it is a means to provoke responses, to learn more about dispositional dynamics in the system.

7.2 Methods

For this study I adopted the concept of adjacent possibles and parallel probes to explore hypothetical ideas for changing the current state of Author Online Presence. Some of these hypotheticals were based on the predicted move towards crowdfunding and patronage, drawn from the parallel music industry, as discussed in the previous section. Others were based on concepts highlighted by findings in chapter 5 (described in 7.2.3).

My method was exploratory, designed to help me learn more about the design space rather than to find solutions to address any of the issues highlighted in chapter 5, or to identify how supportive structures for Author Online Presence may be introduced. I used a qualitative, interpretative approach to interview reader participants about their current experience with Author Online Presence, and to assess their potential response to hypothetical changes to its current state. I focused on readers (rather than authors and readers combined, like the study in chapter 5), because they are the primary target audience of Author Online Presence, and thus able to speak to its value, in its current form.

7.2.1 Participant Demographics

I recruited reader participants over the age of 18 through advertisements on Twitter, Facebook, and the British Library's Digital Scholarship blog (see appendix B2). I did not determine the number of participants to recruit in advance (justified on the principle of information power (Malterud et al., 2016) as noted in 3.7), however my decision to compensate participants with Amazon vouchers informed a maximum cap of twenty-

five participants, based on available budget (details of the recruitment process can be found in 3.7, and the corresponding ethical considerations made regarding incentives in 3.8).

I recruited twelve participants in total, of which seven self-identified as men, and five as women. All were aged between twenty-five and sixty-four years old, two of whom were aged over forty-four (see Figure 17 below).

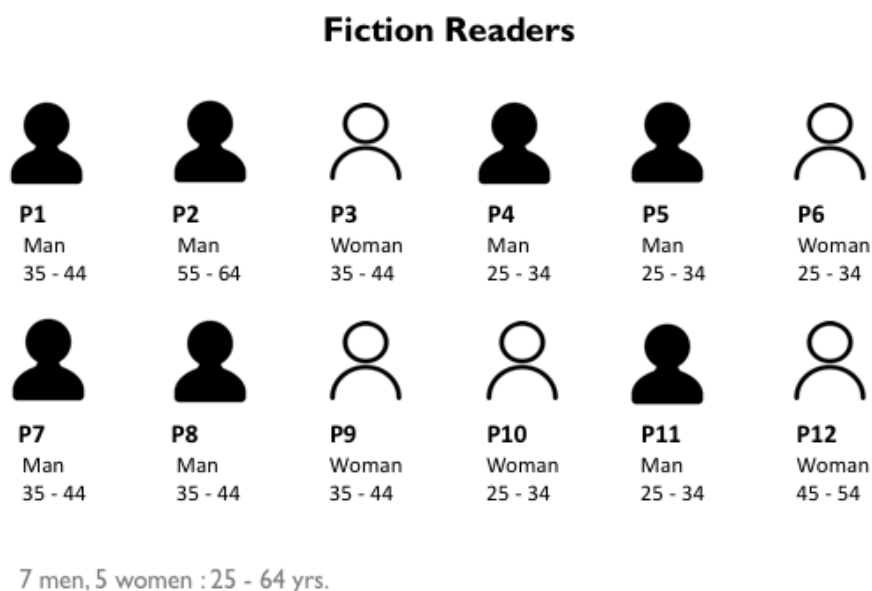


Figure 17: Participant demographic Study 2 (Readers)

A familiarity with platforms such as social media was not a pre-requisite to recruitment, and neither was experience in using any platforms to engage with authors online, as my intent was to attract people with a variety of backgrounds who read fiction (rather than readers who are self-identified users of Author Online Presence). If a participant transpired to have never used an online platform to interact with an author, my intention was to use this as an opportunity to learn why that may be, and whether they had needs that potentially could be potentially met through online support in the future.

As I explained in 3.8, I was cautious in this study to avoid exclusionary language in my recruitment advert, so I advertised for volunteers who self-selected as a person 'who enjoy(s) reading fiction' rather than advertising for 'readers', due to the divisionary connotations of the bookish stereotype discussed in chapter 4.2.2.

7.2.2 Method design

The probe, sense, respond strategy for Complex Systems was developed primarily for industry use, whereby a system is typically bounded - for example, by ownership of a particular company. Author Online Presence is

distributed across an infrastructure of multiple online third-party platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Forums) – i.e., it is dispersed, rather than bounded. This meant that I needed to develop a more abstracted approach to gather insight in this study than is typically followed in the Complex system strategy, to better fit the context of this inquiry.

I therefore developed an HCI-research-specific method, combined with the principles of the strategy. There have been calls (e.g. Blandford, 2019; Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018) for HCI to develop research and design strategies for Complex systems, but at the time of conducting this study, none had yet been published.

Using the principles of exaptive practice, as befitting to a Complex system (i.e., radically re-purposing known methods – explained in 6.3.1) I combined parallel probing with a range of established, complementary HCI methods: parallel prototype design (e.g. Tohidi et al., 2006; Dow et al., 2010); cultural probes (Boehner et al., 2007; Gaver et al., 2004) and sketching (Buxton, 2007) wrapped into a qualitative, loosely- structured interview format which drew on HCI evaluation methods (Preece et al., 2015).

- **HCI Methods (parallel design, sketching, cultural probes, HCI evaluation)**

I drew on parallel prototype design methods from HCI to create low-fidelity sketches that resembled early-stage design prototypes – a method commonly used in HCI (and other design disciplines) to test and refine design ideas prior to implementation. Usually with this method, potential users are shown potential design ideas as a means to eradicate ideas that do not work, and to identify and develop the ones that do, towards ‘getting the design right’ (Tohidi et al., 2006). However, my aim in this study was not to test for an appropriate design, but rather to provide imagery to provoke discussion and reflection. Rather than full, detailed, high-fidelity design prototypes, I kept the sketches simple and unfinished, to emphasise their incomplete, suggestive nature - drawing on Buxton’s concept of the role of sketches (Buxton, 2007). I intended my sketches to be fully disposable, and participants were advised that:

- none of the sketches were designs that were likely to ever be made
- their own design ideas were welcomed
- all feedback was welcome, however critical, as there was no commitment to any of the ideas presented
- that the intention was to learn about their perspectives, as part of an exploratory learning activity.

The main function of the sketches was to spark conversation with my participants to learn more about their current experiences, how they may respond to changes to what they are currently familiar with, and to elicit

more information about their support needs. I used them to incorporate visual prompts into an interview format - a known means to enhance discussion (Kara, 2015).

My method also drew on HCI cultural probing methods (e.g. Gaver et al., 2004), as I used the sketches as a basis to ask ambiguous, open questions to discover the participants think about the design space, and about how they perceive Author Online Presence overall. Unlike the HCI cultural probe method, however, which typically involves participants performing specific tasks with the probes to solicit responses (ibid.), my study drew on HCI evaluation methods (Preece et al., 2015) by introducing each sketch as if it were a new prototype design being tested (which essentially linked back to the parallel prototype design method).

In an HCI evaluation of, for example, a website or mobile application, a user participant would be asked first to 'talk out loud' (ibid.) about their first impressions of an interface when presented with a design on-screen, by explaining what they would expect to find amongst its features, and how they would anticipate using it. I introduced each sketch in this study using this approach, before then proceeding to ask probing questions around the concepts, and opening the discussion more broadly in response to their reaction to each sketch. I also encouraged the participants to share their own ideas and design suggestions, rather than focusing solely on the presented sketches. This alluded to participatory design techniques used in HCI research (e.g. Neate et al., 2019).

Each sketched idea represented either:

- a) an existing platform, depicted in line with current design (e.g. social media)
- b) a crowdfunding or patronage subscription platform based on predictions of the future trajectory of the Field of Music (an adjacent possible)
- c) an adjacent possible change from current platform mediation, based on feedback from chapter 5 findings about visibility (see 7.2.3).

- **Cynefin Framework Method (parallel probing experiments)**

I chose the HCI methods above due to their parallels with the Complex system decision model of probing in parallel, sensing and responding, described in 7.1.1. If a system is Complex you cannot predict the future, due to the levels entanglement between the different variables (Snowden, 2020b), and as the system adapts to accommodate any intervention made within it (Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018). It is not possible to define an ideal future and then try to close a gap towards meeting that ideal - as is often seen in reiterative design

prototyping and HCI evaluation methods, where a single design may be reiterated to refine it. Many of the current HCI evaluation methods fall under the category of good practice, making them better suited to a Complicated system (where causal outcomes can be observed, supporting a process of linear reiteration) than a Complex one.

Testing different ideas in parallel, rather than one at a time, allows for multiple, rational ideas to be explored, quickly and cheaply, and for ideas identified as unsuitable to be abandoned quickly, with minimal risk (Broughman, 2015; Snowden et al., 2020). The ideas chosen as probes to experiment with through this strategy do not need to be thoroughly thought-out, appropriate solutions to a problem (Broughman, 2015) - rather, they should simply be rational starting points coherent enough to support an experiment (Snowden et al., 2020). The rational starting points are small steps – adjacent possibles – rather than large leaps from the current system state.

I identified in chapter 2.2 that a primary motivation for authors and other creative professionals adopting online engagement practices is their need to generate income and establish job security. In chapter 5, author participants' accounts expressed, in alignment with this assertion, that much of their efforts online are an effort to establish their professional profile, to help gather support from industry professionals – either to encourage the sale of their work (as professionals can recommend to readers) or to gain book deals with publishers at acquisition meetings (5.3.1). By and large, their efforts to be visible online related to job insecurity and a fear of invisibility in the market if they did not generate content regularly (5.3.5). Further, the reader participants in the expressed a disinterest in high volumes of promotional material, and shared that they did not need authors to be as frequently visible as they currently are (5.3.5, 5.3.7).

I therefore chose to explore adjacent possibles that broadly covered the themes of:

- Future predictions taken from music (as discussed in 7.1.1), which relate to alternative direct dissemination income generation models (i.e., subscription model platforms)
- The profession of authorship and whether alternative means of supporting them (and thus their income model) may be possible – either through increased industry support (treating authorship more like a job, in accordance with Deresiewicz's (2020) definition of profession), or through increased audience support (treating authorship more as an entrepreneurial business, in accordance with Deresiewicz's (2020) definition of entrepreneurship).

- The issue of author visibility, to gather more data about how readers perceive their current levels of visibility online and to identify opportunities for restructuring the current balance to benefit both parties.

When exploring visibility, I was particularly interested in finding out if readers expected authors to share personal details about themselves, or to use (as was identified as typical in 5.3.2) their own, personal social media profiles to conduct practices relating to their trade as authors.

To experiment with the idea of different income generation models, I used each sketched idea to represent a small change in power dynamics. In some sketches, I indicated increased power in the hands of the authors over what content they share and how, based on models which enabled them greater autonomy, through acquiring readers' financial support through the entrepreneurial models. In some of the alternative income generation models, I also played with increasing readers' power, by offering them choices, in the sketched platform, to decide how their money would be spent (e.g. by choosing between different content options for the author to produce, in accordance with their needs as readers).

In others, I indicated increased power in the hands of industry professionals, by inferring that a platform profile could be run by either the publisher or a bookseller, with subscription payments from readers going through them, rather than directly to the author.

My decision to loosely play with power dynamics in my experimental probes drew on Bourdieu's observations that the tensions in the Literary Field relate to constant power struggles whereby agents are attempting, with their every move, to establish their status in relation to other roles (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993) (discussed in 4.1). As the cues and dynamics of the Literary Field are changed in online spaces, I determined that playing with this dynamic in the study could elicit interesting and useful findings.

7.2.3 Study design and procedure

I followed a loosely structured informal interview format, similar to that of chapter 5, using a video-conferencing platform (Zoom). During the discussions, I showed sketches to the participants, on-screen, which were held on my own computer and made visible through Zoom screen-sharing.

The adjacent possible starting points I selected and depicted in sketched form were:

- Crowdfunding, patronage, and subscription models: based on existing platforms already used by other cultural fields

- Increased input from Literary Field agents (namely publishers and retailers) in online spaces (to help authors manage labour)
- Alternative funding models, whereby readers may pay towards the costs of authorship, rather than paying for the end-product (book)
- A model for connecting readers with authors they are not familiar with already, based on a format used by a holiday booking website, which connects users to unfamiliar hotels.

I made all of the sketches look like existing platforms, rather than depicting a new, unique design, to help put the focus on the idea, rather than on potentially unfamiliar platform affordances, as much as possible. I also drew them to look as though they were displayed on an iPad, to give a sense that these were web-based platforms rather than abstract sketches.

I created the sketches using Miro and showed them directly through that platform. I prepared no specific questions in advance of the sessions, however I used the sketched probes to guide conversation around a priori topics which built on the findings from the study in chapter 5: for example the roles of authenticity and asymmetric visibility, the importance (or lack of) authors being visible online, their response to promotional content, and whether it was deemed to be targeted at readers (or another audience), and the use (or absence of use) of social platforms to contact authors and ask questions or provide feedback.

To make it easier to manage them as visual resources, I grouped the sketches into four categories on the Miro digital whiteboard, as follows:

- 1) **Current status quo:** sketches in this category emulated Author Online Presence in its current state (e.g. a mock author Twitter profile, as depicted in Figure 19) to prompt discussion specifically about participants' current experience and perceptions of the intervention in its current state. In this category I also included a photograph of a bookshop, which I used as a starter task (in keeping with a HCI user testing method (Preece et al., 2015) to open each session with a discussion about their broad experiences as a reader.

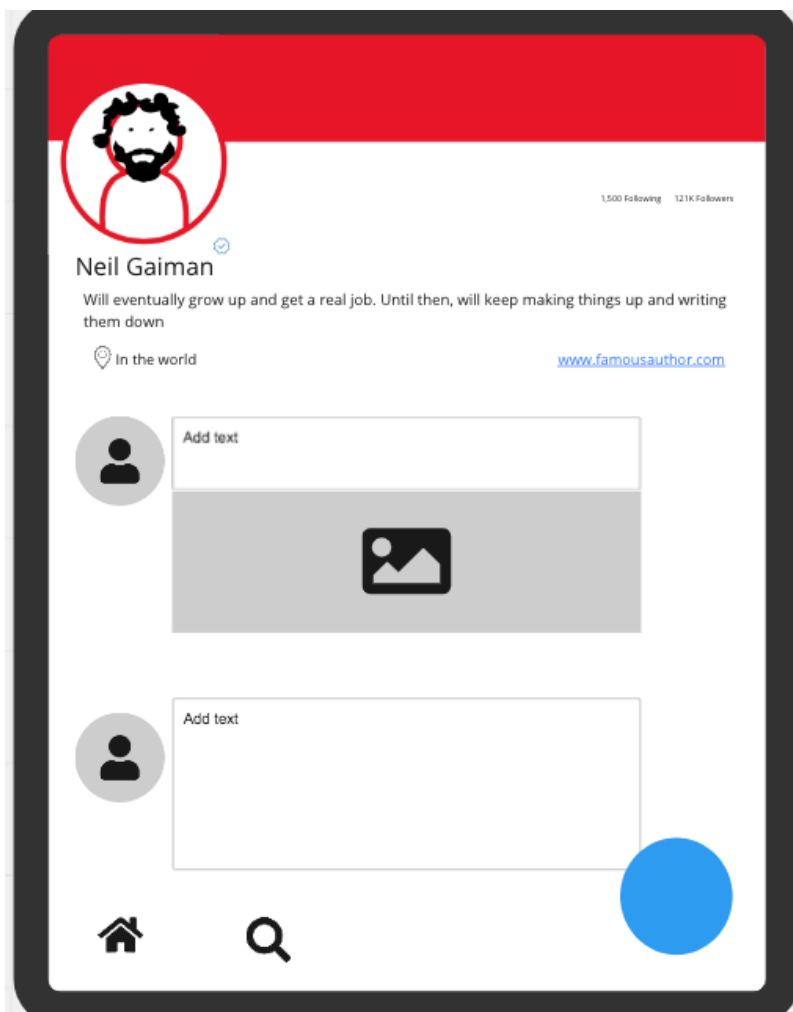


Figure 18: Example sketch from 'current status quo' category, depicting an author's Twitter profile

2) **Entrepreneurial route:** these sketches explored patronage, subscription, and crowdfunding models, based either on those currently in use by creative professionals (e.g. Patreon and Kickstarter) or hypothetical solutions with a different income generation model (e.g. readers paying an author's costs rather than purchasing a book – example in Figure 20 below). I based this group of sketches on the premise of testing adjacent possible changes to the status quo. I labelled this category as entrepreneurial (based on definitions posited by Deresiewicz, 2020) as each sketched income generation model focused on direct, creator-audience dissemination and interaction, without the involvement of a publisher – as if the authors were self-employed, running a business. Each sketch in this category represented either an increase in authors' power (by giving them increased autonomy over of their content sharing decisions) or increased readers' power, by giving them more authority over either what an author in the model created or how they, as a reader user, chose to engage.

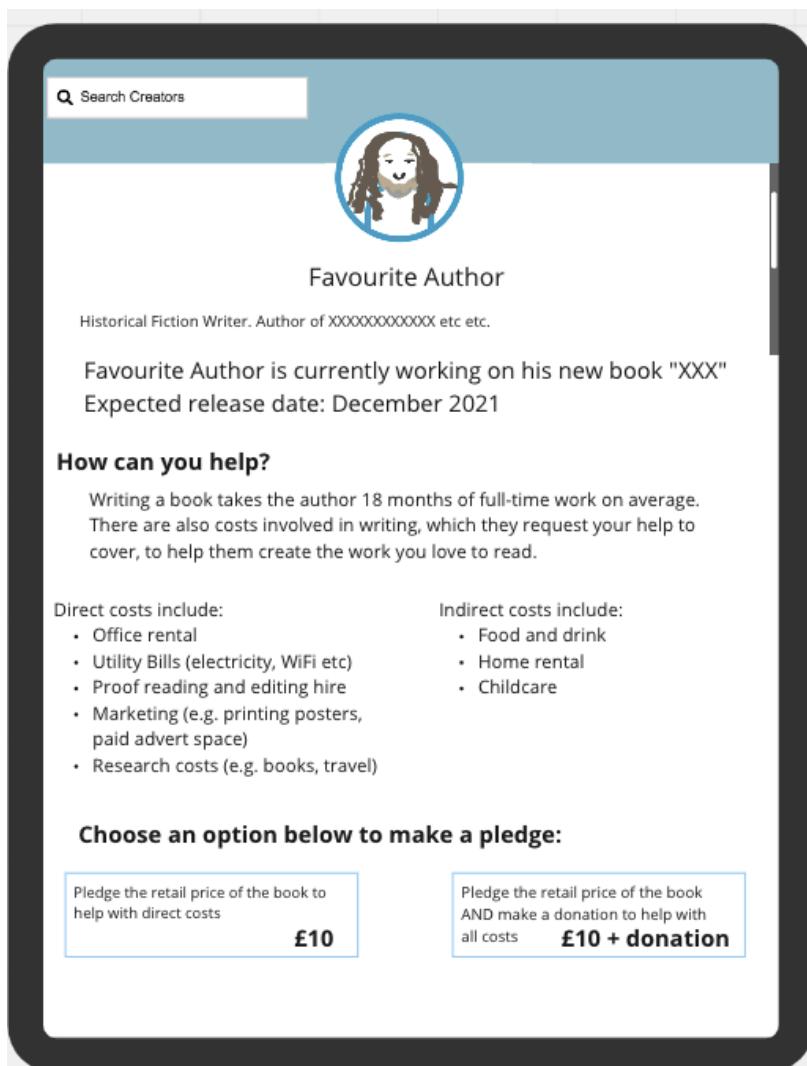
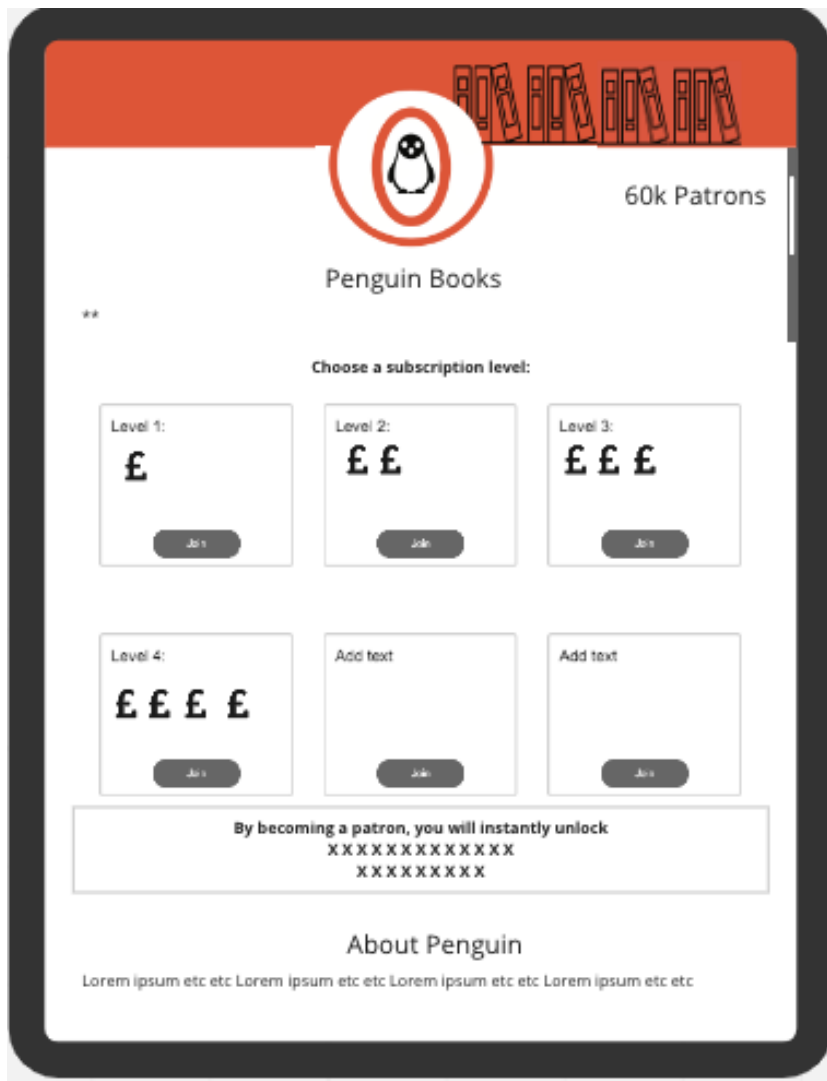


Figure 19: Example sketch from 'entrepreneurial category', depicting an alternative payment model

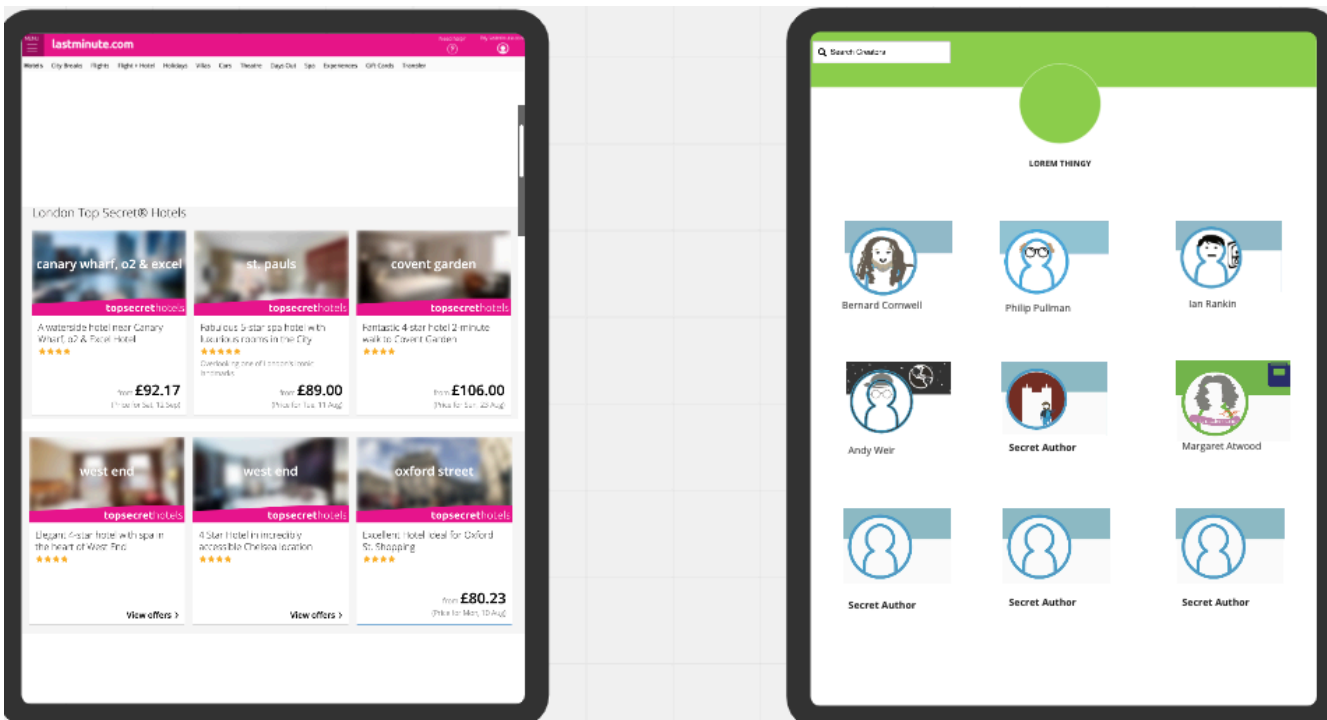
3) **Professional route:** the sketches here explored the involvement of industry professionals such as publishers in a crowdfunding/patronage model to mediate or curate access to authors (to distribute the workload currently experienced by authors). These were labelled professional as more power was given to a mediator to curate on behalf of, or in conjunction with the author, in contrast to them running their own business as with the previous category (Deresiewicz, 2020). I left the sketches open to participants' interpretations by including very limited detail about what the platform would entail in the sketch, as I wanted to explore the participants' expectations of the role of industry professionals in this sort of model (see example in figure 21 below). I used these sketches not only to explore the adjacent possible change to the status quo, but also to probe more broadly about how the participants perceived the role of industry professionals, currently, in supporting and marketing an author's work.

Figure 20: Example sketch from 'professional route' category, depicting a publisher-run patronage model



4) **Visibility:** In the previous study (chapter 5), issues were highlighted pertaining to an asymmetric visibility between authors and readers which impacted their use of current online platforms (e.g. authors were expected to be publicly visible, and share details about themselves, whilst readers could minimise exposure and use pseudonyms or avoid sharing photos of themselves (5.3.8); authors struggled to verify whether a follower was a reader, or why they were interested in the author, leading to discomfort (5.3.8) and problems in managing their performative practices (5.3.2), and author participants felt they needed to be visible at all times, whilst readers expressed they did not require this (5.3.5)). I used the sketches in this category to explore these points further. I also used them to extend the conversation about their expectations of what an author would be anticipated to share of themselves, in different platforms, and whether the participants, as readers, would support providing authors with information about themselves as users (and what this could look like), to explore how the issue of unverifiable audience demographics could be alleviated. One of the sketches (example below in figure 22) also served to prompt discussion about how readers could be supported in finding authors online that they do not already know, as this was a matter raised during the interviews for chapter 5 (although not recorded in the findings in the thesis, as it was not as prominent as some of the other more pertinent themes).

Figure 21: Example sketch from 'visibility' category, depicting a 'secret author' model (right) based on a holiday website's



'secret hotel' feature (left)

All of the sketches I used in the study can be viewed (on a full page each) in appendix B7.

I devised a structured procedure to test the study in a pilot run (see appendix B6 for the plan, and 3.7.1 for details about the pilot), in which I planned to address each category in a linear order. Initially, I planned for all interviews in the main study to follow the categories as stipulated in the pilot plan, reordered to use an AB testing format (see the test plan detailed in appendix B1). However, once the study began, I realised that this format would be too rigid an approach, and unbecoming to a Complex system exploration. Instead, I moved between the individual sketches and between the categories themselves more fluidly. I began all interviews with the starter task (bookshop photo), and then proceeded to the remainder of the sketches in the first category (current status quo) first, but after this point, I frequently moved from one sketch to another, both within and across categories, to align with the points raised by the participant as we talked. Sometimes I would then return to where I had left off in the previous category and then proceed chronologically, but other times I moved to the next most relevant sketch in relation to their most recent comment. In most cases, I loosely followed the categories in chronological order, with small deviations between the category groups, but would move between the sketches within their grouping in whatever order best fit the conversation.

I used all of the topic categories and individual sketches as a springboard for conversation. To reiterate, I did not use this method to test out any of the options presented in the sketches to identify ideas that may be suitable, but instead to provoke discussion. It was my intention to learn more about how the participants were disposed to respond to change, why the proposed changes may fail to learn more about their perceptions of the values of online interaction, and to elicit more detail about how they experience current online mediation in existing platforms. The sketches I presented of hypothetical, parallel adjacent changes to platform mediation were a means to conduct probing experiments in parallel (based on the methods for a Complex system, initially identified in 6.3.1 and 6.5.2). The sketches I presented in the visibility category were to specifically learn more about issues raised in chapter 5, towards better understanding their perceptions of author visibility, as readers, and to probe about possible changes to how visibility is currently managed (again, an adjacent parallel). By re-raising issues from my study findings in chapter 5 I was also able to test some of my preconceptions and to expand my understanding of important issues.

I followed the same overall procedure with each participant, detailed below:

- I emailed an Information Sheet and consent form (see appendix B3) to each participant at least one week before the interview, in a personalised email.
- The consent form was signed by the participant and returned by email. I then counter-signed it and returned a copy to them for their records.

- An appropriate date and time were agreed via email, and a calendar invite was sent to them, containing a link to meet at the agreed time in Zoom.
- At the meeting, through Zoom, I read the Information Sheet out loud and gave each participant an opportunity to discuss the information and to ask any questions. Consent was given again, verbally, and I reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time.
- A brief demographic questionnaire was displayed on the screen for them to complete, using a Zoom poll. The questionnaire requested their age range, gender and where they currently find books.
- I initiated audio recording and screen-sharing, and the study session began, lasting approximately 45 – 60 minutes. The sessions proceeded as follows:
 - Starter Task: a photograph of a bookshop was shown, and the participant was asked to describe how they navigate a bookshop when they visit it. This was used to introduce the topic area.
 - Current experiences with Author Online Presence were discussed, using probes from the ‘current status quo’ category.
 - Sketches from the remaining categories were visited for discussion, in an order befitting to the individual discussion.
 - Participants were given opportunity to reflect on the discussion, and to ask further questions, discuss any further points they wished to raise or design ideas they wished to share.
- Audio recording and screen-sharing was stopped, and I thanked the participants for their time, and encouraged them to contact me if they had any further thoughts or questions over the coming week that they wished to add.
- I emailed an Amazon voucher (£20) to each participant as soon as possible after the interview, with further, written thanks for their participation.

7.2.4 Data collection and analysis

I recorded the interviews using audio only via Zoom, and stored them directly onto an encrypted, password protected hard drive (rather than on Zoom’s cloud server). I transcribed each interview recording in full as soon as possible following the session. Further details regarding how I stored the data, and the measures I took to de-identify the data can be found in chapter 3.8.2 and 3.8.3.

I read through all of the transcripts in full, taking notes, before then performing an initial pass through the data, using MAXQDA (see 3.7.2) to code the full transcript line-by-line, and to group them into provision

categories and high-level themes. I ran through each transcript a second time in MAXQDA to consolidate and refine the codes I had input, by cross-comparing across the full dataset. I then continued this process by downloading the data into Excel and transporting each code into Miro to create a digital post-it-note, which I then used to further refine and regroup the categories and codes (updating the labels in MAXQDA as I did so). As my analysis approach was primarily inductive, like the first study, I used a very similar procedure to code and categorise as I had done previously. The process differed slightly as there was existing data from the previous study to draw comparison from to help analyse meaning. Another way the procedure differed to the first study was that I did not collate and analyse literature, or create diagrammatic models from which to understand the data, through a cyclical Grounded Theory processes (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Instead, I only compared interview data to interview data, with the intention that this would be the final study of the thesis and that it would not be appropriate to incorporate new theoretical analysis at this stage. Instead, I sought to verify and complete the theory already generated.

As with chapter 5 (see 3.5.2 for details), I viewed the write-up procedure as an integral part of my analytical process. I also structured the overall narrative of the write-up to serve as a logical continuation of the findings from chapter 5.

7.3 Findings

In this section, I provided a thick description of my research findings, incorporating direct quotes from the participants' accounts. I grouped the findings under themes, each building on the last incrementally to present a linear narrative through the findings. During the analysis, I cross-compared the findings to those of the chapter 5 study to determine my narrative by structuring it in a format that reflected and built upon the previous dataset. My analysis here formed part of my overall cyclical analytical process for the thesis – effectively I considered these findings to be an expansion of the knowledge gained in the first part of the thesis.

As I used the sketches as a parallel probing technique to spark discussion rather than to test the ideas per se, I chose not to structure my findings around the sketches as participant's responses to them were not the purpose of the study. Instead, I structured the write-up around the discussions held. However, where a sketch provoked strong, repeated patterns of response, I noted this in the narrative. All sketches are available in Appendix B and were labelled and identified alongside the written findings where applicable.

Firstly, I explored the participants' perceptions around the role of promotional content online, and their level of interest (or disinterest) with it (7.3.1). This then led onto their perceptions of the role of publishers in supporting an author's promotion (7.3.2). I then explored the viewpoints raised by participants about the differences between an authors' content when front- and back-stage content is shared, and the shared opinion that there is a fine line to tread as self-promotional content may be perceived as inauthentic (7.3.3). Next, I explored the efforts participants made to curate their social media feeds, and how this impacted their engagement with authors (7.3.4). I then discussed how some engagement practices in Author Online Presence are more suited to fans than to someone who has enjoyed a book without considering themselves a fan (7.3.5). I then discussed differences highlighted in how readers perceive the presence of authors of different status levels in subscription model platforms, and how not all authors are viewed as needing a crowd-sourced income generation model (7.3.6). This was then followed by an account of how different authors are perceived as needing different levels of support, and of how the participants viewed their own role in supporting authors (7.3.7). Finally, I discussed participants' perspectives on who should have the power to determine the content (type, frequency, location) authors produce in Author Online Presence. This revealed that participants believed authors should have the autonomy to manage their practices on their own terms, and that readers should be free to choose what author output they engage with (7.3.8). I then concluded this chapter by discussing the findings (7.4).

7.3.1 Marketing is for **other** readers, not us

I asked the participants about their opinions of and experience with Author Online Presence in social media, to learn more about how they perceived its value.

In keeping with my findings in chapter 5.3.1, they expressed a perception that a core function of Author Online Presence in social media was for the author to promote themselves and their work. Social media was perceived as a useful promotional tool, and it was broadly expected that authors would take advantage of it: "I would **expect** them to do it. Because it's a good marketing ploy" (P2). This expectation was held, in part, because social media presence is the way things are currently done, making it a useful way to deliver information to readers: "(...) I think it's kind of inevitable. Okay. I think really, anybody that's in that sort of position probably [has to] have some kind of online presence. Whether they want to or not. I don't think there's a way that you could really avoid that now (...) it's how people get their information" (P8). It was also because the participants assumed being on social media was in the authors' best interest for their work, to help them be noticed, and thus to help them sell. It was observed that this was best achieved through doing their own

marketing, rather than leaving it to fate, or in the hands of others: “it’s their book that they’re publishing. So, I feel having a bit more of a personal stake in it (...) it kind of builds that kind of personal touch, I suppose. I mean, I guess that’s kind of what they do signings for” (P11).

