

Charlotte Nip

PUB 800

November 12, 2018

### **We Publish Books and Authors.**

When I was ten, ESL class traumatized me where it made me believe that in order to be a literate reader and writer, I had to be born with perfectly spoken and comprehensive English. Throughout high school, I dreamed of being an author, to curate books that have the power to create conversations and ideas just from my fingertips. I still believe in this notion that if a person has a really great idea and somehow have the skills to convey it, then he/she will be able to publish a book. 21st-century publishing tells me the latter, that the industry does not produce books, but produces authors. This is supported by the use of branding in publishing and it's powerful effect of marketing. In the competitive world we live in, where people are constantly fighting for the newest, trendiest, and "best" objects to monetize, we are unfortunately stuck in the realization that publishing is a business economy. For publishing to be about business, it requires the constant reminder that businesses demand money. In order to obtain money, one must find all sorts of unique and captivating ways to attract consumers' attention or desire into giving that money away. Thus, in the current 21st century, we emphasize the authors' brand over publishers' brand, or even the books' brand. I'm interested in exploring what effect author branding has on 21st-century publishing, counter this idea to support my own belief that we can still support branding books over authors, and why it might be more important to do so in our current capitalistic economy than in the past.

Mike Michalowicz, in an article "What No One's Telling You About Writing That Book", suggests that "writing is nothing, marketing is everything." [1] Selling books is a constant motive because if books are popularized or circulated, then there would not be any readership to support the financials of the book. The point isn't to make money off a book (Let's face it, publishing is not a moneymaker field). The importance is building authority, and Michalowicz suggests that with this authority, it builds customer rapport and leads customers to care about the work. Readers are not interested in a story if

they aren't influenced to believe so, or guided into an environment to know about the story from the start. With the increase of social media and technological advances, it becomes over competitive on how content is delivered to consumers. A writer who posts on an uncirculated Wordpress will probably never get recognized unless word of mouth sparks and the word circulates around to people with high positioning power in the creative industry. With this authority, there is more control for the book to achieve any measured success. It appears that the only efficient way to do this is by author branding.

When agents or editors are acquiring new manuscripts to publish, an author's platform is valued over a piece of unknown writing. When we think about any other authors that don't come from a Kardashian family or has publicly spoken about a traumatic event (and many other instances that result in social media recognition), authors are given questionnaires that require full explanation of their established connections within the industry to help with the marketing of the author, and evidently the book, later when the book is an actual, tangible product. Alison Flood, in an article "Traditional publishing is 'no longer fair or sustainable'", shares that "increasingly authors are being asked to do a lot of marketing and promotion themselves." [2] Perhaps in the past centuries, without the input of social media, consumers purchase books for the purpose of understanding and learning content. The saying "don't judge a book by its cover" must have come from someone who judged a book by the cover, to judge the content and make an uninformed decision to purchase the book solely based on the content that is marketed.

An example I refer to is JK Rowling. She was rejected by twelve of the world's largest publishers, having no established public platform before writing Harry Potter. [3] However, when Bloomsbury finally published Harry Potter in 2007, the book exploded and has become one of the biggest book series in children's literature. As more and more authors craft stories that are similar to Rowling's to follow her narrative path, author branding becomes more crucial and dominant in publishing. Joseph Esposito, in his article "Revisiting: Why Publishers' Brands Matter," argues that "in the book world, the argument is that no one buys a book because of the name of a publisher; it's the author's name that counts." [4] Following Harry Potter, JK Rowling continued to produce

fiction novels, but under an alias because she did not want her author branding to be affected in the case that her future works don't sell as well as Harry Potter. [Shamsian, 3] Furthermore, Esposito argues that "brands matter because authors think they do. The best brands attract the best authors – a virtuous circle." [Esposito, 4] Credibility establishes if a bestselling author has multiple published books versus an unknown unpublished author. In our current society, readers rarely have time to research into their next book purchases. The basis of marketing is to promote urgent impulsive buys and spread awareness about the book using the author's name. We describe authors mostly by their previous published works, previous writing jobs, or if other important figures in publishing support or knowledge of the author. Therefore, our modern world becomes highly networked and processed, where without uptakes on authors and their background in writing, it's hard for a publisher to support the manuscript or even know of them. If an author is a nobody, then what might publishers have to use as branding power to manipulate and influence its target audience and consumers? Author brands matter, and unfortunately if an author has no credibility before submitting his/her manuscript, it's almost very unlikely that their work will ever be published.

In Maureen Gillis' thesis essay, "Branding The Borzoi: Imprint Branding and The Knopf Canada List", she describes branding as "ubiquitous, almost everything is perceived to have a brand. The branding paradigm is so pervasive that it colours the way buyers view both the products and services they purchase and the companies that manufacture them." [5] I wonder, if author branding has the "undeniably effective[ness] in helping to sell books- sales figures and poll results seem to support the idea" and "powerful associations that a brand-name author like Stephen King, John Grisham, or Danielle Steel conveys" [Gillis, 5], then how could it be unique and effective to build book branding further? Instead of continuing to feed into the bestseller machine by producing popularized mainstream authors that follow the same formulaic genre, how could we publish books that have the authentic quality that is worthy of this branding recognition? I suggest that in this sense, branding is used to explain to the consumer why a book is worthy of their time. I believe book branding is crucial because of its uniqueness in marketing. As Gillis continues, "people commonly buy a certain book because they are looking for something new to read, not something they have already

read.” [Gillis, 5] She asks, “if each title is unique, why not brand each book separately?”, as if a critique that when author branding is used, each title is diminished and hidden under the key selling points of the author, not the book. For instance, readers buy James Patterson books probably not because his stories are innovative; it is because of his vital credibility as an author over time. If we sell each book as it’s an individual entity, marketing stories instead of people, then we create more diversity in the content that we produce and circulate. Instead of a book being JK Rowling’s next greatest work, it is the next greatest book just on the content and storyline itself. I think that deserves more attention, that a writer can be remembered for one great story instead of ten forced formulaic ones.

The problem with publishing is that in the end, publishing is a business for publishers to uphold. Publishers demand content that keeps people coming back and contributing to the cash flow of income. I wonder, how desperate have we become in wanting to be published? Are we taking the easy way out by using the money, fame, and networking to become “authors” instead of discovering natural, original writing? What is the value of authorship in 21st-century writing? If we continue to flush out writing so it becomes bestsellers based on its viral ability on Instagram or Buzzed articles, then how does that contribute to the legitimacy of writing? It saddens me when people say we don’t publish books; we publish authors. At the end of the day, it is still a business. We must treat it with the professionalism and accuracy that it deserves, that it is a business that requires a constant flow of income, but that income can come from passion projects, or just really passionate writers. We must follow mind-enriching books and give it the attention it deserves, as these ideas are frequently hidden under a landmine of unread manuscripts. If branding is a way to give voice to the author, why can’t we bring this light to the work itself? As if this holds as a foundation for any work being published meaning just enough.

### Works Cited

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