

Cultural products go online.

Comparing the Internet and print media on distributions of gender, genre and commercial success

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Abstract

This article examines whether the attention to cultural products on the Internet is more democratically structured (in terms of gender and genre distributions) than in traditional print media, and how these types of media attention affect commercial success. For the U.S. fiction book releases in February 2009, we analyze consumer ratings at the web store *Amazon.com* and the social network site *Goodreads.com*. The results show that on the Internet far more books receive attention, and that this indeed comes to the advantage of female authors and authors of popular fiction. Also, online publicity affects commercial success positively. These outcomes suggest that online attention to cultural products dampens the effects of institutionally embedded evaluations, while word-of-mouth mechanisms are becoming more prominent for how cultural products are discussed.

Key words: media critics, user generated content, books, gender, popular culture, word-of-mouth

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Introduction

Media play an important part in signaling which cultural or artistic products are released: through advertising (Heilbrun, 1997), editorial or journalistic attention (Shrum, 1991; Debenedetti, 2006) or other forms of publicity (e.g. radio play lists). The cultural industries are generally considered a 'risky business' due to the unpredictability of commercial success for cultural products like movies, books, games or CDs (Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Despite their sharing many similarities in production, structure and content, individual titles are nevertheless unique. Therefore, each title needs to convince audiences of its own specific quality and worthiness to pay for. Besides, in many cultural sectors, the number of released products is enormous.

In traditional formats of cultural journalism artistic producers and media agents cooperate by drawing on their own institutional expertise. The former make first selections of artistic products considered likely candidates of commercial success (with corresponding marketing and public relations campaigns), while the latter sell their attention space (e.g. advertisements) and make editorial selections based on journalistic conventions (e.g. reviews, news items, etc.). Digitalisation and the growing importance of the Internet have challenged these traditional institutional arrangements (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 240ff; Bruns, 2008). However, research has so far mainly focused on the alternative ways of distributing and obtaining the content itself through file sharing and downloading (e.g., McCourt and Burkart, 2003; Ki, Chang and Khang, 2006), because these practices are thought to directly affect business models of the cultural industries (Vaccaro and Cohn, 2004; Küng, Picard and Towse, 2008).

In this paper, we examine whether the publicity for cultural products on the Internet differs from that in newspapers in which traditionally large attention to arts and culture is paid (cf. Janssen, Verboord and Kuipers, 2011). We compare (a) which selections different types

of critics make from the supply and (b) what effects attention in online and print media have on commercial success of products. While taking the traditional instrument of the review as a starting point, we also explore the role of user generated content in the cultural field. Web2.0 technology has made it easier for traditional ‘consumers’ to become ‘producers’ by writing evaluations at web stores (David and Pinch, 2006) or expressing personal tastes on social network sites (Liu, 2008). Such erosion of boundaries between expert critics (i.e. professionals embedded in an institutional context or field who produce evaluations or recommendations) and audiences (i.e. lay persons merely receiving these evaluations) suggests a different, less hierarchical system of creating symbolic value (Jenkins, 2006; Suhr, 2009; Verboord, 2010a). Many Internet adversaries indeed anticipate a ‘democratic’ effect of such de-hierchization (e.g., Benkler, 2006, Chapter 8:3ff). However, a systematic analysis of whether the publicity of cultural products on the Internet increasingly comes to the benefit of products or artists formerly overlooked or neglected has not yet been conducted.

We focus on the case of fiction books published in the United States in February 2009. The book publishing sector makes a strong case for examining inequality in media attention due its large monthly output (in contrast to the film sector) and its relative lack of niche markets (as is the case in the pop music sector). The first research question addresses the possible media difference in attention to cultural products:

Do recently published fiction books receive different amounts of attention on the Internet than in newspapers?

We examine this by comparing the number of reviews found in six leading U.S. (print) newspapers to those on two intensely visited book websites: the web store *Amazon.com* and the social network site *Goodreads.com*.

We then analyze whether the Internet yields different amounts of attention for different types of authors and books. Since the increase of user generated content on the

Internet has been associated with less hierarchical and more democratic ways of dealing with cultural matters, we focus on two traditionally persistent forms of inequality in the arts: differences between male authors and female artists (Dowd, Liddle and Blyler, 2005) as well as ‘highbrow’ and ‘popular’ culture (DiMaggio, 1991; Janssen et al., 2011). Thus, our second research question reads:

To what extent do the Internet attention and the newspaper attention to recently published fiction books differ by authors’ gender and book genre?

Finally, we assess the impact of these forms of media attention on the commercial success of these books, while taking into account genre and gender differences. Whether critics’ opinions also influence the commercial success of products remains contested and seems to depend on the specific audience at which the product is targeted (e.g., Basuroy, Chatterjee and Ravid, 2003; Gemser, Van Oostrum and Leenders, 2007). However, recent work emphasizes the importance of word-of-mouth processes (e.g., Clement, Proppe and Rott, 2007) which manifests itself online through the ‘buzz’ that peer production can generate (cf. Holbrook and Addis, 2008). Thus, our third research question is:

Is there a difference in the effects that the Internet attention and the newspaper attention have on the commercial success of recently published fiction books?