They explained that marketing and promotion was one of the primary functions of social media today (“I mean, it feels like social media mediums are used for marketing nowadays” (P4)) and so regardless of whether an individual participant personally wished to engage with an author’s marketing information, their use of social media to self-promote was congruent with participants’ expectations of the platforms. In keeping with the findings in 5.3.5, they expressed a general disinterest in authors’ promotional content. However, as P4 explained, seeing an author self-promote on social media was preferable to some other marketing methods they had experienced from other business-types:

it’s just a way of getting customers. Which is not a bad thing, I suppose. (...) I mean it’s better than, like, badgering people, you know, through telephone calls. That’s another method, isn’t it – of advertising. I suppose [social media is] an easier, it’s a better way (P4).

They were shown a probing sketch of a publisher-run platform account (appendix B 7c -1) and an automated update service (appendix B 7b -7), to explore their opinions of whether it was necessary for an author to run their own marketing campaign or if this labour could potentially be outsourced or automated. Overall, they expressed an expectation that authors would do their own promotion in social media because, in general, receiving information directly from the author themselves was viewed as more authentic. In contrast, marketing from a commercial entity was viewed as more contrived, and interpreted as less authentic:

I would definitely prefer to get it directly from the author rather than the publisher. Because, again, if the author releases something it feels more intimate, even if it is a planned publicity move. But if the publisher were to offer it, and it seems more, you know, packaged or... yeah, again, just like it would be conscious publicity on their part, which makes it less exciting to me, you know, I don’t want to be sold anything (P10).

All participants assumed that - where an author has a social media account – authors currently managed this workload for themselves, unless explicitly stated otherwise (e.g.: “if it’s run by a team, it’s normally explicitly stated in the bio, or at least that seems to be the case most of the time. [if] they didn’t state it in the bio, I suppose I wouldn’t know” (P6)), and this was taken on trust.

Because chapter 5 had revealed that some marketing efforts by author’s may be intended for the eyes of industry professionals rather than readers, the participants were asked probing, oblique questions to

determine whether this was something they were cognisant of. In keeping with the accounts of reader participants in chapter 5, author's engagement efforts were generally perceived as being for an audience of readers. However, the participants in this study expressed a shared awareness that some practices were likely performed by authors specifically to please their publisher or agent: "I'm sure that their publicist would love for them to have a blog, to be on social media and those kinds of things" (P10). Further, some of the practices that author participants had described in chapter 5 as being something they did for the specific attention of a professional audience (e.g. promoting other work in their genre to appear cooperative (5.3.1)) were noticed by the participants in this study, even if was not fully understood that these practices were intended for a non-reader audience: "I think the authors that I follow tend to also be kind of book focused, not necessarily their own works, although that's generally part of it, but commenting on book culture as a whole or other things that are happening" (P10).

Some (if not all) of these practices were recognisably business-oriented, which was not appealing to the reader participants as it fell short of being engaging for them ("[an author's website can] feel like a LinkedIn profile, almost (...) it's not terribly, what's the word, I don't know, it's not engaging content" (P10)). However, it was accepted as good business-practice for authors to be visible through whatever means it takes, as the participants understood that authors needed to do what they could to generate income:

Financially, it makes sense, I mean, you've only got to see people on Graham Norton³⁴ plugging their latest book [to] make more sales for their books, they want to make more money. (...) the more they are out there, the more people will be aware of them, the more discussion there will be, the easier it I to get access to their work. (...) but that's simply a financial decision (P2).

A discrepancy between reader needs and business needs was observed: "what the user actually wants and what is, kind of makes the most sense, as a business model, aren't the same thing" (p7). This was, broadly, expressed as an expected trade-off, but the high volume of promotional, business-focused content shared by authors was surprising for some. Their comments suggested that it was particularly surprising when well-known authors produced high volumes of promotional content, as they were perceived as not needing to do this because they already had a stable, reliable readership who would purchase their new releases:

I'm surprised, sometimes, you know, for well-known authors, what percentage of their tweets will be in some way promoting something like events, their friends, books, media appearances. It does seem to be, you know, a fairly constant stream of promotion (P7).

³⁴ N.b. Norton is a well-known talk show host on the BBC, who interviews celebrities

Overall, participants' accounts suggested that they assumed that readers were the primary target audience for promotional content, as building an audience of customers was assumed to be the primary purpose of authors being online: "I suppose with social media, like, Facebook, Twitter, all that kind of stuff, the goal is to build an audience. (...) getting, like, the fan base involved" (P11).

As readers themselves, promotional content was not what any of the participants particularly wanted to see, personally, but they expressed an assumption that other readers, with different needs to theirs, may be more interested in it than they were:

I'm all for promoting reading. And I think if it works for a particular person, if somebody sees a tweet by a particular writer and it kind of piques their interest, I think it's a perfectly valid resource (P9).

Only one of the participants questioned the validity of this assumption, suggesting that, perhaps demand for promotional content amongst readers was not as high as those in the industry would like to think: "I think a lot of the time, it's probably seen by authors and by publishing houses and distributors that it's needed for marketing, whereas actually there's not as much demand for it as people think" (P6).

With a consensus that promotional content online was not for them but instead for other readers, the question is raised of which readers, if any, do desire promotional materials, or whether these practices fall short of delivering on audience needs.

7.3.2 Publishers are linked to physical books and are invisible online

Authors were perceived as the public face of their own marketing efforts and were anticipated to be actively promoting their work on social media (regardless of the participants' limited interest in marketing content). However, authors' marketing efforts were largely viewed as just one part of a broader marketing campaign, much of which was (and should be, in their view) managed on the authors' behalf by publishers: "I don't think they should be doing all of their own promotion, because that's what publishers are there for. Erm, but yeah, [if] the author's spoken [themselves], then that is worth so much" (P9).

This led me to ask probing questions to find out how they perceived the publisher's role in supporting authors through online mediums. All participants who were asked struggled to think of any specific examples of publishers doing online marketing: "I'm not sure that I've ever seen anything online for a publisher at all" (P3). They also struggled to determine what the publishers' role in online marketing could be, despite the previous assertion that the role of the publisher was to market, and that authors' efforts were one facet of a broader

marketing campaign. Whilst authors were expected to be on social media, a minority of the participants were cognisant of having ever seen publishers on social media.

The consensus was that publishers' marketing efforts were less visible than authors', and, perhaps, more subtle, accounting for their inability to remember seeing examples:

Erm, you tend to find that when, you know, when somebody's released a novel, it will be that the author is the one who's sent out to, you know, promote their work. They'll do the literary festivals, they'll do the, you know, the interview with Will Gompertz³⁵. And yeah, and I would see the marketing side of a publisher as being... how do I describe it? Slightly less direct. Adverts, well, you know, adverts are direct, but um, yeah, they take a very, I would expect them to take a very different form (P9).

However this may have been an example of attempts to explain away a sense of cognitive dissonance. Some participants suggested that, whilst they could not remember seeing any examples, publisher marketing was most likely to be in the form of targeted adverts online, akin to the sales of other products, which they would therefore try to ignore: "Ads, probably? But again, I tend to try and ignore adverts on social media. They can sometimes be a bit creepy. You know, when you've done a Google search for something two days earlier, all of a sudden a pair of shoes that you Googled [appears] alongside your feed, and that irritates me" (P9). P3 commented that they prefer to buy books from physical bookstores instead of online, positing that this may be the reason they had seen no publisher marketing online, as there was data (e.g. from cookies) to help the seller pinpoint their reading tastes in order to show them tailored adverts. It may, P3 reasoned, look to digital marketers as though they did not buy books at all:

I'm not sure that I've ever seen anything online for a publisher at all. No. And I'm not even sure that I've ever seen a book advertised online. You know, when you've got your emails and they come, the adverts come up on the side... and they're supposed to be targeted, aren't they. So I suppose because I don't buy books online, they think I don't read books. (p3).

Although most were unaware of publishers using social media, several participants had visited publishers' own websites for content such as author interviews. Most commonly, they had visited sites belonging to small press publishers rather than larger publishing houses, as they were interested in content that supported a particular special literary interest, e.g. historical books on a specific topic or era or an interest in a particular press' special edition covers. When asked how they came to find these websites, P8 explained that it was a

³⁵ N.b. Gompertz is currently the BBC's arts editor, well-known for his involvement in reviewing the arts (including books).

further to seeing a comment made about the publisher's site by an author on social media. Others had found them by searching after seeing the publisher's name on a physical book – which was the most common way for all participants to have learned of a publisher's identity at all.

Awareness of the role of publishers, on- and off-line, was generally low, and, except for cases such as collecting books that had a particular aesthetic across a collection, the participants neither paid attention to who a book was published by, nor factored it into their decision making or search strategy. As I conducted the interviews remotely with the participants at home, some left their seats to look at their bookshelves mid-conversation to see what publishers they had purchased, appearing to feel self-conscious about not knowing: "Farrago books published the book I'm reading. I never would have known that. (...) because to me, I'm a little bit like, it's irrelevant." (P3).

Overall, the role of the publisher was difficult for participants to grasp, however it was linked, in their view, more with the physical book than with digital media. This association with the physical book fed into their responses to the sketch that depicted a publisher-led crowdfunding model (appendix B 7c -1). I introduced the sketch as a probe to discuss reader's views of the publisher role in general, and to explore their responses to one possible means of involving publishers in online platforms most commonly associated with direct creator interaction. The most prominent viewpoint highlighted by the participants was that it is difficult to perceive of an online publisher role that does not revolve around the physical book – regardless of the type of online platform model. It was unanimously assumed that the platform depicted in the sketch would be somehow linked to purchasing physical books ("I'm not sure why, particularly, I guess. Digital subscriptions do exist, like, things like audible and Amazon of course. But I don't know. That just says to me that it would be physical books, for some reason" (P6)). Their thoughts around what the platform might support varied, but most anticipated either a subscription model whereby books would be posted, for example, monthly (e.g.: "a subscription box type thing" (P11)) or a platform for communities to discuss a specific book (e.g.: "Maybe it's gonna be like a book club kind of thing?" (P8)). Others suggested that it may be used to offer book recommendations, and to purchase them at a discount or in advance of general release (e.g.: "I would imagine something along the lines of choose three books that you like, and we'll send you similar ones. Or choose a specific genre and we'll choose books for you within that genre" (P6)).

Discussions about publishers getting involved in a crowdfunding model also highlighted a perceived difference between small press and independent publishing and larger, well-known publishing houses. The possibility of seeing smaller press publishers in this type of platform was easier to imagine than a larger

publisher, as a smaller house could share more niche content, better suited to a specialist community who would enjoy rallying to support them: “for me, a large publisher [would] be much less interesting than a niche specialist publisher. And it would also be more fun to support that publisher, rather than Penguin Books” (P2).

Indeed, the presence of a large publisher in a crowdfunding platform was considered an odd premise (e.g.: “[this] strikes me as really strange. I’m not sure why a publisher, specifically like Penguin Books, would be on Patreon. That seems, again, like, kind of unnecessary. But, I mean, publishing is struggling. So who’s to say” (P10)), as large publishers were considered not to need to turn to alternate modes of income generation. This was because larger publishers were perceived as already successful and buoyant. Further - in alignment with the perception that publisher marketing would be contrived rather than authentic (6.3.1) – a large publisher using a crowdfunding space was viewed as incongruent with how such models are understood: as spaces for amateur creatives.

7.3.3 Authenticity in promotion

Exploring how the publisher’s role was perceived helped to reveal the participants’ perceptions of marketing more broadly. This was useful towards understanding how an author’s promotional content in social media and other platforms must be balanced if they are to encourage readers to engage with it. Two key insights were raised in these discussions: 1) The participants were interested in buying and being recommended new books, but were turned-off by active selling, and 2) they understood that authors needed to market their work for sales but were not interested in being marketed to themselves.

The participants knew little of the role of the publisher, but shared a perception that, as commercial entities, they were likely to be overly focused on encouraging sale rather than focused on getting the right books to the right readers. Therefore, a publisher’s input online was generally not sought. Commercial marketing - be it from publishers or book sellers - was described as appearing inauthentic. This was highlighted very clearly by all participants when discussing the sketch which depicted a book recommendation platform (appendix B 7d –4), based on the ‘secret hotel’ feature of a holiday booking website (lastminute.com). Some participants shared their suspicion that this model was likely a ploy to offload poor quality books:

[computer game websites] do a similar thing, where you can pay a small fee and, and you get mystery stuff (...) and I always say ‘oh, that might be a nice idea. It’s not so much money’. And you know, I’ve never done it. And I really like computer games. But I’d almost rather pay a little more to know I was getting something quality. (...) In the same

way as I've never used lastminute.com, but you could only imagine that it's, 'ohhh, we need to get this room sold'. And so it's going in [the secret hotel feature] for a bit of a low price, right? It doesn't feel like it's curated, does it? (P1).

Being treated as a consumer was frustrating to the participants, and explicit marketing was also often considered distracting (e.g.: "you've got, to my mind, the risk of flashing things around the screen that tell you to look at the publishers' other products. So ideally, I'd like to focus on just what I want to focus on" (P1)), or dishonest. This suspicion also extended to point-of-sale displays and tables in bookshops for P6: "I think it is [like the tables], it does tend to be that kind of, like, 'we really want to sell this book so we can push it out' mentality. Right? I don't know why, but I've always pushed against [that]". However, for others, those tables were welcomed (e.g.: "I love the tables (...) Because I do kind of choose books by the covers" (P3)), where they were perceived as curated. If a book in a display was collocated with other books they had already read and enjoyed, for example, this could encourage purchase. The importance of appropriate curation was a recurring theme, which fed into how they perceived Author Presence Online.

Personal recommendation and targeted curation were perceived much more favourably than blanket marketing campaigns, as they reflected well-considered selectivity. Book recommendations from authors were particularly welcomed (e.g.: "(...) I want to see what all the fuss is about. And I picked one up - on the back was a quote from Stephen King being like, 'Tess Gerritsen is my favourite author'. I mean, that wasn't the quote, but it was something, like, positive, obviously (...) and then I immediately just started reading Tess Gerritsen as well" (P11)), and several participants described looking to book reviews written by authors (e.g. in magazines and online) for ideas about what to read next.

The word of an author whose work they had already enjoyed reading was generally trusted by the participants, and this fed into a preference for seeing authors manage their own marketing in social media rather than it being managed by a publisher or agent. Coming from an author, promotional content was perceived as less commercially focused, and more authentic:

I would definitely prefer to get it directly from the author rather than the publisher. Because again, if the author releases something it feels more intimate, even if it is a planned publicity move, but if the publisher were to offer it (...) it would be conscious publicity on their part, which makes it less exciting to me of, you know, I don't want to be sold something. I want to feel like I'm in on the secret of something (P10).

A balance was needed, however. If an author shared too much marketing content, this seemingly disrupted the sense of authenticity and decreased the likelihood that the participants would follow them. As P8 explained, following an author who markets too frequently would feel like subscribing to advertisements:

Just taking Twitter as an example. So [if] all it was was talking about my book, and ‘my book is coming out’, and ‘here’s my book’ and all that kind of stuff, then maybe I wouldn’t be interested in it as much as... actually as a way of finding out a bit more about the writer. I wouldn’t want to follow one which was just like a marketing account for a writer. (...) it’d be a little bit boring. It would kind of feel like just subscribing to adverts (P8).

Participants expressed understanding that authors needed to market their work, to promote sales and, as mentioned earlier, they perceived social media as akin to a marketplace where this is done. But an author self-promoting too frequently was found boring (e.g.: “social media in a way is, I mean, part of it has always been selling, right. (...) it’s only when that purpose becomes really obvious or bald, you know, just, oh, this is how you see social media – as a tool to sell yourself and your products and your books or whatever – then it becomes uninteresting” (P10)) rather than engaging.

7.3.4 Curating online content

Authenticity in authors’ online content was important to all of the participants, but not all wanted to see the same types of content – their preferences were individual. Several enjoyed getting a glimpse of the author’s back-stage personality online (“more of a real person than just a, you know, **a** person or **a** celebrity or **a** writer” (P8)), but (in keeping with 5.3.3) too much backstage was generally unwelcome, especially if it involved details of the authors daily life:

I’m really uninterested in the, in the famous author lifestyle. I just really don’t care. It feels very privileged to me, and I am not interested in it, just like, ‘I’m sitting at my desk doing my writing. And that is my full-time job’. And it’s like, cool. Let your book advance pay for that? I don’t need to see into your office. (...) It just seems over the top. I don’t know. Yeah, I’m just deeply disinterested in literary celebrity in that way (P10).

Again, as raised in 5.3.7, seeing a negative side to an author could discourage the participants from engaging further with either the author or their books. There was also the potential that problematic author behaviour could lead them to abandon using a platform (e.g. “I’ve dropped off [using Reddit] a little bit, because unfortunately, one of the authors that I really liked has developed quite a bad reputation with fans for not

being very nice. So I've been [using Reddit] a bit less, just because of the not-great experience that that was" (P6)).

They recognised that getting the right balance of front- and back-stage content could be difficult to get right: "you've got to be very, very careful on how much of yourself you give away as an author (...) it really is a knife edge they've got to walk" (P2). P10 likened striking the right balance to a successful flirtation:

I think users like to be romanced a little bit to, you know, to feel as though they're being wooed. Or that they like spending time with this person, even if, you know, I'm never gonna meet these authors in real life. But I like to hear their thoughts. And I like to see pictures of their dogs sometimes. I don't just want to see tour dates and book covers (P10).

The participants explained that they used social media for various reasons, not limited to their interest in literature. They described making efforts to curate their social media feeds to ensure they were seeing the sort of content they enjoyed seeing. None used any social media exclusively for access to literature-related content such as author profiles, and their decision to follow an author was subject to the same decision-making process used when choosing to follow any other public figure (e.g. celebrity, musician, politician).

The decision to follow a public figure (and therefore also an author) was judged on whether doing so would add value to their social media feed - usually through providing entertainment (e.g.: "I tend to [follow] a lot of comedians on Twitter. 'Cause again, I think I need that, that kind of light-hearted antidote to everything that's going on. And I don't, writers in social media don't necessarily [provide] that antidote." (P9)).

Some enjoyed reading social commentary from authors (as seen in 5.3.7), whilst some were cautious about how much social commentary - and in particular political commentary - following someone would inject into their social media feed:

It depends, like, I don't mind people tweeting about politics, or people who tweet only about politics and a lot of politics. I just don't only want a certain percentage of my feed being that kind of stuff (P7).

Most of the participants would look to see if an author had an online profile if they had enjoyed reading their work. However, if they could not find them online they were not disappointed. For most, the decision to follow an author once found had less to do with enjoying their books, and more to do with how the author's profile and content fit with their broader interests and, ultimately, how they wanted to curate their social media feed:

So I'm never disappointed if I look for someone and they're not online. I just totally get it. But if I do find them, and you know, I'm scrolling through the Twitter feed and trying to see, like, what sort of tone they're setting. I think I'm mostly looking for someone who's both humorous and critical. I don't just want fluff and I don't want just, you know, criticism or rage or industry information, but sort of a blend. [I] always love a sassy author, I guess (P10).

If an author was seen to post high volumes of content this could be off-putting, as it could overwhelm the participants' feeds: "especially with Twitter, I try to kind of not follow people who tweet a lot because they clog up the feed. So for that reason, I don't follow, follow them. But I'm, I'm certainly interested" (P7). Low-frequency posts - even those that had little to do with literature - could be a potentially favourable addition to the feed, for some:

(...) Tess Gerritsen, who is a thriller writer (...) I think I have her on Twitter. But to my knowledge, she has never posted out anything book related. It's always kind of, not personal as such, but it will be, like, pictures of her dogs. And be 'I'm taking my dog for a walk today'. And she also posts so infrequently that you don't really mind, partly because, unless they're posting regularly, you kind of forget that they're there, I suppose (P11).

When I asked participants about the types of author content they personally wanted to see on their feed, opinions varied. Some were interested in learning from an author about a book and its characters, enjoying information such as work-in-progress updates. Others, however, were only interested in the book as a finished product, and only wanted to engage with content from the author once they have already acquired (and, preferably, read) their book:

I always love when I see authors that I already know or that I already like, who have written, you know, columns in newspapers, or here's a little piece that I wrote that I published over here (...) I love that kind of stuff. But I'm a lot less interest in, sort of, process. Does that make sense? (...) Weekly updates about his current work in progress - like, I just don't care. I want to read the finished book. I don't want to read your drafts. I don't want to hear that you just, you know, nailed down the battle scene. I want to read the book. (P10).

One important factor in choosing who to follow was a desire to avoid potential spoilers about a book they had not (yet) read. In choosing a book physically at a shop the participants made efforts to avoid encountering key information about the plot:

I don't want to find out stuff. So, you know, I'm concerned that if I opened the book at random, it's going to be 'Fred dies tragically'. And I really don't want to know that. I want to come across that in the book, as the author intends me to come across that. So at the

most I would possibly look at the first page (...) but even at that point, I'm looking more at the typeface, the font and so on. Just to see how readable or not it is, rather than sort of like looking. Look, I don't tend to read a book in a bookshop (P2)).

Seeing work-in-progress, interviews, or discussions with readers about a book on an online platform could run the risk of encountering spoilers. This could not be controlled, and so they were cautious to avoid the possibility: "I don't want to know anything. I don't want to know anything about it until I've read it. And **then** I'll read all the reviews and I'll read lots of commentary and stuff" (P12).

Their curatorial decisions were also informed by expectations of the kinds of content shared in a particular platform. For example, few used Instagram to follow authors due to its emphasis on visual content. Authors were associated with text, rather than visual content, because writing is their trade (e.g.: "I follow fewer, I would say, authors on Instagram than I do on Twitter. I'm more interested, I guess, in their words than their photos, which I've never really thought about [before] (P10)). Resultantly, authors were viewed by some participants as a poor fit with a visual platform such as Instagram, and thus with their curatorial decisions within the platform (e.g.: "I use Instagram because I bake and I knit a lot. And that's a very visual resource, which, again, I wouldn't necessarily associate with writers." (P9)). Similarly, there was a general perception that Twitter was a platform used for sharing political views and social commentary (e.g. charitable causes, elections), and that an author using this platform would join in with this format:

I guess that's what Twitter's for - they're telling you about things they believe in. Um, yeah... stuff that's important to them, rather than anything to do with their writing or their characters (P3).

Therefore, the decision to follow an author in Twitter was not, typically, a response to enjoying their book, but rather an expression of interest in their (political) views. If an author mentioned their book in Twitter then this was tolerated, but it was not necessarily what the participants wanted to see on a social media platform:

I find on Twitter, it's more, I don't know, it's more of a commentary site. I feel like the authors, you know, just the general people that I follow are generally commenting on something. (...) I think that really speaks to what Twitter is trying to do with its content. Whereas on Instagram, I find that it's, it's a lot more promotional. So, you know, and I totally get it, but if an author has a book coming out that it's just, you know, pictures of the book in different, you know, settings or different photos that their readers have sent in, and it's like, well, I know what the cover of your book looks like, and I'm not terribly interested in seeing it 15 times this week (P10).

Finally, just like the author participants in 5.3.3, they were conscious that they too, as users, were visible to a confluence of audiences through social media who could see their activity. This knowledge influenced who they chose to follow, and who they actively engaged with. P7, for example, talked about how they primarily had work contacts following them on Twitter. Therefore, joining in with discussions about books and sending messages to an author would not fit the professional image they sought to project:

I wouldn't message [authors] or, I just don't... I'm not active on Twitter, anyway, because it's so public and so connected with work that I just don't tweet very often (P7)).

Curating their social media feed by choosing who to follow needed to fit with the image each participant wished to portray to the world - as humans, rather than as 'readers', and in relation to the other roles they embrace - in addition to fitting with their personal interests. Following someone online is a publicly visible act.

7.3.5 Assessing value, as a reader vs a fan

The participants made decisions around whether engaging with an author's content on a given platform would offer them something of value. What was viewed as a valuable contribution varied across the individuals. One thing, however, was consistent: to invest time (and, where applicable, money) into an author's online content offering - whatever form it took - the participants needed to have already established a positive perception of the author, either through having previously read and enjoyed a book by them, or through them being recommended by a trusted source.

Broadly, it was unlikely that a participant would invest in an author's online content (for example through a crowdfunding or patronage model) if they had not already heard of them, as they needed to be confident that it was a wise investment of their resources:

(...) I don't think I would subscribe if I did not know the author. Because... I am quite... before buying anything, I tend to do my research. I'd like to make sure that everything I'm buying is good value for money. And I don't think this is, erm, I wouldn't feel like it's a very good investment. If I didn't know the author at all. Because, you know, what if I don't like him? (P4).

For some this also mattered offline, when choosing books (e.g.: "I hardly ever go into a bookshop and buy a book that I haven't already got some idea about. Beforehand. (...) I need to have a kind of, a kind of selection criteria before I go in" (P9)), as investing time into something like reading could be difficult to fit into daily life (e.g.: "There's so much to read, and you know, working full-time (...) I haven't got the time in life to enjoy it."

(P1)). As an investment of time and money, some of the participants described being keen to choose wisely, to ensure they got enjoyment out of that investment:

Looking at [an unknown author] from the outset, well, I don't know if I'm gonna like their books. Why am I interested in them as a person? (...) So as a reader, I wouldn't be interested in 'author I don't know'. I'd be much more interested in 'author I have read'.
(P2)

Asked about whether or not they would consider engaging with the online content of an unknown author (be it in social media, forums, or crowd-funding / patronage models) it was observed that the way platforms are currently designed does not sufficiently accommodate discovering new authors and books, even if they wanted to do so (e.g.: "you don't tend to find authors on Twitter at random. (...) Twitter won't be the first introduction you get to that person" (P2)).

When discussing the content offerings described in the sketch of a patronage model (appendix B 7b –2), the participants unanimously expressed uncertainty about what authors could offer, outside of writing their books, that could bring value to them. Writing, after all, was an author's profession, and the reason they had readers' attention:

If they're an author, how many things other than authoring are they doing? You know, what extra can they really offer? [laughs], I dunno! Primarily, they're writing. Writing books, magazines, articles, that kind of stuff. So I would always expect it to be related to that (P1).

When considering whether they would be interested in any of the options depicted in the crowdfunding model sketched, several participants were confused about why an author would be seeking to share other forms of content outside of their books (e.g.: "umm, author's sell books! That's what they sell! [laughs] (P3)), and some perceived non-textual options as 'frivolous' (P1) and, in some cases, unnecessary (e.g.: "(...) not for fiction authors. Like, they **could** produce things that are interesting, erm, as well as their work, but I don't think (...) like, on the face of it, they shouldn't be (...)") (P7).

They aired ideas about how an author could potentially offer written content on a platform to attract their interest, but each idea was dismissed by the participant almost as quickly as they had suggested it, as they determined that it would either be unfulfilling (e.g.: "I was gonna say releasing books slowly, like, you know, you have to wait a year or something and it is just really annoying. Could you have a chapter at a time? (...) but

it's probably not written like that. And then you'd read that in an hour and want the next chapter anyway" (P3)) or that it would take the author's focus away from the book, which was the participants' primary interest.

Several participants shared the view that a lot of online content produced by authors outside of their books was directed at fans, rather than the average reader, and whilst they could see its potential value for others, it was of limited interest to them personally. This view was particularly prevalent when discussing the patronage model sketch (appendix B 7b -2), in which they could subscribe to receive content at different price points: (e.g. "I'd have to be a real kind of hefty old fan to be paying the bigger amount" (P1)). The content depicted in the sketch was well-aligned with most participants' expectations of that sort of direct dissemination model, however it was not typically the type of content they themselves would want to pay for to get from an author.

Some expressed that they would consider the options in the sketch if they happened to be a fan of an author (e.g.: "I would, if it's definitely like an author I read religiously, I would go for [this option]" (P5)), but most explained that they did not identify as a fan of any author, even in the case of authors whose writing they particularly enjoyed.

On balance, the participants' interest was in the book first, content second, and author - as a personality - last: "your main interest is in the book, and it only really becomes about the author once you've already invested in them because of the book" (P2). This tended to hold even where they had determined that they liked an author's work. Therefore, an author's content or engagement efforts outside of the book was often of limited interest:

I buy books because I like the story, and I'm not really that interested in what the author's other opinions are (P3).

One participant expressed a strong attachment to an author (Stephen King) and so kept a close eye on his online activity across different platforms. However, this was more tied to their emotions connected with the book, rather than to the author, as a book by Stephen King had been the first book they had chosen to read independently, outside of their parents' recommendations:

(...) all the authors I was into, Terry Pratchett and David Gemmell, would have been my number one favourite authors joint[ly] prior to Stephen King. But that was very much what my parents were reading. (...) And Stephen King was maybe one of the first authors where I went out and picked myself. (...) I didn't know if I was gonna like it or not, it was just picked up based on the cover. And I think I hold that attachment because it was

maybe one of the first authors that I found-slash-picked, of my own accord without any external influence (P11).

Perhaps evident of stronger attachments formed to books than to their authors, P11 suggested that being a fan of an author likely differed to being a fan of another type of public figure, such as a celebrity or actor. They posited that this difference influenced their decisions around engaging with an author's non-book content online:

I feel with authors especially, it's very different to say, I mean, if it was (...) say, Will Smith. My mum would be there in an instant. Whereas... she's a huge fan of Neil Gaiman as well, but I don't think she would, for example, find an appeal for this. It would just be a kind of, 'I don't really care as long as I get the book' (P11)).

Some of the types of offerings depicted in the patronage model sketch were of potential interest to some of the participants (e.g. access to Q&A video sessions), but in the main, they would be things they would prefer to locate on occasion, rather than as an ongoing subscription.

7.3.6 Tiers of authorship

Not all authors were considered equal in status, and this could impact how the participants perceived their online engagement efforts. Although there was a general view that authors needed to self-promote online, there was also a shared view that very well-known authors did not need to self-promote (in keeping with findings in 5.3.5). This was because if an author was well-known people would talk about them and buy their books regardless of whether they were visible online - either because of mass media marketing like reviews, or discussions in community fan forums (e.g.: "bigger ones would tend to be discussed on something like Reddit. Rather than be there promoting their own stuff" (P1)).

When looking at the sketches of potential crowdfunding platforms (appendices B 7b -2 to -6) the suggestion of very well-known authors using this sort of funding model was largely met with a mix of suspicion and disinterest. The participants' rationale was that if an author was high-profile, they did not need extra support outside of the royalty publishing model. The crowdfunding and patronage models were viewed as specifically existing to provide support to struggling artists, thus rendering the presence of a high-status author unnecessary, because help was not needed: "which explains why I'm so disinterested in the like, hundred thousand patrons. Like, I'm not needed there. I'm not needed in that space. [even] if I would find it, the content, interesting" (P10). As help was not perceived as needed, a high-profile author's presence in the platforms was

also considered somewhat unfair, as it could potentially take attention away from those who needed audience support more:

[it's for] small press writers, definitely, independent writers. You know, I wouldn't expect to find Margaret Atwood on Patreon, for instance (...). Patreon feels like, I don't know, sort of an ongoing fundraiser of... it's not anybody's first choice on how to make a living... would be my impression of it. (...) If you've already, you know, published *The Handmaid's Tale*, then you wouldn't need something like this. And it's kind of rude to take that space away from creators who do rely on this for their living (P10).

Crowdfunding and patronage style platforms were viewed as a space for less-established, or amateur authors, who did not receive support from a publisher (e.g.: “This, I would expect to be much more done by the person working in their back bedroom” (P2)), and so did not have the requisite capital to charge substantial sums for their work: “monthly subscription membership. That would give me the impression that these are people not established enough to have sizeable kind of advances from their publishers (...)” (P9). If an author was seen to have already ‘made it’ in their career, the perception was that they did not belong in these spaces (e.g.: “Because they're very established and you know full well that they're not poor” (P8)).

To explore these comments, I asked the participants how they could tell (beyond the very well-known celebrity authors), whether an author had ‘made it’ and therefore received enough financial support not to need to use these funding models. This was not easy for the participants to answer, and they struggled to explain how they made such a judgement. An author being on prime-time TV shows was one indicator, as was a perception of them selling books in large numbers (e.g.: “Yeah. but like Patricia Cornwell with massive sales of huge hardback books. I don't think she really needs my tenner. I think I probably need it more” (P3)). Some suggested that being published by a very well-known publisher or having a book on a best-seller list was also a potential indicator (although, as noted in 6.3.3, the publisher of a book was rarely noticed):

that's a really good question. It's not something that I've really considered before. I feel like if it were an author who had a book published with, you know, one of the big publishing conglomerates like Penguin Random House, yeah, like, I assume that you're doing okay if you've published a book with Penguin Random House, which is you know, may or may not be true. But that's sort of, I think that would be my line. Like, independently published books or small press books, totally, I would totally still understand the need for something like Patreon. But yeah, if you've, you know, ever hit a bestseller list, I feel like you're probably doing okay (P10).

Accounts suggested that a celebrity author would be perceived as inauthentic if they were to adopt a platform model such as this (e.g.: “if it was an author like Neil Gaiman who was doing it (...) I would be like, ‘no’ [laughs].

You don't do that. It's, it, that would seem somewhat much more to me like monetizing his name rather than offering, erm, valuable content (...)" (P12)), and their presence could disrupt the platform as a result. P10 equated this to a problem recently seen in OnlyFans³⁶, where celebrities had appropriated a site and fundamentally changed how it was used:

I would liken it to, I don't know if you're familiar with OnlyFans. And there was this whole kerfuffle during COVID of celebrities joining OnlyFans and creating these accounts, and in the same way, taking space and air away from people who actually rely on those platforms to make their living (P10).

Judgements about an author's perceived status and the viability of their presence in a platform suggested something of a paradox, as the participants were more willing to support up-and-coming authors through a crowdfunding or patronage model, as they believed they would benefit from their assistance (e.g.: "I think if it was someone, you know, prop-, a real blockbuster raking in lots of cash, I might think, well, is your fee not high enough? (...) I'd be a bit sceptical. But if it's not a super big, super big name, I might be more inclined to give support, especially now when the arts are struggling" (P9)), yet were more likely to look at, and be able to find, an author they had already heard of. They observed that this could make it potentially difficult for new, unknown authors to gain traction (e.g.: "(...) if nobody wrote a book, the world would be a very sad place. But I don't know how I would find the right author to do this for early enough in their career" (p3)). P5 suggested that the authors most likely to benefit from patronage models were therefore more likely to be somewhere in the "middle tier" (p5) – neither extremely well-known, nor an unknown beginner.

7.3.7 Support associated with the book, not its creator

Authors who did not have a publisher to support them were perceived as freelancers with unpredictable income, which is why it was deemed appropriate to support them through crowdsourcing or patronage models: "I'm a patron of [a] freelance film writer. I really like her work, so it's quite nice just to be able to actually chip in and give something towards getting that work and being able to read it (...) because she's a freelancer sometimes she doesn't know, I guess there's no guarantee she's actually going to get a publisher for it" (P8). One of the sketches (appendix B 7b -4) tested an idea whereby readers could contribute to the costs incurred by authors to support their writing, rather than paying for their actual work. This suggestion was met with strong and largely negative reactions: particularly for published authors, who were largely

³⁶ A subscription platform primarily used by sex workers to share digital adult content, which rose in popularity during the pandemic of 2020, and with it, started to attract celebrity accounts sharing other forms of content

viewed as employed professionals rather than freelancers, hired to write, and supported accordingly (e.g.: “Erm, I’m not sure, actually, how I feel about [paying for this model]. Because I was... I would think that the author should have a source of funding or... to trade... just to work. I thought that... yeah, I thought that authors would have sources of funding (...) I suppose erm... from companies, I suppose, like the company which hires them. Or, like, the company that they’re with, sorry. So, I think like, I mean, I mean, I think had the idea that authors like worked for, like, the publishing company, like the company would pay them. For their work” (P4)).

