Digital Opportunity or Digital Excess? E-Publishing and the Reading Habits of University Students*

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Abstract
From its rather uncertain inception around a decade ago, e-publishing has become a central aspect of the trade publishing industry (that is, that branch of publishing that sells books to the general public). Textbook publishing is yet to make e-publishing truly part of its business practice. Yet at the same time, particularly with the advent of smartphones, students are now as addicted to reading on screens as they ever have been. As one instructor at a Canadian University whom I interviewed put it, students actually prefer reading on screens. What is the future of the print book in such an environment? Does it have one? Should it have one? Are there differences in reading from a screen and a page? What economic factors will drive changing reading habits? Since all these questions are so current, it is difficult to arrive at final answers. Yet considering these questions now is crucial since technological changes will keep occurring in classrooms; some form of change is inevitable.

Key words: e-publishing, reading habits, students, textbooks

INTRODUCTION
In an interview I recently did with publisher and consultant Thad McIlroy, McIlroy commented that “Publishers of successful legacy print products can milk them for a few more years but it would be foolhardy to launch a product primarily in print today.” (Interview by email, 5 September 2012). In other words, McIlroy saw the entire business model of the textbook industry as being on the edge of great change - change deemed as inevitable.

Of course, promoters of e-publishing have been saying for years that the print book is ‘dead’ and that e-books are the wave of the future. However, one distinction that must be drawn at the beginning of this discussion is that between trade publishing and textbook publishing industries. They are quite different. ‘Trade’ refers to the way average people understand publishing generally: the novels and celebrity biographies and popular non-
fiction that people usually peruse in book stores. Text publishing, on the other hand, is aimed at a very specific market: that of students who are enrolled in schools. The students this paper will focus on will be a more specific group yet: those in universities and colleges, whose reading lists are assigned by instructors, and who then in turn purchase their texts for classroom and study use.

However, to understand the state of textbook publishing, it is necessary to understand the state of the publishing industry generally – including trade – and its evolution of attitudes toward e-technology. And this evolution has taken place so quickly, and so without precedent, that it is worth underlining that there is not a body of pre-existing research per se, but rather a collection of articles and interviews (several conducted by this author) that constitute a body of study around which a clearer perception of what appears to be happening in textbook publishing for post-secondary students can be reached.

This paper is divided into three parts: a general overview of the recent history of e-publishing and publishers’ changing reactions to it (subdivided into two parts); a summary of some expert opinions on e-publishing and the textbook industry; and finally, a summary of some students’ opinions about e-texts and their place in the classroom or world of homework/self-study.

GENERAL OVERVIEW - PART ONE
Publishers have been talking about e-books for many years. However, it was the dual impact of 11 September (which damaged book sales) and the stock market crash of 2008 (which damaged book sales again) that really accelerated a sea-change in attitudes; before that, the primary idea in publishing circles was that the print book was a ‘perfect technology’ and that e-books would always take second place to print. Of course, in the background of all this was the appeal of technology; the way in which new technologies tend to attract usage because they attract consumers – particularly among the young. However, first it is necessary to give an overview of the industry from the inside as it were, and observe the attitudes of publishers themselves.

I have been interviewing publishers since 2006. At that time, when I first asked publishers about the role that e-technology (e-readers such as the Sony Reader or Kindle) and audio books might play in altering book publishing, the responses of publishers were guardedly enthusiastic, though often tinged by an emotional attachment to the physical object of the book. This was true even among avant garde publishers. For example, Che Elias, of the experimental American house Six Gallery Press, commented:

I think [in terms of the effect that e-books and audio books have on people] it’s obviously easier for some people to have a book read to them because of their schedule or what not and I think it’s great but you can’t beat holding the real
book in your hands and actually reading. I think push comes to shove that the bound copy (book) of the text will be what prevails [Elias, interview, 2007]

On the other hand, Bev Daurio of the small Canadian literary house Mercury Press, who was one of my first interviewees (in late 2006), saw more promise in audio books than e-books.