Here we examine both the chartings in one of the most important U.S. bestseller lists, that of the *New York Times* (Hardcover, Paperback and Mass Market), and the sales rankings on *Amazon*.

Although this research is explorative given its focus on one month of book releases and a limited number of medium titles, we nevertheless aim to contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, we pursue an *empirical* analysis of an often theorized issue: whether attention to cultural products on the Internet suffers less from traditional inequalities (here: cultural hierarchy, gender inequality). Second, we offer an explicit comparison between

medium types that has so far not been made. Often, the Internet is analyzed as an almost autonomous media system. Third, our sample concerns a cross-section of the fiction book output in one particular month. We thus prevent focusing only on the most successful products which are often the subject of cultural analyses. Contrary to a sample of products found in the media, this procedure ensures us that our media content analysis is not merely a reflection of the (in many cases unknown) supply.

Cultural products and media attention

According to many scholars and publicists the Internet offers important alternatives to traditional ways of producing, distributing and consuming cultural products (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Anderson, 2006). Particularly the growing share of user generated – or peer produced – content has led to a “convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins, 2006: 2).

Technological affordances of various kinds have supported audiences in intervening media practices traditionally restricted to ‘professionals’ (Bruns, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009). Audiences can distribute professionally produced content through sharing and downloading media files (Hargittai and Walejko, 2008; Kinnally et al., 2008), and produce and distribute creative content themselves through sites such as *YouTube* (Burgess and Green, 2009). Also, they can engage in selecting, rating and discussing cultural products via social network sites (e.g. *Goodreads*), webzines or blogs (e.g. *Cinematical*) and webstores (e.g. *Amazon*), and even contribute to the consecration of cultural artists or products through wiki-driven knowledge websites such as *Wikipedia* (Bruns, 2008).

In contrast to the traditional model of cultural criticism, hardly any editorial control is involved in these bottom-up practices of discussing cultural content. Whereas most cultural

critics working for a print medium answer to an editorial board which checks whether copy is in line with journalistic conventions and the specific policy of the media outlet, online critics often encounter no restrictions or gatekeepers. Print media, such as newspapers, apply institutional logics which reflect the conceptions of arts and culture as produced in cultural fields and increase consensus formation among critics (Bourdieu, 1993; Janssen, 1997). Newspapers' cultural staff editors are often trained in the cultural discipline they write about (Curran, 2000). Hence, the selections that reviewers make closely follow the ideas on what constitutes 'high quality' culture in other domains of the cultural field. And even the discourse that newspaper critics use expresses a highly particular perspective on culture which stems from the autonomous nature of cultural fields: one which emphasizes intellectualization and cultural authority and functions as a 'legitimizing ideology' (Baumann, 2007). This legitimization concerns other professionals in the field as well as audiences whose 'belief' in the critics' expertise is a *conditio sine qua non* for their cultural authority (Bourdieu, 1993). It then enables critics to contribute to the creation of symbolic value at the societal level.

Within professional journalism cultural criticism is thus highly institutionalized. Reviews in an online context, however, often do not need to pass editorial gatekeepers. Neither credentials of expertise nor affinity with the legitimate institutional logics are required to publish in peer-produced contexts (Bruns, 2008). Consequently, in the online environment we expect that different – or at least a wider variety of – conceptions of arts and culture are articulated than in the realm of print. As a result, online reviewing may present a significantly different selection of the cultural supply. Also evaluation patterns may differ from how institutionally embedded critics valorize cultural products. Such shifts in the criteria by which cultural products are signaled and discussed in the media might challenge the institutionally shared conceptions of art (Verboord, 2010a). Ultimately, it might transform the process of value creation in the cultural domain as new cohorts of media users tend to prefer the Internet

to print media such as newspapers (Pew, 2009). With the exception of a few case studies (e.g., Beer, 2008; Suhr, 2009), there is hardly any empirical research of how online attention takes shape and what it renders specific cultural products. It is only through a more systematic comparison of cultural output and media selections, we argue, that general patterns can be established.

Inequality in media attention to fiction books

The output of fiction books is considerably larger than what the mainstream print media can review on a weekly basis. This tension has only become more apparent as book production kept growing in the past decades. In the United States the number of published fiction book titles increased from 3,137 in 1970 to 25,184 in 2004 (Greco, Rodriguez and Wharton, 2007: 4-5). Although precise estimates for the U.S. are unavailable, research in the Netherlands shows that relatively few books of the total output are reviewed and that this number has declined over time (54% in 1978 versus 36% in 1991)(Janssen, 1997: 282). Given the recent cutbacks in pages allocated to book reviews, including the disappearance of separate book sections in many American newspapers (Rich, 2009), attention rates are likely to have decreased further.