Their understanding of how authors are financed by publishers was limited. Some understood that authors could receive up-front payments from a publisher (e.g.: “(...) you would hope they could look after their finances well enough. I think they... if they’ve got a publishing deal, don’t they get, like, an up-front?” (P3)), and P10 was aware that grant funding was made available to authors (“(...) when you get to a certain point of, of having published enough, there are so many grants available for authors [once] you’re established (...)” (P10)). This suggested a low awareness of how precarious the profession and the funding associated with it could be.

Resultantly, the participants dismissed the prospect of funding an author’s costs, as they believed they should be covered by the publisher: “(...) I’m put off by the indirect costs, because those are costs that every person bears no matter what job they do” (P6). However, some expressed a willingness to consider contributing to the direct costs for printing a physical book, if the author was self-published and it was clear they did not have a publisher covering production costs. P5 suggested that their reticence to contribute to general costs may be because it feels more appropriate to support the author as a writer, brand, and persona, than to support the person behind the persona:

It’s more like you’re paying, you’re helping the person rather than the persona? (...) I almost feel like people will be more willing to give to the persona. If that makes sense. (...0 especially if it’s their favourite author, I think a lot of people... there’ll be more funding for a persona (P5).

This may have related to a closer association with the book over the person, but may also, alternatively, have related to a disinterest in too much back-stage information.

The participants perceived that the reader’s role in supporting authors was buying their book, rather than concerning themselves with the costs associated with creating it: “Not interested. I really don’t care. That is not my issue. That is down to their publishing team, and their management structure. Right? (...) I help the author out by buying the book, right, and perhaps by publicising the book on my own stream” (P2). The alternative models suggested in the sketches for financing fiction writing (appendices B 7b -4 to -6) were met

with uncertainty, overall. Models through which they would pay for direct access to content, rather than to cover expenses, were “closer to home” (P4) and easier to understand.

One sketch (appendix B 7b -5) proposed a model whereby readers could contribute their own labour to help with either the creation of the book, or the management of online content, to assist authors. Options which invited them to contribute skilled labour (e.g. copy editing, marketing) were unanimously rejected, as they believed it was wrong to be asked to provide the sort of labour associated with a profession without fair payment. However, more casual labour that did not require professional skills was something they would consider:

[this] fires alarm bells in my head because I always assume that if they don't mention a wage, they're expecting it to be for free, which is, I think, especially in this example, you know, kind of predatory. Yeah. To put it lightly. I do like the, the idea of, of trading, you know, light labour of, you know, forum moderator, for instance, for exclusive content. I think that that seems like a pretty fair deal. But for something like copy editing, or marketing or content management, that those are, you know, professional skills that you should probably hire a professional for (P10).

Beta-reading was particularly appealing to some participants if it was for an author whose work they already knew well, as it would be an enjoyable way to read the book ahead of release: “Beta reading is different, because you get the enjoyment of reading the work (...) If I really wanted to read a book, then I probably would do it for free. But I would maybe like a copy of a book when it did come out. Yeah. It really depends.” (P6). Most who would consider beta-reading were happy to do so without receiving a copy of the book at the end, as they would have effectively already read it.

Overall, the participants expressed that contributing to the management an author’s online community (e.g. forum moderation) was a fair trade for access to exclusive content, if they were invested in that community, although only one participant said they would likely do it themselves.

The discussions around this sketch highlighted a perception that authors of different status tiers would have different support needs, and this would factor into the participants’ decisions about whether to offer this sort of help. For example, they acknowledged that a high-status author would attract high-levels of engagement, and would, in turn, likely attract high-numbers of volunteers to help, as they would have a large fan base. They explained that being a high-profile author with a large audience automatically impacted that author’s ability to manage their online profiles, as they would likely receive high volumes of messages which they could not

plausibly respond to. A smaller author would essentially receive fewer, and so would be better placed to respond to messages themselves:

(...) Neil Gaiman must get kind of, **thousands** of responses to his tweets. (...) whereas, like, a new author probably doesn't get that many. Is probably really excited, I would imagine, you know, if it was me I'd be like 'oooh!' and having a look to see, [but] you probably get to a level where you've got so many that you can't sort of engage in that way (...) [Neil] hasn't got enough, he couldn't, he wouldn't write any books if he spent all his time looking at the comments (P12).

It was therefore suggested that higher-status authors may benefit more from voluntary assistance with platform management. However, conversely, a higher-status author would be more likely to have formal, paid support mechanisms in place, negating the need for community support:

I don't know that this would be necessary for an emerging writer, because I don't think that, you know, there would be a forum, or, you know, a book that has a readership that only sold 500 copies, for instance, you know(...) if it's gotten to the point where you need a forum moderator, then you probably will have people who are happy to do it for whatever you're willing to offer (P10).

Overall, the participants expressed being most interested in beta-reading for a high-profile author to see their book in advance, without requiring a copy to keep after reading. Yet they would be disinterested in providing high-profile authors with other forms of support, perceiving that it was not needed (e.g.: 'I'm so disinterested in the like, hundred thousand patrons. Like, I'm not needed there. I'm not needed in that space' (P10)). For a lesser-known author, there was more interest in providing them with financial support to help them create their book - if deemed valuable to the participant, individually, and if it were within their means, financially, to do so. To do this, they would require a copy of the book once it is released, as part of the deal.

7.3.8 [Autonomy for authors and readers to engage on their own terms](#)

Discussions around one of the sketches, in which readers could choose between different forms of author content to subscribe to (appendix B 7b -3) revealed that, whilst they appreciated being given a choice about what sort of content and information to engage with, they ultimately believed it should be the author's decision to offer what they wanted to create. All participants expressed a view that authors should have the autonomy to use online platforms as they see fit rather than doing what the market asked of them. They unanimously expressed that if an author chose not to share any online content, outside of their book, then this would be respected and would neither disappoint (e.g.: "I dunno, I mean it's up to them. I suppose. If I heard that

someone didn't have social media, I wouldn't be upset about it, you know" (P5)), nor dissuade them from reading their books (e.g. "Yeah, I'd still be interested in reading their books. So (...) it wouldn't bother me if I didn't get to follow, well it **doesn't** bother me if I don't get to follow somebody on Twitter, it doesn't matter" (P8).

If an author created engaging content to share on platforms such as social media, this was a nice to have rather than a must have, and was appreciated as such:

Social media is just such a (...) you, know, some people are really into it and love it, and some people absolutely hate it and don't want anything to do with it. Both are fine. (...) I'm sure there are some [authors] not online at all, and that wouldn't put me off reading their books (...) I read a lot of [literature] by people that are dead [laughs], so you know, obviously, [they're] not going to be about, you know, promo- raising their new book on Twitter. So that doesn't put me off at all. (...) It's more just like, sometimes I'll read a book, and I think 'oh, you know, I found it really interesting, I'll see if they're on social media'. And, you know, if they're not, fine, I don't expect them to be (P12).

The participants felt free to choose whether or not to engage with an author's social media content on their own terms, as it was free to access: "it's almost free content, right? You're getting their, like, witty observations on life for free through your Twitter feed, rather than from their books" (P7). As it required no commitment on their part, none of the participants had suggestions of how an author's social media content could be improved to better meet their needs – if content was not interesting it could simply be ignored, and this stance suited them.

When it came to paying for digital content, as seen in some of the hypothetical sketches, this would be considered only if the content was interesting, of value to the individual participant, and affordable within their individual budget:

I mean, part of it, for me, comes down to the price of how much the monthly contribution is going to be. And, and so what you're going to get for that monthly contribution, I guess, as well. (...) because of the fact that I already support other things. The monthly outgoings. So for instance, one of the podcasts that I like, and I do, and I am a patron of, I wanted to support them at the top level, but I just couldn't justify the extra money per month that was going to cost me. It was just a bit extra too much, with the other bits that I was supporting (P8).

Cost was a significant factor for several of the participants when considering whether to support an author through any of the paid models shown, including buying books. In many cases, decisions about whether they

would want to use the different model in the sketches came down to affordability, which was a very personal decision (e.g.: “That sounds quite fun, but that's not necessarily viable. I don't know, maybe it is for people who who've got that disposable income” (P9). If they did choose to pay for content online, most viewed it as a decision to support an author’s work rather than as a “transactional relationship” (P10). By deciding to support an author’s work, the participants would be giving them space to work the way they wanted to. P10 explained that if they, personally, chose to support an author through any of the models shown in the sketches, they would have no desire to direct what the authors produced as if it was a commission being produced for them:

I'm trying to think of like the creators that I follow now, and what I really like about supporting them on something like Patreon is it feels like I'm giving them space to create something. And I feel like I want to be pretty hands-off with it, if you know, whatever, if I'm signing up for your Patreon, whatever you want to pop on, there is fine by me just whatever you have room for whatever you have space for (P10).

Therefore, where a hypothetical platform offered the participants the option to choose from different forms of author content (as in the sketch in appendix B 7b -3), the ability to choose was appreciated, as it allowed them more autonomy as consumers. This was a welcome contrast to choosing from pre-ordained lists of content, as current patronage models often afford: “I would probably expect that they have more control over it because that's the way these kinds of things tend to work, but I would prefer if I have more control over it” (P1). However, none of the participants wished that their personal preferences of what to engage with or to consume would limit what an author proceeded to produce.

Notably, although they generally expected that authors would use platforms such as social media to self-promote (as mentioned in 5.3.1), several participants shared an assumption that, if an author was online, they (currently) did so out of personal choice rather than obligation, sharing the type of content they wanted to share. If an author wished to share personal information about their back-stage life, then this was their choice to make and would not be judged, regardless of whether or not a participant was interested in seeing this: “whatever they want to present to the world, that’s what they, if they’re comfortable doing it, then I’m usually quite fine with that, so that’s how they present themselves” (P5).

With this expectation of current author autonomy, they expected that the authors would consciously set up separate personal and public profiles to manage their privacy (in contrast to findings from author participants in 5.3.2):

I'd expect them to have a fake name on a kind of private or private setting on their personal account. So, two separate ones (...) even if the original profile was a personal one, I'd fully expect them to be within well within their rights to adjust the privacy settings. And, and set up a second account where they could just say whatever they like, to post pictures of their children, if they have children, and communicate with their friends. (...) I think that people had every right to, you know, reveal or conceal whatever they felt they wanted to about that about their own personal life. (P9)

As public-facing figures they expected that an author may need to expose a little more of themselves online than an average user might (e.g.: “if an author is going to use Twitter, in a way that's relevant to their work, it would involve them, I think, sharing something of themselves, like, Twitter is so public, and, like, people I know, in my work area, follow me on Twitter, so I just be more private about it than I think an author would need to be to use it usefully” (P7)). However, none of the participants wanted to see an author share anything they were uncomfortable with sharing (e.g.: “I don't believe that I have any right to their private life just because I bought their book” (P2)), as they believed authors had a right to protect themselves, and their personal lives, however they needed to.

7.4 Summary and conclusions

The findings presented in this chapter provided an enriched account of how readers experience engaging with Author Online Presence.

Through probing conversation with the sketches, I discovered that readers are aware that Author Online Presence is frequently connected to business needs and income generation, and that they are respectful and understanding of the need to self-promote. On balance, they seemingly assumed that self-promotion practices were directed towards an audience of readers, however they were generally disinterested in seeing it for themselves. They therefore perceived that self-promotional content must be aimed at other readers, with different needs and interests to theirs.

There was a general perception that authors self-promote online as one part of a broader tapestry of marketing efforts, predominantly supported by their publisher. However, the publisher was largely invisible to readers, and the participants could not account for examples of online publisher promotional efforts they had encountered. They assumed that publisher promotion most likely took the form of embedded adverts, much like the sales tactics of other retail businesses. They were disinterested in seeing publishers promote authors due to a suspicion that publishers would prioritise selling – something deemed to be inauthentic behaviour.

Promotion direct from the author was considered more appropriate and gave an impression of greater authenticity.

The participants enjoyed some of the practices authors currently follow in Author Online Presence, particularly where their content sharing presented as authentic. However, this was judged on an individual basis. In general, the participants were more interested in an author's book than an individual author themselves. They would look up an author to see if they had an online presence if they had enjoyed a book, but this would not necessarily lead to them actively following or interacting with the author. There was limited interest in seeing promotional materials, and many wished to avoid seeing updates about the book or the process of writing it – either as it was not of personal interest to them, or as they wished to avoid spoilers. If they did not wish to follow or engage with an author further, this was not considered disappointing or problematic, and would not discourage the readers from reading their future books.

To choose to follow an author, the authors' online content sharing patterns had to add something valuable to the readers' social media feed, for example providing entertainment, or offering interesting insight about matters that chimed with their own values. Choosing to follow an author in social media was no different to – and was part of the same process as – following any other public figure. The decision to follow or not follow was lightweight, and of little consequence to the participants. The decision was also weighed against how the curation of their feed would look to their followers such as work colleagues, to whom they wished to present as professional. Having publicly visible conversations with, or about authors and their books could, for some, be unappealing given the visibility of communications held on social media.

In discussing hypothetical subscription model platforms, the participants shared that their decisions of whether to subscribe would depend on several factors. The content would need to provide value (as well as value for money) – and typically, the sorts of content shared in current subscription models was something they did not perceive as worth paying for from an author. This was because they saw the author's role as producing a book rather than producing other content. It was considered that producing content online, outside of the book, was an odd thing for authors to do, but possibly of interest to their fans if not their broader readership.

Regarding models of monetary support through means other than purchasing a book, the participants used their judgement to determine whether they were needed. Alternative modes of income generation were perceived as being for struggling or new authors, as those who have a publisher should already be

remunerated appropriately. If an author was asking for money, the view was shared that this was down to bad business management on their part. If a particularly well-known author was seen to promote themselves with this sort of model, then that was perceived as either inauthentic (as they did not need the additional income) or somewhat predatory, as their ability to draw a large following could draw attention away from the authors who needed to generate their audience and income.

Finally, the participants expressed that authors should have (and were assumed to already have) autonomy to choose when and how they engage with an audience online, without interference from either their publisher or from readers determining what they should produce. In turn, readers wanted autonomy to choose what to engage with for themselves, and were satisfied that in its current form, Author Online Engagement was something they could disengage from where it was not interesting or engage with when it was. As free content, they expressed no sense of commitment either way. Their primary means of engaging with an author was through their book.

By conducting this study, I generated new insight about how readers perceive Author Online Presence, as well as their perspectives of some potential changes, by learning about how they view their role in offering support and their interest in paying for online content.

At the end of chapter 5 I presented a table (table 2, p. 123) which listed the current practices that authors follow in Author Online Presence (at the time of the study), and the intentions their interviews inferred as behind those practices. No additional practices were confirmed through this study with readers, however they did confirm their awareness of some of the intentions behind author's practices, such as self-promotion, commercial cooperativity, and generating income. It is worth noting, however, that income generation was embedded into many of the sketches and may not have been raised to the same extent if the study had been conducted differently. In table 3 below (next page), I have built on the previous table to include details of some of the issues the participants in this study described, whereby Author Online Presence is not effective.

By conducting this study, it was possible to learn a little more about how readers may be disposed to respond if certain changes are brought into Author Online Presence.

This provided a new point from which to consider future research steps, and how to approach designing new supports for authors and readers in online platforms.

Outward Practice:	Desirable Intended Outcomes (Inferred):	Potential Problems with Practice (Inferred):
Sharing public updates and information about their work	Promote own work for attention and sales Maintain readership / Attract new readers	Unsuitably balance of informational and promotional content may result in reader choosing to disengage (based on individual value judgement) Readers unlikely to encounter content of an unknown author
Retweeting, sharing, and promoting the work of other authors	Give support to other authors Appear collegiate and commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile)	May contribute to an overload of undesirable content in a follower's feed, and discourage engagement Audience members may be unfamiliar with, or disinterested in, publisher
Retweeting, sharing, and promoting their publisher's initiatives	Appear commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile) Raise the profile of their publisher	Mismatch in timing (if opportunity aligned with release date, which may not align with readers' readiness to ask questions) May attract unwelcome or problematic attention
Responding to questions and comments from online audience	Reward readers and audience Engage with attention (rewards author) Promote own work for attention and sales Appear commercially cooperative (to raise author's own professional profile) Maintain readership / Attract new readers	Author status may influence audience perception of the appropriateness of their presence in a platform Ongoing author visibility may not be required Mixed environment such as social media (where literary content is not expected as part of normal practice in the space) may reduce audience interest in book-related content, as incongruent with their social media habitus Audiences mixed following may reduce willingness to participate in literary discourse in social media
Highlighting social causes (e.g. charity, world event)	Use public profile to raise profile of/generate attention for cause (e.g. for fundraising)	

Table 3: Potential problems with the current approach to Author Online Presence

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

“Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void but out of chaos.”
The Last Man (Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 2012)

In this thesis, I provided a theoretically, and empirically grounded descriptive account of how interaction between authors and readers has been understood and how it is currently experienced by them online. In this final chapter I share an overview of the research I conducted across the whole thesis and return to the contributions of the work stated in the first chapter, drawing conclusions about how they have been met (8.1). Next, I reflect on the key implications of the research findings from the two empirical studies, using the lens of the Literary Field as a Complex system to consider their application in future research and design (8.2). I then reflect on the theoretical and empirical approaches used to conduct the research (8.3) and conclude with opportunities for future research to develop this work further towards creating mediation support for authors and readers (8.4).

8.1 Overview of the research and its contributions

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to explore how, where, and why authors and readers of Genre Fiction engage and interact with each other using the internet. Initially I had anticipated, based on prior literature, that the provision of disintermediated opportunities to connect online would provide clear evidence of rich discourse between the two groups. I had expected that authors would be benefitting from direct feedback from their readers, in terms of better understanding their market and how their work is received. I had expected that readers, in turn, would be benefitting from the direct opportunity to learn about, and from, the authors whose work they enjoy.

To scope out the focus of this thesis, I conducted a high-level literature review into online interactions amongst authors and readers. From this, I found that previous work in the area was sparse. It was also largely focused on reader communities interacting with other readers, rather than with authors, and on the role of their chosen platforms in mediating between readers and a written text (see chapter 2). In the absence of a clear body of literature from which to build an understanding of their joint online experience, I conducted an empirical interview study (chapter 5) with twelve authors and readers of Genre fiction. My goal was to build an inductive understanding, from their direct accounts, about how authors and readers each experience online interaction in relation to fiction. In parallel to conducting the interviews, I also reviewed a broader set of literature across

several different disciplines to enrich my analysis process. Through this approach, I developed a theoretically informed framing to help understand:

- a) aspects of the participants' accounts, which referred to differences between offline and online interaction opportunities, and related their experiences to a broader, offline literary context
- b) how the interaction mediation between authors and readers has been previously understood and researched
- c) the role of environmental influences on mediation, to consider how offline and online mediation may differ and how this may influence experiences with online interaction
- d) parallels between the experiences of authors and readers and of other creative workers and their audiences, and how these have been researched. This served to identify similarities which could cast light on participants' accounts, and to identify differences specific to the literary field.

I presented the core literature I had reviewed across two chapters. In chapter 2, I shared work which gave insight into the current status quo of engagement across the creative industries. In chapter 4, I shared work around offline mediation and the historical context of author and reader engagement. To consolidate the most relevant theories I had identified in the literature with my study analysis, I produced a model depicting what I called the Literary System: a system of agents (i.e., people, organisations, places, structures) involved in providing mediation in the Literary Field (a concept from Bourdieu's (1977) work, see 4.1), and their use of physical places (using concepts from Dourish and Harrison's (1996) and Bitner (1992) - see 4.3.1) to do so. The model is reproduced below, in Figure 23:

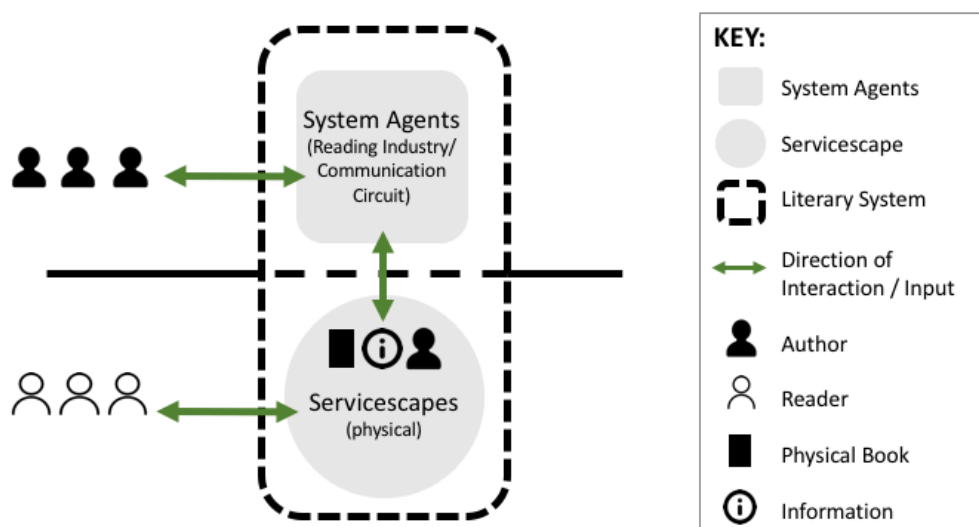


Figure 22: Literary System offline in place [B]

To identify the agents involved in mediation for the model, I combined Darnton's concept of the Communications Circuit (Darnton, 1982) (described in 4.1) which mediates books between authors and readers, and Fuller & Rehberg Sedo's concept of the Reading Industry (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013) (described in 4.3.2) which mediates literary events, providing opportunity for face-to-face interactions. I then depicted that the outputs of both are shared in physically situated Servicescapes. The outputs of the Reading Industry included: the provision of information (about authors and books), and access to authors (through their performances at organised, Reading Industry mediated event). The output of the Communications Circuit is books (and also information about the books, e.g. adverts). All outputs from the system are mediated within Servicescapes.

I positioned authors and readers outside of this consolidated mediating system, but expressed that they are, even when outside the system, positioned within the Literary Field. This was to depict that authors and readers have the agency to interact with, and through, the system, and that when they enter it, they do so in the capacity of their roles as author or reader. Authors enter the system (in their author role) through negotiation with the system agents who mediate their book, information about their book and author role, and who organise their presence for readers to access through events³⁷. Readers enter the system by directly accessing the physically situated Servicescapes (bookshops, libraries, temporary organised event venues) to engage with the different service offerings available to them. People who are authors also read, and so may also enter the system through the reader route (rather than through the author route) when acting in that role.

A dotted-line was used to depict a permeable boundary around the system, to introduce the idea that interaction with the system was subject to a combination of physical constraints (e.g. geographic location, seating arrangements) and systemic constraints (e.g. opening hours, ticketing, time-boxed opportunities). This boundary depiction drew on research from literary events (4.3.3), Servicescapes (4.3.1) and McArthur's (2016) definition of systemic boundaries and barriers (4.3.3). By depicting boundaries in this way, I illustrated that interaction with the system is not passive, with readers as receivers at the end of a circuit (as suggested in Darnton's (1982) Communications Circuit model). I also used it to illustrate that mediation is created through constraints which serve to enable and restrict behaviours - to counter Darnton's somewhat disembodied conception of the feedback chain between authors and readers which is also emphasised in

³⁷ It was highlighted in the findings of chapter 5 that authors often organise their own events. This represents a deviation from the model, however as this situation typically relates to the royalty publishing model, there is still a level of system mediation involved (i.e. the events are organised to promote books which have been produced by the system). It is important to remember that the model is a symbolic representation of circumstances, which captures an overview, but abstracts some details.

theories such as reader response theory (see 4.2.2). By positioning authors and readers outside of the bounded system, my Literary System model also highlighted that activity outside of the system's designated Servicescapes is largely invisible to the system (e.g. readers sharing books, which was observed as common practice by an author participant in 5.3.2 and described as contributing to the difficulty in identifying an authors' market audience).

In the next chapter of the thesis (Chapter 5) I shared findings from the interview study used to produce the models. Amongst the study findings, a range of practices that authors perform online came to light, which I listed in a table in 5.4. I found that many of the online practices that participants explained authors participated in were not intended for an audience of readers, but instead, for an audience of industry professionals.

The presence of a large, mixed audience (industry professionals, readers, and other, unidentifiable individuals) on online platforms made it difficult for authors to manage their performative practices and could lead them to experience negative repercussions such as anxiety. Some of the practices they used were to maintain a constant visibility (partly resultant from a pressure from their publisher to be always active online) by sharing different types of content. Their constant visibility, however, was not required by readers, who tended to directly search for updates about an author's book on their designated website and found social media updates difficult to follow. Notably, neither the author nor reader participants expressed a desire for the facilitation of direct communication with each other to be improved. Readers were reported to only contact authors sporadically through the current mediation options, and typically only to share words of encouragement. Where readers used the opportunities to ask questions of authors, the questions were typically generic. This, amongst other things, pointed to an interrelation distance or asymmetry between authors and readers who, despite being nominally equal users in the online platforms, remain separated by their roles, and do not have a peer relationship.

In chapter 6 I used these findings to extend the model of the Literary System to include online mediation: both within the Literary System (i.e., formal platforms supported by agents of the Literary System) and outside of the Literary System (i.e., online social platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and forums). This model (reproduced below in Figure 24) depicted how most online interactions, as described by study participants, are conducted outside of the Literary System in third-party platforms. Building on the model to include online mediation helped me to understand that by interacting in third-party platforms rather than in the Literary Systems' designated Servicescapes, authors and readers needed to establish their own rules, patterns of practice, and means of managing interactions.

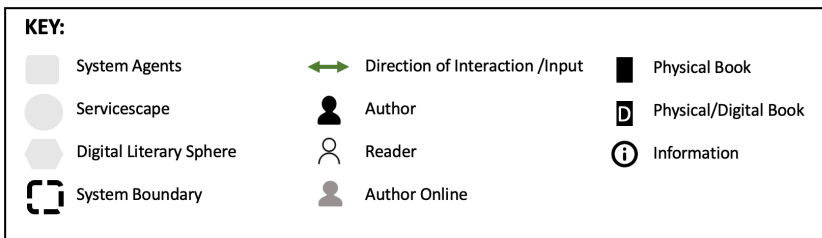
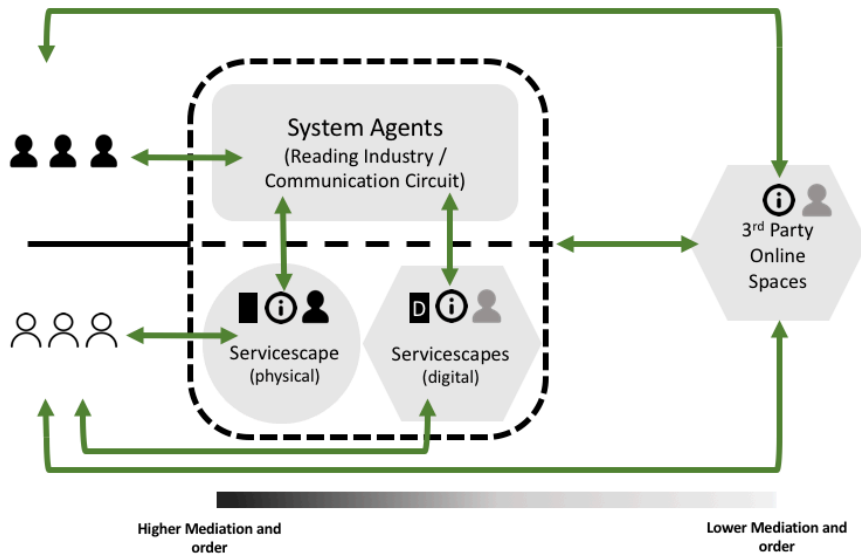


Figure 23: Literary System offline and online, in relation to third-party online spaces [B]

Building on this updated model, I next explored how the specific act of authors cultivating an online presence fit within the Literary System, and what the existence of this practice as a phenomenon contributes to literary practices and culture more broadly. I reconceptualised the phenomenon as **Author Online Presence** – a specific intervention (or input) into the Literary System (illustration reproduced below, in Figure 25).

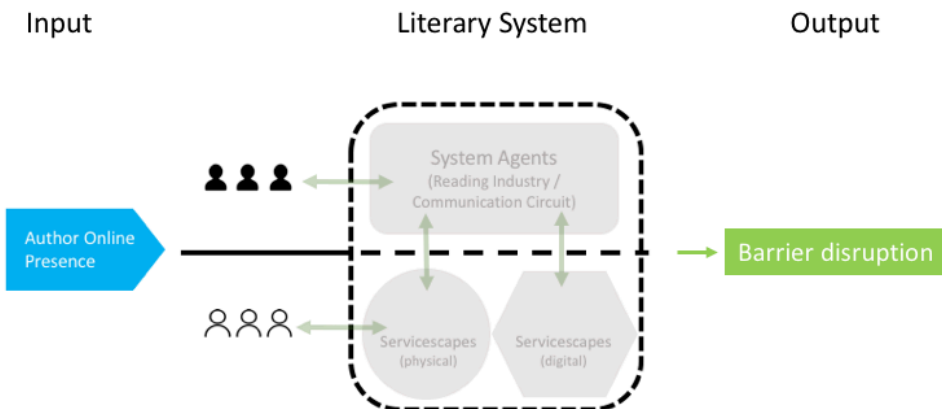


Figure 24: Intervention (author online presence) into the Literary System [B]

As an intervention, Author Online Presence serves as an infrastructure (added to the existing, base infrastructure of the Literary System) for facilitating particular, desired outcomes. Unlike the outputs of the Literary System (i.e., books, information, events) which are shared through literary Servicescapes for readers to access them, Author Online Presence predominantly sits within third-party online platforms outside of the Literary System's direct management.

I posited that the key intended, desired output of Author Online Presence was to disrupt barriers between authors and readers through establishing author's visibility and accessibility. I also posited, based on the interview findings in chapter 5, that as an input, Author Online Presence is also bestowed with the responsibility of producing numerous different desired outputs (e.g. promoting work, building professional networks, maintaining a current readership, attracting new readers). However, I argued that the attainment of these desirable outputs was inconsistent (e.g. following online practices cannot guarantee success, but there are examples where it can, e.g. J.K. Rowling, raised in 5.3.5), and it could also produce other, unintended outputs. I used this inconsistency of output as a basis to challenge the applicability of causal logic in the system: is it possible to anticipate consistent, predictable patterns of output from Author Online Presence all? (6.2).

What was striking in the results of the first stages of my research was the complexity of the relationships between the different variables impacting Author Online Presence, and the ways these relationships were highly situated and contingent. In other words, there was resistance to the author's (in particular) efforts to reproduce consistent outcomes, and investigation did not identify clear models of behaviour that could be explained in any definite terms. To capture this complexity and to think through its significance, I introduced, in chapter 6, a sense-making model: the Cynefin Framework. The Cynefin Framework (reproduced in Figure 26 below) depicts five zones within which a given system may be managed. Two of the five depict ordered system types (Complicated and Clear), and two depict un-ordered systems (Complex and Chaos). The fifth zone represents a state of not knowing which type of a system is under observation (called the AC - or Aporetic and Confused - which consists of two different levels of uncertainty) (descriptions in 6.3.1). The Cynefin Framework is a tool used to gather a retrospective understanding of the system type once patterns of data have already been identified.

I reanalysed the work I had conducted in the first stages of my research against the Cynefin Framework and posited that the Literary Field is a Complex system (in 6.4.1): one in which human action and the various influencing variables from both within the field (e.g. practices, roles, actions) and outside the field (e.g. economic circumstances, social factors) are tightly intertwined, and constantly, fluidly impacting each other and instigating change. A Complex system is subject to dispositional logic, rather than causal logic, and is in a constant state of flux, never returning to an equilibrium state. My assessment was conciliant with Bourdieu's observations of the dynamics in the Literary Field (see 4.1).

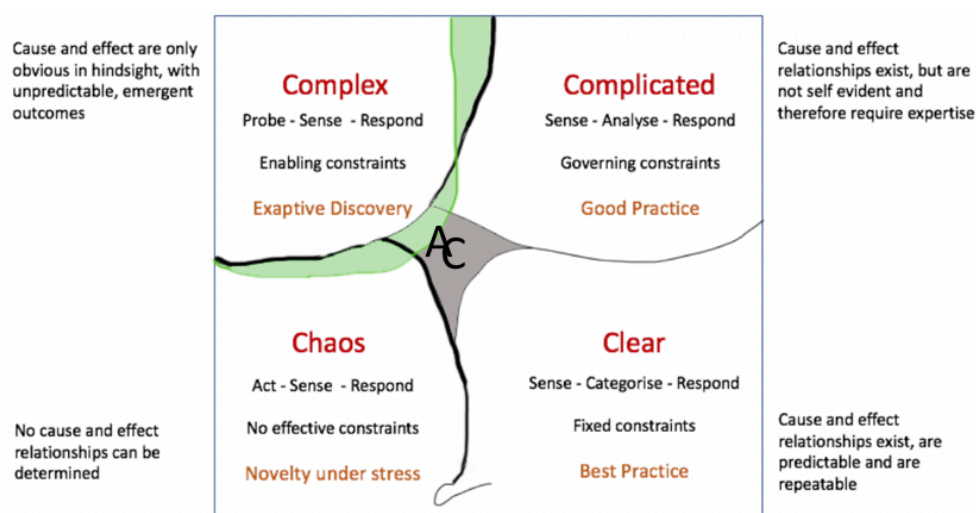


Figure 25: The Cynefin Framework (Adapted from Snowden, 2020) [B]

Through this reanalysis I observed that, although the Literary Field can be framed as a Complex system (and thus un-ordered, and dispositional), order and causal patterns were evident in the Literary System (made up of the Communications Circuit and the Reading Industry). I used this to posit that the Literary System is an infrastructure designed to create order in the Literary Field, because without order, certain desired outputs could not be achieved (e.g. book production). I posited that the Literary System predominantly manages processes within Complicated order, but some aspects reach a level of stability and predictability which enables them to be managed in Clear order (e.g. mass print methods, see 6.4.2).

Next, I identified that social media has been classified by complexity theorists as a system at the boundary between Chaos and Complex (6.4.3). Author Online Presence is largely operated in social media, and so I posited that the repeated practices described by participants in my chapter 5 study were evidence of efforts to create stability into this highly unordered space. Authors, for example, looked to the behaviour of other creative workers and authors to follow their lead and establish routine ways of sharing content online, specific to the platform being used and what it affords. These new practices do not stabilise for long as changes to the

platform and the ways that they are to be used are constantly introduced. Because social media is managed between Chaos and Complex (where causal outcomes cannot be repeatedly reproduced) users and their practices are subject to volatile change, and react accordingly with altered, often exaptive, behaviours.