Audio books will continue to be used and useful, but e-books— it’s hard to say— though on-line access to archive, historical and reference materials as well as specialty journals and the like is growing and seems appropriate. My feeling is that there will be more displacement into video-related and game leisure activity— and perhaps it’ll be a couple of generations before we find out how books as they are now will fare and in what forms. [Daurio]

The tendency in 2007 was to see e-books as a marginal technology: Robert Lasner, of the American house Ig Publishing, remarked:

So far, e-books have been a failure. I think people like the feel of a real book, and I don’t know if electronic substitutes will ever suffice.

However, Jonathan Burnham of HarperCollins, one of the largest publishers not only in English but throughout the world, commented:

I think that if the right sort of device — at the right price-point as well — comes along, this will lead to a major shift — quite a rapid shift — from the traditional book form. I know that I myself use my e-reader around 70% of the time. I think there’s a very strong potential market for them. As with the i-Pod, there could be an explosion of use of that sort of medium which would be very sudden. The complication is that we’re now in the middle of a recession. (Burnham interview, 2007)

When I re-contacted in 2010 the publishers I had already spoken to, I found that there was more of a trend to accept e-books — and see them as potentially profitable — than earlier. It was the midst of a particularly severe recession, and because I was asking questions about the touchy subject of whether business for publishers was getting worse, in this case, I kept the respondents’ identities secret. What was noteworthy was there was a general movement to accept e-books, though there was still some reticence about them. I asked publishers the following simple question: Are your e-book sales increasing? Answers were as follows:
Respondent A: Yes.
Respondent B: n/a
Respondent C: Yes.
Respondent D: We don’t publish ebooks. Some of our books are now available on Kindle, Nook, etc., but we regard them as book sales for the sake of accounting. Yes, that part of the business is growing, but it’s in the hands of our distributor.

Respondent E: Yes.

Respondent F: Yes.

Respondent G: Don’t publish e-books.

Respondent H: Haven’t done enough in this area to have anything useful to add here.

GENERAL OVERVIEW – PART TWO

In 2010 and early 2011, the phenomenal success of tablet computers such as the Apple I-Pad, Samsung Galaxy, and so forth, helped accelerate a trend toward e-publishing. Nevertheless, resistance to the very idea of e-publishing remains, and it is important not to automatically deride that resistance as reactionary. For example, on 28 August 2010, publisher Dan Wells put up a post at his website *Thirsty: A Bibli Oasis Blog* about an event launched by the Literary Press Group. It is called The Handmade Campaign, and is part of what Wells described as the back-to-the-book movement. The Campaign focuses, Wells wrote, “on well-designed physical books in this age of e-reading hysteria”. [“For the Real Reader (not the e-Reader)”, August 28, 2010, http://biblioasis.blogspot.com/2010/08/for-rear-reader-not-e-reader.html.] The last phrase in the sentence was telling as it revealed a degree of ambivalence – perhaps even antipathy – toward e-publishing.

This is not to say the desire to embrace the opportunities offered by e-publishing does not exist. In the summer of 2010, the online literary magazine *Joyland* announced a contest (mentioned at Corey Redekop’s blog *Shelf Monkey* on July 18, 2010, “A Chance to be Published!”) to find short story writers interested in having collections of their work published purely as e-books under the Joyland imprint [Redekop, Corey, http://shelf-monkey.blogspot.com/2010/07/chance-to-be-published.html].

