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Chapter 15 - The Future of the Book and the Slow Book Movement

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The Future of the Book and the Slow Book Movement

-Sarah Ellen Pettigrew-

The future of books is not clearly known, but the ebook has a high likelihood of taking over as the primary method of reading. Ebooks are disruptive to the realm of written works. These technologies essentially “steal” customers from the already established and successful methods, such as printed



books. Disruptive technology is a slow process, and can be seen in the rise of popularity of the ebook. Although we are moving into an era that is embracing the advancements of technology and continually trying to progress, the progression into an ebook-only society could be

challenging. Ebooks require a device in order to access them. This, among many other reasons, argues that there could be many downsides to ebooks.

The Downside of Ebooks

As with accessing any source of information, there is often an associated cost. Aside from libraries, books come at a price. For many people, purchasing ebooks is not a problem, but there are an increasing number of people (especially children) under the poverty line. UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) states that an approximated 1 billion people were not literate at the beginning of the 21st century and these people are living in poorer health and poverty than those who are literate¹. This statistic included an estimated 130 million children. These statistics are worldwide. However, if we want to change the method of reading, it is essential that the goal would be for literacy to spread worldwide in order to for the

technologies that allow for this to truly be disruptive. To tell a child whose family cannot provide enough food that the only means of acquiring books is through a computer may prevent this child from ever having access to books, and ultimately literacy rates among those in poverty will continue to decline. Not only is this an issue for these children throughout their childhood, but also throughout their life. By not becoming literate, they will most likely continue to live in poverty, especially in developing countries. For this reason, it is essential that print books continue to exist and be used until all households can afford a computer.



Ebooks require power in order to be used, and more often than not, an ereader or other electronic device needs to either be charged or continuously plugged in. This can become a problem, as print books never required any additional materials in order to use them. If a person is using an ereader, they are burdened by the nagging battery bar that warns them that their access to books is quickly running short.

Ebooks are not as easily lent or borrowed compared to print books². Although it may be possible to access ebooks through an online library, the ability to share your elibrary with your friends and family is not necessarily possible, especially considering the people you are lending to would need compatible devices to read the ebook on. Also, some people do not like reading from a screen for long periods of time, so the preferences of different readers could prevent them from sharing their books with others.

Ebooks also are increasingly being read on computers and tablets with multiple applications. This increases the amount of distraction occurring while reading, since there can be many other windows, tabs, or applications open simultaneously on the device. This could be viewed negatively since distraction when reading is not desirable. According to a study performed by using technology from Mozilla's Firefox browser, one half of Firefox users have more than two tabs open at all times³. The ability to be easily distracted by advertisements is obvious, but sites like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube have also contributed to the distracted reading that can occur while reading ebooks². Clearly distracted reading is not preferred for being able to connect with the works, which is where the movement from the idea of slow reading is rising.



Slow Book Movement

The Slow Book Movement arose from the Slow Food Movement, which encouraged eating traditional types of foods as opposed to fast foods, and also put an emphasis on farming⁴. In a similar fashion, the Slow Book Movement urges readers to read more classic works⁵. Focusing on the classics will allow for readers to develop a better understanding of themselves and of how to connect with



others. The notion that the books being read must be classics is debatable, although the reasoning behind it can apply to many other works. The idea of

reading classics is to challenge the reader and for the reader to be confronted with moral dilemmas in the books they read. This will allow for personal growth as the reader empathizes with the characters of the story.

Reading books in a way that creates a personal connection allows for the reader to internalize the stories and to explore the opinions of the authors and of themselves. These results come from the “slow” part of the movement as readers dedicate a small amount of time, say 30 minutes a day, to slowly reading a novel⁶. Breaking apart novels into small chunks over a long period of time allows the reader to become more connected to the text.

With the rise of the Internet, readers are able to absorb a range of small facts rather than deep and meaningful concepts⁷. Although we are learning a large amount of information, we are not trying to contemplate these facts and relate them to one another. This is one of the goals of the Slow Book Movement, as the reader will purposefully take time to think over the small chunks that they read and have time to make connections that otherwise may not have been discovered.

Pro-Reading

The Slow Book Movement is really moving towards a new culture in which people enjoy reading and make an effort to reflect on and analyze the material. Reading is a skill many people acquire at a young age. The texts we choose to read are often selected based on readability⁸. When we are familiar with a



text, or the verbiage used is familiar, we tend to read faster. With the addition of more complex ideas and words being used, however, the reader is forced to slow down. The idea behind the Slow Book Movement is to read more thought-

provoking and challenging works, such as the classics, in order to slow down your reading.