The boundaries between the different system types in the Cynefin Framework operate in different ways. I compared my findings with the different boundary dynamics identified in the Cynefin Framework. In doing this, I observed that, while the Literary Field is a Complex system, the Literary System within it is frequently in a transitional state between un-order and order, and between different levels of order. This observation was in keeping with Driscoll’s (2014) argument that contemporary literary culture is characterised by transitions: always rooted in past practices and experience whilst moving into new ways of existing (Driscoll, 2014).

Transitioning an unordered system into an ordered system takes time, and often requires repeated iterations to introduce stability gradually and purposefully.

To build on this position, I next created a set of diagrams to explore the transitional path followed by the Literary System as it has moved processes from unordered to ordered over time. I also explored how the new intervention in the system - Author Online Presence - is currently circumnavigating Chaos and Complex. As a much newer phenomenon, Author Online Presence has not yet established patterns of order as the Literary System (Communications Circuit and Reading Industry) have, and so is not on the same trajectory.

Snowden et al. (Snowden, 2019d; Snowden et al., 2020) identified the three most common trajectory paths between system domains, as levels and types of order change. I used this work to produce a diagram illustrating the different trajectories of the three mediating systems within the Literary Field: Author Online Presence, The Communications Circuit, and the Reading Industry (reproduced in figure 27 below).

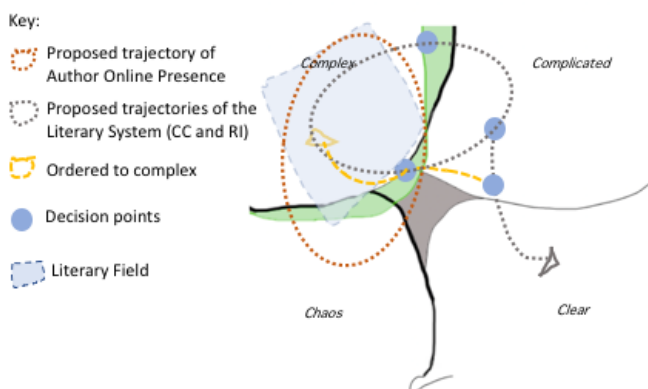


Figure 26: Proposed trajectory paths of the Literary Field, and the systems of the Communications Circuit, the Reading Industry, and Author Online Presence (each an intervention in the field) [B]

I used this in conjunction with what I know about the dynamics in the different system types to position that, more than being a new intervention or infrastructure in the Literary System and Field, Author Online Presence is a product of opposing forces acting upon circumstance. Straddling the liminal zone between Complex and Chaos, it is in a state of flux which will likely take a significant length of time to stabilise (if, indeed it does) because of the multiple, parallel, and oppositional forces acting upon it and changing it. I argued that there is also an ever-present risk that bureaucratic thinking in the ordered aspects of the Literary System may result in a tendency to manage aspects of the system in the complacency zone (see 6.5.1), unknowingly. If this is the case, then over-constraint and poor awareness may threaten to push Author Online Presence into Chaos.

By exploring the Literary System through the Cynefin Framework and producing these diagrams, my work contributed new theoretical grounding from which to understand the Literary Field as a Complex system, and Author Online Presence as subject to fluidly changing, dispositional dynamics.

To build on this new knowledge, I next developed a method and study (chapter 7) to help better understand the value of Author Online Presence, in its current form, to its primary intended audience - readers. I also used this as an opportunity to explore how readers (as agents in a dispositional system) may be disposed to respond if the current format of Author Online Presence changed.

I created a generative method using the key principles of the approach for researching and managing a Complex system, as posited in the Cynefin Framework (i.e., to **probe** with parallel experiments, to **sense** what happens as a result of the probing, and to **respond** in accordance with those results (see 6.5.2)). I combined these principles with a set of conciliant, known methods from HCI research (detailed in 7.2.2).

In part, I made this decision in response to calls (Blandford, 2019; Greenhalgh and Papoutsis, 2018) to incorporate complexity theory such as the Cynefin Framework into HCI methods, due to an increase in HCI research being undertaken in Complex systems with no clear, well-fit method available (Blandford, 2019).

My method involved sharing with participants a series of sketches depicting hypothetical future platforms (readers of fiction – see 7.2.1). Each sketched platform represented a small change from how Author Online Presence is currently mediated.

My findings revealed (amongst other things) that the demand for authors to be accessible online was limited, and that participants' decisions about whether to actively follow an author online was no different to how they

would decide on following another type of public figure. For the participants, choosing to engage with a public figure depended on a perception that their content was shared authentically. Their typical way of sharing content also needed to add value to the participants social media feed, which they went to efforts to curate to ensure it was interesting and entertaining. The participants responded to proposed changes by considering how it aligned with their values, and what it could offer them. Some proposed changes were more readily accepted than others, giving some insight into their pre-dispositions.

The empirically informed, theoretical work I presented in this thesis served to position the phenomenon of author's using online platforms for engagement (Author Online Presence) against a broader context of the Literary Field and an infrastructure of order for performing desired practices within it (the Literary System).

My intention with this framing was to contribute to an ongoing research conversation about how online literary engagement is experienced, and to offer a new grounding from which to conduct future research. I did not present this work as a final, summative account of contemporary literary practices, and anticipate that as more research is conducted in the future, and as more changes occur in the field, this framework may be adapted, modified, and even overwritten as understanding evolves. Drawing on Korzybski's (1994) description of maps ("A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness" (Korzybski, 1994, p. 58)), I consider my work to offer a guiding and symbolic account of the territory under investigation.

In chapter 1, I stated five contributions from this thesis, which I revisit here, to identify how they have been delivered in this work:

Contribution 1: [A model of the Literary System, describing the influence of environmental affordances and interconnected agents on mediation between authors and readers, on-and off-line](#)

- The diagrammatic models I presented in chapters 4 and 6 (reproduced in this overview) combined existing theory from literature collated in chapter 4 with my findings from the research in chapters 5 and 6 to present a new theoretical concept - the Literary System. I concluded the model with the descriptive work in chapter 6 which posits Author Online Presence as an intervention into the Literary System, conducted primarily outside of the system in third-party platforms.

Contribution 2: An empirically grounded account of how authors and readers of fiction currently use online social platforms to support their practices

- I conducted two empirical studies (chapters 5 and 7) to build an account of how authors and readers currently use online platforms to interact. I compiled the practices described in chapter 5 into a table and developed this further in chapter 7 after enriching the account through further qualitative interview data.

Contribution 3: A theoretically grounded description of the different forms of complexity and levels of order which characterise the Literary System and the Literary Field., along with an analysis of the implications of differing levels of order on developing appropriate strategies for researching and managing different online practices

- In chapter 6 I re-analysed the work I had conducted in the first half of the thesis through the lens of complexity theory using the Cynefin Framework. Through this, I determined that the Literary Field is a Complex system, with aspects of the Literary System (seated within the Literary Field) managed at different levels of order. I explored how transitions occur between levels of order and concluded that order is not static. Rather, changes in the system and in how it is managed result in periods of transition both between and within order domains.

Contribution 4: A novel qualitative interview method, based on composite methods from complexity theory and established HCI research

- In chapter 7 I designed and tested a new method for qualitative research in a Complex System. I combined known HCI methods with the decision model from the Cynefin Framework of probing parallel experimentation.

Contribution 6: Explicit connection of interdisciplinary work from multiple fields into a centralised conception of the context and nature of the literary field and interactions within it

- Throughout the thesis – particularly in chapters 2, 4 and 6, I introduced work from across multiple disparate research fields and business fields. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 I combined concepts and theory from across this body of literature to produce models of the Literary System and of the Literary Field as a Complex System, each situated in specific environments which influence them bi-directionally. The summary in 8.1 brought together this work to show an overview of how I brought these different

threads together into an integrated working theory about the nature of the Literary Field and online interactions between authors and readers connected to it.

For the remainder of this chapter, I address my findings to discuss their broad implications for design (8.2) and future research, and opportunities for future research and design work (8.3). This discourse meets the fifth contribution stated in chapter 1 (**Contribution 5: Broad implications for undertaking future research into author and reader interactions, and for designing methods to support and monitor the ongoing effectiveness of authors' online practices**)

8.2 Implications of the work

In HCI research it is commonplace after collecting empirical data to report key pain points and insights from the findings as a discussion about its Implications for Design. This term is used to describe presenting what has been learned about user needs, the shortcomings of the technology under observation in meeting those needs, and to argue for specific data-driven changes to be made in the future to improve the situation. Whilst this is probably the most common approach to wrapping-up HCI research, it has been argued that expecting Implications for Design to be the natural end-point of research can overlook outcomes whereby design should not necessarily be the next step (e.g. Dourish, 2006a). I believe my thesis presents one of those circumstances, as to move straight to working on how platforms for author and reader interactions are designed would be too reductive at this stage, and may even introduce new, unforeseeable problems. The dynamics in a Complex system are fluidly evolving, and, although my work here gathered some insight into the experience from two key user groups (authors and readers), there is more work to be done to learn about their aspirations and needs, as well as to bring other stakeholders into the conversation (e.g. publishers), before moving on to design.

For this reason, I have not reported on Implications for Design in this chapter. Instead, I discuss some of the key, broader implications from my work, and propose some of the possible ways that my findings could be followed by future research (which may later, in turn, lead to design). In the following sections I discuss these implications under three key headings: **Differentiation between Genres of Visibility**, in which I point to aspects of Author Online Presence that may benefit from more explicit identification (8.2.1); **Author Autonomy**, in which I discuss the importance of supporting authors to engage online on their own terms (8.2.2); and **Boundaries and Constraints**, in which I address the importance of carefully managing online interactions, as an absence of constraints can lead to Chaos (8.2.3).

8.2.1 Differentiation between Genres of Visibility

In Chapter 6.2 I observed that the anticipated purpose of authors' establishing an online presence is manifold. For example, by going online, authors are expected to raise their own profile and the profile of other literary professionals, engage with current readers, attract new readers, and market their work. Effectively, it is an intervention into the Literary System - which I named Author Online Presence in chapter 6. However, without clarity as to precisely what purpose the intervention is intended to fulfil and for whom, authors are managing a high workload with little certainty as to what, in fact, they are managing. Whilst authors navigate a varied and confusing workload, readers and other types of users interested in authors' output must navigate different platforms and forms of content to locate what interests them. Without more clarity about authors practices and their outcomes, it is near-impossible to evaluate how successfully their efforts are being mediated by the technology.

To support creative freedom and collaborative engagement, it is necessary to create intelligent and well-defined constraints. In chapter 4.3 I discussed how interactions in a physical Servicescape are defined and mediated through supportive, systemic boundaries and barriers. These boundaries and barriers facilitate desirable behaviour and restrict unwanted actions. Constraints are crucial because without them, the intervention (be it a physical event or an online conversation) is subject to too many unknown variables which can influence and infiltrate it. This can result in uncertainty and other negative experiences.

The importance of constraints was addressed in the Cynefin Framework (i.e. without them, there is Chaos, but balance is important 6.3.1). Some of the effects of poor constraints in social media (a Chaos system, see 6.4.4) were observable in my findings from the first study I conducted, in Chapter 5. For example, author participants in 5.3.8. described difficulties in recognising who their audience were, with one commenting that they resultantly protect their safety with a blanket assumption that all who contact them are potentially dangerous.

It makes little sense, as Hesmondhalgh (2007) observed, to classify doing something in digital (like getting online) as if it were just one category, because this overlooks the different social uses and meanings behind what the digital medium is being used for (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Lumping these differences together in one category risks a "technological reductionism" (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 303). Although I reduced the act of authors making themselves available online for engagement as one intervention (Author Online Presence), I did this for the purpose of interrogating the phenomenon. In reality (as I explored in chapter 6) Author Online

Presence is not one thing. Rather, it represents a series of emerging practices designed for different ends, it is a product of dispositional forces, and it an infrastructure which holds different meanings and social implications for its different, varied users.

It would be beneficial for future work to more clearly define the varying manifestations of Author Online Presence, as this would help to **differentiate** between them and their impacts- i.e., to distinguish between their different features (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). In this context, I use the word differentiation to posit identifying what different services and practices form Author Online Presence, along with what purpose they serve, and what their different outputs (desired or incidental) are. By better understanding the constitution parts of Author Online Presence and their impact would provide a starting point for determining their value. This would give a basis for determining which aspects may be valuable to maintain, which may potentially be abandoned, as well as which would benefit from being developed (e.g. through design support). It would also help identify how, and within what level of order, each constituent part may be appropriately managed (i.e. should some aspects be managed in Complex, and others in Complicated or Clear).

This manner of differentiating may be linked to the term **formatting** (Ryan, 1992) – a word used in the cultural industries to refer to how products (e.g. records, books) are sequenced and linked according to their common elements, so that market risk may be managed. For example, the use of genres to categorise films, music or books to indicate to audiences the type of experience they can anticipate from the product (Hesmondhalgh, 2007).

This level of categorisation would not be fixed. Genres, as Hesmondhalgh observed, have a tendency to “mutate, hybridise, disappear and appear so rapidly that no genre classification would work over any historical period greater than three or four years” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 273). His description is particularly apt for the online practices and services associated with Author Online Presence, as they develop and change constantly and fluidly as part of a naturally Complex system. However, as I evidenced in 7.3.4, users benefit from curating content according to what it can offer them, to ensure their experience is both valuable and a good use of their time. Therefore, even if fluid, differentiation could be a key means of supporting users – readers to help them choose wisely, and authors to use their time wisely.

My findings from the two empirical studies identified three key factors of Author Online Presence which may benefit from differentiation: author practices, cohorts of user needs and author tiers, which I have detailed

below. As the intervention of Author Online Presence is, at its core, the act of an author making themselves visible and accessible to a potential audience, I referred to the three factors as **Genres of Visibility**³⁸.

- **Author practices**

Within the remit of Author Online Presence, authors conduct numerous practices for a range of desired outcomes. In some cases the purpose of a practice is unclear, even to them: for example, in 5.3.1 some author participants were unsure why they needed to advertise their work, when they perceived their online audience as one of industry professionals rather than readers. Similarly, in 7.3.1 reader participants identified discrepancies between the way authors marketed and their own needs, as the (assumed) target market. I found that authors were following some practices because they perceived them as being something they were supposed to be doing online, based on their observations of other authors and public figures.

For authors, improving **awareness** of the different practices they follow, the online trends those practices are associated with, and how an audience perceives the value of those practices may empower them to focus their labour on what works best for them. This may serve to alleviate some of the pressure they experience around performing multiple practices simultaneously out of a fear of invisibility (as discussed by author participants in 5.3.5). Doing things for the sake of doing things suggests low awareness, and this is understandable, as they are seeking to survive (and flourish) professionally under evolving circumstances. There is potential for either manual support (e.g. providing demographic and usage data from across the practices, backed by use research) as well as technical support (e.g. designing affordances to better manage the differences, or to make more visible the demographic and usage data to support decisions) here. With support, authors could be empowered to determine which practices would be most prudent to focus their attention and energy on.

At the end of the first study chapter I informally listed a series of practices conducted by authors and the intended outcomes sought through those practices (see Table 2, p. 123). I developed this further in chapter 7.4 (Table 2, p. 200) to include potential areas whereby user needs were seemingly not met by the practice, or where a practice produced unintended, potentially negative outcomes. I inferred these listed practices from participants' accounts in the two interview studies. However I had not explicitly sought to find this information as part of my interview process. As such, the details I listed offer a provisional starting position only, and there is scope for future work to focus on this more intentionally.

³⁸ In part this is also a play on words, as this work has focused on genre fiction authorship.

As I mentioned briefly earlier, differentiating between author practices (whilst acknowledging and respecting their fluidity) could also help to identify which ones could be better managed within Complicated (or even Clear) order, and which are better managed in Complex. For example, in both of my studies participants described turning to authors' individual websites to find clearly organised information about book releases, rather than relying on an author's social media updates to inform them about their work. This was due to issues such as misaligned chronology and 'noise' (5.3.6 and 7.3.2). Other practices - particularly those which involve more human, relational interaction rather than information interaction - may be better managed in the generative, Complex domain. Additionally, differentiation could identify opportunities to find novel solutions by testing in Chaos to see what happens and respond accordingly. These examples are hypothetical, to illustrate that by better differentiating between author practices, beneficial management solutions may become apparent, and supportive guiding constraints may be introduced, as a result of greater systemic awareness.

Differentiation alone would not be enough., because the system is evolving and changing all the time. It would also therefore be important to work out how to monitor change. The approach to managing practices would also need to be flexible. As being overly reductive could be potentially damaging: the system's Complexity must be respected, where applicable, to avoid running the risk of over-constraint that could send the system over the boundary into Chaos (the Catastrophic Fold described in 6.5).

- **Cohorts of user needs**

In the findings across both studies I identified that there are asymmetries both between author and reader groups, and within their groups. These asymmetries impacted on their needs as users of online platforms. Different readers, for example, had desires and interests which impacted what content they engage with and how. They are individuals with varied tastes and backgrounds. Much of their engagement with Author Online Presence was found to have a limited connection to their needs as readers. Rather, they engaged with Author Online Presence in accordance with its fit with their broader entertainment and information needs, treating authors as they would any other public figure.

It is not likely realistic that Author Online Presence (or any literary service) could cater to the needs of all. However, there may be opportunity to differentiate by making cohorts and their associated needs visible. Participants in 7.3.5, for example, made distinctions between the types of contents authors share that would be suitable for fans, potentially, but of less interest to those who do not consider themselves to be fans.

Whilst it is extremely important to avoid a return to, or creation of, exclusionary language and binaries (such as non-readers and primary readers, as I highlighted 4.2.2), there may be value in exploring ethical ways to cohort platform users according to broad needs and interests rather than their role (or any hierarchy within that role). Through cohorting, it may become easier to identify candidates for empirical research to learn more about their aspirations, and to enable their participation with Author Online Presence by creating new forms of engagement to inspire them.

By establishing what user needs are sought and then making them visible through differentiation, the effectiveness of practices associated with Author Online Presence may be more clearly understood and evaluated. This has potential to lower authors' current, excessive labour efforts.

There is a concept of "1000 true fans" (Deresiewicz, 2020, p. 50) whereby it has been asserted in the creative industries that an independent artist can make a satisfactory living without attracting a large audience. Instead, gathering a cohort of 1,000 fans who can be relied upon to purchase all their works, if disseminating directly without a publisher, and then relying on the proceeds from that cohort can be a good working strategy. It is a focused and strategic form of engagement that removes some of the pressures of catering to a mass audience (many of whom may not contribute financially to the author's profession) like those attracted on social media.

- **Author tiers**

In chapter 5.3.1 I highlighted that authors were, informally, divided into tiers in accordance with the size of their Twitter following, which typically correlated with status (noting, for example, that most trade authors had circa 3-4k followers, but very high-status authors may have significantly more). In both empirical studies, my participants noted differences between the visibility of very high-profile authors and other authors. Their comments suggested that a high-profile (e.g. celebrity) author could spend less of their time self-promoting in online platforms, because mass media coverage and a pre-existing large audience ensured that their newly released work was visible (see 5.3.5 and 7.3.6). The reader participants in 7.3.7 also suggested that in some platform dynamics (particularly in the case of those which focus on alternative income generation models like crowdfunding), high-profile authors would out-of-place, as their ability to draw large-scale attention may potentially diminish opportunities for those more in need.

Whilst it is, again, important to avoid exclusionary or hierarchical divisions within the role of author, there may be value in making visible the differences between author tiers, due to their impact on authors and

readers as platform users, the potential impact of an author's presence on a particular platform³⁹. Identifying cohorts will help to direct research efforts to spark conversations with authors at different levels, as well as their readers, to create new opportunities, befitting to their needs (which will differ, dependent on their positioning), in contrast to the current, homogenous approach being followed by authors online.

An imbalance between authors at different levels is far from a new discovery. Asymmetry has long existed in the book market - a select few high-status authors are made highly-visible in the marketplace, and a focus by publishers on celebrity and commercial works has "resulted in a squeezing of the midlist" (Squires, 2007, p. 37) in the Literary System as a whole. Similar issues have also been highlighted recent studies in music, with observations that in music streaming services (e.g. Hesmondhalgh, 2020) and patronage subscription services (e.g. Regner, 2020), audiences are disproportionately distributed across musicians of different status levels. This impacts on creators' opportunities to generate income, as most attention (and, thus, income) is directed to a select few, high-profile creators.

A report by Digital Media Finland investigated streaming revenue statistics to determine the distribution across musicians in Spotify, and used the findings to differentiate artists into three categories: **Top-Tier**, **Mid-Tier** and **Basic-Tier** artists (Muikku, 2017). The top-tier (circa 1% of all artists) were found to generate the most streamed tracks, and the basic-tier (circa 90% of all artists) generated the least, by a significant gap (Muikku, 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2020), showing a very unequal and hierarchical distribution. Looking to research from other industries such as this could benefit future work into Author Online Presence.

It was posited by Hesmondhalgh, for example, that monitoring the mid-tier, specifically, may be the best way to assess the sustainability of a model over time (Hesmondhalgh, 2020). I would add that monitoring the mid-tier could also be a good strategy to observe online practices as they evolve. Hesmondhalgh based his argument on the premise that, essentially, those at the top will always be relatively comfortable, and the basic-tier will likely always struggle, as this has always been the way of things (ibid.). But as practices evolve over time, the middle-tier have the potential to be a rich ground for investigation, because they are the ones most susceptible to the change, and who can either benefit or lose from it depending on how they process and approach changing circumstances.

³⁹ As mentioned in 7.3.6, an influx of celebrities into an online subscription service, OnlyFans, notably changed the way the platform was used, and disrupted the experience of content creators already using it. Primarily, the site has been used for online sex work, although it was not purpose built for that demographic (much like MySpace, which became associated with music due to majority use, rather than by intentional design – see 2.2.1). Since the influx of celebrity users, the platform's overall use has changed (Manavis, 2020).

In both music and literary research, there has been a disproportionate focus on celebrity creators (Murray, 2018) - similarly to the focus on bookish readers (noted in 4.2.2). This has overlooked the more average, mid-tier creator. It is known that celebrity creators do not use online platforms in quite the same way as other creators (although there are likely similarities, as their lead may be followed). By establishing an ethical means to, at least loosely, differentiate between authors, attention could be redirected to the mid-tier. Talking to them and learning from them offers potential for designing support mechanisms. Meeting their accessibility needs may potentially help them to flourish and establish novel, creative practices of their own, rather than them following the lead of the top-tier creators, who are less reliant on online practices for securing their professional success.

I would caution, however, that cohorting authors by tier should not lead to technological exclusion. This could happen, for example, if the cohorting led to creating different platforms or zones within platforms for different author tiers. This could be tempting, for lots of reasons. However, online social platforms are used for social activities and have complex dynamics. Separating any users through a form of hierarchy would echo (and perhaps be a form of) societal segregation. Confining specific populations to specific spaces has a long history of creating social injustice. There can be benefit, in some circumstances, where segregation is done voluntarily (Soja, 2010) - for example, a user group choosing to separate into community groupings where they can explore their identity and form bonds (as seen in platforms described in 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.2) – but a rigid imposition would inevitably be problematic (ibid.). Further, separating user groups in a dispositional system which is subject to continual change would also likely over-constrain the system, potentially pushing it into Chaos.

It must also not be overlooked that there may be benefits to the current mixed userbase: e.g. a top-tier author may retweet a middle-tier author's promotional posting, which can generate attention and sales (see 5.3.4). Similarly, seeing each other's practices could prompt evolving practices and bring beneficial change. Further, if a top-tier creator uses a new platform, this can bring new users to that platform, making it possible for them to discover mid-tier creators. This has been seen before – e.g. Oprah Winfrey's first tweet on Twitter attracted an influx of new members, and influenced how Twitter is used (Burgess and Baym, 2020). Again, my call for cohorting is to build systemic awareness, rather than to create strict new bounds.

My findings from the two studies in this thesis would suggest that the current, homogenous approach to Author Online Presence - whereby authors across all tiers use the same platforms and follow similar practices - may potentially be creating undue stress and confusion amongst users. Differentiating between Genres of Visibility could support an improved awareness of the different parts that make up the system of Author Online Presence and allow for differences and complexity to be respected. As Driscoll (2014) observed, one of the most important factors contributing to the atmosphere at a physical event is the audiences' perception of who else is in the crowd (Driscoll, 2014), and seeing the similarities (and differences) is integral to building community, even if temporarily (ibid.). At present, there are restrictions to visibility in Author Online Presence. Practices are intertwined, and their purpose unclear. Audience members and the reasons they engage with certain practices cannot be clearly identified. This can restrict community engagement.

The concept of differentiation that I described here has been used in other fields (e.g. psychology, architecture, and town planning), and is an important component of better integrating communities. As Siegel (2012) observed, differentiation allows for "separate, differentiated areas [to] maintain their unique features while also becoming linked (...) not becoming blended or "all one", but rather [maintaining] differences while facilitating connection" (Siegel, 2012, p. 19). Differentiation in Genres of Visibility and cohorts, then, could help to empower users to follow their own paths, whilst forming engaging connections.

It could also help to determine how to develop guiding constraints - essential to a healthy, Complex system - which (as Hesmondhalgh observed of categorization by genre more broadly) can "allow for creativity and imagination within a certain set of boundaries, and enhanced understanding between audiences and producers" (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 70). Through better integration, greater harmony in the system may be achieved whilst respecting its complex, dispositional dynamics.

8.2.2 Author autonomy

In Chapter 2.2.1, I discussed Baym's (2018) qualitative interview study with musicians, and some of the Implications for Design she identified. These included: improving mediating support to better enable musicians to focus on their primary work, whilst reducing the reliance on their ability to "make friends" (Baym, 2018, p. 199) in online platforms to make a living; and better enabling them to participate online on their own terms.

In both of my studies (especially those in Chapter 7), reader participants revealed that they do not feel strongly that authors need to be actively online. They respected that authors are busy with writing (5.3.5) and wanted

them to be able to focus on that work (7.3.5). Further, their own schedules, outside of their ‘reader’ roles, prevented them from being available to always read or engage with authors’ content (5.3.5 and 7.3.8). This suggested a correlation with Baym’s findings, and that any new support mechanisms introduced should prioritise enabling authors to manage their time effectively, whilst minimising their ‘fear of invisibility’ (5.3.5) – as their visibility is not the requirement (from their potential audiences’ perspective) they can often come to think (and to fear) it is.

Both authors and readers need support to engage on their own terms. In 7.3.8 this was discussed in terms of autonomy - i.e., that authors would benefit from greater autonomy from the external control of gatekeeper (and, perhaps, cultural) expectations over how they use online platforms, and that readers require information to grant them greater autonomy to curate what content they engage with, to better fit with their individual time-availability, interests, values, and budget.

In chapter 4.2, when discussing Darnton’s Communications Circuit (1982), I noted an observation by Hesmondhalgh that authors have creative autonomy over what they write, but less input as to how their text is processed and marketed once it enters into the chain (Hesmondhalgh, 2007).

He argued that the notion of creative autonomy is pivotal to understanding how cultural industries have functioned since the twentieth century, and expressed that the production chain metaphor (such as the Communications Circuit - often used to understand cultural production) is harmful to, and in some ways in opposition to, the creative autonomy necessary for cultural products to be created (ibid.) – despite simultaneously enabling that creation. He argued that organisations have increasingly exerted strict control on the stages that follow creation (i.e., reproduction and circulation), and only a “very few superstars” (ibid., p. 69) have autonomy over what work of theirs is promoted or released (ibid.) once it is in the system⁴⁰. Notably, as Squires observed, “each new generation of publishers caused consternation to the previous one by their market-based activities” (Squires, 2007, p.34), highlighting that profitability has been a significant agent in the application of constraint.

It appears that now, through interventions such as Author Online Presence, circulation and creative production have become more closely intertwined. Nominally, this increases the potential for creative

⁴⁰ He posited that the “combination of loose control of creative input and tighter control of reproduction and circulation constitutes the distinctive organisational form of cultural production” (ibid., p. 69). This is in keeping with the premise that conflicting dispositions characterise the Literary Field.

autonomy outside of the constraints of the Literary System's production chain. This means a change to how the cultural industry functions. By directly engaging with audiences, authors have more autonomy over circulation. However, the Literary system still influences their practices, and this highlights a potential area through which the system could fall into Chaos if the continued influence results in over-constraint⁴¹.

My interviews in chapter 7 suggested that readers assume authors to have autonomy over what they do online and how they present themselves. In general, authors' efforts were best appreciated by the participants when they appeared authentic (7.3.8), and less connected with commercial aims linked to the Literary System. This suggests that, if authors are better supported to focus on their writing and to share content on their own terms, they may be more likely to enjoy the task. In turn, if they enjoy the task (and thus present as authentic) their audience may enjoy it more and choose to engage. Autonomy in how and when they create, and a positive reaction to these efforts could (again, echoing Baym's findings in 2.2.1) help authors to feel more secure and empowered in the online environment, and assured that their efforts are well appreciated.

Contrary to what I had expected to find in this work, my interview findings suggested that there is currently little call from readers for authors to engage online to any great extent. Authors are associated in readers' habitus with books, and when they are online, separated from books, they are perceived as an individual public figure amongst a mass of other types of cultural workers, celebrities, and public-facing individuals. There may be interest in their content and efforts, as individuals, but they are not currently called to be online in their role of author, per se. That said, however, there was no clear thirst for literary festivals initially, because it was an unknown entity (Finklestein and Squires, 2019). This changed. Author Online Engagement is in its early developmental stages, and how it takes form could change how it is currently perceived. A focus on supporting authors to have greater creative autonomy online may introduce new conditions whereby as-yet undeveloped practices could attract engagement in ways that cannot yet be anticipated. I suggest that by supporting creative autonomy, some of the excitement and speculation that has existed (and continues to) observable around physical books could be ignited in authors' online content.

⁴¹ It has been noted that since the 1990s, bureaucracy within the cultural industry organisations themselves has increased, in favour of strict organisational structures (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Davis and Scase, 2000) suggesting that autonomy has been compromised inside the system too. Control by a small number of large literary agents, amongst other changes in power and value structures, have also diminished autonomy (Squires, 2007), including power shifts towards the choices of commercial markets. As Moretti observed, what readers buy incentivises reprints, which determine what is available for future generations (Moretti, 2000).

8.2.3 Boundaries and constraints without over-constraint

Boundaries and constraints are crucial to both identifying the state of a system, and to promoting greater integration within it. Problems with the current levels of constraint in Author Online Presence are evident in issues such as lowered autonomy for authors, and the multiple practice they are currently expected to follow.

To differentiate (as I suggested considering in 8.2.1), involves indicating the bounds of something. My intent is for this to be used to promote greater systemic awareness: to monitor the system, and to create new opportunities in it. However, creating bounds has the potential to also introduce new controls which could potentially also have negative consequences if used to assert too much order.

Even if practices, tiers, and cohorts are differentiated, their meaning and value will not be the same for all agents in the system (or be static for any agent). The bounds would therefore need to be used for guidance purposes, to aid exploration and creativity, rather than to minimise choice or to homogenise content within neatly bounded genres⁴². If information is experienced as overly homogenised it can become background noise to ignore (McKay et al., 2020), and evidence of this was observable in participants' accounts in 7.3.4 who would, for example, either mentally filter out or choose not to engage with promotional content where it was perceived as either too contrived, or too high-volume. Constraints, then, must seek to enable rather than homogenise.

Further, as the Literary Field is Complex, it is dispositional rather than causal. This means that peoples' response to, and behaviour around, Author Online Presence cannot be predicted with any certainty, nor stabilised into repeatable patterns. Fluidity is a characteristic and, as Martens' (2016) noted, it is considered impossible to predict what online platforms will be popular even two years into the future (Martens, 2016). Therefore any constraints introduced, or bounds identified, need to be managed with a flexible approach.

8.3 Future work

Through my work in this thesis I showed that there is an active interest in the labour undertaken by authors in online platforms, and the consequences (beneficial or negative) it can have for literary understanding. Parallels between other creative fields suggest that there is also a clear asymmetry between creators and

⁴² AS McKay et al. observed, a shelf of books, each uniform in height and size, may look attractive – but it does not invite exploration or discovery (McKay *et al.*, 2020).

audiences that online platforms do not currently mediate effectively. This means there is a need to design more supportive structures and to build greater awareness of what is mediated, to whom, and its value.

One of the main problems I faced when conducting this work was a dearth in literature pertaining to how authors and readers interact from a social, rather than text-centric perspective - both in offline and online contexts. As Murray (2018) observed (which I noted previously, in 2.1), existing work is piecemeal and scattered across disciplines (Murray, 2018), making it difficult to consolidate, particularly as different disciplines use different terminology and framings for the same or similar concepts. There would be value in conducting future work which consolidates different disciplinary perspectives so that they can be more readily used together to build a strong understanding of circumstances. There would also be value in creating opportunities to collaborate to share expertise across disciplines.

My work also highlighted clear discrepancies between what authors, readers and (in accordance with participants' accounts) industry professionals such as publishers believe to be the function of Author Online Presence. There is an important role in future research to attempt to close this gap, through building a better integrated understanding. Collaboration between researchers and industry could lead to a more tailored, effective, experience to better protect the interests of authors - whose employment is precarious and whose labour costs are currently disproportionately high. At present, authors are under great pressure to conform with practices that do not produce a clear output, in a system in which the goal posts are constantly changing, due to its dispositional nature. As Brown and Duguid (2017) observed:

Processes inevitably will go wrong. They need to be able to adapt to changing practice, and changes are often best detected and understood by the practitioners, whose insights are lost when suppressed by process (Brown and Duguid, 2017, p. 86)

At present, the practitioners involved (i.e., authors) can experience overload and stress. Similarly, readers can at times face overwhelm at the volume of content produced by Author Online Presence, and experience difficulties in navigating it to satisfy their interests. Involving their participatory input when developing new practices could help resolve this.

In 8.2 I suggested the possibility of differentiating between Genres of Visibility. It is unlikely to be possible (not necessarily beneficial) to fully separate practices⁴³, for example by moving certain ones into tailored

⁴³ Separating practices by providing specific digital infrastructures for limited actions can lead to obsolescence, as there is a need for fluidity over time. As Sennett (2018) observed of architectural buildings, it is better to have a structure that's use can be adapted to

platform zones. However, there would be value in conducting future work to consider how to make the volume of concurrent activity more manageable. Turning to research that has investigated the social ramifications of physical space usage for social practices (e.g. Bafna, 2003; Hillier, 2016; Sennett, 2018) may shed light on how best to consolidate multiple services and features whilst promoting positive interaction, and minimising cognitive overload.

Finally, there is a role in future work to try out new approaches, and to develop novel ideas to improve (and positively mutate) Author Online Presence. Creative approaches are “generally best accomplished obliquely rather than directly” (Kay, 2012, p. 8), by looking at a problem from different angles, such as drawing from analogies in different fields. In a Complex system where change is continuous, neither good nor best practice (which rely on what is already known, as discussed in 6.3.1) are applicable. This makes it a good idea to look elsewhere for ideas, and to take an exaptive approach (i.e., radical repurposing of practices from elsewhere, as described in 6.3.1). A potentially useful analogy to draw from could be the work of Daniel Siegel (Siegel, 2018) in neuropsychology, which details a process for creating awareness and improved integration in the human mind (which is also considered to be a Complex system). This work has some clear parallels with the Cynefin Framework, due to the inter-relational nature of mind. Additionally, looking at work in other areas of the social world which have been, for example, impacted by the internet, could also highlight helpful parallels that may be translatable to this context, to help introduce positive change and support.

