

Online community of readers = e-reading?

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***Abstract:** In Hungary the e-book culture is now evolving. The publishers are creating a large number of new e-books, and the libraries are speaking about how they can serve e-books to the readers, because there is no law about that at the moment. Up till now the readers could obtain new Hungarian e-books most of the time illegally. For this reason there are a large group of online communities that are dealing with e-book exchanging.*

In my presentation I will try to give answers to the following questions:

- 1. Where can we find such communities on the internet?*
- 2. How are these communities working? What behavioral patterns describe the members of the community?*
- 3. What is the attitude of the classical online communities of readers towards the e-books and e-reading?*

I will also show the community of the biggest Hungarian social website for booklovers, named Moly.hu.

Keywords: e-book, web2.0, Hungary, online communities

INTRODUCTION

Many people think that the future of reading resides only in e-books, so the printed books will disappear. We can treat this thought as a dystopia, but also we should pay attention to this part of the reading culture. In many countries you can buy e-books or borrow them from the library, but in Hungary the e-book culture is now evolving. The publishers are creating a large number of new e-books, and the libraries are speaking about how they can serve e-books to the readers. Because up till now the Hungarian publishers and libraries were very passive regarding this topic. It could be because of the financial problems or the technical deficiencies, or maybe they thought the public do not need innovation; it is a very complex phenomenon. The main point is that there is no law about e-book borrowing at the moment (Szalacsi 2013), and up till now the readers could obtain new Hungarian e-books most of the time only illegally, because they couldn't get it from the library and could find only few Hungarian titles in the publishers offer. So if somebody wanted to read an e-book, he could either choose from the few titles or had to choose another language and buy a book for example from the Amazon.com. Or he could download its illegal Hungarian version from the internet. Most of the time these e-books are illegally scanned from the printed version and are made by the readers or they are amateur translations with a great amount of mistakes. As one of the most famous book-bloggers said in an interview: "Pirated e-books filled huge deficit for years".

For this reason there are a large group of online communities that are dealing with e-book exchanging. In the Hungarian scientific literature we have a large group of results about the social sites for booklovers, the Moly.hu (Audunson and Tóth 2011) and about the Hungarian website, the Rukkola.hu, on which we can exchange our printed books (Jávorka 2013), but until this time nobody investigated the e-book reader communities on the internet. In spite of this from the former researches we can draw important conclusions.

At first we must ascertain two concepts. The first is the e-book exchanging. I am not sure about if these are the best words for describing this process: when somebody gives an e-book

to the other person, most of the time he will get another in exchange, but it is not necessarily from the same person. It works like the Rukkola.hu website but with e-books instead of printed books. In that case we called it book exchanging, so this time I will call it e-book exchanging. It is not a giving or a donation, because the owner of the e-book keeps it to himself too. It is not a lending, because the acceptor will not return it. It is more than a sending and downloading, because the person who gets it will likely pass the e-book on, give something else in exchange or give another e-book to someone else, becoming a part of the exchanging circle in the process.

The second concept I want to elucidate is the online communities of e-books. As Fröhlich says the community is the ideal-typical definition of groups or social systems that have solid ties between the members as a result of spontaneous or specifically emotional follow common goals. These include the family, circle of friends, neighbours, religious sects. The community led by the "essential will" (Fröhlich, 1994). So this time we are speaking about communities operating in the virtual space, they have rules and common purposes, goals for example the same interest or a need to exchange information or a service, so something that can be a reason for the community form. In this case this thing is the e-book reading.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

At first I made a research among booklovers. A questionnaire was elaborated and made available in Facebook groups (Librarians, University of Pécs's students, Rukkola.hu users in Pécs, etc.), on the Moly.hu website and was sent to the students of the Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resources Development of the University of Pécs between 2nd and 15th November. 907 questionnaires were filled in and returned.