The books that are considered for reviewing are traditionally those which best fit the institutional ideas of legitimate culture (Van Rees and Vermunt, 1996; Janssen, 1997). The long academic tradition of separating 'literature' from 'popular fiction' (e.g. DiMaggio, 1991) is being reproduced by most newspaper critics as their own status within the field requires them to comply with the institutional norms. Genres like crime and mystery fiction, romance fiction, science fiction and fantasy therefore receive little attention in newspapers (Janssen et al., 2011). Within the literary field, they are considered 'genre fiction'. Their reliance on standardized plot structures, their focus on story rather than style, and their publishers'

explicit aims to maximize profits collides with the ideas of literary value that critics and scholars propagate (cf. Coser et al., 1982; Bourdieu, 1993).

As an illustration, we present an analysis of longitudinal data on the cultural classification practices of two U.S. newspapers in the period 1955-2005 (cf. [removed] for details on the data). Table 1 shows the distribution of several genres for the fiction book reviews in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* for the years 1955, 1975, 1995 and 2004/2005. Literary fiction comprises more than 50% of all reviews, with the exception of 1975. In that sample year, 40% of the book reviews were devoted to thrillers. Since then, however, literary fiction has become more dominant again, showing its highest share in 2004/2005.

Table 1 about here

A second type of inequality in attention to works of fiction concerns gender. Within the literary field, female authors are less likely to receive long-time consecration (Showalter, 2010) as well as contemporary media attention (Women in Publishing, 1987; Vos, 2008). Indeed, Table 1 shows that female authors have been underrepresented in the past five decades in American newspapers' fiction book reviews. Ever since 1955, quite consistently, about two-third of all book reviews is devoted to male authors. To a certain extent, this gender bias seems to be related to the genre inequality. Whereas popular genres as crime fiction and science fiction have only limited access to newspaper media, the female dominated romance fiction remains almost completely invisible despite its success among readers (Radway, 1984). Other studies suggest that gender inequality is quite persistent in the cultural domain, as a consequence of men engaging more often in field-specific power struggles (cf. Tuchman and Fortin, 1984; Bielby and Bielby, 1996; Dowd et al., 2005). Male artists more often deploy

sideline activities (e.g. reviewing, award jury membership) through which they can influence the way cultural products are evaluated (Vos, 2008). In addition, women have also encountered barriers in terms of gender stereotyping throughout history: whether this concerns the association of masculinity and musical genius (Dowd et al., 2005: 82-83) or the prejudice that female authors tend to write ‘sentimentally’ and focus on the ‘female experience’ (Showalter, 2010). Publishers have to a certain extent capitalized on this development by targeting female readership more extensively (e.g. psychological or romantic subgenres in the thriller domain, “chick lit”). On the production side of the publishing field women have traditionally also been in the minority: while they have improved their position in editorial and publisher positions since the 1970s, they are still underrepresented at senior positions (Greco et al., 2007: 166ff).

We expect both types of inequality to be smaller on the Internet. Popular fiction genres comprise among the most sold and read types of fiction books around the world (Verboord, 2010b). Without institutional barriers of editors, audiences can express their preferences more profoundly through comments and ratings at web stores or social network sites, which would – through proportional representation – increase the presence of these genres in the media. Moreover, women are increasingly overrepresented among the reading audience (NEA, 2004). We thus expect that female authors will profit relatively more from peer production practices than male authors.

Effects of media attention on commercial success

Research into the effects of media attention – or more specifically reviews – on the commercial success of cultural products has mainly been done in the field of film. Here, most studies show that for movies which are targeted at large audiences, the so-called blockbusters, the number of reviews is more important than whether reviews are favorable in tone (e.g.

Basuroy et al., 2003). Yet, for products aimed at smaller, artistically oriented audiences, such as art house movies, the actual evaluations and recommendations that critics lay out in their reviews have positive effects on box office performance (Gemser et al., 2007). Thus, whereas attributions of positive feedback by critics are important for the artistically legitimated products to receive industry recognition, mainstream products depend on being noticed and creating a ‘buzz’ in attaining successful market performances (Holbrook and Addis, 2008).

These results are in line with findings on the social differentiation of media usage and interest in cultural products, as well as with critics being institutionally embedded as described above. A taste for cultural products of a particular degree of legitimacy is often combined with using media that hold a similar degree of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984; Bennett et al., 2009). Cultural participants who have a taste for ‘highbrow’ cultural products (like art house movies or literary books) often read the print media that pay most and most positive attention to these type of products (e.g. ‘quality’ newspapers) and are, via processes of self selection, thus likely to take critics’ judgments into consideration (Bourdieu, 1993; Shrum, 1991; Janssen et al., 2011). Since conventions on what constitutes ‘qualitative’ and ‘popular’ websites are less developed, it is not yet clear whether similar types of social differentiation occurs on the Internet.