8.4 Comments and conclusions about the research approach

In chapter 3 (Methods and methodology) I described the position from which I approached this thesis, and how that approach developed over time as my thinking evolved. To conclude this thesis, I wish to further reflect on my research approach and consider what I might have done differently.

I came to this thesis with no literary or publishing research background, although my BA was in Fine Arts and thus somewhat rooted in an understanding of creative production practices. My initial thinking at the start of this work came primarily from an HCI perspective, having completed my masters in HCI immediately prior to starting the PhD. With that, I (somewhat naively) anticipated that I would be looking at ways to improve mediation support, knowing that it was unlikely that what exists now mediates interactions between authors and readers as well as it could. As I conducted my first empirical study it became clear to me that things were

different purposes over time, as a building that can only cater for its original use can render itself obsolete in a short space of time (Sennett, 2018).

not going to be that simple (with hindsight, I appreciate that of course it was never going to be so straightforward: this is a matter of human interaction, and human dynamics are complex). I quickly realised that, to do justice to the data I was collecting, I would need to build a broader contextual understanding of literary culture and practices, and I would need to be open to adapting my approach as I continued.

With no prior background in the broader topic of literary culture and practice, I had a lot to learn, and I needed to read broadly and filter judiciously. This was a process I thoroughly enjoyed because it was fascinating to learn about literary history and theory, and I enjoy, more generally, finding connections between disparate concepts. Simultaneously, though, it was daunting, as the more I read the more I realised I did not know yet, and the more unwieldy my literature review and concurrent data analysis became.

Further, by taking this approach rather than focusing on the technology in hand, it seemed that my work was becoming increasingly removed from that of my fellow PhD peers in HCI and the expectations of how we should conduct research in the field. This left me feeling very uncertain and vulnerable at times. That said, I am naturally a non-linear thinker and, in general, I function best in uncertainty. Science Fiction and Fantasy author Terry Pratchett shared a comment about his writing process which I feel chimed with both my approach to this research, and my difficulties in communicating my process as I went along:

It would be hard to describe my usual way of working, but I suspect it would look to a bystander [like] the activity of a man who does not know what he is doing. That would be reasonable to surmise; generally I do not, and the purpose of writing the novel is to find out. (...) I tinker with ideas, invent characters, try out lines of dialogue, and generally play around with it until I have found a way to let myself know what I am thinking; often, one of the characters says something that tells me what the story is about (Pratchett, 2014p. 177)

Had I come to this work with a different background, I would have likely brought in more (or at least different) prior assumptions, approached the topic from a different angle, and perhaps would have produced a very different thesis. To quote Snowden (2019c), when looking at a Complex space, “Naïveté may [be] an advantage as it breaks patterns and see[s] things differently” (Snowden, 2019c), and I think that, whilst my limited prior knowledge contributed to the difficulties I experienced in doing this research it was also a benefit, as I was not bound to any anticipated result or perspective. I was learning as I went along, and this helped me to remain open to alternative ideas. I certainly do not proclaim that I now know everything about the history of literary interactions, or indeed of contemporary research in the field. Yet I hope, from my extensive

efforts, that the grounding I provided in this thesis will be accepted as a valuable contribution to ongoing discourse.

With hindsight, my efforts to build a background knowledge may have been excessive- indeed I wrote many thousands of words about various theories and perspectives that did not make it to the final cut of this thesis. There are areas in the thesis where I feel I could have been more concise, particularly in chapter 4. However, I stand by my process and am glad that I went to the lengths I did.

Similarly, I feel I may also have delved more deeply than was necessary into clarifying the workings of the Cynefin Framework. It is a complicated theory that has not been used in this domain before, and it took work to understand it, adapt it, and present it coherently. I may have been over-inclusive of detail, yet at the same time, it should not be assumed that I covered the model in its entirety- there is a lot that I did not share about it to avoid overloading the readers of this thesis. I trust that the balance I struck is, overall, appropriate. Whilst I used the Cynefin Framework as a pragmatic means to help me look at my ongoing research from a different perspective, there is a risk that it may appear that I believe, somewhat evangelically, that the lens of complex systems is the only way to look at the topic covered in this thesis. This is not the case. Using the Cynefin Framework helped me to move my research in a new direction and I believe there would be value in building on the framing of Complex systems and order in future work. However, I do not view it as the end point of the conversation, and other approaches and perspectives should certainly continue to be explored.

By using the Cynefin Framework to consider the applicability of causality in the Literary Field, I stripped down the phenomenon of authors establishing an online presence into very simplistic terms – positioning it as an intervention into a Literary System, which I called Author Online Presence, intended to serve particular functions (primarily breaking down barriers between authors and readers). This is, of course, an oversimplification of a very complex and nuanced phenomenon. However, through this simplification, my thinking around the thesis transitioned from seeking to find solutions to interaction barriers, to considering why there are barriers in the first place and trying to find ways to respect them and the dynamics at play. I therefore stand by my process, and believe it was a helpful addition to the work.

Somebody once described the processes of doing a qualitative thesis to me as akin to trying to get an octopus into a jar. This analogy certainly befits how the last four years have felt. Sweaty, scratched-up and dishevelled, I had initially tried to coax and sometimes even wrestle the octopus in, focused on ensuring that all the parts of it I had analysed were clearly visible through the glass. But over time as my process developed, I came to

understand that my job had never been to get the octopus into the jar. Rather it was to appreciate the creature by exploring the fine details of how it looked, how it behaved and interacted, and perhaps even to start thinking like an octopus to consider which jar it would choose, and how it would reveal itself.

I hope this work will entice a whole host of octopus-wrangling enthusiasts into taking this research to the next stage, and to learn how the octopus may be supported to thrive in this ever-changing environment – to the benefit of both authors and readers alike.

8.4.1 Limitations of the work

In this thesis I determined how authors and readers experience interacting online in a range of platforms. As I used a qualitative approach in my empirical studies, my findings were based on low participant sample sizes. This approach was important to collating rich, inductive data, and gave a clear indication of some of the issues currently faced by both authors and readers, and how they correlated with similar findings in parallel fields such as music. Whilst I could have collated and analysed quantitative engagement metrics (e.g. examples of interaction around a particular author, or a specific online literary event), and considered various ways of doing so, I determined that doing so was not appropriate to my inquiry. Firstly, analysing what is visible online would have only shown what people are willing to present online. Prior research had already identified a bias towards positive presentation in online interactions, or often conversationally tangential to the central content or literary topic (see chapter 2.1.2). As such, my analysis would have been limited to my interpretation of something that may not show reality. With limited available theory to understand online interactions top-down, it would also have been difficult to interpret. I could have used qualitative account from my first study for comparison to support analysis of quantitative, automated data, however I felt that I still needed to verify, test, and build on those findings through additional qualitative data before it would be possible to do such an analysis proper justice. Such an approach could be used for future work, for example, to categorise interactions according to the Genres of Visibility I discussed in 8.2, having developed my understanding through the additional qualitative study.

I also wished to adhere to qualitative methods for other reasons. There have been few in-depth interview studies asking readers and, particularly, authors about their experiences online, and I felt it was important to address this gap. I believe there is still work to be done in collating more qualitative accounts, and it would be helpful to gather data from across a larger sample of participants to build on, and challenge, my findings.

Finally, I also wished to avoid using qualitative automated data in my second study for comparison, because I had identified online interactions as occurring between a Complex and Chaos system. Therefore, causality does not apply, and patterns in the data may be coincidental or fleeting. I wanted to be able to test out patterns I thought I had perceived in the first study through questioning, and wanted to remain open to new data completely changing my view on some of my interpretations, rather than seeking to verify them.

My decision to focus on authors and readers without including other agents (e.g. publishers of different sizes, literary agents) was intentional, as authors and readers are the people most directly involved in the online interactions I was interrogating. Or at least they are perceived as such - my findings revealed that readers, for example, are not always the intended audience of authors' practices, despite appearances. However the assumption that authors are going online to specifically engage with readers persists, and is largely unchallenged, regardless. I chose to speak to readers only for my second study because although they are perceived as the target audience, there have been limited efforts to find out if author practices deliver on their needs. This is particularly the case with genre fiction readers, who may sometimes be overlooked, in research domains such as my own, in favour of readers who associate with more traditionally high-brow, bookish values. There was much to learn from these two user groups alone, to make a strong contribution to knowledge in this area. Whilst I did not gather accounts from other agents such as publishers in this thesis, due to scope, the models I have presented could certainly be enriched by doing so in future work. Broadening the discussion through their involvement would also introduce new insight.

My research was also conducted with English speakers, the majority of whom lived in the British Isles. As such, my participant demographics were not representative of the full demographic of genre fiction readers and authors globally, and my findings cannot speak to alternative systems of publishing which may be prevalent in other countries. I believe that my study findings are likely to represent the experience of many authors and readers - certainly in Western cultures – particularly as I found parallels with other research from across the cultural fields conducted in the United States of America and Australia. But it is still likely that, had I conducted this work elsewhere, my findings would have differed.

A strength to my qualitative interviews was my use of a loosely structured format to follow my participants' lead through open questioning. This approach produced rich, varied data. A limitation was that so many different, interesting perspectives were raised by the participants that I had to filter and prioritise, to maintain clarity in my written thesis. Resultantly, some important findings - less pertinent to the focus of this thesis - have been lost through editing, which may be worthy of addressing in the future.

As I was reading prior literature into author and reader interactions, it struck me that the phenomenon has been considered (particularly in older research, but also in more contemporary work in the case of my own field, HCI) in overly simplified terms for a long time. Authors produce, readers consume, and the core interest of either party is the written work. I found this problematic, as there is more to their relationship than their interaction with and through texts, and the roles of author and reader do not fully define the complex, fully embodied humans who write and read them. However, in the first study (which I conducted before reviewing literature in depth) I fell into this trap somewhat myself, by advertising for ‘reader’ participants.

This prompted some confusion and uncertainty amongst potential study volunteers, too, who were uncertain, for example, of whether they read enough to be classified as a ‘reader’. Recruiting for authors was more clear-cut, but not without its difficulties (as I mentioned in chapter 3.5.1). In the final study I sought to dispel this division by using less exclusionary terminology when I advertised for volunteers. However, I received so many volunteers within hours of advertising on social media that my call was limited in a different way: my recruits had all seen my advertisement either through my close connections, or through staff at the British Library who had also shared the advert. This meant that most of my volunteers were people who had close connections to either the literary or academic world in some way. Had there been no pandemic, I would have liked to have advertised through posters in public spaces (e.g. coffee shops, supermarket noticeboards) to try and attract a broader demographic, but this was not possible due to restrictions on space-use and movement. In future work, it would be beneficial to trial alternative recruitment approaches to attract a breadth of viewpoints from people who enjoy reading fiction, whilst simultaneously avoiding exclusionary classifications of what this means.

Whilst I have described a broad, contextual background of literary practices and historical research, there are many influencing aspects that I have not been able to include in this work within the timeframe, and it is inevitable that other perspectives – some conciliant with, and some likely in opposition to my own – have been researched which could enrich the perspective shared here. However, I believe that my work has provided as faithful an account as possible within the timeframe, and, importantly, brings a new and needed perspective into the field of HCI, towards closing the gap between disciplinary knowledge. In future work, I would welcome collaboration with other research disciplines to enrich the perspective offered here.

Finally, in my research approach I did not observe interactions in social platforms directly, nor did I conduct experiments in situ (i.e. directly in the platforms) to observe the impact of change on the system’s inter-relational dynamics. To me, it was important to collect direct, qualitative accounts rather than to watch

behaviour and make assumptions about what they may mean particularly to tackle some of the prior assumptions made in research that did not hold with my participants. During my literature review, I had found that more studies observed behaviour than discussed it – particularly when it came to author participants, who are often difficult to access. My position in the British Library helped me to gain access to some authors I may otherwise not have been able to, and this was an unmissable opportunity, which contributed strongly to the body of related work.

I simulated the appearance of platforms using sketches in my final study in chapter 7 to minimise the gap created by interviewing rather than observing behaviour at the interface, as it allowed me to see how participants may respond to a platform or interaction within it. However, I did not enable participants to go through the actions they would follow if they were to encounter such a platform in the real world. As Sennett (2018) said, “anticipating what something is like before experiencing it can be a bad thing” (Sennett, 2018, p. 178) and the rituals people develop are created in place – not imagined beforehand (ibid.). My approach was quite abstract, and it is likely that what the participants anticipated in my study would likely play out a little differently in a real encounter to what they described would happen. There is usually a gap between what people think they will do, and what they actually do in the moment. To address this limitation, the work would ideally need to be continued through a longitudinal study, perhaps inclusive of ethnographic methods, to observe real-world examples of interactions with, and through, the platforms under investigation.

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Appendix A: Forms and materials from study 1 (Chapter 5)

Appendix A 1: Study One Ethics Form

Ethics Proportionate Review Application: Staff and Research Students

Computer Science Research Ethics Committee (CSREC)

Staff and research students in the Department of Computer Science undertaking research that involves human participation must apply for ethical review and approval before the research can commence. If the research is low-risk, an application can be submitted for a proportionate review using this form. Applicants are advised to read the information in the SMCSE Framework for Delegated Authority for Research Ethics prior to submitting an application.

There are two parts:

Part A: Ethics Checklist. The checklist determines whether the research is low-risk. If it is, Part B of the form should also be completed. If not, the checklist provides guidance as to where approval should be sought, but the checklist itself does not need to be submitted.

Part B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form. This part is the application for ethical approval of low-risk research and should only be completed if the answer to all questions (1 – 18) is NO.

Completed forms should be returned to the Chair of CSREC by email (s.m.wilson@city.ac.uk).

Part A: Ethics Checklist

If your answer to any of the following questions (1 – 3) is YES, you must apply to an appropriate external ethics committee for approval:		<i>Delete as appropriate</i>
1.	Does your research require approval from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES)? (E.g. because you are recruiting current NHS patients or staff? If you are unsure, please check at http://www.hra.nhs.uk/research-community/before-you-apply/determine-which-review-body-approvals-are-required/)	No
2.	Will you recruit any participants who fall under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act? (Such research needs to be approved by an external ethics committee such as NRES or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee http://www.scie.org.uk/research/ethics-committee/)	No
3.	Will you recruit any participants who are currently under the auspices of the Criminal Justice System, for example, but not limited to, people on remand, prisoners and those on probation? (Such research needs to be authorised by the ethics approval system of the National Offender Management Service.)	No

If your answer to any of the following questions (4 – 11) is YES, you must apply to the Senate Research Ethics Committee for approval (unless you are applying to an external ethics committee):		<i>Delete as appropriate</i>
4.	Does your research involve participants who are unable to give informed consent, for example, but not limited to, people who may have a degree of learning disability or mental health problem, that means they are unable to make an informed decision on their own behalf?	No
5.	Is there a risk that your research might lead to disclosures from participants concerning their involvement in illegal activities?	No

6.	Is there a risk that obscene and or illegal material may need to be accessed for your research study (including online content and other material)?	No
7.	Does your research involve participants disclosing information about sensitive subjects?	No
8.	Does your research involve the researcher travelling to another country outside of the UK, where the Foreign & Commonwealth Office has issued a travel warning? (http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/)	No
9.	Does your research involve invasive or intrusive procedures? For example, these may include, but are not limited to, electrical stimulation, heat, cold or bruising.	No
10.	Does your research involve animals?	No
11.	Does your research involve the administration of drugs, placebos or other substances to study participants?	No

If your answer to any of the following questions (12 – 18) is YES, you must submit a full application to the Computer Science Research Ethics Committee (CSREC) for approval (unless you are applying to an external ethics committee or the Senate Research Ethics Committee). Your application may be referred to the Senate Research Ethics Committee.		<i>Delete as appropriate</i>
12.	Does your research involve participants who are under the age of 18?	No
13.	Does your research involve adults who are vulnerable because of their social, psychological or medical circumstances (vulnerable adults)? This includes adults with cognitive and / or learning disabilities, adults with physical disabilities and older people.	No
14.	Does your research involve participants who are recruited because they are staff or students of City University London? For example, students studying on a particular course or module. (If yes, approval is also required from the Head of Department or Programme Director.)	No
15.	Does your research involve intentional deception of participants?	No
16.	Does your research involve participants taking part without their informed consent?	No
17.	Does your research pose a risk to participants greater than that in normal working life?	No
18.	Does your research pose a risk to you, the researcher(s), greater than that in normal working life?	No

You must make a proportionate review application to the CSREC if your research involves human participation and you are not submitting any other ethics application (i.e. your answer to all questions 1 – 18 is “NO”).

Part B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form

If you answered NO to all questions 1 – 18, you may use this part of the form to submit an application for a proportionate ethics review of your research. The form must be accompanied by all relevant information sheets, consent forms and interview/questionnaire schedules.

Note that all research participants should be fully informed about: the purpose of the research; the procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including information about what they will be asked to do, what data will be collected, how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long it will be kept; the fact that they can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Background Information	
Name:	Carol Butler carol.butler@city.ac.uk
Supervisor (if student):	Dr Stephann Makri (City University) and Ian Cooke (British Library)

Your Research Project	
Title:	Digital Publishing Technologies and the Reader: Investigating Technology-Mediated Interactions between authors and readers around digital documents
Start date:	17 th April 2017
End date:	30 th September 2020

Traditionally, communications between author and reader have been mediated through a hierarchical publishing structure: an author creates their work, embedding their intended meaning, which is then published and distributed for reader consumption. The reader then digests and interprets the work, applying their personal frames of references and preconceptions of authorial meaning, as they read.

Exchange of questions and feedback between parties has always occurred outside of these reading and writing acts, and the impact of this exchange on shaping an author's work well documented. However, in the past it has been mediated through the publishing chain (e.g. through letters: sent privately via an author's agent, or published in newspaper digests); constrained by available technology and largely only possible after a finished work has been made available. As such, this communication has been somewhat slow and limited.

Today, a range of networked, electronic tools enable instant, multidirectional exchanges on a global scale, which are used by communities of authors and readers to interact directly. Some of these tools are intended for the purpose, and others, such as generic social media, are appropriated by reading communities to enable their desired activities.

This exploratory study investigates the role played by technology in mediating these interactions from the perspectives of authors and readers, to determine how it may be better supported.

The study will explore the following main research questions:

- RQ1 What interaction behaviour is evident amongst authors and readers online?
- RQ2 What intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive this behaviour?
- RQ3 What functionality mediates the interactions held within existing tools?
- RQ4 What limitations and constraints impact interaction behaviour?
- RQ5 How do interactions contribute to the shaping and development of content?

The literary sub-genres of Young Adult (YA) Fiction and Historical Fiction have been chosen as the focal domain* as they attract a broad demographic of readers and authors, and vibrant activity.

A series of semi-structured interviews will be conducted in two stages:

1) With a maximum of 24 authors of these sub-genres, all of whom use technology to interact in relation to their reading and writing. Authors who have been previously published through traditional means will be recruited, alongside those who have not, to identify any contrast in motivations and interactivity

2) With a maximum of 20 readers who are members of online reading communities relating to the two sub-genres

Participants will be recruited through a combination of direct referrals (of authors and readers associated with the British Library and the wider network of the researcher); networking at publishing events and through advertisement within readership social networking groups, e.g on Twitter and GoodReads.

There will be an initial screening to ensure volunteers meet the following recruitment criteria for the study:

- They are over 18
- They are either an author or reader of YA and/or Historical Fiction
- They use digital tools to interact with others online in relation to their reading and/or writing, relating to one or both of these sub-genres
- They are able to attend a face-to-face interview (in person or online)

Participants will then be asked to attend a face-to-face interview session, up to one-hour in duration, held in a privately booked room at City, University of London or the British Library (BL). Due to their close links with the BL, it may also be possible to book a private room in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, should an alternative location be required.

Alternative arrangements may be made (e.g. should participants live outside of London), to interview using remote video call (e.g. through Google Hangouts or Skype), to enable face-to-face discussion and screen sharing, however in-person interviews are preferred.

Care will be taken to ensure that only adult participants over 18 and are recruited, who may not be considered vulnerable through their participation in the study.

The study will be structured in three key stages:

- 1) The Participation Information Sheet will be sent to participants by email at least 1 week before the interview. This will then be read out loud and discussed on the day, and the Consent Form reviewed and signed once agreed, making clear that participation is voluntary. Participants will be given a copy of the Consent Form to keep
- 2) Participants will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire form
- 3) A semi-structured interview will be conducted, using a series of themed questions as prompts. Some areas of the interview will be less structured than others, with the participant's responses guiding the direction of discussion, within these themes. Participants will be asked to show examples of the typical interactions, using their own devices. This will help illustrate the behaviour and actions they are describing, and to introduce the researcher to the tools' functionality where previously unfamiliar. Permission will be requested in the Consent Form for photographs to be taken of key interaction points where appropriate and helpful to the study. If an interview is held through video call, screen sharing can be used to show interactions on their computer, which can then be captured with a screen shot. Similarly, if on a mobile device, the video camera can be used to the same ends, again with prior permission, as per face-to-face interviews

Once study data has been gathered, all identifying data will be anonymised and participants will be represented through randomly assigned ID numbers. Names will not be associated with any other collected data and will not appear in any reports or presentations. Any photographs taken will also be anonymised, obscuring their face and any identifying features (e.g. tattoos), and ensuring that no personal information captured from their devices is visible.

Audio recordings will be transcribed and analysed using an inductive approach, identifying emergent patterns in the data through application of thematic coding. The following sensitising concepts derived from related literature will lay the foundations for initial interrogation of the data, in relation to the research questions:

i) interaction behaviour with the community; ii) goals and motivations; iii) use of current tools; pain points with current tools and gaps in functionality for which they find workarounds (electronic or otherwise) or are unable to perform; iv) how feedback, comments and any demographic data is used to inform and develop authors' ongoing and future writing

Data captured will also help develop insight into further matters such as preferred community size; management of community roles such as mentoring and gatekeeping; and recurrent activities that shape the infrastructure of these communities, which exist outside of the traditional institutional control and as such are somewhat self-regulating.

All study data will be stored securely with paper copies of forms kept in a locked draw and scanned, with electronic copies password protected and backed up. Access to data will be given only to myself, my supervisors (Dr Stephann Makri and Dr Andrew McFarlane at City, and Ian Cook and Stella Wisdom at the BL) and external examiners, should this be required.
Should any participants choose to withdraw from the study at any time, data gathered about them will be destroyed and not used.

Attachments (these must be provided if applicable):	Delete as appropriate
Participant information sheet(s)	Yes
Consent form(s)	Yes
Questionnaire(s)	Yes
Topic guide(s) for interviews and focus groups	Yes
Permission from external organisations (e.g. for recruitment of participants)	Yes

Appendix A 2: Study One Recruitment Advertisement (separate for authors and readers)

Are you a Reader of Literary Fiction?

If so, your help is needed!

Who am I and what am I up to?

I am a PhD student working on a joint research project at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design at City, University of London and The British Library.

I am researching how authors and readers communicating with each other online is influencing how people read and write, and how technology could be better designed to support their needs.

Through their active involvement with this project, The British Library are interested in identifying types of writing and cultural activity that they have not previously collected. Findings from this study will be used to help them develop their future policies for collection and preservation, along with their future service design.

How can you help?

I am looking for readers to participate in an interview, to discuss their experience in communicating online about reading and writing.

Interviews will last between 45 mins and 1hr, and will be arranged to suit your availability.

To take part participants must:

- 1) Be over 18
- 2) Be a reader of Fiction (written for Young Adults or older)
- 3) Use digital tools to interact with readers and/or authors online
- 4) Be able to commit to a face to face interview. This can be in person or online (e.g. through Skype or similar)

During the interview I will ask you to discuss how and where you interact with others in relation to your reading, and to show me some examples of how you use the technology to do this. I will ask to see this on your own device (e.g. phone or laptop) to help illustrate what you are describing, and to help me understand how the technology facilitates it. No personal data from your device will be collected or shared- your confidentiality is very important.

If you're interested in helping with this exciting project, and influencing future library policy and technology, please get in touch and we can discuss!

You can contact me at carol.butler@city.ac.uk

Are you a Fiction Author?

If so, your help is needed!

Who am I and what am I up to?

I am a PhD student working on a joint research project at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design at City, University of London and The British Library.

I am researching how authors and readers communicating with each other online is influencing how people read and write, and how technology could be better designed to support their needs.

Through their active involvement with this project, The British Library are interested in identifying types of writing and cultural activity that they have not previously collected. Findings from this study will be used to help them develop their future policies for collection and preservation, along with their future service design.

How can you help?

I am looking for authors to participate in an interview, to discuss their experience in communicating online about reading and writing.

Interviews will last between 45 mins and 1hr, and will be arranged to suit your availability.

To take part participants must:

- 1) Be over 18
- 2) Be an author of Fiction (writing for an adult or young adult audience - writers of children's fiction are excluded from this study)
- 3) Use digital tools to interact with readers and/or authors online
- 4) Be able to commit to a face to face interview. This can be in person or online (e.g. through Skype or similar)

During the interview I will ask you to discuss how and where you interact with others in relation to your writing and reading, and to show me some examples of how you use the technology to do this. I will ask to see this on your own device (e.g. phone or laptop) to help illustrate what you are describing, and to help me understand how the technology facilitates it. No personal data from your device will be collected or shared- your confidentiality is very important.

If you're interested in helping with this exciting project, and influencing future library policy and technology, please get in touch and we can discuss!

To take part, you can contact me at carol.butler@city.ac.uk (Twitter: @fantomascarol)

[Appendix A 3: Study One Participant Information Sheets \(separate for readers and authors\)](#)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study: Digital Publishing Technologies and the Reader: Investigating Technology-Mediated Interactions between authors and readers around digital documents

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am a PhD student working on a joint research project at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design (HCID) at City, University of London and The British Library.

I am researching how the ease of rapid, multidirectional communication online shapes an authors' writing, with their readers more freely able to contact them with feedback and questions than ever before, and with authors able to access information about their audience and their interests.

The aim of my research is to understand how readers and authors communicate using online tools, in order to share feedback, ask questions and discuss written work, and how technology could be better designed to support people's needs. I am interested in where this activity is happening, what people talk about and why.

Through their active involvement with this project, The British Library are interested in identifying areas of writing and cultural activity that have not previously been collected. Findings from this study will be used to help them develop their future policies for collection and preservation.

By better understanding what people want from the technology too, through the expertise of the Centre for HCID, the study will also help them to consider the services they offer to readers and authors, and how better their needs could be supported.

Why have I been invited?

I am inviting readers of Young Adult (YA) and Historical Fiction to discuss their experience with communicating with other readers and authors through digital tools, in a face-to-face interview.

If there are any difficulties readers face using online tools, or things that they wish they could do but cannot at present, I am interested in that too as it will help us consider how needs can be better supported by technology.

You do not need to be an expert with tech, but you do need to have an online presence, and experience in talking about and sharing activities with readers and authors online- preferably quite often.

Ideally I would like to see some examples of how you interact using these tools on your own device - perhaps your smartphone, or laptop - whatever you normally use, as this will help me to understand exactly what you do, and to identify things that could be improved for you.

You must also be at least 18 years old and able to attend a face-to-face interview.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary- it is up to you whether or not you take part. If you do choose to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, but will remain free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You will not be penalised or disadvantaged in any way, and any data that we have already collected about you will be destroyed, and discounted from the study.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate, we will arrange a face-to-face interview, at a time that's convenient to you. If you are in the London area, this can be at City, University Of London, or the British Library. If you are not, then we can arrange a video chat using Skype or similar. The interview will take between 45 mins and 1 hour, and will be structured as follows:

1. 1) We will discuss the study and any questions you may have about what it entails, after which you will be asked to sign a consent form
2. 2) You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire
3. 3) You will be interviewed about your involvement in online reading communities, and what the experience is like for you. Although there are some key points I wish to cover, the interview will predominantly be like an informal chat, as I wish to learn from your experiences rather than to direct you. The interview will be captured using audio recording. At times I may ask you to show me examples of what you are talking about, so that I can better understand what you are describing. With your consent, I may ask to take some photographs of what you are doing with the technology, to help me better record what you have shared with me. If any photos are taken you can be assured that no personal or identifying information will be shared with anyone, as your confidentiality and privacy is of utmost importance.
4. 4) At the end, I will ask if you have any questions or further points you'd like to add, that may not have come up already

This is an exploratory study, with the aim of finding out more about your experience and motivations to engage with reader communities - it is not a test of your ability or an

experiment. Data analysis will mostly be qualitative, looking at trends emerging from what different readers have said, and will be used to inform my next studies.

What do I have to do?

I ask that you partake in the discussion openly, as I am interested in learning about your experiences - good and bad, so that I can understand how future technology could potentially support you better. Ideally, as mentioned, I'd like you to show me what you do when interacting with reading communities – perhaps on your phone or a laptop, depending on what you usually use. This isn't a test of your abilities with technology at all- it's just to try and better understand what happens when you use it and what tasks you perform.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks or disadvantages to you associated with taking part in the study. As mentioned, you are welcome to withdraw at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in the study, you will contribute to an understanding of why and how people communicate about reading and writing, and how technology could better improve their experience.

The insight you give can help shape the way that the British Library preserves cultural knowledge in the future, and what new content could be collected. In turn, this may impact how other institutions and libraries work in the future too.

Through better understanding of how you use the technology, and how it potentially could be changed for the better, your participation could help contribute to a better experience for reader communities and how you interact in the future.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Study data will be stored for 10 years, as standard policy for university studies, and then will be destroyed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. The only people who will have access to the data collected will be me, my supervisors (Dr Stephann Makri and Dr Andy MacFarlane at City, University Of London, and Ian Cooke and Stella Wisdom at the British Library), and the external examiners assessing my project. All data; including photographs; transcriptions of the audio recordings; and demographic questionnaires; will be anonymised once it is collected, and stored securely. Your name and any identifying information, will not be associated with the data, and will not appear in any reports or presentations. The records will be stored digitally and backed up, under password protection.

What will happen to results of the research study?

The study will be written up to form a part of my PhD thesis, and the results used to inform my next studies during the PhD project. I hope also to submit my findings for academic publication in conferences and international journals in the fields of Human-Computer Interaction and Digital Humanities. It is likely, therefore, that it will also be presented at

talks and conferences. Wherever findings from the study may be shared, rest assured your confidentiality remains important and will be upheld.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: "Digital Publishing and the Reader"

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg

Research Governance & Compliance Manager Research & Enterprise City, University of London Northampton Square
London

EC1V 0HB

Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Computer Science Research Ethics Committee

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Carol Butler

Primary PhD Supervisors: Dr Stephann Makri Ian Cooke

carol.butler@city.ac.uk

stephann@city.ac.uk ian.cooke@bl.uk

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study: Digital Publishing Technologies and the Reader: Investigating Technology-Mediated Interactions between authors and readers around digital documents

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am a PhD student working on a joint research project at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design (HCID) at City, University of London and The British Library.

I am researching how the ease of rapid, multidirectional communication online shapes an authors' writing- with their readers more freely able to contact them with feedback and questions than ever before, and with authors able to access information about their audience and their interests.

The aim of my research is to understand how readers and authors communicate using online tools to share feedback, ask questions and discuss written work, and how technology could be better designed to support their needs. I am interested in where this activity is happening, what people talk about and why.

Through their active involvement with this project, The British Library are interested in identifying areas of writing and cultural activity that have not previously been collected. Findings from this study will be used to help them develop their future policies for collection and preservation.

By better understanding what people want from the technology too, through the expertise of the Centre for HCID, the study will also help them to consider the services they offer to readers and authors, and how better their needs could be supported.

Why have I been invited?

I am inviting authors of Young Adult (YA) and Historical Fiction to discuss their experience with communicating with readers through digital tools in a face-to-face interview. I am interested in talking to authors who have been published through traditional means, as well as aspiring authors who have not been published (and may, or may not, wish to be).

If there are any difficulties authors face using online tools, or things that they wish they could do but cannot at present, I am interested in that too as it will help us consider how their needs can be better supported by technology.

You do not need to be an expert with tech, but you do need to have an online presence, and experience in talking to your readers online- preferably quite often. It may be that you publish your work digitally and leave it open to reader feedback in one (or more) websites. Alternatively, you may use platforms such as your own website or social media to answer reader's questions and converse with them, without showing your work in these spaces.

Ideally I would like to see some examples of how you interact using these tools on your own device - perhaps your smartphone, or laptop - whatever you normally use, as this will help me to understand exactly what you do, and to identify things that could be improved for you.

You must also be at least 18 years old and able to attend a face-to-face interview.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary- it is up to you whether or not you take part. If you do choose to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, but will remain free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You will not be penalised or disadvantaged in any way, and any data that we have already collected about you will be destroyed, and discounted from the study.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate, we will arrange a face-to-face interview, at a time that's convenient to you. If you are in the London area, this can be at City, University of London, or the British Library. If you are not, then we can arrange a video chat using Skype or similar. The interview will take between 45 mins and 1 hour, and will be structured as follows:

- 1) We will discuss the study and any questions you may have about what it entails, after which you will be asked to sign a consent form
- 2) You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire
- 3) You will be interviewed about your involvement in online reading communities, and what the experience is like for you. Although there are some key points I wish to cover, the interview will predominantly be like an informal chat, as I wish to learn from your experiences rather than to direct you. The interview will be captured using audio recording. At times I may ask you to show me examples of what you are talking about, so that I can better understand what you are describing. With your consent, I may ask to take some photographs of what you are doing with the technology, to help me better record what you have shared with me. If any photos are taken you can be assured that no personal or identifying information will be shared with anyone, as your confidentiality and privacy is of utmost importance.
- 4) At the end, I will ask if you have any questions or further points you'd like to add, that may not have come up already

This is an exploratory study, with the aim of finding out more about your experience and motivations to engage with reader communities - it is not a test of your ability or an experiment. Data analysis will mostly be qualitative, looking at trends emerging from what different authors have said, and will be used to inform my next studies.

What do I have to do?

I ask that you partake in the discussion openly, as I am interested in learning about your experiences - good and bad, so that I can understand how future technology could potentially support you better. Ideally, as mentioned, I'd like you to show me what you when interacting with reading communities – perhaps on your phone or a laptop, depending on what you usually use. This isn't a test of your abilities with technology at all- it's just to try and better understand what happens when you use it and what tasks you perform.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks or disadvantages to you associated with taking part in the study. As mentioned, you are welcome to withdraw at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in the study, you will contribute to an understanding of why and how people communicate about reading and writing, and how technology could better improve their experience.

The insight you give can help shape the way that the British Library preserves cultural knowledge in the future, and what new content could be collected. In turn, this may impact how other institutions and libraries work in the future too.

Through better understanding of how you use the technology, and how it potentially could be changed for the better, your participation could help contribute to a better experience for reader communities and how you interact in the future.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Study data will be stored for 10 years, as standard policy for university studies, and then will be destroyed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. The only people who will have access to the data collected will be me, my supervisors (Dr Stephann Makri and Dr Andy MacFarlane at City, University of London, and Ian Cooke and Stella Wisdom at the British Library), and the external examiners assessing my project. All data, including photographs, transcriptions of the audio recordings, and demographic questionnaires, will be anonymised once it is collected, and stored securely. Your name and any identifying information, will not be associated with the data, and will not appear in any reports or presentations. The records will be stored digitally and backed up, under password protection.

What will happen to results of the research study?