E-books, then, are striving to be considered equal to print. The success or failure of e-publishing will both be a question of cultural change (that is, acceptance), and also economic reality. Furthermore, the world of print is not a homogenous one; books, particularly fiction titles, available in hardcover often appeal to a different audience than paperback editions do, and not all paperbacks are priced equally. Given that university students, the newly graduated, and an often-impoverished creative class form a not-insignificant audience for literary fiction, it is important to ask whether book pricing of what is in print might also be critically examined from the point of view of lowering costs. As was stated in the abstract of this paper, e-publishing is not the only option open to publishers as they look for new strategies to increase their readerships; they might find ways to reduce the cost of print books by re-embracing formats that have fallen out of fashion, such as the pocket paperback. As well, they might embrace new print technologies such as print-on-demand. This latter might not lower prices at the retail end, but it would do so at the production end, and as a result hold considerable potential for the benefit of publishers.
Furthermore, e-books are attractive to the young because the young are attracted to smart phones and tablet computers. Robyn Read, who worked for a while as an acquisitions editor at Freehand Books and also works as an instructor at the University of Calgary, notes that university students simply like reading from screens; the ambivalent attitude that older readers tend to have about “screen text” does not exist among them. The effects of the generation gap are particularly noticeable here. While e-publishing can be rationalised as a necessary concession among book people who love the touch and smell of print, no such rationalisation is even necessary if electronic technologies are themselves the preferred “platform” for a text.

Text publishing, as mentioned before, is a substantially different field of publishing than trade publishing in the following regard: its audience is different, and its methods of reaching that audience are different. Industry expert Thad McIlroy notes in an article entitled “The Future of Educational Publishing” that “the North American textbook industry is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. The signs are everywhere. Perhaps the only group that appears to offer little credence to the crisis is the industry itself.”

The major issue is the high cost of textbooks, mainly those used in higher education, where students must shell-out the cost directly, estimated, by the College Board at between USD805 and USD1,229 on books and supplies alone during the 2007-08 school year. The price of textbooks has never been dirt-cheap, but the last several years have seen the price of many texts climb to USD150 or more. Suddenly a range of individuals and groups have taken notice [http://thefutureofpublishing.com/industries/the-future-of-educational-publishing/].

In short, students are very sensitive to the price of their texts, and the texts themselves can sometimes be overpriced (on occasion, conspicuously so).

As I have noted elsewhere, frequently students react to high prices by simply avoiding paying them and making illegal copies instead. While this seems to put the entire onus of blame on students, such an analysis would be superficial. There are co-factors contributing to this “too much or too little” mentality that the industry needs to remain sensitive to: prices can be very high, and exorbitant. One writing book I know of – printed on relatively cheap paper, retailed for close to USD90 – an exorbitant mark-up.

Educational publishers can counter their costs have increased not only because of the price of print publishing but all the ‘extras’ that students are now coming to expect:

“While many factors affect textbook pricing, the increasing costs associated with developing products designed to accompany textbooks, such as CD-ROMs and other instructional supplements, best explain price increases in recent years. Publishers say they have increased investments in developing supplements in
response to demand from instructors.” (Annual Percentage Increase in College Textbook Prices, College Tuition and Fees, and Overall Price Inflation, December 1986 to December 2004)

However, the industry itself has fallen into bad habits. Not only can price mark-ups be excessive, publishers have also often fallen into the habit of bringing out a ‘new’ edition of popular texts every year or two. Again, speaking from experience, I know of a literary anthology that does this, and its rationale is beyond credulity: it is an anthology of mainly canonical works (from Spenser onward); yet ordering the book from Korea is near-impossible since the various editions tend to knock each other out and furthermore it is the kind of volume that would do well via second-hand bookstores. But planning a class reading list with page numbers becomes a big headache when not all students have the same edition. The instructor, in such a case, does not ‘adapt’ to the variations among editions (now at five, for a book originally anthologised not so long ago) but gives up. The publisher’s ‘clever’ strategy of continually changing a book not in need of change, backfires. Or in the case of works in the public domain, students can easily access what they want legally by searching online.

Outside a North American context, this writer’s understanding is that textbook prices are more reasonable in fixed (but not necessarily, relative) terms: the textbook industry will charge what the market will bear, and so prices are lower in countries outside the U.S. and Canada. This means that the same title of, for example, a large American company, will be sold at a cheaper price in Asia. However, because of the nature of online shopping, booksellers and book-buyers in the US have the option of buying that title at its lower, overseas price. This procedure is called re-importation.