Research on the impact of online reviews on the commercial success of cultural products emphasizes the importance of word-of-mouth or ‘buzz’. In the traditional media landscape, word-of-mouth typically occurs when trendsetting consumers start a one-directional cascade of recommendations after having picked up positively evaluated information (Caves, 2000: 175ff). On the Internet, ‘online feedback mechanisms’ – a form of user generated content – not only introduce a bidirectional form of communication, but also facilitate multiple and faster moving cascades to arise simultaneously (Dellacorras, 2003). The impact of online word-of-mouth on commercial success has been shown for movies: the

amount of talk or ratings on the web seems to be more salient than having high ratings (positive evaluations)(Liu, 2006; Duan, Gu and Whinston, 2008). Although for books word-of-mouth has been argued to be more relevant due to the large output (Sorensen and Rasmussen, 2004; Clement et al., 2007), the results are less decisive. Both star ratings and number of reviews at *Amazon.com* and *bn.com* affect sales rankings (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). However, as far as we know, no explicit comparison has yet been drawn between attention in print media and on the Internet.

Method

The design of the research and coding schedule for the data collection, as well as the compilation of the sample was performed by the researcher. The data were collected by undergraduate students following a course on the publicity of the arts at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. All data were inspected, corrected if necessary, and cleaned by the researcher.

Sample

To examine how selections are made by media critics, we need to establish the complete population of released books critics can choose from. For this purpose, we reconstructed the total supply of published fiction books in the U.S. in one demarcated month: February 2009. February can be seen as a ‘normal’ month – falling outside the Christmas and summer season – in which both debutants and star authors are published. In the highly competitive American book market, publications by star authors are scheduled throughout the year in the hope of hitting the number one position in the bestseller lists: *“In 2000, 21 books hit the No.1 spot and an astounding 18 of them did so in their first week of sales. [...] Publishers became very skillful in their publication scheduling and the development of one-day laydown tactics, which*

feature massive distribution nationwide, enabling all retailers to begin selling a book simultaneously [...] These days, many more major titles get this treatment, betting all on their only shot at the No.1 spot' (Bowker Annual 2001: 620-621). And indeed, both John Grisham (*The Associate*) and Danielle Steel (*Honour Thyself*) are found in our sample.ⁱ

We used several sources to reconstruct this book output. First, we used the February 2009 list of new releases at *FictionDB.com*. This website offers monthly overviews of what fiction titles are released in the U.S.. Second, we used information from Books in Print: a database distributed by the Bowker Company, that is specialized in book information, which contains data on all books currently in print in the U.S.. By searching the database for all fiction books published in 2009, and then selecting books released in February and not costing less than \$8.50, we obtained a second sample.ⁱⁱ The results of this search were added to the *FictionDb* list. All redundant findings were removed. Next, we cross-checked the list with (a) the list of new releases ('hot books') on *Amazon*, (b) the books mentioned on the websites of the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *San Francisco Chronicle*, and (c) books listed in the *New York Times* fiction bestseller lists of February and March. Books that were not on the initial list were checked for their release date on *Amazon*: all books released in February 2009 were added to the sample. Finally, if several books of one author appeared on this list, we again checked their release date at *Amazon* (if they were not released in February 2009, we deleted them from the sample).

The result is a list of fiction books that is a sample of U.S. book releases that approximates the total population in one month. This list consists of 881 titles and contains hardcover books, paperbacks and mass market pocket books – both originals and reprints of earlier hardcover editions. All 48 students involved in the data collection were handed out a standard coding schedule distributed in class to find information on the books and authors. Also, they received instructions in class. Each student coder collected data for approximately

20, randomly assigned, authors in the sample. The data were collected between May 1 2009 and May 20 2009, with almost 75% between May 12 and May 15. Since 6 students did not finish the data collection, and for about 25 books only limited data could be retrieved, our final sample consists of information on 727 books.

Measurements

For every book, coders first gathered information on publication details like edition type (hardcover, paperback, mass market), release date (on *Amazon*) as well as background information on the author (sex, genre, number of previously published books according to Books in Print – also called ‘output’).ⁱⁱⁱ These data were found in Books in Print, *Amazon*, or additional sources on the Internet (e.g. *Fantasticfiction.com*; *Wikipedia.com*). In the analyses, we distinguish between the following genres: general fiction, crime fiction, romance, historical fiction, science fiction/fantasy, young adult and other fiction. Note that general fiction is the broad ‘default’ category which includes fiction without explicit labels as well as literary fiction (which was considered too difficult to code separately in a reliable way – at this point the research thus differs from the results of Table 1 which is based on a different data set). Gender is coded as female=1 (books by combinations of men and women were left out of the analyses).^{iv} Output is recoded into six categories running from 0 books to more than 100 books.

Attention on the Internet was operationalized by recording the number of ratings at *Amazon* (actually called ‘customer reviews’) as well as at *Goodreads*. This gives us a measurement of all Internet users who gave an evaluative score to the sampled books. We did not include the actual reviews since then we would have a much more select group of users involved. The range of the ratings at *Amazon* varied between 0 and 755; at *Goodreads* the maximum amount of ratings was 98,188. Since both measurements had heavily skewed

distributions, we recoded the number of ratings for both websites into five categories: 0 ratings; 1 to 5 ratings; 6 to 20 ratings; 21 to 99 ratings; and more than 100 ratings. Note that the mean height of the ratings was also coded. However, ratings tended to be very positive on average and in later analyses these variables did not differentiate among social background characteristics or commercial success indicators (see also Appendix for further descriptive results).