In my paper I will try to give answers to the following questions:

1. Where can we find such communities on the internet?

Are they using social networking websites, blogs or old type forums, maybe torrent sites? What is the most popular platform? Are they taking advantages of the opportunity of the web 2.0?

2. How are these communities working? What behavioural patterns describe the members of the community?

Do they speak about the substance of the books or just about the exchange? Do they develop friendships? So are they a real community or just some people who like the same things? How friendly and helpful are they in the community? What are the most popular books? Do the users search it single-mindedly or do they most of the time just browse?

3. What is the attitude of the classical online communities of readers towards the e-books and e-reading?

I will also show the community of the biggest Hungarian social website for booklovers, named Moly.hu. Because we can presume that the users of this site read e-books much more often than the others, they are deeper in the digital reading culture, they are using it regularly and naturally. But we know from the old users of the Rukkola.hu that they exchange their paper books on the site but they don't buy books online. So are the users of these social sites e-book readers and members of online reading communities too?

Apart from these one of the biggest question is that: What is the effect of these communities on the e-book market? (Bodó 2011) Will the members buy books legally if they can download it free? Will this seize back the development of the e-book culture? What can the publishers and the libraries do in this situation without strong law system in the background?

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

The demographical data in this research are very similar to the demographic data of the social networking sites for booklovers. Most of the responders are woman (82%), and live in big cities: in the capital or one of the country seats (55%). The average age is 28 years. The youngest respondent is 13, while the oldest is 78 years old. The repliers are highly educated.

Most of the fillers (74%) are using one of the social sites: the Moly.hu or the Rukkola.hu. So we can state that there is a stable stratum that loves books and reading, but keeps abreast of the times and use the internet for book connection activities. Do they love reading e-books?

THE HABITS OF THE RESPONDERS

The first question about the reading habits was the following: “Please, think of a typical occasion when you choose readings for yourself! How often do you choose a book from the following sources?” I wrote items that the answerers had to rate with these words: never, generally yes, generally no, very often. For us the most interesting data is this: only 14 people said that they often buy e-books and 679 said they never do this. But 120 repliers often download free e-books and 319 do this generally. So most of the responders, even if reading e-books, they don’t actually pay for them. And most of them do read e-books: 69% answered that.

50% of the responders has an own e-book reader, 4% use someone else’s and 46% use other electric devices. In the 1st table you can see the answers about how often do the answerers read e-books of the listed genres. The repliers had to mark in a five-point scale the frequency of the reading. If we compare the data with the answers of the Moly.hu and Rukkola.hu users, we will see that there are no differences in genres of reading when they use an e-book or a printed book (Audunson and Tóth 2011; Jávorka 2013).

Table 1. The genres of the e-books

Genres	Value
Autobiographies	1,63
Classis novels	2,97
Contemporary novels	3,48
Thrillers and adventure novels	3,11
Science fiction and fantasy	3,24
Esoteric literature	1,45
Educational literature	2,16
Scientific literature	2,28
Essays	1,68
Current politics and society	1,49
Short stories	2,63
Poems	1,89
Dramas	2,04

Only 29% of the repliers exchange e-books with other people and only 13 responder said that they often get to know new friends during the exchanging. Most of them get new e-books online from their friends or they acquire the readings from impersonal sources, for example torrent sites and file-sharing sites which they find with Google. They know that what they do is illegal so they share it only with those in who they trust.

Because of this many of them do not want to tell from where they get e-books or in which community are they members. 13% of the repliers said they are a member at least in one online community that deal with e-books. But after this when they had to name the communities, it revealed that many of them don't understand the concept of online community. Most of the time when they want to have an e-book, they use torrent sites and forums but in these platforms there are no communication between users: because of the rules they can only comment about the problems with the downloading.

Facebook was also listed among the communities: lots of closed groups are found that deal with e-books. Although not all of these are illegal, but because of the high number of different languages and their way of function is impenetrable.