U.S. college textbook prices may exceed prices in other countries because prices reflect market conditions found in each country, such as the willingness and ability of students to purchase the textbook. While geographical barriers have historically limited the reentry of textbooks intended for international distribution back into the United States, known as reimportation, recent advances in electronic commerce have broken down this barrier. In response to concerns that the international availability of less expensive textbooks might negatively affect textbook sales, publishers have taken steps to limit large-scale textbook reimportation (Annual Percentage Increase in College Textbook Prices, College Tuition and Fees, and Overall Price Inflation, December 1986 to December 2004)

What is germane here is this: publishers will be very proactive at protecting their profit margins. At root of the problem is economics: the publishers want to retain market share by having popular titles, and also to make a profit; the students want good material at as low a price as possible. Once digital devices are introduced into this equation, digital media itself becomes important because it has the potential to lower prices significantly. But it is a double-edged sword: from the industry’s point of view, it magnifies the already-
existent problem of copying; not only will students have the option of photocopying, but they will now be able to scan books illegally, and distribute them that way. On the other hand, if a digital model of publishing and distribution can be managed effectively, students will have the option of titles at lower prices while still paying enough for the publishers to make a reasonable profit.

The question then becomes one of determining what students want? As instructor Robyn Read has suggested, the underlying assumption of material on e-publishing tends to assume that students will naturally gravitate toward e-texts because students are so enamoured of their smartphones, laptops and tablet computers (Read, 2009). However, it turns out that student preference for digital ‘platforms’ is not as universal as one might initially assume, and that print books still possess practical advantages. Furthermore, any analysis of students’ opinions toward e-books must, in the present circumstance, also take into account students’ attitudes toward reading generally; these are not fixed, and, as numerous cultural observers have pointed out, they are being noticeably influenced by digital technology in forms other than that of e-book. In other words, digital technologies (such as smartphones and tablets) not only present students with the option of utilising e-books but, of course, the option of distractions from reading e-books. While this paper cannot consider such a massive social phenomenon in detail, it is a phenomenon which needs to at least be recognised as a contextualising factor for the final section of this paper which shall deal specifically with the attitudes of students toward e-reading in an educational environment.

EXPERT OPINIONS ON E-PUBLISHING AND THE TEXTBOOK INDUSTRY
Parallel to the changing attitudes toward e-publishing has been an increasing body of evidence indicating a crisis in casual reading itself; this crisis should not be equated with literacy (though it would not be illogical to argue it would have an impact on literacy). Instead, it is a crisis in the reading habits of young people. In the United States, this crisis was exhaustively documented in a report commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and released under the title ‘Reading at Risk’. In effect, young people (particularly boys) were performing at low levels of reading for pleasure. This is a cause for concern to educators because, obviously, a young person who gets pleasure from reading (or at least reads in his or her own time) will likely perform better at reading tasks while in school.

The largest and most comprehensive study in English of reading habits among a national population has been in the United States by the National Endowment for the Arts study ‘Reading at Risk’. The study took place over some decades and employed census data in order to determine reading patterns. One category of reading the study focused on was termed literary reading – that is, serious reading for pleasure (NEA, 2004: p.27). It found a significant decline for the 18 to 24 age group between the years 1982 and 2002. The total decline was 35.7%. During the same period TV watching stayed relatively uniform: “In
1982 and 1992, the average amount of TV watched per day was 3.0 hours. This decreased slightly to 2.9 hours per day in 2009” (NEA, 2004). Thus: “These figures suggest that TV watching may not be an important factor in the overall decrease in literary reading”. However, the study also noted movie watching (including videos) and computer usage increased, and, as these various ‘new media’ formed a context in which reading habits were declining, the study remarked, “although nearly half of Americans read literature in 2002, literary participation is clearly less popular than it used to be, possibly due to competition for entertainment time and money for a range of other options, including video-games, movies and the Internet.” (p. 28). It was the latter medium that the report paid particular attention to.