Attention in newspapers was measured by searching for reviews of the specific book title in LexisNexis in the last three months in six designated U.S. newspapers (*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*). The maximum number of newspaper reviews for books in our sample was four.

Indicators of commercial success were twofold. First, it was registered how many weeks the book charted in one of the three *New York Times* (NYT) fiction bestseller lists (Hardcover, Paperback, Mass Market).^v This variable was recoded into four categories: 0 weeks; 1 to 4 weeks; 5 to 8 weeks; and more than 8 weeks. Second, all coders registered the sales rank of each book, if present, at *Amazon*. This sales rank was later reversed and recoded in 10 categories because of its skewed distribution. This inversed sales rank runs from 1 (rank below 1,000,000) to 10 (in the top 1,000).

Furthermore we gathered information to check whether media attention could be attributed to authors' reputations (cf. Clement et al., 2007) through (a) the total number of ratings an author received at *Goodreads.com*, (b) the amount of previous newspaper attention (all articles published between 1999 and 2008, in the same six newspapers), and (c) the previous number of bestsellers between 1999 and 2008 in the NYT Hardcover list.^{vi} The former two variables were recoded into categories because of skewed distributions. *Previous ratings at Goodreads* has eight categories ranging from 0 ratings to more than 5,000 ratings.

Previous newspaper attention comprises five categories running from 0 articles to more than 100 articles.

After the data collection, the researcher added an additional control variable signaling whether the author was a 'classic' author (1) or not (0). A small number of publications concerned new editions or republications of books originally published many years earlier, often by authors who had already passed away. Some of these authors are part of the 'canon' and appeared to be often referred to in newspapers and/or discussed at *Goodreads*, without receiving media attention for their republications. Consequently, these authors may be subject to different publicity mechanisms (e.g. Henry James, Mark Twain).

Results

Print and online media clearly differ in media attention to new releases: 10% of all 727 books in our sample received a newspaper review, whilst 71% and 72% received a rating at *Amazon* and *Goodreads*, respectively. Newspapers pay significantly more attention to new hardcover books (18% of all 238 hardcover titles) than to paperbacks (8%) and mass market pockets (4%) ($\text{Chi}^2 = 24.4$; $p < .001$). For the two websites, however, paperbacks and pockets *do* constitute a substantial part of their selections: paperbacks about 66%; pockets about 71-72% (compared to hardcover books: 76-79%).

To which extent do both media types make similar choices from the book output? Inspection of the correlations (see Appendix) suggests that books reviewed in newspapers also receive attention on the Internet. These are probably titles which somehow stand out (a glance at the data indeed shows literary titles like *The Women* by T.C. Boyle and *A Mad Desire to Dance* by Elie Wiesel). Of course, the percentages mentioned above imply that on the Internet also many other titles are noticed and given attention.

In Table 2 we present the media attention for fiction books differentiated according to authors' gender. Again, *Amazon* and *Goodreads* diverge from the traditional pattern as represented in the newspapers. Although female authors do not receive significantly less reviews in newspapers than male authors (as displayed by the historical trends reported in section 2), on the Internet they clearly receive more ratings than men. Whereas 60-65% of the men receive attention on the web, for women this percentage is over 80%.

Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows the distribution of media attention over genres. In line with theories on institutional arrangements in the literary field, newspapers predominantly focus on general fiction. On the Internet, however, general fiction is not the most rated genre. At *Amazon*, less legitimate genres such as crime, romance, science fiction/fantasy and young adult fiction receive more customer reviews. Ratings at *Goodreads* are more equally distributed over genres, yet young adult fiction books receive slightly more of them than the other genres.

Table 3 about here

Together these bivariate results suggest that ratings at *Amazon* and *Goodreads* are indeed distributed over books in less traditional patterns than newspapers reviews are. Female authors, popular fiction books and mass market pockets receive more attention on the Internet than in newspapers. However, to test whether the effects of gender and genre cannot be attributed to one another or to other author or book characteristics, we turn to multivariate analyses. We perform three binary logistic regression analyses in which we analyze the odds of receiving a rating or a review.

Table 4 shows the results of these analyses. According to model 1, female authors are almost two times more likely to get a rating at *Amazon* and *Goodreads* than male authors. In contrast, no gender difference was found for newspapers. As for genre, *Amazon* and *Goodreads* show different outcomes. Whereas most of the popular genres have larger chances to get a rating at *Amazon* than the reference category general fiction, this is not the case at *Goodreads*. Apparently, at this social network site general fiction is represented to similar extent as popular fiction. For newspapers, the odds of being reviewed for romance, science fiction/fantasy and young adult fiction are smaller than 1 – indicating less reviews than general fiction.