The other famous social site what the repliers use is the Moly.hu. I checked the site and I found 474 virtual shelves in connection with the e-books but not any of them were illegal. I also tried to exchange e-books with the users. I was very surprised when I received all of the books which I asked. It is a good example to social sites even if the core of the social life is not the e-book culture but only the reading itself. So in this site the users do not distinguish between the platforms.

The most famous source is the CanadaHun.com website. It is a forum to Hungarians who live in Canada or somewhere else outside of Hungary. Although in the foreign countries it is really hard to find and read Hungarian books, on the part of the readers there is a great demand for it. Therefore a part of the forum concentrates on this and offers a large supply of e-books to the members. On this forum there is a very active social life but not because of the e-reading rather because of the clannishness.

WHEN THEY DO NOT READ E-BOOKS

In the questionnaire there was an empty field in which the repliers had to write if they do not read e-books than why. The 1st figure show the answers. Only 4 people could formulate the problem with the small supply. Most of them explained the fact with emotions: they love printed books, their atmosphere and their smell. 60 people said that they haven't got an e-book reader, most of them want to have one, but it is very expensive to them. However 69 repliers do not like to read with electronic devices. It is important that they do not distinguish between e-book readers and PCs, tablets or laptops. Most of them said that their eyes are very sensitive and they become tired fast when they read this way. So they do not know anything about the new e-book readers and their technology.

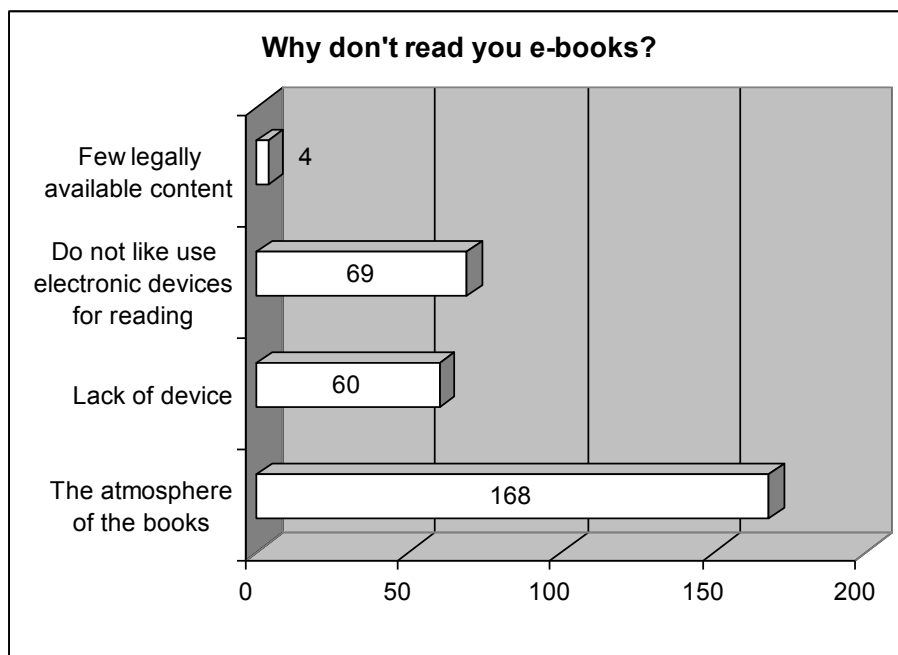


Figure 1. Why Hungarian people do not read e-books

From the non-e-readers only 32% said that they have a friend or an acquaintance who in the past tried to encourage them to read e-books. I think it is a small rate, the e-readers are not active at drawing in new members.

CONCLUSION

I saw a number of things, but I did not find any online communities that could correspond to my conditions. The Hungarian e-book readers download from impersonal sources, because they that what they do is illegal. In the future we will have to do a new research in this topic and check the changes in this world. When the publishers and the libraries will find their place in this new world, everything will be different.

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