The study will be written up to form a part of my PhD thesis, and the results used to inform my next studies during the PhD project. I hope also to submit my findings for academic publication in conferences and international journals in the fields of Human-Computer

Interaction and Digital Humanities. It is likely, therefore, that it will also be presented at talks and conferences. Wherever findings from the study may be shared, rest assured your confidentiality remains important and will be upheld.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: "Digital Publishing and the Reader"

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg

Research Governance & Compliance Manager Research & Enterprise, City, University of London Northampton Square
London

EC1V 0HB

Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Computer Science Research Ethics Committee

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Carol Butler

Primary PhD Supervisors: Dr Stephann Makri Ian Cooke

carol.butler@city.ac.uk

stephann@city.ac.uk ian.cooke@bl.uk

Appendix A 4: Study One Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: **Digital Publishing Technologies and the Reader**: Investigating Technology-Mediated Interactions between authors and readers around digital documents

Please initial box

1.	<p>I confirm that I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.</p> <p>I understand this will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being interviewed by the researcher • allow the interview to be audiotaped • completing questionnaires asking me about demographic information • making myself available for a further interview should that be required • using my own computer or electronic device (e.g. smartphone) to illustrate examples of my typical use of digital tools to interact with others in relation to reading and writing • Where appropriate, allowing photographs to be taken of me using my device for specific tasks • Where appropriate, allowing photographs to be taken of the screen on my device for specific tasks 	
2.	<p>This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop understanding and theory surrounding interaction behaviour amongst readers and authors online • To inform British Library collection and service design policies • To develop design guidelines to better address interaction needs in reading community technologies • To form part of the researchers PhD Thesis, and to identify appropriate areas of further study for the Thesis • Results from the study may be used to form part of a published research paper <p>I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisations other than City, University of London and the British Library.</p>	
3.	<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.</p>	
4.	<p>I agree to City, University of London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.</p>	
5.	<p>I agree to take part in the above study.</p>	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix A 5: Demographic Questionnaires

Demographic Questionnaire: Author

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What genre do you write for? (please circle)
 - a) Young Adult Fiction
 - b) Historical Fiction
 - c) Other (please state):
4. Which of the following best fits you:
 - a) My work has been published through a traditional publishing contract
 - b) I have self-published my work
 - c) I have been published traditionally, and self-published
 - d) My work has not been previously published, but would like to in the future
 - e) My work has not been previously published, and I do not wish for it to be in the future
5. If your work has been published before, please confirm through what formats: (circle as many as appropriate)
 - a) Print
 - b) Ebook
 - c) Audiobook
 - d) Other (please state) _____

Demographic Questionnaire: Reader

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What genre do you read and communicate about online? (please circle)
 - a) YA Fiction
 - b) Historical Fiction
 - c) Other (please state):

Appendix A 6: Guiding questions for interview (readers and authors separately)

Interview Prompts- READERS

- Where marked “SHOW ME?”, participants will be asked to show an example, using their device, of the type of interaction behaviour they are talking about.

What activity and where? (RQ1, RQ2)

Covering topics such as:
What tools used (“SHOW ME?” if unknown)

<p>What are they used for and when (“SHOW ME?”) What are the motivations for use</p>
<p>Interacting with the community (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)</p> <p>Covering topics such as:</p> <p>How they interact with the community or individual authors and readers (“SHOW ME?”) Any problems faced as a result, and any benefits Impact of size, groups, prior relationships and community participation on their interaction Time spent interacting and factors such as length/volume/time influencing commitment to interacting Comparison between speaking online and in person re reading activities Type of interactions held with others – including interesting examples (“SHOW ME?”)</p>
<p>Technology - Functionality, limitations, constraints (RQ3, RQ4)</p> <p>Covering topics such as:</p> <p>How track and navigate new messages and updates Switching between tools for different tasks or replication of effort across different tools (if so why) Tool specific issues and workarounds (“SHOW ME?”) Anything desired from tools that isn’t possible? Exporting/Downloading/Saving from tools Relation between tool use and reading of physical books Impact of change within a tool (functionality change, tool closure or merger, etc)</p>
<p>Wrap up</p>
<p>Do you think (or hope) the way you communicate about reading/writing will change in the future?</p>
<p>Do you have any comments you’d like to add, or questions to ask?</p>

Interview Prompts- Authors

- Where marked “SHOW ME?”, participants will be asked to show an example, using their device, of the type of interaction behaviour they are talking about.

<p>What activity and where? (RQ1, RQ2)</p> <p>Covering topics such as:</p> <p>What tools used (“SHOW ME?” if unknown) What are they used for and when (“SHOW ME?”) What are the motivations for use</p> <p>Author specific prompts:</p>
<p>Is this different to or an extension of how you relate with readers offline?</p>
<p>Do you feel that this differs for authors who have an agent, to those who do not?</p>
<p>Do you self-publish any of your written work on any tools?</p>
<p>If yes, does this impact how you connect with your readers?</p>

Interacting with the community (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

Covering topics such as:

How they interact with the community or individual authors and readers (“SHOW ME?”)

Any problems faced as a result, and any benefits

Impact of size, groups, prior relationships and community participation on their interaction

Time spent interacting and factors such as length/volume/time influencing commitment to interacting

Comparison between speaking online and in person re reading activities

Type of interactions held with others – including interesting examples (“SHOW ME?”)

Author specific prompts:

Do you find it any different to the way you would communicate with your readers in person?

Do you consider this to be a leisure activity or part of your job?

Do you use any of these tools as a reader, rather than an author?

If yes, how do you use it and do you see any differences in the way you interact?

If yes, do you find it easy (or necessary) to separate your roles? (e.g. separate accounts? Pseudonyms? Friends lists? Privacy settings?)

Could anything help make this easier for you?

Are there periods where your activity is higher than others, e.g. when publicising a new release?

If yes, do you interact in different (or more) ways during such times?

Technology - Functionality, limitations, constraints (RQ3, RQ4)

Covering topics such as:

How track and navigate new messages and updates

Switching between tools for different tasks or replication of effort across different tools (if so why)

Tool specific issues and workarounds (“SHOW ME?”)

Anything desired from tools that isn't possible?

Exporting/Downloading/Saving from tools

Relation between tool use and reading of physical books

Impact of change within a tool (functionality change, tool closure or merger, etc)

Author specific prompts:

Do you use any tracking data provided by tools, e.g. demographics and read-time stats? (SHOW ME?)

Impact on author's work (RQ5)

Does communicating through the tools impact your work? If yes, how?

Have you changed any of your work because of it? How?

Do you feel it puts you under any pressure to work differently/more quickly/other?

If yes, is this good or bad?

Have you made new useful connections or taken part in any collaborative work as a result of these communications?

Wrap up

Do you think (or hope) the way you communicate about reading/writing will change in the future?

Do you have any comments you'd like to add, or questions to ask?

Appendix B: Forms and materials from study 2 (Chapter 7)

Appendix B 1: Study Two Ethics Form

Ethics ETH1920-2042: Miss Carol Butler (Low risk): Application

Title	Digital Publishing, Technology and the Reader
Principal Applicant	Miss Carol Butler
Department	Computer Science
School	School of Mathematics, Computer Science & Engineering
Supervisor	Dr Alex Taylor

Risks

R1) Does the project have funding?

Yes

R2) Does the project involve human participants?

Yes

R3) Will the researcher be located outside of the UK during the conduct of the research?

Yes

R4) Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, involve collaboration between institutions, or involve data collection at an external organisation?

Yes

R5) Does your project involve access to, or use of, terrorist or extremist material that could be classified as security sensitive?

No

R6) Does the project involve the use of live animals?

No

R7) Does the project involve the use of animal tissue?

No

R8) Does the project involve accessing obscene materials?

No

R9) Does the project involve access to confidential business data (e.g. commercially sensitive data, trade secrets, minutes of internal meetings)?

No

R10) Does the project involve access to personal data (e.g. personnel or student records) not in the public domain*?

No

R11) Does the project involve deviation from standard or routine clinical practice, outside of current guidelines?

No

R12) Will the project involve the potential for adverse impact on employment, social or financial standing?

No

R13) Will the project involve the potential for psychological distress, anxiety, humiliation or pain greater than that of normal life for the participant?

No

R15) Will the project involve research into illegal or criminal activity where there is a risk that the researcher will be placed in physical danger or in legal jeopardy?

No

R16) Will the project specifically recruit individuals who may be involved in illegal or criminal activity?

No

R17) Will the project involve engaging individuals who may be involved in terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or violent activity and other activity that falls within the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015)?

No

Applicant & research team

T1) Principal Applicant

Name

[Miss Carol Butler](#)

T2) Co-Applicant(s) at City

T3) External Co-Applicant(s)

T4) Supervisor(s)

[Dr Alex Taylor](#)

T5) Do any of the investigators have direct personal involvement in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest?

No

T6) Will any of the investigators receive any personal benefits or incentives, including payment above normal salary, from undertaking the research or from the results of the research above those normally associated with scholarly activity?

No

T7) List anyone else involved in the project.

Ian Cooke and Stella Wisdom at the British Library - both supervisors on the project, which is part of a Collaborative Doctoral Studentship PhD.

Also second City supervisor Andrew McFarlane and Stephann Makri (currently on leave).

Project details

P1) Project title

Digital Publishing, Technology and the Reader

P1.1) Short project title

Investigating Readers' Perceptions of Authors' Online Activity

P2) Provide a lay summary of the background and aims of the research, including the research questions (max 400 words).

This PhD investigates how and why contemporary fiction authors and readers interact online, and considers the role HCI design could play in supporting their evolving needs.

Through empirical research, the project has highlighted several constraints and shortfalls in current interaction support. It also uncovered a background of misconceptions regarding the purpose of author/reader interactions, e.g. that it leads to increased book sales, or that it necessarily leads to richer conversations between author and reader (and that this is desirable to both).

Furthermore, it has highlighted a tendency for past research to focus on a restricted conceptualisation of what it is to be a reader, leading to design support that overlooks the needs of a broader spectrum of readership.

These findings raise questions around the appropriateness of a) how the problem of supporting interactions is typically interrogated, and b) the value of current mediation, and whether *what* is being facilitated (as opposed to specifically *how* it is facilitated) is congruent with user needs.

This study will build on previous research findings to further interrogate how readers experience current author/reader mediation online, and how they perceive its value. Key challenges identified in prior research will be shared with participants through sketched representations of possible solutions, acting as a discussion prompt. Rather than a prototype tool for refining the affordances of any specific design idea, the sketches are intended as an opening-up exercise to advance conversation with readers; to learn of how a change in mediation to address the issues may be received, and to elicit further, unanticipated needs and challenges from readers' perspectives.

The study will address the following research questions:

RQ1: At a conceptual level, in what ways may interface design account for supporting the differing needs and perspectives of authors and readers?

RQ2: What challenges arise if the current mediation is changed to shift power dynamics between authors and readers, in relation to the following areas:

- Author autonomy, reader control, 3rd party mediation, user visibility?

RQ3: How might such interface designs sit alongside the publishing industry?

RQ4: At a conceptual level, how might HCI design methodology be adapted to account for the fluid, changing dynamics of a complex system?

The PhD contributes an enriched understanding of user experiences with current mediation support, and of how dispositions and behavioural trends in the literary field influence the mediation and how it evolves. This study will work towards addressing the current gap in reader representation by extending participation to a broader range of readers, to elicit different perceptions of the value of current support. By introducing a range of ideas to prompt exploratory discussion, it will also identify further constraints and opportunities to consider for designing future interventions for mediation.

P4) Provide a summary and brief explanation of the research design, method, and data analysis.

For ease of reading, a word document containing the following summary has been uploaded.

METHODOLOGY:

The study uses a qualitative, interpretive approach to help open-up the potential design space, rather than a reductive, narrowing approach to find the 'right' design. The study will not deliver clear-cut design requirements nor make generalisable statements about user needs. Rather, it will compile incomplete glimpses about readers' perspectives and how they are disposed to respond to changes, to discover more about the potential design space and to spark design inspiration.

The study approach draws on a method from a branch of complexity theory called the Cynefin Framework (Snowden, 2005) and from complementary HCI methods. The Cynefin Framework has been used previously in this project to help build a more nuanced understanding of interactions and dynamics in the literary field. The work posits that the literary field (and in turn, online interactions between authors and readers) to be primarily be a complex system- a system domain* in which linear causality does not hold. As such, a traditional, positivistic study approach geared toward finding a single solution for a well-defined problem (an approach that assumes linear cause and effect) would be ineffective. Instead, an approach embracing non-linearity is needed, to explore tensions, generate insights and expose multiple perspectives (Greenhalgh & Papoutsis, 2018) to better understand how the system may respond to change. The Cynefin method involves using multiple, safe-to-fail probing experiments in parallel, as an oblique means of observing and learning about how the system responds to change. By introducing multiple ideas, the technique focuses not on testing ideas to narrow them down to the best solution, but on uncovering what would make each idea fail (Snowden, 2011), to learn from the failure. This method helps build understanding of how people in the system are disposed to respond to change, to help better understand what overall direction of change would be beneficial to introduce.

The approach was developed for industry use, where a system is bounded by, for example, ownership of a particular company or setting. Author and reader interactions, in contrast, take place across multiple online sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, forums) run by different 3rd parties - dispersed rather than bounded, necessitating a more abstract approach to gathering insight.

There have been calls for HCI to develop strategies for researching and designing in complex systems, but work in the area is in its infancy (e.g. Blandford, 2019). This study addresses that gap by testing a novel method which combines the basic principles of the Cynefin method of parallel probing with parallel design (e.g. Dow et al., 2010; Tohidi, Buxton, Baecker, & Seilen, 2006) participatory design (e.g. Neate, Bourazeri, Roper, Stumpf, & Wilson, 2019), the use of probes (e.g. Boehner, Vertesi, Sengers, & Dourish, 2007; Gaver, Boucher, Pennington, & Walker, 2004) and sketches (Buxton, 2007). Sketches depicting potential, coherent ideas for change will be shown to participants. These will act, in part, as probes, to introduce new challenges to help expose reader perspectives, and to enhance interview discussion (Kara, 2015). The sketches will resemble low-fidelity design prototypes of Twitter (currently used extensively for author/reader interactions) and will introduce affordances similar to those of Kickstarter and Patreon, which have been predicted in the prior work as a likely direction for authors to follow in the future.

Unlike an HCI evaluation involving prototypes, the sketches will be disposable, suggestive, and presented as a range of ideas amongst many other possibles, rather than acting as definitive, isolated ideas to be refined for development (in keeping with Buxton's definition of sketching (Buxton, 2007).

Drawing from HCI probing methods, user feedback will not be gathered to narrow options or to user-test interface affordances. Instead, they will be an exploratory tool, tested to see how they fail, with an expectation (as per the Cynefin method) that none of the ideas presented will be developed for future design. The sketches will effectively serve as a springboard for design speculation (Boehner et al., 2007). Participants will also be encouraged to share their own ideas in response, either verbally or through sketches of their own, alluding to participatory design techniques. Open-ended questions and discussion around the sketched ideas will focus on testing the validity of the researcher's understanding of the design space (rather than testing the specific sketched ideas), raising new, important design challenges (which may supersede those previously considered), and embracing the complexity of the system, rather than seek to minimise it.

In the Cynefin method, parallel probes typically depict small changes of direction from the current status quo, which either amplify or dampen current constraints. Pierre Bourdieu, a prolific scholar in literary studies, identified power as the most constant and prolific struggle within the literary field (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993) and evidence of this was rife in the difficulties author and reader participants discussed in our previous study. Therefore this study will explore ideas that alter constraints of power in the system: some sketches suggest greater power in the hands of the authors over what content they share and how, and others transfer greater power to the reader or a mediator (e.g. publisher).

Due to restrictions to meeting participants in person during the current pandemic, the study will trial a new mode of participation by presenting the sketches and materials in an online whiteboard and workshop space, Miro.com.

STUDY DESIGN:

Individual, self-identified fiction readers will be recruited to participate voluntarily through a call for participation (see attachments). The study format will be semi-structured: participants will be taken through a series of tasks in a predetermined order (see table below), and will be asked questions around a small number of a priori concepts to test some of the researcher's preconceptions of the design space. However, the majority of questioning and discussion in the study will be organic and open-ended, driven by participant responses, with the concepts introduced in a playful, informal manner. Data recorded will be analysed to identify emerging patterns across participant responses. By identifying patterns, a greater understanding of the problem domain* and the value the current – or a potential - mediation will be gathered, to help consider the next steps for researching and designing support.

Research Design and Data Collection

The study will recruit between 7 and 25 participants. The aim will be to avoid limiting recruitment to any particular reader demographic, as an open call to anyone who reads fiction, however participation will be restricted to adults over 18 only. Participants will be recruited through personal referral, advertisements in public spaces and, primarily, advertisements on social media. As such - whether they use it to interact with authors or not - some familiarity with Twitter, Facebook etc. will be likely, but not a prerequisite to recruitment. The participants will, however, need access to a computer and an internet connection, as it will be conducted online (a potential limitation to participation). Each participant session will last between 60 and 80 minutes, with a further 10 minutes afforded to allow for introductions and setting up the session on the participant's computer (totaling at 1hr 30 mins maximum).

The sketches will be grouped into categories according to particular directions of power exchange, introduced as separate tasks for ease of management (in a similar manner to a user research study where different elements of a design are introduced in order). No explicit explanation of the overarching concept (power) being tested in any task will be given to the participant. The task separation format will allow for the order in which ideas are presented to be randomised, to minimise potential bias towards the researcher's train of thought. To enable randomisation, the participants will be spread across two to three groups (depending on the number of participants ultimately recruited), following the tasks in the order presented in the table below. All participants will complete task 1 first, which serves as a broad introduction to the research area, with tasks 2 through 4 randomised:

Group A Group B

Starter Starter

2 3

3 4

4 2

Wrap-up Wrap-up

The study will follow the below basic structure:

- Starter Task: an introductory task into the topic area, to encourage discourse around (and challenge to) the researcher's preconceptions of the current status quo of how authors are presented on Twitter, and to introduce participants to the functionality of Miro.
- Task 2: explores adopting (and evolving) the current patronage/crowdfunding models for disseminating work directly to their audience without formal 3rd party mediation – effectively a self-employed, entrepreneurial route (Deresiewicz, 2015). The sketches will display different ways to increase and decrease the power of authors and of readers by discussing ideas around reader-control of what content is shared by the author, versus author control of what reader patronage is spent on, to interrogate beliefs and potential reactions to power shifts and what this could mean for design.

- Task 3: explores involving industry professionals such as publishers with the crowdfunding/patronage model to mediate or curate author access. Here, more power is given to a mediator, lowering author independence – effectively a professional, rather than entrepreneurial route (ibid.) This task will explore readers' current understandings of the role of mediators (e.g. publishers, bookstores) and perceptions of their value. It will also explore reactions to increasing the distance between author and reader through re-introducing 3rd party mediation to explore their potential future role, and whether the mediator-type (e.g. publisher, bookstore, tool algorithm based on user preferences) would impact their response to the platform.

- Task 4: explores changes in visibility, and the power afforded through autonomy of choice re. what is and is not shared through an author or reader's profile, and through access to information about each other.

- Wrap-up Task: An opportunity for reflection, and for further questions, discussion points and ideas to be shared.

An initial pilot study (with 2-3 participants) will be run to test the study format and materials, and challenges in presenting them through Miro. Any issues that arise (e.g. clarifying wording, study pacing) will be refined and finalised prior to commencement. Full summaries of the tasks can be found in the attached document in 4.1.

RESEARCH METHOD:

A call for participation will be advertised on online public social media platforms, referral through word of mouth (e.g. by colleagues and re-tweets), and in public spaces (e.g. noticeboard in public library, where prior consent is granted). The researcher's email address will be provided with the call, and volunteers will be encouraged to complete a google form with their contact details, so that the researcher can get in touch with them about recruitment (see info attached).

Further to successful contact (and interest expressed in participating), volunteers will be sent an information sheet by email to read in advance of the study session, and a consent form to sign and return via the researcher's university email address. Once the signed consent form has been returned, a mutually agreeable date will be scheduled for the study, which will include an invitation to meet in Zoom (using the researcher's City login credentials). If a participant has difficulty using Zoom, the researcher will alternatively invite them through Teams (again, using a City login).

After introductions over Zoom, the participant information and consent sheets which were previously sent by email will be read out-loud by the researcher, giving the participant opportunity to ask any questions they may have before proceeding. It will be made clear that they can withdraw from the study at any point without negative repercussions. Once consent is agreed, the participant first be sent a link to a form to complete a basic demographic questionnaire data to aid analysis (see link:

<https://forms.gle/Gxg6LCeATuBUYZcw7>). They will then be invited to follow a link to a shared online workshop space in Miro.com, which both participant and researcher will be able to see on-screen, and in which the researcher can direct the participant to specific areas of the board.

At this point, audio recording will be initiated (and announced to the participant to ensure their awareness), and the study will begin. Audio recording will be used to capture what is said by the participants, which will later be transcribed for analysis. Data will also be collected through any additions they make to the Miro board (e.g. through addition of notes, post-its, sketches). Video recording of the screen will not be necessary, as anything added to Miro (e.g. notes) will be available to the researcher after the session. After the wrap-up task, recording will be stopped (and participants informed it has stopped).

At the end of the session, participants will be thanked for their time, and encouraged to contact the researcher if they have any further thoughts or questions over the coming week that they wish to add.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Data collected through audio recording will be transcribed, and visual data on the Miro board will be collated to supplement the written data.

First I will read through all transcripts, making notes at the end, towards interpreting what is happening, before then taking an initial pass through the data to cluster it into high-level themes and note key words or concepts raised. A detailed, systematic, thematic coding analysis will then proceed (Braun & Clarke, 2020), to code all data line-by-line, making several passes through to refine, add, and iterate themes according to observable patterns in the data. Outliers and unusual occurrences will also be noted. The data will be treated as a holistic body and interpretation kept open, so that any preconceptions of the researcher may be superseded by more pertinent issues highlighted in the study. Once the data has been coded it will be interpreted within the framework of the role of power exchanges, which will be used to respond directly to the research questions through the writing-up.

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P4.1) If relevant, please upload your research protocol.

P5) What do you consider are the ethical issues associated with conducting this research and how do you propose to address them?

As a study involving participants, informed consent is an important factor to ensure it is conducted ethically. Each volunteer participant will be given a study information sheet and consent form prior to the session, with a minimum of one week to read through details and to ask questions before giving consent and participating. These forms will also be read to them during the session to check their comprehension and to ensure informed consent, along with a reminder that they may withdraw from the study at any point without negative repercussion, and that any data collected will be destroyed. Only individuals who are adults, over 18, will be included in the study, and the study does not involve any at-risk groups, to further ensure informed consent can be given. The study will not have any impact on participant's external lives (e.g. there will be no exposure to harm, personally, professionally, or otherwise, as a result of their involvement in the study).

Ensuring the ongoing confidentiality of all participants is also a key consideration, and will be built into the data collection, storage and analysis process. All signed consent forms (which will be managed digitally) retained by the researcher will be kept in a password-protected folder on an encrypted university laptop which will in turn be physically locked away when not in use, to prevent others from seeing participant's names. All recruited participants will be assigned a unique identification (ID) number, and the link between this number and their name contained on one spreadsheet only, which, again, will be password protected. All audio data and screen-shots of visual data on Miro will be stored in a locked folder on the researcher's encrypted university laptop until transcribed in full, after which textual data will be associated with their ID number only, and stored in a locked folder for analysis. Identifiable audio and screen capture data will be removed, onto an external hard drive, without reference to their ID numbers, to ensure separation. The external hard drive will be stored in a locked cupboard, and again, password protected. To use Miro, the participants will be given access via a second account held by the researcher, and as such will not be linked to their own name or private email address. Immediately after the session, the password will be changed to ensure that the participant cannot re-enter the board. The Miro board privacy settings will be kept as private view.

As the study will be conducted online, video conferencing (Zoom) will be used, through a City-run account for security. Session audio will be recorded, rather than screen-capture, avoiding video capture of their face and other identifiable features (e.g. their home in the background) on camera in Zoom.

All data transcripts will be examined for identifiable data, which will be permanently edited to remove identifiable information.

Examples of identifiable data include names of participants, friends, family, acquaintances, names of workplaces or locations (such as bookstores or specific, identifiable online communities) frequented.

P6) Project start date

The start date will be the date of approval.

P7) Anticipated project end date

31 Jan 2022

P8) Where will the research take place?

Due to current restrictions to movement and face-to-face meetings brought about by the current global pandemic, the research will be conducted online using a combination of Zoom video conferencing and Miro (an online whiteboard and workshop space). The researcher will work from their home office on the Isle of Man to conduct distanced research sessions with participants. Participants will be primarily recruited from the UK, however as the study is online, English-speaking participants from elsewhere will be eligible to volunteer, provided that a mutually agreeable session time across time-zones can be organised.

P10) Is this application or any part of this research project being submitted to another ethics committee, or has it previously been submitted to an ethics committee?

No

Funding

F1) Funder

Covered by an ongoing PhD Studentship award from the AHRC (award Ref 1931278). Amazon vouchers for participants will be funded by available student funds from HCID.

F2) Does the funder require external membership on the approving REC?

No

F3) Has the funding been approved?

Yes

F4) Value of grant

£ 0

External organisations

E1) Provide details of the external organisation/institution involved with this project.

The project is funded by a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership studentship awarded by the AHRC. It is supported by a supervisory collaboration between HCID at City, and the British Library, whereby both institutions have equal footing as project supervisors.

E2) If applicable, has permission to conduct research in, at or through another institution or organisation been obtained?

No

Human participants: information and participation

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Under 18'; 'Adults at risk'; 'Individuals aged 16 and over potentially without the capacity to consent'; 'None of the above'.

H1) Will persons from any of the following groups be participating in the project?

None of the above

H2) How many participants will be recruited?

25

H3) Explain how the sample size has been determined.

As an explorative, qualitative study, generalisation is not being sought. As qualitative semi-structured interviews, data collected will be rich and thick. It is therefore necessary to ensure a manageable dataset relative to the timeframe for analysing and completing the PhD.

It is often suggested that circa 12 participants is appropriate for qualitative work, although successful studies may frequently have fewer than this (or indeed more). We believe that circa 12 participants will likely provide enough information to gather enough user perspectives to be able to proceed with further research (although, again, will not be generalisable, which is not an appropriate aim in this study) and to provide insight about participant's reactions to the sketched design ideas. However we wish to have leeway to recruit more than this (up to 25) if we perceive that we do not have enough data to identify any clear patterns in response, or if we believe the data could be enriched or more readily interpreted by recruiting more individuals.

H4) What is the age group of the participants?

Lower Upper

18

H5) Please specify inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Participants must be aged over 18, with access to a computer connected to the internet, and with capacity for video conferencing.

Participants must be English speakers, to enable communication with the researcher.

H6) What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them?

Potential risks to data protection will be managed as described in P5. As the online method is as yet untested, there may be a burden of difficulties with the technology. Furthermore, there may be burden on their time availability, in particular due to the current difficult global circumstances. To minimise this, the schedule will be managed to respect their availability and constraints, and a voucher given to thank them for their time and assistance.

H7) Will you specifically recruit pregnant women, women in labour, or women who have had a recent stillbirth or miscarriage (within the last 12 months)?

No

H8) Will you directly recruit any staff and/or students at City?

None of the above

H8.1) If you intend to contact staff/students directly for recruitment purpose, please upload a letter of approval from the respective School(s)/Department(s).

H9) How are participants to be identified, approached and recruited, and by whom?

A mix of advertisements in public online forums (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Goodreads, LinkedIn) and in public spaces on the Isle of Man where given consent (e.g. local library, cafes) may be used to recruit volunteer participants. These will be posted by the main researcher, however the supervisory team may also recruit through word-of-mouth with their networked connections (e.g. through British Library colleague's contacts). Participants will not be approached directly, rather the researcher's contact details will be provided, so that volunteers may express their interest and ask any questions they may have before agreeing to participate.

H10) Please upload your participant information sheets and consent form, or if they are online (e.g. on Qualtrics) paste the link below.

H11) If appropriate, please upload a copy of the advertisement, including recruitment emails, flyers or letter.

H12) Describe the procedure that will be used when seeking and obtaining consent, including when consent will be obtained.

The consent form will be sent to the participant through the researcher's university email along with the information sheet, at least one week ahead of the scheduled session. They will be asked to read the information sheet, and then complete, sign and return the consent form by email (due to restrictions to meeting face to face).

Both forms will also be read aloud to them at the start of the session, to ensure their informed consent and to give opportunity for questions.

H13) Are there any pressures that may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part in the project?

Yes

H13.1) Please provide details and describe how you propose to address these.

There are no specific pressures, however the researcher is sensitive to people's current workload and mix of personal circumstances – particularly during the pandemic and any additional stress or constraint this may impact them with. The researcher will work to alleviate any problems with time-availability to ensure a mutually agreeable time is arranged, and will seek to be flexible where possible if there are any unforeseen circumstances. Their right to withdraw at any point will be iterated in writing and in discussion, to ensure they feel confident that they may refuse without negative repercussions.

H14) Is any part of the research being conducted with participants outside the UK?

Yes

Human participants: method

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Invasive procedures (for example medical or surgical)'; 'Intrusive procedures (for example psychological or social)'; 'Potentially harmful procedures of any kind'; 'Drugs, placebos, or other substances administered to participants'; 'None of the above'.

M1) Will any of the following methods be involved in the project:

None of the above

M2) Does the project involve any deceptive research practices?

No

M3) Is there a possibility for over-research of participants?

Yes

M3.1) What steps will be taken to safeguard the participants from over-research?

This is a relatively small study, and recruitment will be done on a voluntary basis. If any volunteers were recruited for the PhDs previous studies, they will not be invited to participate. There is, as with any study, the possibility of that volunteers may have taken part in other, somewhat related studies. However this particular research is unique in its method and scope, and is not anticipated to have strong cross-overs with past studies, thus minimising the risk.

M4) Please upload copies of any questionnaires, topic guides for interviews or focus groups, or equivalent research materials.

M5) Will participants be provided with the findings or outcomes of the project?

Yes

M5.1) Explain how this information will be provided.

In the consent form, participants will be asked if they wish to be informed of study findings, and if they consent for their contact details to be kept for this purpose.

If a research paper is published from the work, a copy will be sent to those participants who wished to be updated.

Furthermore when the PhD is updated, they will be emailed a link to read it online should they wish.

M6) If the research is intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community, please give details.

It is intended that the research will help towards designing future platforms, which may benefit authors, readers and potentially interested parties (e.g. publishers, literary agents). The findings will be considered by the British Library and may be used to help form their collection and preservation policies, which in turn may assist other libraries.

It is also hoped that the research may benefit other creative professionals (and related research) such as musicians and artists who encounter similar issues with online interaction.

M7) Are you offering any incentives for participating?

Yes

M7.1) Please give details, justifying their type and amount.

£20 amazon voucher.

The study is both lengthy and participatory, and it is thus reasonable for participants to be paid for their considerable time and contribution. Current global circumstances are particularly complicated for many (e.g. parenting and working at home), and so their time is all the more appreciated.

An Amazon voucher will be used as this is the usual mode within the research centre, and will allow for the student researcher's university funds to be allocated direct from the university.

M8) Does the research involve clinical trial or clinical intervention testing that does not require Health Research Authority or MHRA approval?

No

M9) Will the project involve the collection of human tissue or other biological samples that does not fall under the Human Tissue Act (2004) that does not require Health Research Authority Research Ethics Service approval?

No

M10) Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, their legal or political behaviour, their experience of violence?

No

M11) Will the project involve activities that may lead to 'labelling' either by the researcher (e.g. categorisation) or by the participant (e.g. 'I'm stupid', 'I'm not normal')?

No

Data

D1) Indicate which of the following you will be using to collect your data.

Questionnaire

Interviews

Audio/digital recording interviewees or events

Computer-based tasks, screen recording or software instrumentation

D2) How will the the privacy of the participants be protected?

De-identified samples or data

D3) Will the research involve use of direct quotes?

Yes

D5) Where/how do you intend to store your data?

Data to be kept in a locked filing cabinet

Data and identifiers to be kept in separate, locked filing cabinets

Password protected computer files

Storage on encrypted device (e.g. laptop, hard drive, USB)

D6) Will personal data collected be shared with other organisations?

No

D7) Will the data be accessed by people other than the named researcher, supervisors or examiners?

No

D8) Is the data intended or required (e.g. by funding body) to be published for reuse or to be shared as part of longitudinal research or a different/wider research project now or in the future?

No

D10) How long are you intending to keep the research data generated by the study?

10 years

D11) How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended?

until graduation

D12) How are you intending to destroy the personal data after this period?

At present, the intention will be to follow the university's current policy (i.e. to shred paper and to request IT to remove digital records from the university laptop). However, as policy may change in the coming years, the latest policy will be used as a reference point to ensure the correct thing is done when the time comes.

International research

I1) State the location(s) of your fieldwork.

Region

Isle of Man

Country

Isle of Man

I2) Will the researcher be travelling to a country where the Foreign & Commonwealth Office has issued an orange or red travel advisory?

No

I3) Have you identified and complied with all local requirements concerning ethical approval, research governance and data protection?

Yes

I3.1) Provide details of the local requirements, including contact information of any agencies, research ethics committees etc. The research will not be conducted on the Isle of Man for any reason other than the researcher's current temporary residence. In all relevant areas, the Isle of Man mirrors UK law, and it's citizens considered british citizens. The study itself will be done online following City's governance guidelines, and will not differ from the researcher undertaking the research from e.g. a London residence, online.

Contact name

NA

Organisation

Telephone number

0

Email

carol.butler@city.ac.uk

Address

I4) Will the research be carried out in a country where people will be able to contact City directly using the complaints procedure?

Yes

Health & safety

HS1) Are there any health and safety risks to the researchers over and above that of their normal working life?

No

HS3) Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment would be required?

No

Appendix B 2: Study Two Recruitment Advertisement

Centre for Human Computer Interaction Design (CHCID)

Department of Computer Science

City, University of London

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

For PhD Research in online interactions between fiction readers and authors

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of reader perspectives of how fiction authors use social media to interact with readers online.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to an online video-call interview to discuss your opinions about how fiction authors use social media, in relation to your own experiences and needs as a fiction reader. You would also be asked to critique a series of sketched design ideas for alternative ways of interacting with authors, and to share your own thoughts about what could be changed in the future.

Your participation would involve one online session, lasting approximately 60 – 90 minutes. In appreciation for your time, you will receive a £20 Amazon voucher.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact Carol Butler (PhD Candidate) by:

a) by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/L83ebWVVXC2QYMr6>

Or

b) by sending an email to carol.butler@city.ac.uk

This study is supervised by Dr Alex Taylor at CHCID, City, University of London.

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Computer Science and LIS Ethics Committee, City, University of London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk

[Appendix B 3: Study Two Participant Information Sheet](#)

REC reference number: ETH1920-2042, 1st September 2020, version 1

Title of study: Investigating Readers' Perceptions of Authors' Online Profiles

Name of principal researcher: Carol Butler

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Invitation

We would like to invite you to participate in a PhD research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please get in touch and I'll be happy to discuss it with you. You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am working on a PhD research project jointly supported by the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design (CHCID) at City, University of London and The British Library.

I am researching the contemporary practice of fiction authors having publicly visible online profiles, and how this impacts engagement with readers and other authors.

Through their active involvement with this project, The British Library will use findings from the work to help them develop future policies and services. Drawing on the expertise of CHCID, the research will also contribute new knowledge which may help the future design and development of online communication technology.