In model 2, reputational control variables are added. As can be observed, most of the significant effects found in model 1 remain. This means that the larger attention to female authors (*Amazon*, *Goodreads*) and popular genres (*Amazon*) cannot be attributed to previous media attention or commercial success. Clearly, having received many ratings on previous books at *Goodreads* increases one's chances of being rated for their current book, and so do chartings in the NYT bestseller list. Internet attention to books, however, is predicted very differently than newspaper attention. Commercial success does not increase one's chances of being reviewed in print, and ratings on the Internet do so only to a limited extent. Newspapers still follow traditional institutional reviewing policies, in which previous attention in newspapers is important (cf. Van Rees and Vermunt, 1996).

In sum, these outcomes indicate that attention to books on the Internet is following different pathways than in print media. For both *Amazon* and *Goodreads* publicity appears to be more open to authors who traditionally face stronger institutional boundaries such as female authors and authors in popular genres.

Table 4

Our third and final research question concerned the influence of Internet publicity on the commercial success of books. We analyzed the chances of getting into one of the three NYT bestseller lists (conducting a logistic regression) and the (inversed) *Amazon* sales rank (conducting an OLS regression). The three indicators of media attention now function as explanatory variables and are no longer modeled as dichotomous variables. The results are shown in Table 5. For both measurements of commercial success we first estimated a base model containing gender, genre and output.^{vii} While we observe little differentiation among genres,^{viii} female authors appear to have more commercial success than male authors. The odds of charting in the NYT bestseller list for women are almost three times higher than for men, and also they have higher *Amazon* sales ranks. However, these effects disappear when we include Internet and newspaper attention in model 2. Apparently, all gender differentiation runs through differences in online attention: female authors are more commercially successful than men because they are more often rated online. And the more ratings authors receive at *Amazon*, the more likely they are to chart in the NYT bestseller list. For *Goodreads*, the odds increase by factor 15 for each higher rating category. Obviously, higher *Amazon* sales ranks are influenced a little stronger by *Amazon* ratings. For both indicators of commercial success attention in new media thus increase chances of success, in contrast to newspaper attention which has almost no impact. Also, note that the levels of explained variance are extremely high: 72.7% and 50.1%, respectively.

In model 3, we control for reputational effects. Clearly, these status indicators do not interpret the influence of Internet publicity: the impact of *Goodreads* ratings becomes even larger. Reputation variables have a limited effect of their own. Previous attention at *Goodreads* only influences the sales rank (positively), but not someone's chances of NYT bestseller success. Newspaper attention in the past ten years sorts no effect. Finally, as was to

be expected, previous success on the NYT bestseller list is a strong predictor of the success in 2009 (cf. Verboord, 2010b). These results thus demonstrate that attention on the Internet increases the commercial chances of books, regardless of authors' reputations.

Table 5

Conclusion and discussion

The emergence of the Internet as a widely used medium forces producers of culture to reconsider their publicity strategies. Particularly younger generations of cultural participants have adopted the Internet as a way to find information, talk to friends and follow trends in leisure and lifestyle at the expense of print media. This paper explored how the media attention to newly published fiction books in the United States can be described in the age of the Internet, and how it influences the commercial success of books. Our focus was on two popular websites: web store *Amazon.com* and social network site *Goodreads.com*. The results show that significantly more books receive attention online than in newspapers. The unlimited virtual space not only comes to the advantage of *more* books, but also to specific groups of authors underrepresented in print media. Consequently, the Internet, to a certain extent, does away with traditional forms of inequality which are associated with how institutions in the cultural field work. Particularly, female authors and authors of popular fiction stand a better chance to getting a review online than in print. Since women comprise the majority of fiction readers nowadays and crime fiction and romance fiction are among the genres most widely read, this is in line with the expectations. The Internet simply offers opportunities for readers interested in these types of books to communicate about them. This is not to say that books reviewed in newspapers have become obsolete; online they just have to share the attention with a large group of other works. For publishers, the results imply that the increasing market

segmentation in their publication strategies (e.g. differentiation in thriller types: psychological versus action based) increasingly needs to be accompanied by publicity strategies which address the corresponding niche media.

Getting attention online also has an impact on the commercial success of books: the more ratings that a book receives at *Goodreads* or *Amazon*, the larger the chances that this book hits the NYT bestseller list. Note that (unreported) analyses including the average height of ratings – the number of stars – did *not* show significant effects. The amount of attention in newspaper attention bears hardly any relation to commercial success. Of course, it is likely that attention on the Internet and bestseller list success influence each other. Once a book charts the list, probably more readers will be inclined to report their experience with and opinion of the book at peer-production sites. Future research should examine the dynamics of this relationship more closely by deploying a more fine-grained temporal design, for instance by recording week-by-week attention rates and chart notations. Nevertheless, this finding does highlight another characteristic of the Internet: the fluid and sometimes almost continuous nature of online attention. Whereas print media generally publish once or twice on new cultural products, on the Internet publicity can become a ‘buzz’ that lasts for longer time periods. Who initiates a ‘buzz’ is worth investigating, as these innovators may become the new ‘taste makers’ (cf. Tepper and Hargittai, 2009). Despite lack of institutional arrangements that govern the print media, many online reviewers try to qualify as ‘top reviewers’ and establish a reputation for themselves (David and Pinch, 2006). Moreover, many contributors to webzines aspire after a professional career and strongly resemble professional journalists with regards to educational background and cultural preferences, as was shown by a survey amongst 121 amateur reviewers of 17 Dutch cultural websites (Haan, 2008). Hence, cultural publicity on the Internet need not be the end of institutionally embedded cultural valorization – it may just introduce new practices and formats.