Reading has many benefits, including mental stimulation, stress reduction, increased knowledge, vocabulary expansion, memory improvement, strengthened analytical skills, improved focus and concentration, better writing skills, and entertainment⁹. According to the Slow Book Movement, there is a need to read daily. The retention of readers when slowing their process down increases, as they are able to form a connection to the text. This connection will not only allow for the benefits of reading slowly, but the general benefits of reading will be greater.

Can Old Technology be Disruptive?

The question “can old technology be disruptive?” stems from the idea of a movement away from ebooks towards print books in the Slow Book Movement. This transition clearly provides benefits to the readers, but is it truly disruptive? The best way to examine this is to go back to what disruptive technology actually means.

Disruptive technology is essentially a simple concept that is introduced to the public and gains popularity, eventually surpassing the established technologies¹⁰. Typically they have smaller target audiences and a simpler approach. The beginning stages of disruptive technology do not seem promising, but the lack of enthusiasm in the beginning stages allows for the future boom in success¹⁰.

The Slow Book Movement could be disruptive, as it will take the fast reading nature of the ebook and transition into a more purposeful and meaningful reading style. The ebook has attempted to overtake printed books as a disruptive technology, but there are clearly groups who do not see this technology as disruptive or better, and are urging readers to look to the past to see the future of the book. The ebook in of itself, has not successfully been

disruptive, as it has not displaced the printed book. In this way, it may be arguable that reverting to an all-print book society would not be disruptive but just a more standard use of the “norm.” In the end, readers may find that the only way to see the future of the book is to look to the past rather than to the new technologies of ebooks.

The Future of Reading

Besides the debate of the future of books is the greater debate of the future of reading. There is a fear that future generations will abandon what we know as reading now, for more fast-paced absorption of information¹¹. The ability to access books has become so easy with the instant-download feature of ereaders and tablets, so the future of reading could also be readers who read a more diverse range of materials. Much like the way that people have switched the way they purchase and listen to music, very few people buy CDs and many people digitally download songs to an electronic device or cloud service. This transition took some time, but the majority of the population has embraced the change in this technology.

For this reason, it would appear that ebooks may soon take over print books, but movements like the Slow Book Movement will still allow readers to be in control of which “tablet” they read from.

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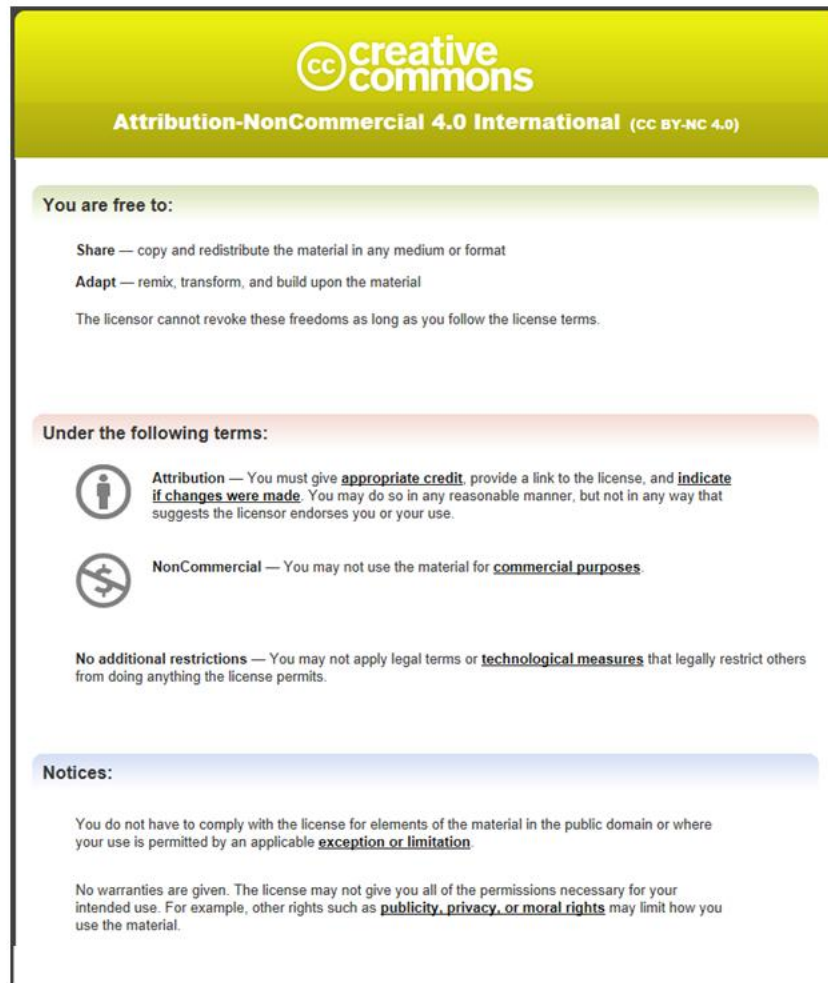
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