This study will build on my previous work to better understand how readers experience the way authors currently use social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), and how well it meets their needs as readers. The study seeks to involve readers in the ongoing research by discussing their reactions and feedback to a series of design sketches of possible avenues for changing how things are currently done, and by asking them to openly share their own needs, preferences, opinions and ideas.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting people who enjoy reading fiction to discuss their thoughts and views about how authors currently use social media to enhance or supplement the experience of fiction readers, and how this could potentially be improved. I hope to talk to a range of different people, and I'm equally interested in hearing from readers who already use the internet to interact with authors, and those who currently do not.

To take part, you need to be at least 18 years old, with access to a computer on which you can attend an online video conferencing call to talk one-on-one to the researcher (that's me, Carol). The call will be a friendly, informal

interview, and you will be encouraged to speak freely and openly with me. Your confidentiality is important, and will be fully respected.

While we talk, you will need to be able to use the internet on your computer to look at some sketches we have created, to help us chat about ideas. You do not need to be an expert with technology, and I will not be testing your abilities or knowledge – the interview will be an opportunity to share your views and ideas, without judgement.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary- it is up to you whether or not you take part. If you do volunteer to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form, but will remain free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You will not be penalised or disadvantaged in any way if you choose to withdraw, and any data that we have already collected about you will be destroyed and discounted from the study. Please note, however, that it will no longer be possible to withdraw beyond the date of the PhD publication, once all analysis and writing-up has been completed.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate, we will arrange a face-to-face video-conference call, at a time that's convenient to you, using Zoom (or if that is difficult for you to access, a similar tool).

The session will take between 1 hour and 1hr 30mins, and will be structured as follows:

- 1) Through a video call, we will discuss the study and any questions you may have about what it entails, and I will ask you to confirm your consent.
- 2) I will then share a link for you to log into a website. Once you are logged into the website, the interview will start, which will be captured using audio recording. Although we will talk through video call initially before to make it easier to get set up before starting, only audio will be recorded, and you will be welcome to switch your video if you wish. You can be assured that no personal or identifying information will be shared with anyone outside of the study, as your confidentiality and privacy is of utmost importance.
- 3) You will be interviewed about your thoughts around how authors currently present themselves online, and why. I will show you some sketches on the screen, which show a range of design ideas for potentially changing how things are currently done.
The sketches will be used to help us understand how and why the ideas might fail, in your opinion, to help us better understand your perspective. You will therefore be encouraged to share your genuine reaction to them (and you can be assured that I won't be offended if you reject any, or all, of the ideas!).
There are some specific topics I wish to ask you about, but the interview will predominantly be an informal, friendly chat, as I wish to learn from your experiences rather than to direct you. At the end of the session, I will ask if you have any questions or further points you'd like to add, that may not have come up.

This is an exploratory study to find out more about your experience and motivations to engage with authors online (or to not engage with them, as the case may be). It is not a test of your ability, and it is not an experiment. To analyse the study, we will look at trends in what the different readers who took part have said. This will be used to inform future studies.

What do I have to do if I take part?

We ask that you partake in the discussion openly. I am interested in learning about your perspectives – positive or negative – to help understand how future technology could potentially support you better than it does at the moment. If you have any questions, comments, or thoughts during the study, please don't hesitate to share them - I am very interested in what you have to say and in learning what is important to you (and sometimes I might not know to ask about something without your prompt).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks or disadvantages to you associated with taking part in the study. As mentioned, you will also be welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in the study, you will contribute to our understanding of why and how people communicate about reading and writing, and how technology could better improve their experience.

The insight you give can help shape the way that the British Library preserves cultural knowledge in the future, which, in turn, may impact how other institutions and libraries work in the future too. It will also be used to help researchers better understand what people need from technology, which may be used to develop new online sites and tools.

By participating, you may help contribute to a better experience for readers and other communities as they interact online in the future. This may help the real lives of authors and readers, and potentially other types of online groups.

Expenses and Payments

As a thank you for your time and assistance, we will send you a £20 Amazon voucher.

How is the project being funded?

The PhD project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) UK, and supported by internal funding from CHCID at City, University of London, and the British Library.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to this study to declare.

What should I do if I want to take part?

To take part, please contact the researcher to arrange a time-slot to conduct the study over video call, by sending an email to carol.butler@city.ac.uk. You will be asked to complete and return a consent form before conducting the study.

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/>).

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. **If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose.** The only people at City **and the British Library** who will have access to your identifiable information will be the principal researcher Carol Butler, her PhD supervisors (Drs Alex Taylor, Stephann Makri and Andy MacFarlane at City, University of London, and Ian Cooke and Stella Wisdom at the British Library), and her PhD examiners. City will keep identifiable information about you from this study for 10 years after the study has finished.

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal>. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (IOC) <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your confidentiality is very important to us. Only the primary researcher (Carol) will have access to your personal data before it is anonymised. Once it has been anonymised, the data from your study session will be shared only with her supervisors and examiners. The data collected will not be made available for direct use by any other parties.

All data, including transcriptions of the audio recordings and any demographic information you share will be anonymised and stored securely using an encrypted laptop and a locked filing cabinet. Your name, and any other identifying information, will not be associated with the data collected from your session, and will not appear in any reports or presentations. Any quotes used from your session will be anonymised to ensure you are not identifiable in any reports.

What will happen to results of the research study?

The study will be written up to form a part of my PhD thesis, which will be made available online on City's and the British Library's websites (at city.ac.uk and ethos.bl.uk). We hope also to submit the findings for academic publication in conferences and international journals in the fields of Human-Computer Interaction and Digital Humanities. It is likely, therefore, that it will also be presented at talks and conferences. Wherever findings from the study may be shared, rest assured your confidentiality remains important and will be upheld. If you wish to receive a copy of any papers we write using your study data, we will be happy to share this with you, with your consent to keep your contact details for this purpose.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Computer Science and LIS Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you may phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: "Digital Publishing and the Reader".

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
 Research Governance & Compliance Manager
 Research & Enterprise
 City, University of London
 Northampton Square
 London
 EC1V 0HB
 Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

Insurance

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Carol Butler carol.butler@city.ac.uk
 Primary PhD Supervisors: Dr Alex Taylor alex.taylor@city.ac.uk
 Ian Cooke ian.cooke@bl.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

[Appendix B 4: Study Two Consent Form](#)

Name of principal researcher: Carol Butler
 REC reference number: ETH1920-2042

Title of study: Investigating Readers' Perceptions of Authors' Online Profiles

Please tick or
initial box

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information dated 1 st September 2020 (V1) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
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2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged.	
3.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up the time of publication of the PhD thesis or of any written academic paper (whichever comes first).	
4.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
	I understand that audio for the interview will be recorded online, and that a City licenced version of Zoom or Teams will be used by the researcher to protect my confidentiality and to aid compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).	
	I understand that measures will be taken to protect my confidentiality and data when using Miro.com: I will access the site using login credentials associated with the researcher, rather than an account associated with my own name and data. I understand that the password will be changed immediately following my interview, to further protect my security.	
	I understand that data recorded from the study will be transcribed, anonymised, analysed and interpreted as part of a broader data set from across the study, to identify trends across participant responses.	
	I understand that results from the study (which may include my anonymised data) will be written up for the PhD thesis, and may be published academic papers (e.g. conference papers, journals), and shared in reports and presentations.	
	I consent to direct quotes from my audio recording to be used, with the understanding that any potentially identifiable information will be removed, and quotes will not be associated my name, to ensure confidentiality.	
	I understand that my anonymised data will only be shared with the research team during the analysis process, and may be made available to the PhD examiners. The research team include the principal researcher (Carol Butler), her advisors at City (Drs Alex Taylor, Stephann Makri, Andrew McFarlane) and her advisors at The British Library (Ian Cooke and Stella Wisdom).	
5.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
6.	I would like to be informed of the results of this study once it has been completed and understand that my contact details will be retained for this purpose.	
7.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Appendix B 5: Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions (sent via a Zoom poll)

Please answer the questions below.

***Required**

Age *

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 or over

What gender do you identify as (if any):

Woman

Man

Non-binary

In what country do you live? *

Where do you usually get fiction books or writing from? *

Large chain bookstore (e.g. Waterstones, Barnes & Noble)

Smaller independent bookshop

Amazon

Supermarket

Charity Shop

Gift from friend, family etc

Library

Digital writing platform online (e.g. Wattpad)

Other:

Appendix B 6: Pilot study test plan

n.b. larger scale images of the sketches are in the next appendix

Task	Description	Timing (mins)	Cumulative (mins)
Starter task: Current Status Quo	This task will serve to further familiarise the participant with navigating around the Miro board, whilst also introducing them to the topic in hand - the current mediation of author/reader interactions. The task will focus on gathering participant's views and expectations of current facilitation. Semi-structured questioning will also interrogate the researcher's prior conceptions of how the mediation fits reader needs.	4	4

1) Bookshop photo discussion prompt: the participant will be asked to talk a little about how they navigate a bookshop, on entry, to find or browse the books they are interested in.

They will be asked about what sort of cues they look for and what they'd expect to see. This will be used as an opener to discussion, and to test and expand on the researcher's understanding of some of the key differences in affordances between physical and digital navigation of the literary field.

They will also be asked if they have ever been to any author events (e.g. signings) and to briefly explain about what they expect from the events (regardless of whether they have attended one or not).

Next, they will be asked about how they use the internet to find books or to engage with authors, and how/if this differs.



Figure 27: Bookshop photograph prompt (photo credit: shelf-awareness.com, CC0)

2) Next, they will be shown the first sketch, depicting a Twitter homepage which shows two posts by authors, and two other user posts. Echoing the enquiry around the bookshop, they will be asked about how they'd navigate a social media page such as Twitter to find out about books. As with the bookshop, they'll be asked about what they'd expect to find, and what cues they'd look for.



Figure 28: Twitter home sketch

3) A sketch of a famous author's profile page will be used to discuss the participant's expectations of what sort of content an author would share, what they would want – or expect – to see. (the participant may or may not know of the author- if they have not, we will reflect on this on the basis of an author that they are familiar with).

4

8

4

12

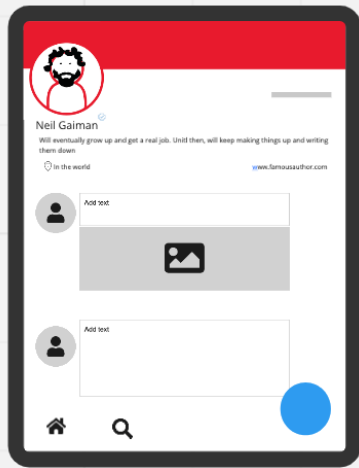


Figure 29: Famous author twitter profile

Task 2:
Entrepreneuria
I Route

Sketches will explore questions around participant's expectations of (and preference for) content delivery and frequency of updates by authors.

- 1) A landing page sketch of a crowdfunding/patronage tool will be shown to ask participants about their expectations of the site, and how they would navigate it as a reader.

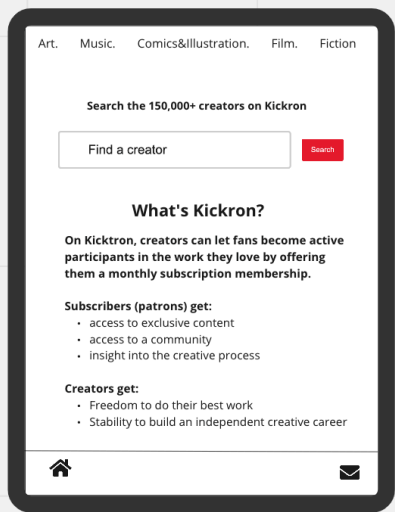


Figure 30: Landing page for patronage site

- 2) A famous author's profile page sketch will be used to discuss what sort of content the reader would expect – or want – to see, and their views on the value of this mode of mediation. Discussion will be encouraged around their thoughts and any concerns around this form of delivery (and whether they would willingly pay by subscription over individual books), and what may either work better to meet their needs, or how this mode could be adopted to meet their needs. This sketch will interrogate views around reader-control (and thus power) over content.

3

15

5

20

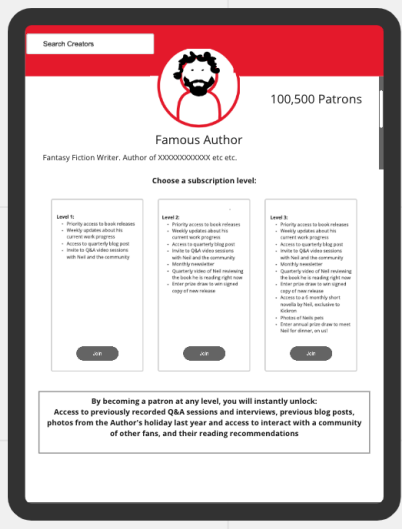


Figure 31: author profile sketch

- 3) Next, a sketch of an unknown author profile would be used to elicit differences in perception for authors they have not heard of, or read, and comments about expectations, wants or concerns will be noted

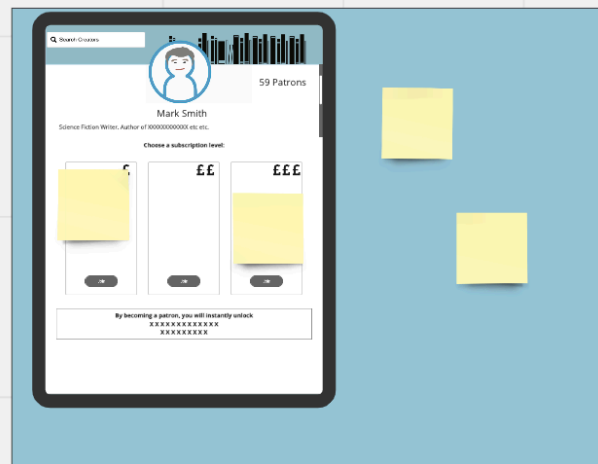


Figure 32: Unknown author profile

- 4) A sketch will be shown and discussed, where the user can choose bundles of content, rather than to pay for pre-determined list of content aligned with increase in payment. This will play with the idea of increased reader control over what they pay for in the service. They will be asked about commitment to options, or whether opportunity to change their choices (akin to returning a library book and taking out another) would impact their perception of the service value.

5

25

4

29

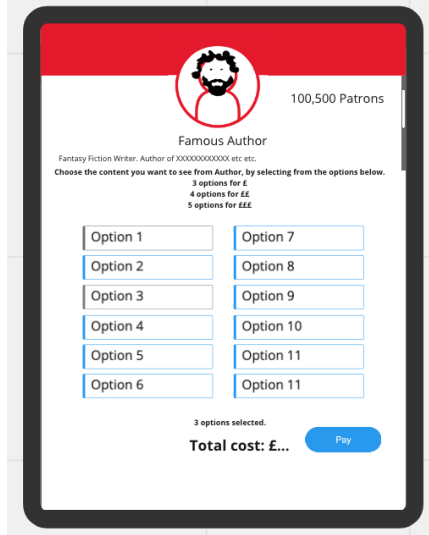


Figure 33: Bundled content

- 5) A sketch will be introduced where the reader does not pay for content production, but rather to support the author as a business, entrusting them to use the money for expenses incurred producing their work, but giving the author greater autonomy to proceed without delivering regular online content in addition to producing e.g. a book. Participants will be encouraged to share their reactions and thoughts around this concept.

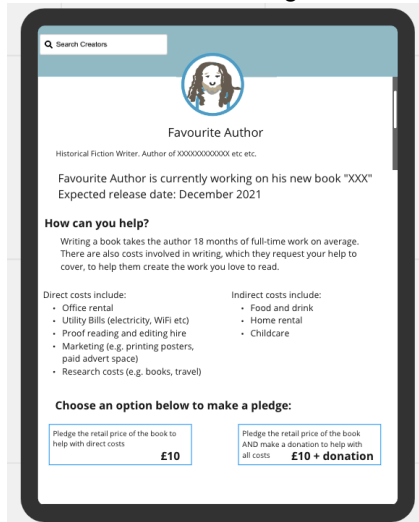


Figure 34: Support author business

- 6) Playing further with the concept of author as independent entrepreneur, the next sketch will investigate the idea of the reader contributing to the author (and paying for access to content) with their own labour, either through volunteering their professional skills, or volunteering to help maintain the platform itself. This will explore the concept of supporting an author to write through other means, and the response this suggestion elicits.

4

33

4

37

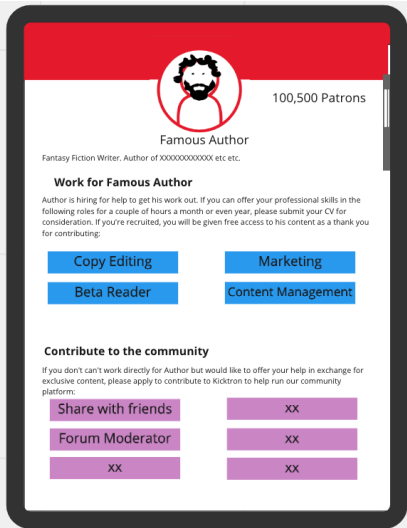


Figure 35: work for the author/ platform community

- 7) A sketch will be introduced depicting the idea of supporting literature, rather than individual authors, through contributing to a consortium led by self-published authors.

This will be used to further extend the conversation about contribution, independence and supporting the literary field and authorship in new ways. It will also consider views around supporting authors to work that is not explicitly connected to writing content, but that they currently often conduct, unpaid.

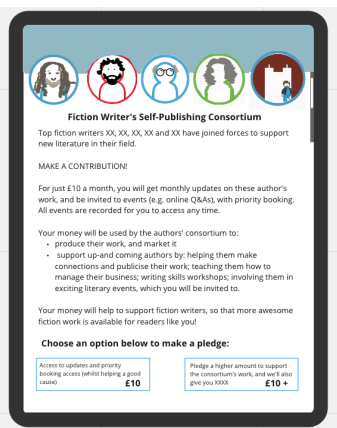


Figure 36: author consortium

- 8) One further sketch will be introduced to elicit reactions to author updates being fully automated and depersonalised, rather than created personally by the author, to further discuss the balance of presence expected, and sought, by readers, with discussion of their views around author visibility and anonymity.

4

41

4

45

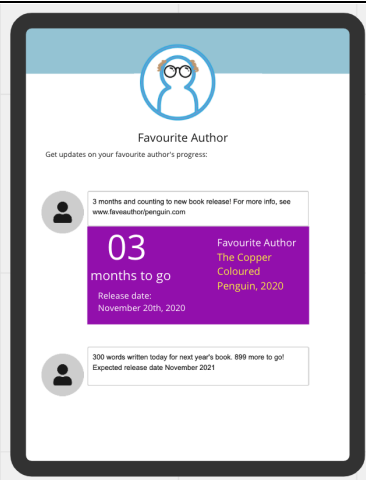


Figure 37: automated update

**Task 3:
Professional
Route**

- 1) A sketch depicting a crowdfunding profile page will be shown, but rather than an individual author, it will depict a well-known publishing house. Participants will be asked for their impressions of what they would expect here, and whether they would contribute to individual publishing houses under a subscription, rather than with an individual author directly. This will be used to discuss their understandings of the role of a publisher, and they will be asked if they are familiar with this particular one (Penguin books), and of any others, as prior research in HCI and literary research fields have highlighted limited understanding of publishers amongst many readers.



Figure 38: Publisher profile page

- 1) A similar sketch will be shown, depicting a well-known bookshop offering curated access to a range of publisher content. The sketch will include well-known publishers alongside smaller independents. This will be used to further elicit what is known of the role of publishers, and what readers would expect to find, in terms of content, if presented with this interface. Discussion around how – and whether – this may help or encourage them to find or try work by authors they do not currently know. Potential differences between this experience and that of a physical bookshop will be probed.

5

50

4

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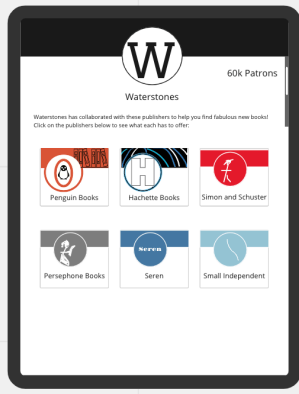


Figure 39: Waterstones curation

- 2) A sketch will be shared depicting a platform-run (rather than an external 3rd party) interface where the reader subscribes to broad-based genre packages. With the content left purposely ambiguous, discussion will be framed around expectations of what could be offered in here and how, and alternative means of organising content. Opportunity to make and share notes or sketches around potential content design based on the readers suggestions will be available.

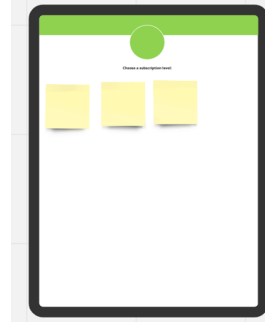
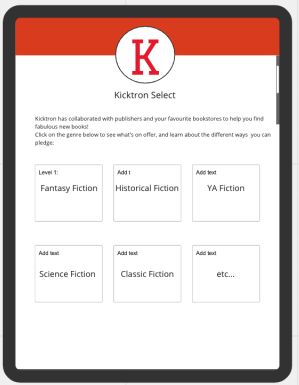


Figure 40: Platform-curated sketch, and design/note-making space

5

59

Task 4:
Visibility

- 1) Participants will be asked to discuss what level of personal information an author should share online about themselves, in contrast with what they, a reader, should share (or would feel comfortable sharing) online. Ideas around different beliefs, putting themselves in an author's shoes, and achieving balance will be discussed, with notes taken, to determine (conceptually)** the minimum viable level of information that they could each share, and under what contexts.

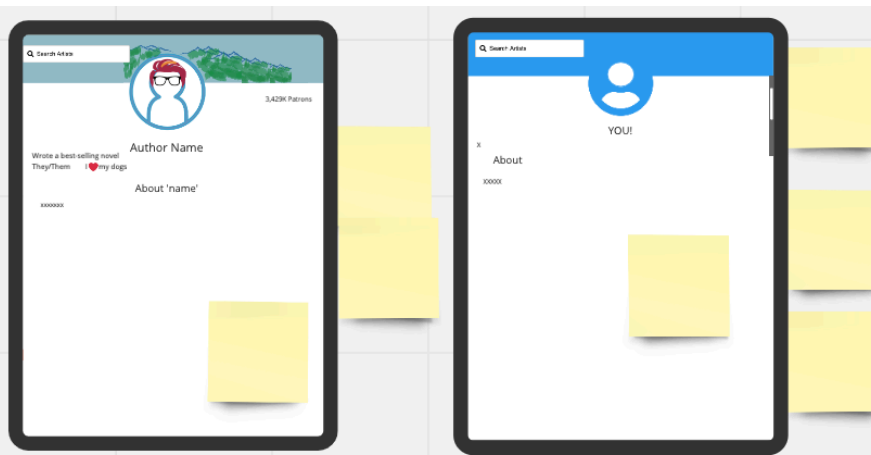


Figure 41: visibility balance

5

64

3

67

2) One final idea will be introduced – paying for the work of hidden authors (presented as akin to booking a ‘secret hotel’ on lastminute.com, to discuss thoughts and reactions around investing in written work by an unknown entity, and what could encourage trust or engagement.

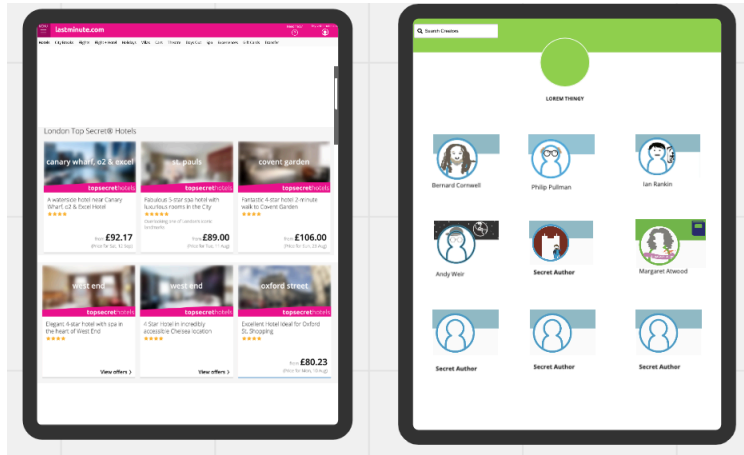


Figure 42: secret author sketch

Wrap-up

To close, the participants will be invited to a final, clear whiteboard space, and any follow-up questions the researcher – or participant – may have will be discussed, for clarification or addition of further information. The participants will be invited, if they wish, to share any further suggestions, concerns or ideas, which will be posted onto the whiteboard (either through researcher transcription as they speak, or through participant use of the board, as appropriate)

8

75

Appendix B 7: Study Two Sketches

B 7a -1: Current status quo




B 7a -2: Current status quo



1,500 Following 121K Followers

Neil Gaiman 

Will eventually grow up and get a real job. Until then, will keep making things up and writing them down

 In the world

www.famousauthor.com

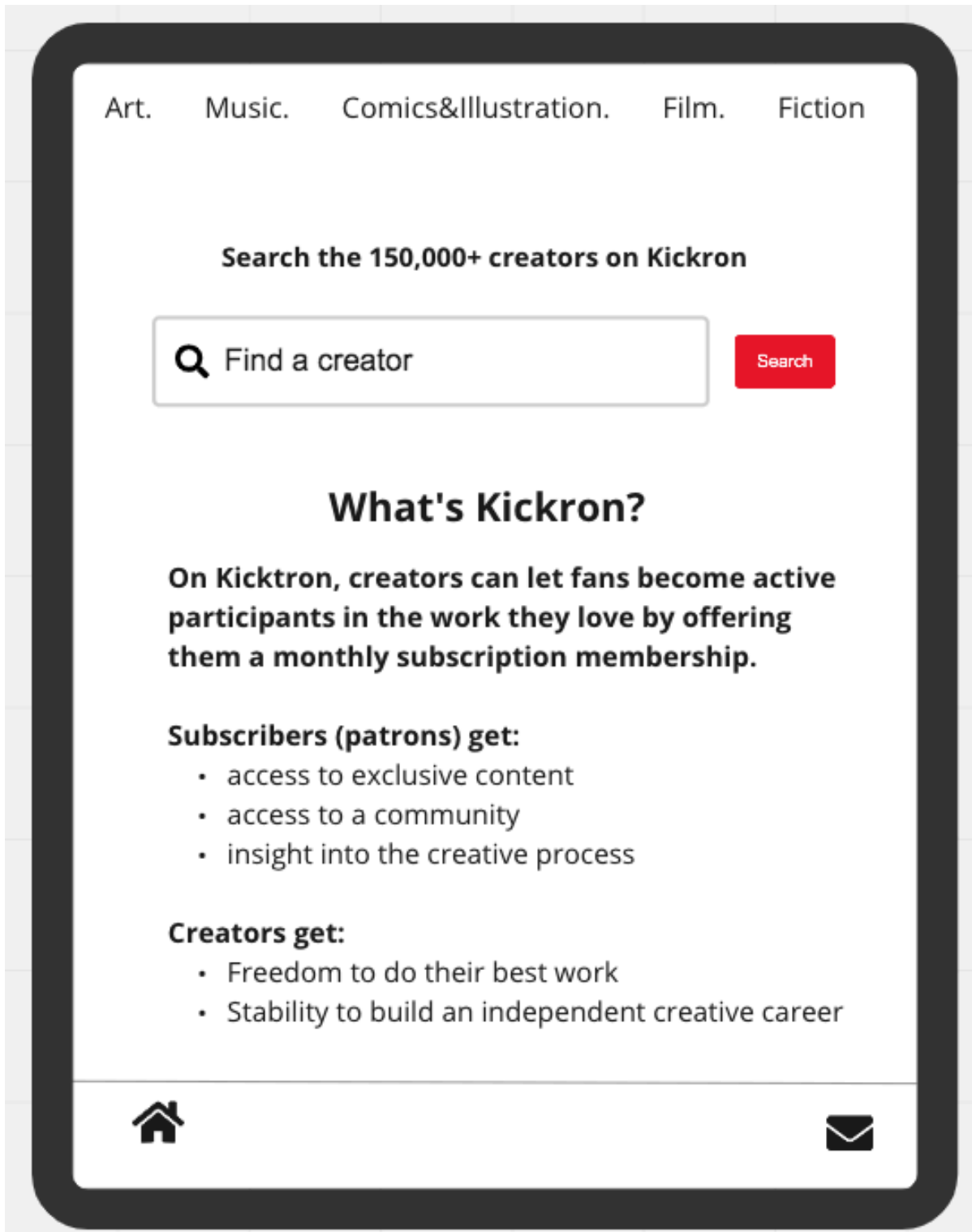


Add text




Add text





Search Creators



100,500 Patrons

Famous Author

Fantasy Fiction Writer. Author of XXXXXXXXXXXX etc etc.

Choose a subscription level:

Level 1: £

- Priority access to book releases
- Weekly updates about his current work progress
- Access to quarterly blog post
- Invite to Q&A video sessions with Neil and the community

Join

Level 2: ££

- Priority access to book releases
- Weekly updates about his current work progress
- Access to quarterly blog post
- Invite to Q&A video sessions with Neil and the community
- Monthly newsletter
- Quarterly video of Neil reviewing the book he is reading right now
- Enter prize draw to win signed copy of new release

Join


Level 3: £££

- Priority access to book releases
- Weekly updates about his current work progress
- Access to quarterly blog post
- Invite to Q&A video sessions with Neil and the community
- Monthly newsletter
- Quarterly video of Neil reviewing the book he is reading right now
- Enter prize draw to win signed copy of new release
- Access to a 6 monthly short novella by Neil, exclusive to Kickron
- Photos of Neils pets
- Enter annual prize draw to meet Neil for dinner, on us!

Join

By becoming a patron at any level, you will instantly unlock:
Access to previously recorded Q&A sessions and interviews, previous blog posts, photos from the Author's holiday last year and access to interact with a community of other fans, and their reading recommendations

B 7b -3: Entrepreneurial Route

 100,500 Patrons

Famous Author

Fantasy Fiction Writer. Author of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX etc etc.

Choose the content you want to see from Author, by selecting from the options below.


3 options for £
4 options for ££
5 options for £££

Option 1	Option 7
Option 2	Option 8
Option 3	Option 9
Option 4	Option 10
Option 5	Option 11
Option 6	Option 11

3 options selected.

Total cost: £... [Pay](#)

Q Search Creators



Favourite Author

Historical Fiction Writer. Author of XXXXXXXXXXXX etc etc.

Favourite Author is currently working on his new book "XXX"
Expected release date: December 2021

How can you help?

Writing a book takes the author 18 months of full-time work on average. There are also costs involved in writing, which they request your help to cover, to help them create the work you love to read.

Direct costs include:


- Office rental
- Utility Bills (electricity, WiFi etc)
- Proof reading and editing hire
- Marketing (e.g. printing posters, paid advert space)
- Research costs (e.g. books, travel)

Indirect costs include:

- Food and drink
- Home rental
- Childcare

Choose an option below to make a pledge:

Pledge the retail price of the book to help with direct costs £10	Pledge the retail price of the book AND make a donation to help with all costs £10 + donation
---	---

 100,500 Patrons

Famous Author

Fantasy Fiction Writer. Author of XXXXXXXXXXXX etc etc.

Work for Famous Author

Author is hiring for help to get his work out. If you can offer your professional skills in the following roles for a couple of hours a month or even year, please submit your CV for consideration. If you're recruited, you will be given free access to his content as a thank you for contributing:

Copy Editing	Marketing
Beta Reader	Content Management

Contribute to the community

If you don't can't work directly for Author but would like to offer your help in exchange for exclusive content, please apply to contribute to Kicktron to help run our community platform:

Share with friends	XX
Forum Moderator	XX
XX	XX



Fiction Writer's Self-Publishing Consortium

Top fiction writers XX, XX, XX, XX and XX have joined forces to support new literature in their field.

MAKE A CONTRIBUTION!

For just £10 a month, you will get monthly updates on these author's work, and be invited to events (e.g. online Q&As), with priority booking. All events are recorded for you to access any time.

Your money will be used by the authors' consortium to:

- produce their work, and market it
- support up-and coming authors by: helping them make connections and publicise their work; teaching them how to manage their business; writing skills workshops; involving them in exciting literary events, which you will be invited to.

Your money will help to support fiction writers, so that more awesome fiction work is available for readers like you!

Choose an option below to make a pledge:

Access to updates and priority booking access (whilst helping a good cause) **£10**

Pledge a higher amount to support the consortium's work, and we'll also give you XXXX **£10 +**



Favourite Author

Get updates on your favourite author's progress on their upcoming book:

3 months and counting to new book release! For more info, see www.faveauthor/pangolin.com

03
months to go

Release date:
January 20th, 2022

Favourite Author
**The Copper
Coloured
Pangolin, 2022**

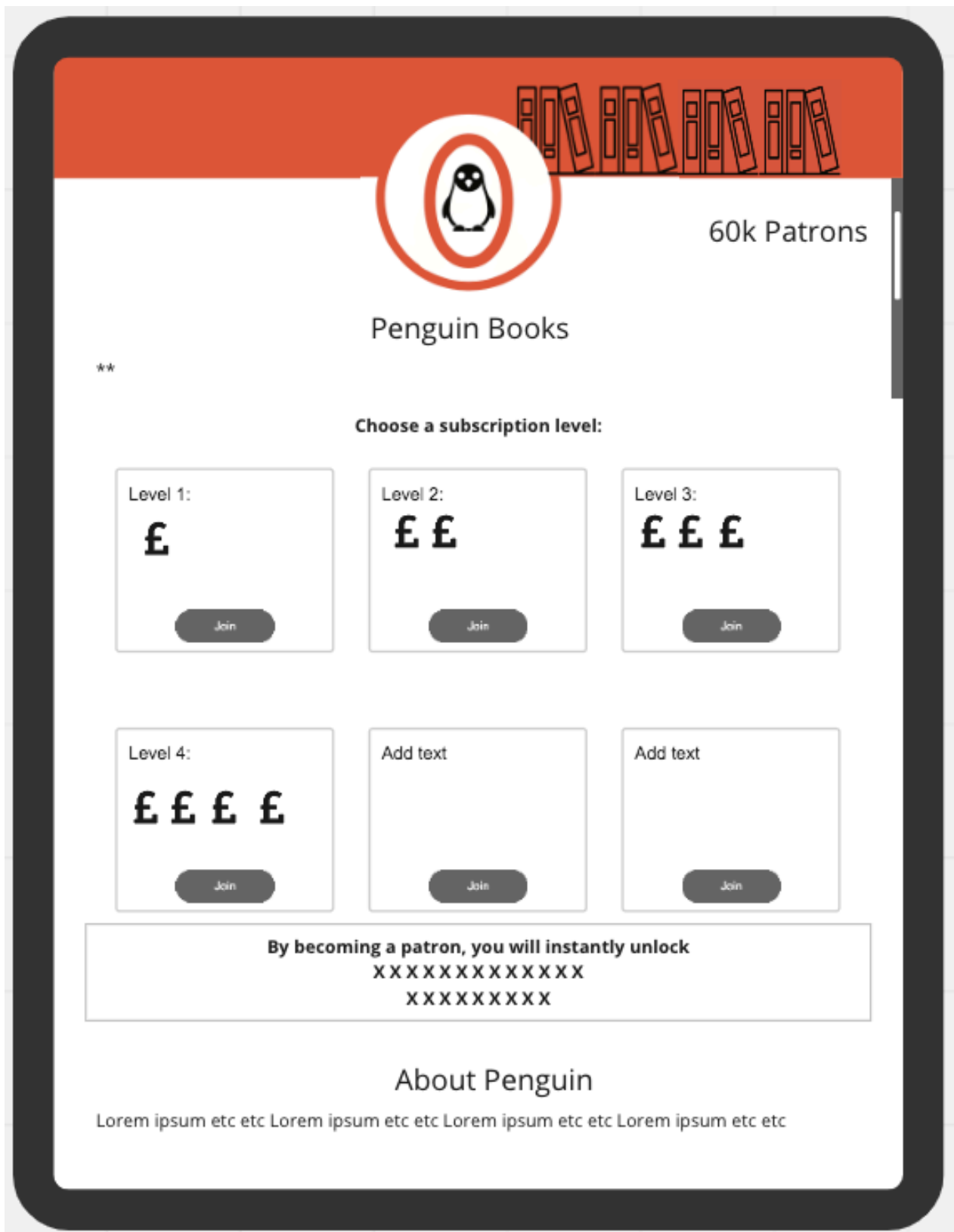
Latest updates:



September 19th 2020.
300 words written today for next year's book. 899 more to go!