A number of limitations to this research should be mentioned. Our study only incorporates two websites. And although these websites seem to be widely used among readers, they may not be representative for how cultural information is communicated on the web. Our choice for *Amazon* and *Goodreads* implies a continuous focus on ‘mainstream media’, while the Internet also contains a wide variety of ‘niche media’ which are worth analyzing. Another issue which would worthwhile to further explore is the role of status and education therein. Social inequalities may affect the nature and usage of online reviews. For instance, high status buyers at *Amazon* may be more hesitant to write reviews than low status buyers because they feel they have to live up to expectations accompanying their status. Or maybe they ‘seize the opportunity’ and draw upon their cultural capital to engage in reviewing. It should be noted, however, that both studied outlets are aimed at book readers and thus seem somewhat biased towards high educated. Future research should therefore also extend the analysis to other cultural genres and different contexts. Book readers are generally overrepresented among the higher educated, the elderly and women (Griswold, 2008). To what extent effects of publicity differ for genres aimed at for instance younger people – e.g., pop music – and different types of media outlets (e.g. general social network sites as *Facebook*) would contribute to our understanding of media communication. Also, it would be useful to examine other countries and other time periods to see if the results found here are actually representative for the general functioning of the Internet.

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Table 1: Fiction book reviews in U.S. newspapers by gender (n=452)

Year	Gender ^a		Genre ^b					N
	Male	Female	Lit.	Thril.	Rom.	SF	Other	
1955	67%	33%	58%	25%	1%	0%	16%	136
1975	77%	21%	46%	40%	1%	3%	11%	115
1995	62%	38%	54%	35%	0%	0%	11%	106
2004/2005	64%	36%	68%	13%	2%	7%	10%	95

Source: CCST (Janssen & Verboord, 2008). Sample of 28 editions of the *New York Times* and 21 editions of the *Los Angeles Times*, per year. The last year was coded for the second half of 2004 and the first half of 2005.

^a Doesn't always add up to 100% due to missing values and male-female combinations.

^b Genre categories in this data file are 'literary fiction', 'thrillers and crime fiction', 'romance fiction' and 'science fiction/fantasy'. Category 'other' includes poetry, comics, autobiographies/faction, play, picture books, westerns.

Table 2: Gender differences in media attention for fiction books (N=718)

	<i>Amazon</i> rating	<i>Goodreads</i> rating	Newspaper review	Total
Male	60.8%	65.1%	12.3%	375
Female	81.3%	80.2%	8.5%	343
Total	70.6%	72.3%	10.4%	718
Chi-Square	36.4 ***	20.4 ***	2.8	

Note that 6 authors were man-women combinations and for 1 author we could not establish the sex.

Significance: *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 3: Genre differences in media attention for fiction books (N=727)

	<i>Amazon</i> rating	<i>Goodreads</i> rating	Newspaper review	Total
General fiction	61.5%	75.0%	18.6%	156
Crime	75.8%	74.2%	13.3%	128
Romance	82.4%	75.4%	3.5%	142
Historical fiction	62.7%	70.6%	11.8%	51
SF/Fantasy	77.2%	72.4%	8.9%	123
Young adult	79.1%	83.6%	3.0%	67
Other	38.3%	41.7%	8.3%	60
Total	70.6%	72.2%	10.3%	727
Chi-Square	53.9 ***	33.8 ***	24.4 ***	

Significance: *** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Table 4: Results of logistic regression analyses explaining three forms of media attention for fiction books (N=718)

	<i>Amazon</i> rating ^a		<i>Goodreads</i> rating ^a		Newspaper review ^a	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Edition type	.740 *	.853	.772 *	.852	.491 ***	.541 **
Female	1.981 **	1.642 *	2.087 **	1.626 *	.809	.912
Genre=general fiction	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Genre=crime	1.857 *	2.302 **	.957	1.199	.568	.643
Genre=romance	2.044 *	2.885 **	.705	1.042	.201 **	.282 *
Genre=historical fiction	1.096	1.257	.804	.898	.497	.433
Genre=science fiction / fantasy	2.308 **	2.370 **	.919	.709	.423 *	.546
Genre=young adult	2.005 ~	1.923	1.512	1.440	.144 **	.146 *
Genre=other	.403 **	.743	.279 ***	.642	.402 ~	.525
Output	.883 ~	.600 ***	.962	.511 ***	1.002	.732 **
# Previous <i>Goodreads</i> ratings		1.737 ***		2.468 ***		1.185 *
Previous newspaper attention		1.023		1.014		2.022 ***
Previous NYT bestseller success		1.579 ~		2.330 *		.923
Nagelkerke R ²	.208	.370	.107	.453	.157	.281

^a All three dependent variables are recoded into 0 (no) and 1 (yes). Coefficients are Exp(B) or odds.