The percentage of U.S. adults reading literature dropped from 56.4 % in 1982 to 46.7 % in 2002 – a decline of almost 10 percentage points. This may indicate a downward trend over the past two decades, but it is important to note that the SPPA is not conducted on a yearly basis. This monograph looks at the surveys held in 1982, 1992, and 2002 – ten-year snapshots. No information is available for non SPPA years, and it is possible that the 2002 drop is a short, one-year change. If the 2002 data represent a declining trend, it is tempting to suggest that fewer people are reading literature and now prefer visual and audio entertainment. Again, the data – both from SPPA and other sources – do not readily quantify this explanation.

As discussed in Chapter 3, television does not seem to be the culprit. In 2002, those who do read and those who do not read literature watched about the same amount of TV per day – three hours’ worth. The Internet, however, could have played a role. During the time period when the literature participation rates declined, home Internet use soared.

According to a 2000 Census Bureau report, 42% of households used the Internet at home – up dramatically from 26% in 1998, one of the earliest years of the Bureau’s tracking. By contrast, literary reading rates reported in 1982 and 1992 were virtually identical in a period before the Internet was widely available. It was not until 2002 that the reported percentage of adults reading literature dropped considerably. (p.30)

Similar findings can be found in studies conducted in Canada by Statistics Canada and internationally by the OECD for its ‘Programme for International Student Assessment’. And, if this were the case, might it then not be true that introducing a form of book which is specifically designed for digital machines such as computers and smart phones and e-readers would be a particularly effective way of reaching these disappearing readers? The question cannot be answered in any categorical way: the technologies that are driving these social changes are just too new. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of the
widespread popularity of these technologies – as this author has remarked, their popularity is so widespread that it is self-evident – that these questions must be considered now and with thoughtfulness.

When one considers the usage of textbooks rather than ‘literary’ books, one finds that the crisis is not so much one of declining reading. Students who buy and use textbooks are, so to speak, a captive audience; they read because they are required to. This is certainly particularly true first in Asia, with its widespread focus on education, and in particular in South Korea, with its unusually demanding and time-consuming schooling culture. As the Center on International Educational Benchmarking remarks: “But [these generalisations about diligent study habits in Asia] have a particular bite in South Korea. The demand for education is stronger. The pressure on students to perform is greater. The number of hours spent by students studying every day and every week is longer (longer, in fact, than in any other OECD country).” [http://www.ncee.org/programs-affiliates/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/south-korea-overview/] Put differently, South Korean students will be good readers when compared to international averages. But will they transfer their reading habits over to e-books?

My research has reached some preliminary findings that in some respects fulfill expectations but that in other respects are counter-intuitive.

SUMMARY OF SOME STUDENTS’ OPINIONS ABOUT E-TEXTS
Discussions with students at the university where I work on the topic of e-texts has led to a few preliminary conclusions: the first is that digital technology is not loved in a whole-hearted way by students because of the same factor that tends to alienate students from print books that are overpriced: the digital devices are themselves quite expensive.

I interviewed a group of students first in September 2012 (Harvor, 2012), and then groups in March 2013. Cell phones tend to be reasonably priced, but still remain out of the reach of students whose families are poor. And cell phones do not have an internet function; only smart phones do. But smart phones – while priced at a reasonable price for the electronic-object-itself – come with monthly plans that are (unsurprisingly) quite high. The other option for students is to either buy an e-reader – a device intended solely for reading e-books – or a portable computer, such as a laptop or tablet. But again, prices for these are high. Students on fixed budgets may simply find that buying paper books makes more economic sense in the immediate term. One student remarked: “I have an e-reader and I like it. But it’s expensive and I can’t use it for anything else.” (personal interview A, September, 2012).

All students these days have access to desktop computers with an internet connection, if only through university study rooms. But these are, of course, not portable. So what
will one bring to class? Print-outs? If so, the price of printing out may turn out to be higher than simply buying the text.

Students also like the tactile quality of print books. One can easily write marginalia in them. As another student pointed out, this is a good tool when studying later for exams (personal interview B, September, 2012). E-devices have note-taking functions, but they are not as intuitively easy to use or, later, access.