September 10th 2020.
200 words written today. 4 coffees consumed. Time for a nap.



The image shows a mockup of a Penguin Books subscription page. At the top, there is a red banner with a row of books. Below the banner is the Penguin Books logo, a penguin inside a red circle, and the text "60k Patrons". The main heading is "Penguin Books". Below this, there is a section titled "Choose a subscription level:" with four options: Level 1 (1 pound), Level 2 (2 pounds), Level 3 (3 pounds), and Level 4 (4 pounds). Each level has a "Join" button. There are also two placeholder boxes labeled "Add text". At the bottom, there is a section titled "About Penguin" with placeholder text.

60k Patrons

Penguin Books

**

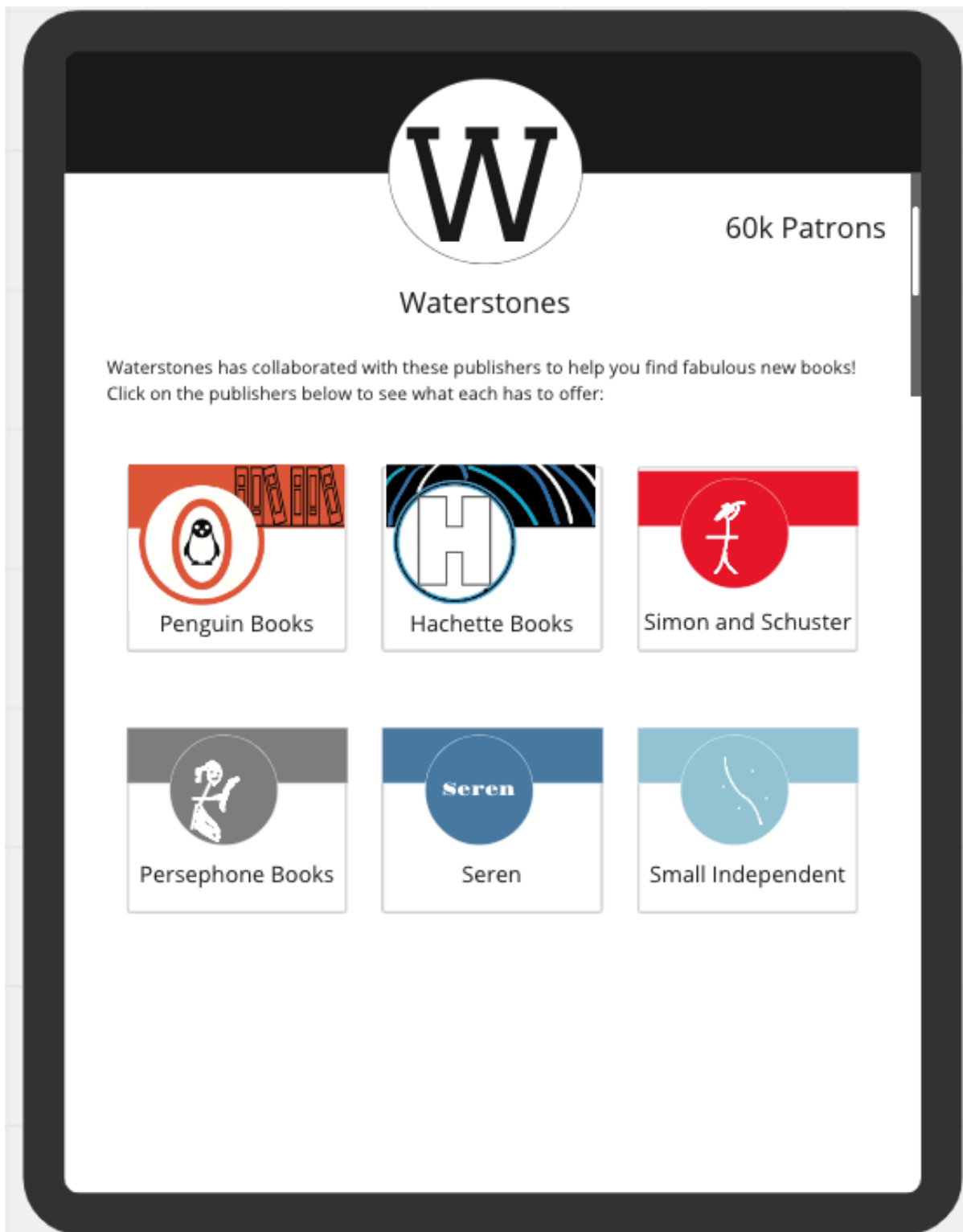
Choose a subscription level:

Level 1: £ Join	Level 2: £ £ Join	Level 3: £ £ £ Join
Level 4: £ £ £ £ Join	Add text Join	Add text Join

By becoming a patron, you will instantly unlock
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

About Penguin

Lorem ipsum etc etc Lorem ipsum etc etc Lorem ipsum etc etc Lorem ipsum etc etc




A promotional graphic for Waterstones, featuring a large 'W' in a circle at the top center. To the right of the 'W' is the text '60k Patrons'. Below the 'W' is the name 'Waterstones'. A paragraph of text reads: 'Waterstones has collaborated with these publishers to help you find fabulous new books! Click on the publishers below to see what each has to offer:'. Below this text are six publisher logos arranged in two rows of three. Each logo is a square with a colored header and a white footer containing the publisher's name. The logos are: Penguin Books (orange header, penguin icon), Hachette Books (black and blue header, 'H' icon), Simon and Schuster (red header, stick figure icon), Persephone Books (grey header, woman icon), Seren (blue header, 'Seren' text), and Small Independent (light blue header, star icon).


W


60k Patrons


Waterstones

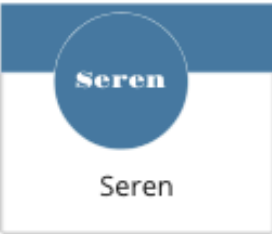
Waterstones has collaborated with these publishers to help you find fabulous new books!
Click on the publishers below to see what each has to offer:


 Penguin Books

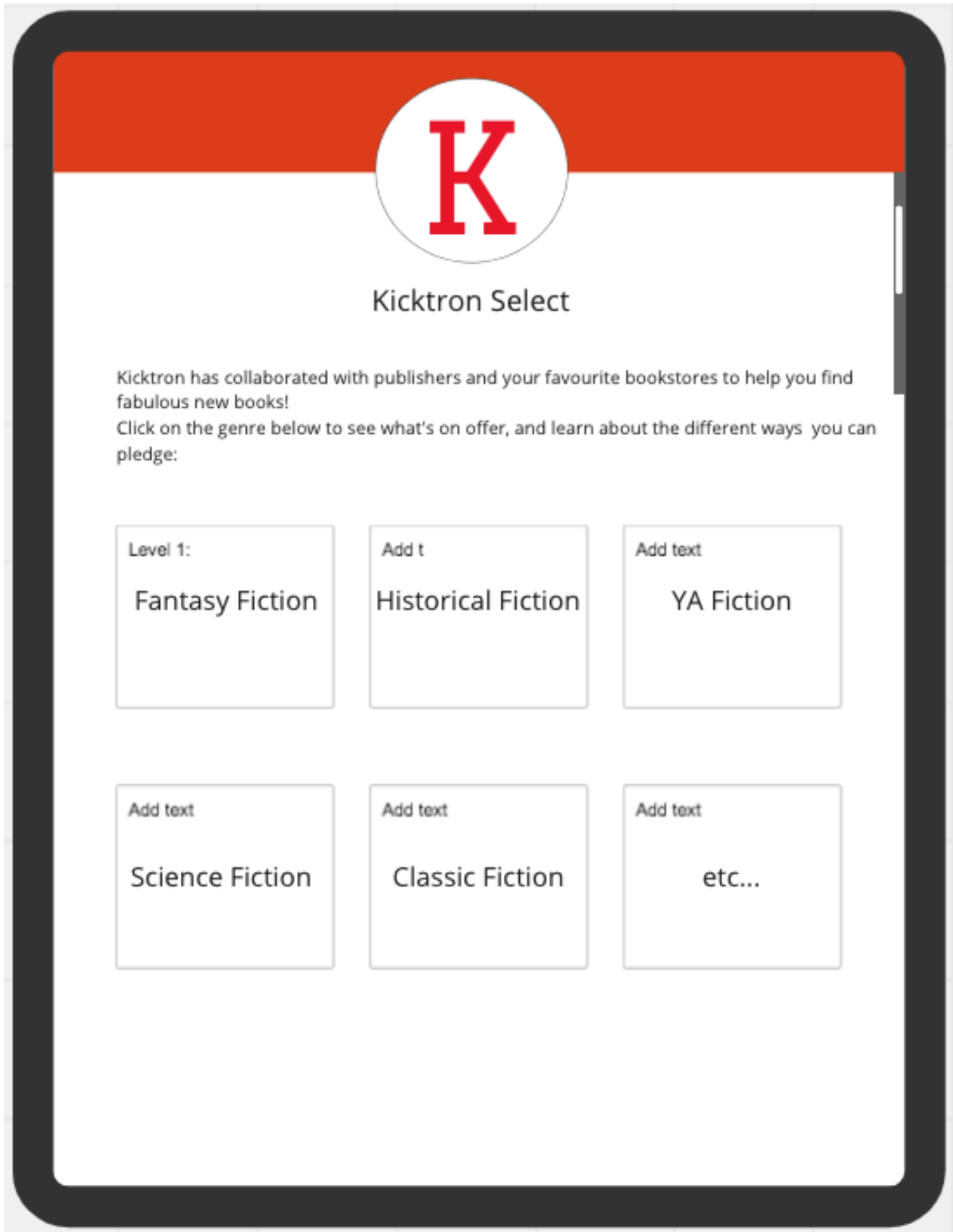
 Hachette Books

 Simon and Schuster

 Persephone Books

 Seren

 Small Independent

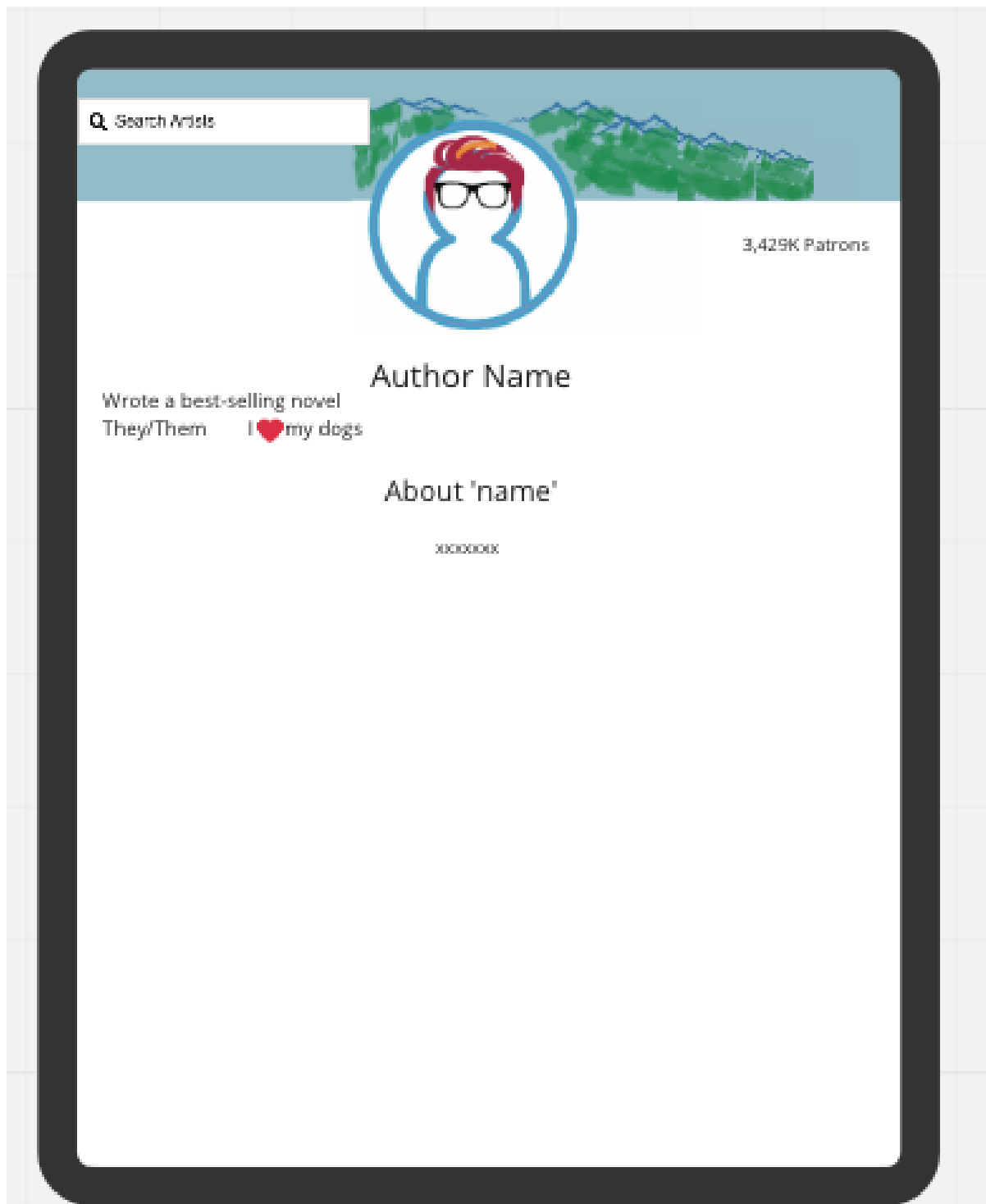
A promotional graphic for 'Kicktron Select' featuring a large red 'K' in a white circle on a red background. Below the logo, the text 'Kicktron Select' is centered. A paragraph of text explains the collaboration with publishers and bookstores. Below this, six rectangular buttons are arranged in a 2x3 grid, each representing a book genre: Fantasy Fiction, Historical Fiction, YA Fiction, Science Fiction, Classic Fiction, and etc... Each button has a placeholder 'Add text' at the top.

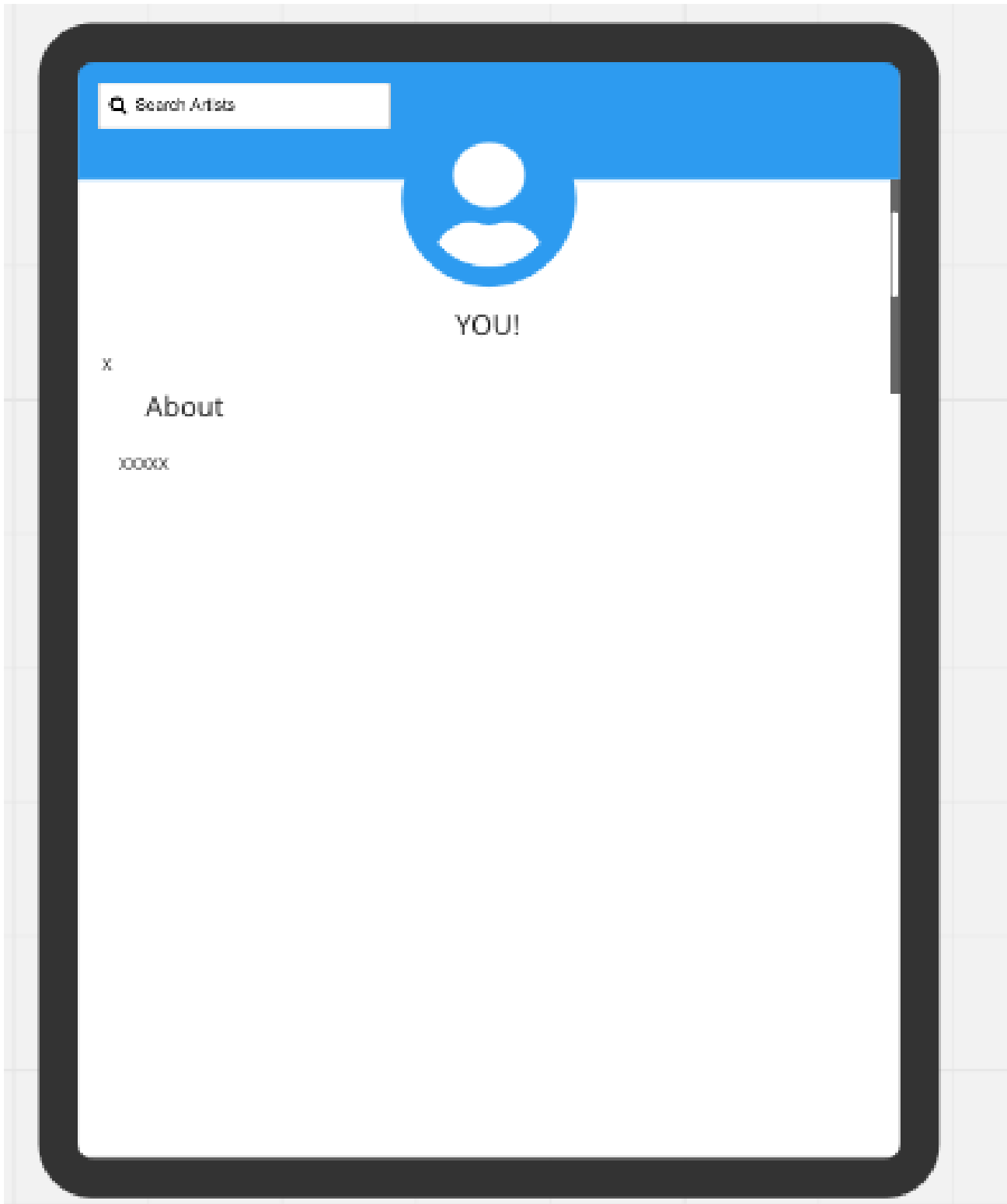
K

Kicktron Select

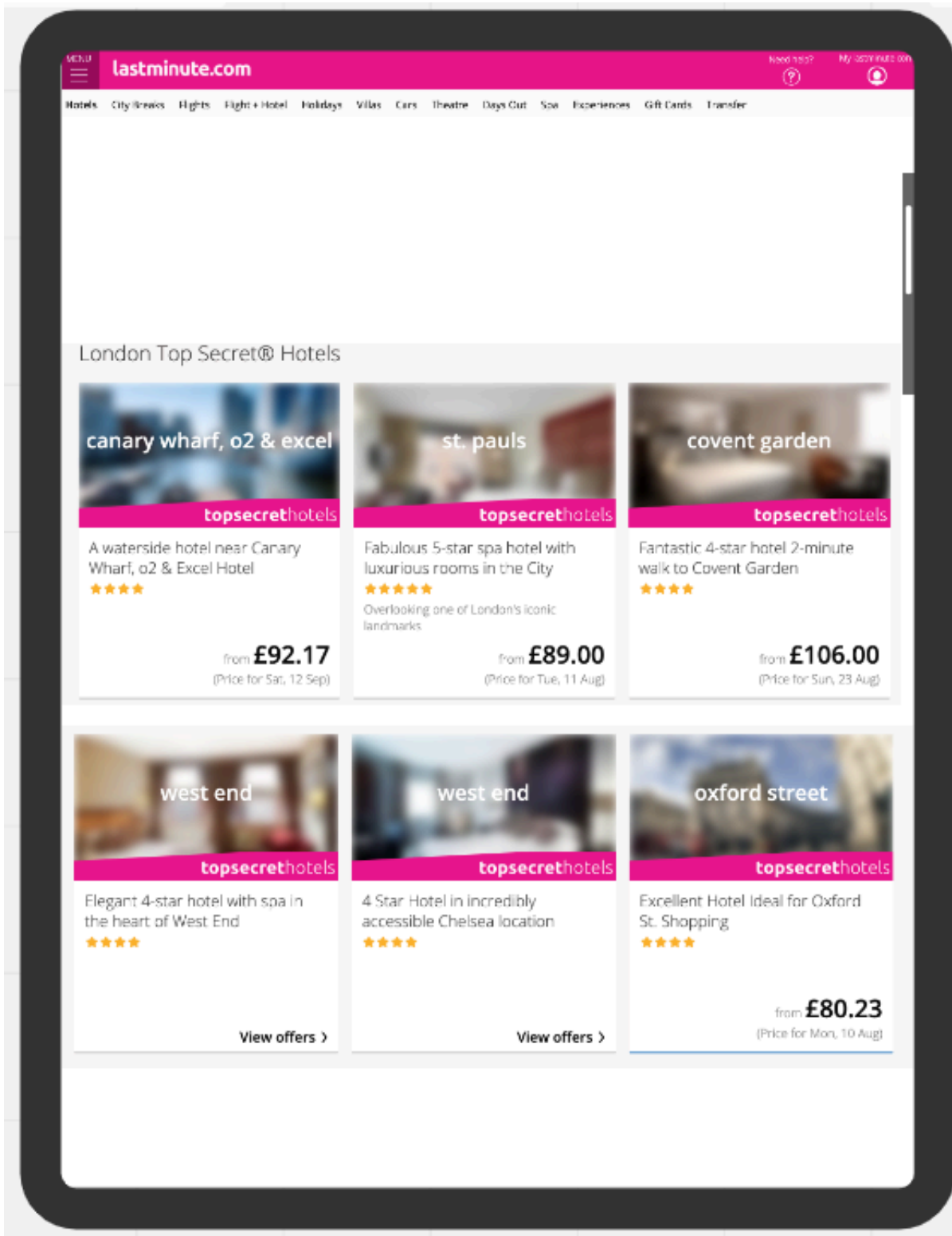
Kicktron has collaborated with publishers and your favourite bookstores to help you find fabulous new books!
Click on the genre below to see what's on offer, and learn about the different ways you can pledge:

Level 1: Fantasy Fiction	Add t Historical Fiction	Add text YA Fiction
Add text Science Fiction	Add text Classic Fiction	Add text etc...

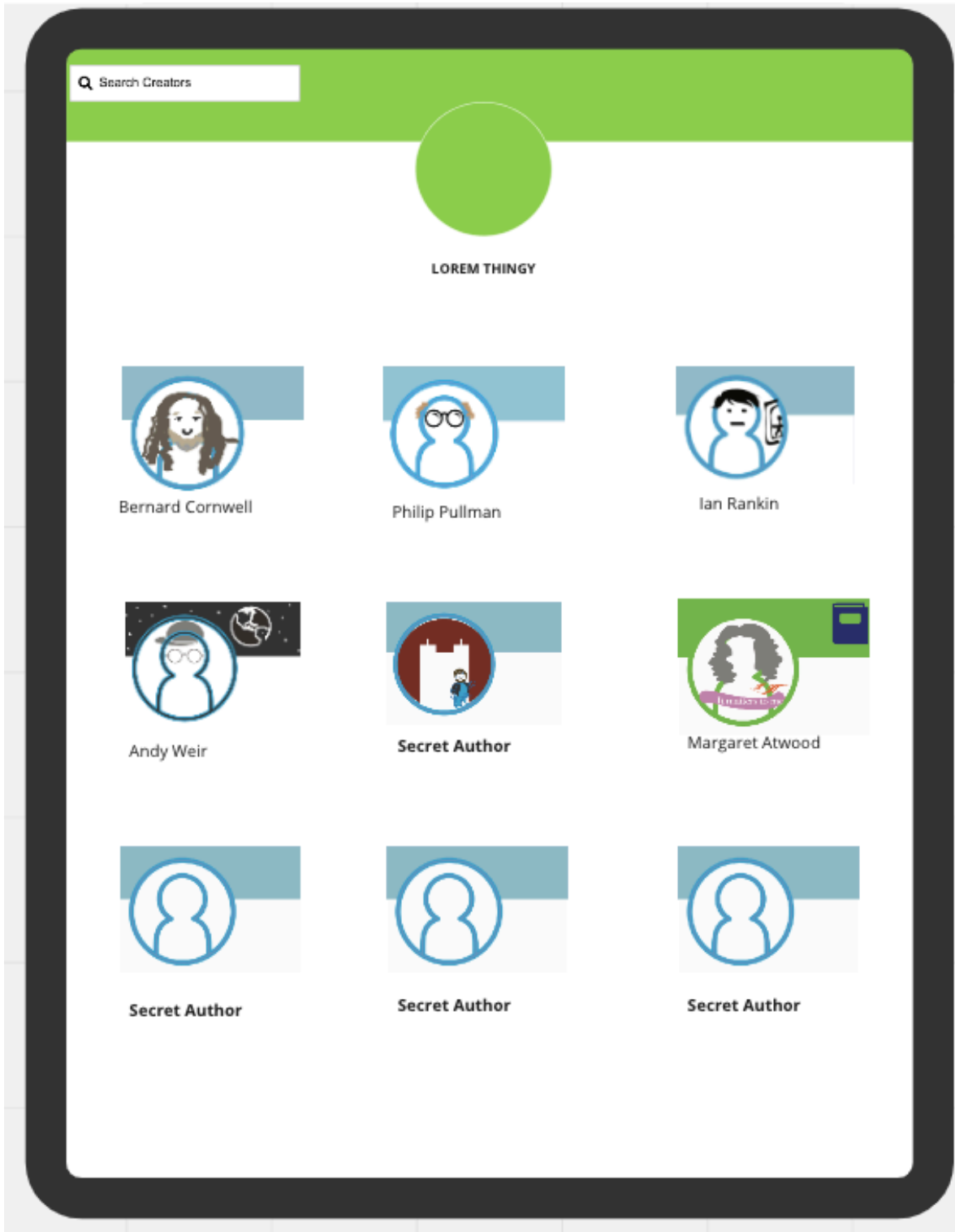




B 7d -3: Visibility



B 7d -4: Visibility

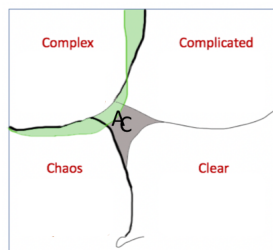


Appendix C: Boundary characteristics in the Cynefin Framework

Dynamic transitions between levels of order are represented in the Cynefin Framework by the boundary lines drawn between each system type. The boundaries are permeable, to account for dynamic movement between system types – and each has different characteristics, dependent on the system types they separate, and thus they are drawn differently, with varying line thicknesses.

The sketch below illustrates the boundaries, adapted from Snowden's work (Snowden, 2019c, 2019d). Lines are at their thinnest between Complicated and Clear, and thicker between Complex and Complicated, and Complex and Chaos. A green band (called the liminal zone) intersects Complex, Complicated, Chaos and AC, and there is a hooked shape, referred to as a wave, at the bottom of the line separating Chaos and Clear (called the Catastrophic Fold – which will be explained shortly).

The following section provides a brief overview of the roles of each boundary (clockwise from Complicated), to support the analysis of the current position of the literary field and, in particular, Author Online Presence.



- **Boundary between Complicated and Clear (one-way dynamic)**

The boundary between the two ordered system types is represented by a thin line in a lighter shade of grey than the rest, to portray that this boundary does not represent a crossing point from one type of system to another, but rather, a shift in perception within the same type of system (i.e., ordered) (Snowden, 2017b). Both Complicated and Clear are ordered. The difference between them is how much order is applied. The dynamics across the boundary are typically one-directional, as structured order can become firmer and more restrictive (i.e., Complicated order can become Clear), but is rarely loosened (ibid.) Rather than become less ordered, a system in Clear order is more likely to break for being too stringent (see boundary between clear and chaotic below).

Managing a system within Complicated order is generally advisable, to support adaptation when circumstances change, which may be difficult with more rigid constraints (Clear) (Snowden, 2017a). The more structure applied, the less uncertainty may be embraced, and the less prepared we are to manage it (Snowden, 2011). As mentioned in the previous section, many of the practices in the literary system are managed as Complicated, but some repeatable processes (e.g. mass printing of books) may be managed in Clear, as it becomes possible to perform something in the same way, repeatedly (i.e., to follow Best Practice).

- **Boundary between Clear and Chaos (one-way dynamic)**

This is the most significant boundary in the framework, as it does not allow for a controlled transition. It is also a key aspect of the framework and an important part of the model in itself, as Clear ordered systems as highly vulnerable, and susceptible to unintentionally crossing this boundary. The boundary itself is referred to as the **Complacency Zone** (Snowden *et al.*, 2020) This is because it is typical to become complacent with highly controlled practices (and management), as it is often believed to be the best way to maintain order (ibid.). Those who favour high structure are not often open to change when needs or behaviour fall outside of expected patterns of best practice. Fixed thinking like is what can make a system vulnerable in the face of change. Complacency can result in a gradual tension that leads to a breakage (Snowden, 2010), but the tension can often go unnoticed, as people are good at finding workarounds and presenting the appearance that things are working well, even if they are not (*"Humans are, to use a wonderful Scottish dialect word, canny: they find ways around problems, they learn to conform on the surface while taking a more naturalistic approach behind the facades of formalism"* (Snowden, 2011)).

A system can survive in the Complacency Zone for a significant period of time, however when something breaks it can fall through the **Catastrophic Fold** (Snowden, 2019b) - depicted by the wave in the model, to highlight that crossing this, into Chaos is perilous, and represents a sudden (and total) loss of control (Snowden, 2019b).

“the principle is that if you start to believe things are simple, you start to believe that they're ordered, you start to believe in your own myths, you start to believe that past success means you're invulnerable to failure, you effectively move to the Complacency Zone, which is the boundary between [clear] and chaotic, and you fall over the edge in a crisis” (Snowden, 2010).

The Complacency Zone intersects with the Confused state of AC, as there is a sense of not knowing the reality of the situation when complacent. It is possible to be in the AC, unaware that the current position is the Complacency zone.

- **Liminal Zones**

Crossing a boundary line intentionally is not an instant shift – it can take time (Snowden, 2019d). The green band in the image above represents the *Liminal Zones*. The word *liminal* (meaning ‘on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations’ (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020)) indicates the transitional nature of crossing into certain system types. The word was chosen as it carries a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty – even trepidation before committing to leave what is known, and to grow (Snowden, 2019b). Crossing a liminal zone into another system type changes not only the system, but the agents within it, their behaviour (ibid.). There is a suspension in time as it is crossed, as options are held onto before making a commitment to change (Snowden, 2017b). The uncertainty is a response to changing circumstances – in contrast to the uncertainty of the AC zone – and the knowledge that change is occurring.

There are two liminal zones in the Framework – one between Complex and Complicated (with the green band on the left of the black line, within the bounds of Complex) and one which intersects Complex, Chaos and AC, below the black line. The liminal zones exist within the bounds of the system where the green band is drawn, i.e., between Complex and Complicated, they are seated in Complex, and between Chaos and Complex they are in Chaos or AC. Crossing over the solid black line is an exit from both the system type being left behind, and from the period of transition, into the other zone, and is like stepping into a new identity (ibid.)

- **Boundary between Chaos and Complex (two-way dynamics - Liminal)**

The boundary between Chaos and Complex is liminal, and the dynamics are two-way. A system or practice can move from Chaos to Complex by introducing constraints and enabling new patterns to emerge. As described in 6.3.1, there is no right way to get out of chaos – any action will move the dynamics, and then the results can be observed, and more considered action taken from there. Therefore, whatever controls are introduced to move out of Chaos should not be considered final (Snowden, 2010). Applying constraints to chaos moves the system into the complex zone, where constraints are light and enabling (6.3.1). Once moved into Complex, the idea is to create conditions (through changes to the enabling constraints) which actively stimulate more easily recognisable behaviour which can then be managed (Snowden, 2019a). Different things may need to be tried in order to transition into Complex, and so time may be spent in the liminal zone.

Whilst transition from Chaos to Complex is usually the desired direction, the boundary is two-directional as it is also possible to dip into Chaos from Complex, in a controlled manner, for the purpose of experimentation. This is done by abandoning constraints to see what happens, so that a better understanding of dynamics can be achieved. This can support novel discoveries (Snowden, 2019d). Snowden described social computing such as social media as the ‘ultimate learning environment’ (Snowden, 2000) due to the absence of constraints, and a controlled entrance into Chaos can bring very useful insight. Unlike crossing over the Catastrophic Fold, this move does not represent a slip into chaos, but rather the liminal zone between Chaos and Complex acts as a contained test area (Snowden, 2017b, 2019b) – a safe bubble which can be closed once learning is complete, rather than a transitional state into Chaos (Snowden, 2017b).

- **Boundary between Complex and Complicated (one-way dynamics – Liminal)**

As system agents interact with each other, patterns of behaviour form. As mentioned previously, in a Complex system, patterns are not repeatable, and the appearance of being a pattern is more likely to be accident than design. However, over time, patterns can evolve and stabilise as we better understand the dynamics of the system, and find ways to create constraints. As this happens, the liminal zone between complex and complicated is entered (Snowden, 2019b, 2011). The crossing takes time and can require numerous iterations to get the system constraints and procedures right. It is a period of uncertainty, it is wise not to rush things (Snowden, 2019b). It can take time, and also trial and error, to cross this zone. Like the other liminal zone, it is an area ripe for experimentation, pilot studies, prototyping and iterating ideas to find out what will successfully stabilise a situation (Snowden *et al.*, 2020). Methods such as Scrum and Lean fit well here, as they explore ideas, but maintain the flexibility to abandon an idea that does not work well (Snowden, 2017b). Because dynamics in a Complex system are dispositional rather than causal (and the liminal zone is seated within Complex) any failures in the system will be unique to context, so past experience will not provide the right way to achieve stability. A Complicated system type is entered once enough order has been achieved to transition past the liminal zone. The crossing is one-directional, from Complex to Complicated only.

- **Boundary around AC (two-way dynamics - only liminal where bordering Complex)**

The AC (coloured in grey in the image above) is a state of not knowing which system type is under observation, as discussed in 6.3.1. The boundary separating the AC from all other systems is two-way, because by coming to understand which type of system is the right one (and it could be in any of them) the AC is immediately exited. It is also possible to enter disorder from the other systems if changes are not tracked and awareness is lost (as mentioned in 6.4.3, sometimes understanding needs to be ‘re-set’).

It is also possible to intentionally transition from AC through the liminal zone into either Complex – by testing to gain clarity, or to Complicated - by inviting debate between experts to see if a consensus can be met (Snowden, 2019c) if an accurate understanding of where the system is cannot be readily determined. The lack of situational awareness in the AC can easily lead to a fall into Chaos if the misunderstanding leads to inappropriate application or removal of constraint, essentially acting in the same way as the boundary between Clear and Chaos. Resultantly, it is always important to develop awareness, and to proceed following appropriate, system-specific steps, and this is the stage we are currently in.