Controlled for date of coding and whether author is 'classic' or not.

Significance: *** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05 ~ p<.10

Table 5: Results of logistic regression analyses and OLS regression analyses explaining commercial success of fiction books (N=718)

	NYT bestseller list			<i>Amazon</i> sales rank (inversed)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female	2.933 *	1.624	2.429	.452 *	-.003	.017
Genre=general fiction	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Genre=crime	2.016	1.980	4.485	.240	.420 ~	.448 *
Genre=romance	1.565	2.140	2.805	.044	.421 ~	.496 *
Genre=historical fiction	.000	.000	.000	.590	.783 **	.817 **
Genre=science fiction/fantasy	1.691	.903	1.506	.230	.323	.310
Genre=young adult	.000	.000	.000	-.200	.010	.065
Genre=other	.000	.000	.000	-1.182 **	.007	.197
Output	1.976 ***	2.093 **	1.972 *	.334 ***	.266 ***	.083
# <i>Amazon</i> ratings		3.619 **	3.640 *		.821 ***	.769 ***
# <i>Goodreads</i> ratings		15.637 ***	32.292 **		.650 ***	.434 ***
# Newspaper reviews		.781	1.035		.173	.206 ~
# Previous <i>Goodreads</i> ratings			.966			.246 ***
Previous newspaper attention			.658			-.010
Previous NYT bestseller success			2.762 ***			.111 ***
Nagelkerke R ²	.279	.726	.797			
Adj. R ²				.082	.501	.526

Coefficients of NYT bestseller list are Exp(B) or odds; coefficients of *Amazon* sales rank are unstandardized Bs.

Controlled for date of coding and whether author is 'classic' or not.

Significance: *** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05 ~ p<.10

Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive results Amazon.com and Goodreads.com

Amazon.com	Number of ratings	0 ratings	212 (29%)
		1-5 ratings	235 (32%)
		6-20 ratings	175 (24%)
		21-99 ratings	93 (13%)
		100+ ratings	10 (1%)
	Mean height rating	4.19 (0.67)	
Goodreads.com	Number of ratings	0 ratings	202 (28%)
		1-5 ratings	177 (24%)
		6-20 ratings	114 (16%)
		21-99 ratings	158 (22%)
		100+ ratings	74 (10%)
	Mean height ratings	3.80 (0.70)	

Heights of ratings are on scale from 0 to 5.

Table A2: Correlations between key variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Female	1										
2.Genre: general	-.085	1									
3.Classic	-.218	.181	1								
4.Output	-.185	-.092	.356	1							
5.Newspaper review	-.062	.142	-.085	-.064	1						
6.Amazon rating	.209	-.048	-.229	-.104	.218	1					
7.Goodreads rating	.161	.005	-.081	-.024	.266	.744	1				
8.Newspaper 99-08	-.193	.137	.309	.386	.234	.066	.191	1			
9.Goodreads author	-.003	.014	.163	.474	.109	.395	.572	.406	1		
10.NYT 2009	.094	-.055	-.056	.184	.114	.381	.354	.223	.253	1	
11.NYT 99-08	.008	-.040	-.034	.174	.025	.199	.196	.230	.184	.499	1
12.Amazon sales rank	.099	-.072	-.147	.172	.167	.637	.613	.190	.504	.458	.277

Bold font = significant at .05

End notes

ⁱ There was also a pragmatic reason for choosing February. We aimed at collecting data in the beginning of May, when students followed a course in which they collected the data for this research. February was not too early and not too late to construct the sample and then let students find relevant data on the books.

ⁱⁱ For pragmatic reasons we choose not to include all mass market fiction available. Thus, these titles in our constructed sample mainly come from *FictionDB.com*. Note that Books in Print could not be trusted as single data source because it appeared that occasionally books do not get a subject label (that is: 'fiction') and are thus not picked up by the search.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genre was to be established by the explicit labeling in Books in Print or Amazon.com, or otherwise by alternative descriptions on the Internet. The coding schedule supplied definitions and examples of all genre types. Although these sources are not authoritative, they signal the way labels are used in the market place by publishers, mediators and readers.

^{iv} For pragmatic reasons, we take first names to be indicators of the author's sex. Ambiguous names were checked. Of course, it is possible that some authors take pseudonyms of the other sex (e.g. within serialized romance fiction). Still, in these instances media critics and readers are not aware of potential other identities.

^v Note that the researcher had already collected the charting details, up to April 26 (week 17) 2009, entered them in an SPSS file and printed an alphabetically ordered list for coders to consult. Information on previous bestseller list success was also at the disposal of the researcher and distributed similarly among the coders.

^{vi} Previous listings in the Paperback and Mass Market list were not available to us.

^{vii} Note that edition was not included since charting in the NYT bestseller lists was the aggregate for separate lists for hardcover, paperback and mass market.

^{viii} Within the genres historical fiction, young adult fiction and other fiction, the sample of February 2009 did not contain titles that managed to get charted in the NYT bestseller list.