In contrast to this, the search function of e-devices is superior to that of books. Student C remarked that when looking for a word or phrase within a text, e-devices are clearly superior. (personal interview C, September, 2012).

Several books at the same time tend to be heavy. E-devices such as a smart phone are lighter. Several students were emphatic on this point, since the task of carrying these books around all day can be a burden (personal interview D, September, 2012). But again, electronic devices are not a simple catch-all solution. The screens on smart phones are too small for extended reading (personal interview E, September, 2012). But buying another digital device with a larger screen – tablets are the most popular option in this regard – adds to weight, and, again, there is the initial cost of buying the machine.

Finally, some students simply prefer print when reading for long periods of time. Apart from a single-use device such as an e-reader (think of Sony or Kindle’s e-readers), the screens of digital devices do not make for a pleasant reading experience when one is poring over a text for hours on end. This was a point of view expressed by several students (personal interviews group F, September, 2012).

Approaching two groups of students again in March 2013, I gave them an anonymous questionnaire. With this latter inquiry, I wanted to find out four essential pieces of information: first, was there a great discrepancy between reading (i.e., for school) and reading for pleasure; second, did students read books online; third, was a price differential a factor in determining whether students would prefer texts in e-book format; and fourth, whether it was in fact the case that “21st Century youngsters” were really as enamored of reading from screens as observers such as Robyn Read has said they were.

I asked the following questions:
1. How many books a year do you read?
2. How many books a year do you read for pleasure?
3. Do you read books online?
4. Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 1,000 won below the print book price?
5. Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 2,000 won below the print book price?
6. Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 3,000 won below the print book price?
7. Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 4,000 won below the print book price?
8. Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 5,000 won OR MORE below the print book price?
9 If you prefer reading print books, explain why.
10 If you prefer reading e-books, explain why.

Questions One and Two
Group A was a class of students studying English and American literature. They were, by the nature of their course choice, more likely to be active readers in their spare time. This was reflected in their answers to questions one and two, especially the latter. Since students had long lists of mandatory reading, their numbers in this category were also high. (When students themselves indicated their answers were often ‘guesstimates’ and wrote down their answer as a range – for example 20-30 books – I assigned their answer a median number). As an aggregate of all books including school books, no student read fewer than 9 books. One student read 90. The average number of total books read per student was 31.7.

The majority of students in group A indicated they read at least 10 books a year for pleasure. Answers to question two ranged significantly. One student answered 1 or 2, and two students answered 2 books. Another answered 60. The average for the class was 15.2 books read per student for pleasure annually.

Group B was a class of students studying Basic Writing (a first year course). Their fluency varied, though several students are in fact upper year students, some with high fluency. Answers to question one again varied, with 10-20 being a common response. The lowest number given was 2. The highest was 30. The average number of total books read per student was 10.4.

Answers to question two were relatively low with answers such as 1-2 or 2-3 fairly common. The lowest number was a blank (zero). The highest was 30. The average for the class was 5.3 books read per student for pleasure annually.

Question Three
Regarding question three and the reading of books online, answers were overwhelmingly negative. In group A, four students read books online (one student remarking “Actually, I don’t like ebooks. But I bought 5 books online to check what’s an ebook”). The remaining six students categorically did not read books online.

In group B, four students read books online (one student clarifying that she had only done this once). The remaining nineteen students categorically did not read books online, some adding exclamation marks for emphasis.

Questions Four to Eight
Price was a major consideration when students were asked whether they would buy a textbook as an e-book. The majority of students answered ‘no’ to questions four through
seven, only answering ‘yes’ to question eight. A few students showed some flexibility, beginning to show interest in buying e-text books at the ‘3,000 won below the print book price level’. However, most wanted a reduction of ‘5,000 won OR MORE’.

Results for Group A were:
4 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 1,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 10, Yes: 0
5 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 2,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 10, Yes: 5
6 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 3,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 9, Yes: 1
7 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 4,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 8, Yes: 1. Maybe: 1
8 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 5,000 won OR MORE below the print book price?
   No: 3, Yes: 6. Maybe: 1
(For this last question, one student added: “I would never buy e-books if it is for study, but I would consider buying the e-books when it is for pleasure (if it is much cheaper than paper books”)

Results for Group B were:
4 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 1,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 19, Yes: 4
5 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 2,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 18, Yes: 5
6 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 3,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 20, Yes: 3
7 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 4,000 won below the print book price?
   No: 20, Yes: 3
8 Would you buy an e-text book if the price was 5,000 won OR MORE below the print book price?
   No: 10, Yes: 11. Maybe: 2

Because the students in group B had a lower degree of fluency than those in Group A, some of the questions may have been misunderstood. For example, to questions 4 and 5, two students answered ‘yes’, then proceeded to answer ‘no’ for the remaining – that is, they wanted a minor discount in price rather than a major one. However, as the survey was administered anonymously, I did not have any way of following up, and the students may have had their own reasons for answering this way (I had explained the questions in detail verbally before handing out the survey sheets); it is possible some students wanted book prices to be relatively high in order to support publishers.
Questions Nine and Ten
These questions were, like the first survey I did, open-ended. I wanted to delve a little deeper into students’ attitudes about the experience of reading an e-book versus that of a print book. In group A, one commonly found comments such as “I prefer reading print books because e-books are tiring for my eyes. Also, on print books, I can write down simple memos.” [Mar. 19, 2013]. Of all the answers, three strands of thought emerged: liking the feel of paper, getting tired eyes from digital devices, and being able to easily write notes on paper. In group A, two students liked the feel of paper; six got tired eyes from digital devices; and two preferred taking notes on paper.

In Group B, the tendency was again to strongly prefer print to digital: only two students indicated a preference for the latter. One wrote: “It is easy to read e-books because almost all have a smart phone.” Another wrote: “Because e-book is also a book. I think that doesn’t matter what it made of.” Mar. 19, 2013]. The same three strands of thought were found. However, three more were added: feeling that one was studying from a print book, but not e-book; needing to make a paper print-out anyway from an e-book for work in class; disliking the unnatural colour of the screen of an e-book. In group B, two students liked the feel of paper; seven got tired eyes from digital devices; and three preferred taking notes on paper. Of the additional categories, one student liked the feeling that one was studying from a print book, one student disliked reading an e-book, needing to make a paper print-out anyway from an e-book for work in class; one student disliked the unnatural colour of the screen of an e-book.

CONCLUSION
Proselytisers of e-books need to pull back somewhat and ask themselves if all their assumptions about the inevitability of tech change and the inherent superiority of internet-based culture are necessarily based on reality. I have to admit that I was somewhat surprised to find that young university students are not as universally keen on digital texts as I had initially assumed. Furthermore, this ambivalence expressed by students retained its consistency between surveys of their attitudes, and between levels of students.

However – and it is a big however – the key to understanding where the text book industry might go then, requires a model that includes both print and e-text. The print text book will likely be with us for some time. The main questions remain economic and qualitative: at what price, and at what quality? Furthermore, while it is probably print books will remain, it is far from certain they will remain predominant. In the end, economic factors will be crucial, along with changing behaviour. In the end, economic factors will be key, along with changing behaviour. Anecdotal experience suggests that young people have misgivings about e-textbooks but that these misgivings are not major. Particularly in the case of texts that do not have to be read for extended periods, such as the short texts often used in EFL classrooms, there is no overarching reason why e-texts will not catch
on. What will be a deciding factor here, this author thinks, is the innovative attitude of publishers. And since usage of other ‘platforms’ such as CDs and online additions to texts show that textbook publishers already are innovative, it is reasonable to assume that therefore e-texts can only grow in popularity. Change can and will happen. It is not difficult to foresee a future in which most text books are in e-format and only a minority in print. However, this general trend may have much variation, with certain texts remaining largely in print, while other texts – treated in a more disposable manner – moving toward an e-format.

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