Profiling the independent author.
Who are self-published authors, what factors influence their likelihood of commercial success, and has self-publishing played a role in disrupting the publishing industry?

Holly GREENLAND

Table of Contents

Abstract

Since its re-emergence in the late twentieth century, self-publishing has become an increasingly professionalised route to producing and sharing information and stories; one which is hypothetically open to all. However, stigma persists regarding its validity within the publishing community and the perception of the self-published, or 'independent', author as taking the 'last resort' continues. Against this backdrop, limited academic research has been undertaken to analyse the reality of the self-publishing landscape today; the composition and motivations of those utilising self-publishing methods to publish their work and the potential impact of the model on the wider industry.

This study identifies measurable evidence of the success of self-published authors today; defines the psychographic profiles of those self-publishing to segment and name the resulting clusters; identifies a range of factors that may impact the likelihood of commercial success when self-publishing and considers to what extent self-publishing has disrupted the established model, including representation in authorship. Research methodology included a digital author survey with 819 valid responses, including measuring for the first time the Big Five personality traits for authors publishing across three models (self-publishing, traditional publishing, hybrid publishing), and a six-month sample analysis of Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller sales figures.

Notable findings include a recommendation to shift proactively from using the 'self-published' author naming convention to adopting more widely the 'independent' or 'indie' author label and identifying and naming two author-clusters segmented by success drivers; Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans. In addition, a small but intriguing correlation has been identified between a rise in author commercial success scores as defined in the study and lower scores for agreeableness alongside higher scores for neuroticism, as well as a stronger positive correlation for publishing more books in a shorter period. Alongside this, evidence was found that self-publishing has and will continue to disrupt the traditional publishing model, potentially impacting the availability of both content and publishing services to the traditional industry. Finally, a lack of significant diversity within the independent model was surfaced, raising questions regarding the need to continue to seek new ways to diversify author voices and stories in the future.

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction & Context

1.1   Introduction

This chapter aims to set the context and case for this study, presenting the key information that brings self-publishing to where it is today; the people, processes, and perception of the model. This includes defining 'self-publishing' as a model for the purposes of this study; describing the current traditional publishing process; outlining key milestones in the development of self-publishing, focusing on the period 1999 to 2023, which began with the advent of Web 2.0 and includes the rise of the so-called self-publishing 'Authorpreneur'.

This introductory chapter also aims to evidence the stigma that persists in some spheres in relation to the self-published author and the associated publishing model, as well as introducing the counterarguments to those factors. In addition, the key reasons will be identified and considered as to why, despite the tide of stigma surrounding self-publishing, authors continue to use this model. These themes will then be explored further in the main body of this study through primary data collection and analysis. Understanding the history and existing perception of self-publishing is critical for subsequently interpreting the study findings, as well as the impact these findings may have on authors, the wider sector and society as a whole in the future.

Before setting the context for this study, an introduction to the structure, tone, and presentation style used to report the study process and findings will be summarised.

1.2   Thesis Structure, Tone, and Presentation

This study has taken a cross-disciplinary approach, seen most clearly in the application of business management models to build hypotheses, alongside broader social science methodology for data collection and ethnographic analysis, while investigating topics such as publishing and creative writing, at the heart of the Arts and Humanities. The traditional formatting and tone for academic papers across these disciplines varies dramatically, and therefore clarifying the approach taken here is intended to aid interpretation of the thesis itself.

The thesis structure, tone, and presentation aim to ensure the content is accessible and practical both for academics, and for two key audiences outside of the academic sphere – authors and publishing-industry professionals. This is of particular importance as the topic, as will be demonstrated, is little studied in the academic world and therefore real-world engagement and application with the findings is anticipated to be of high importance. The accessible approach to academic writing has been investigated in a range of academic and informal settings, including a key paper by Graham Badley from *Qualitative Inquiry*, which puts forward an argument for 'post-academic' writing. Badley describes the model as:

> Both academic and accessible. It is academic in the sense that it addresses key issues in each discourse community. It is accessible in that it can be read and understood by broader audiences (Badley, 2019, p.95).

Badley puts forward arguments for a range of practical steps to bring accessibility to academic writing, including the concept of speaking in a 'human voice' and approaching academic writing as a 'human storyteller'. This narrative approach ensures the widest audience can follow and understand the content and is particularly suited to the study subject at hand, as an exploration of the author's role both in fiction and non-fiction. Academic accessibility is supported by a range of institutions and is a growing discipline in itself. For example, the University of Cambridge (ICE) course Making Academic Writing Accessible[1] ran most recently in 2021 and is aimed at undergraduates, postgraduates and 'more senior academics'. Here, the course offers learning outcomes, including 'how to build bridges between the sometimes-esoteric language of academia and writing for the general reader'.

The accessible approach will be utilised in this paper, both in the storytelling and the language and tone used. The thesis will follow the steps of the research undertaken as it unfolded chronologically to build a narrative to a conclusion, and the language and tone used will intend to offer a 'human voice' to the subject. Jargon will be avoided or explained where possible and, as Badley (2019) suggests, the text will avoid an 'over theoretical approach', while balancing this with the need for academic rigour. Discussion and interpretation are positioned alongside findings where the reader is most likely to raise questions of the data presented or how it could be interpreted, to further build the story of the

---

[1] To find out more about the University of Cambridge course, visit: https://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/course/making-academic-writing-accessible

study as the reader responds. For this reason, the Findings and Discussion chapters are combined. The thesis remains in the third person to reflect the objective nature of the data collection process and analysis undertaken throughout the study.

1.3　Definition: The Self-Published Author

At its simplest, the Cambridge Dictionary defines self-publishing as – 'to arrange and pay for your own book to be published, rather than having it done by a publisher'. Here the definition outlines the dual role of the self-publisher, not just to 'arrange' the activities needed, but to pay for the activities through personally funding the endeavour. By placing the definition of self-publishing in the context of *not* having a publisher, an early indication of the perception of self-publishing as a model only utilised when a publisher is not available, rather than as a stand-alone option, can perhaps be seen.

In their 2013 paper 'What satisfactions do self-publishing authors gain from the process?', Baverstock and Steinitz offered an alternative, empowering definition for self-publishing, as an activity focused on taking: 'personal responsibility for the management and production of content' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013b, p.274). This descriptor puts the author's own 'responsibility' at the heart of the definition, raising up the role of the author from simply the practical activities of 'arranging and paying'. The other most significant paper on self-publishing, Faith Dillon-Lee's exploration of the impact of the independent model on Fantasy authorship, did not offer a specific definition, but describes her view on the main positive of the model:

> (…) the independent author is able to publish their work themselves, retaining their rights, but gaining some of the benefits of a publishing house through gaining access to relevant publishing services (Dillon-Lee, 2018, p.200).

Here Dillon-Lee uses the term 'independent author', and it should be recognised that this term, along with 'indie author', is on occasion used interchangeably in the sector in reference to self-publishing authors and will also be used in this way for this study.

In *The Naked Author* (Baverstock, 2011) Baverstock addresses each of the various services that can be accessed to support a journey of independent publishing. Dillon-Lee also refers to the concept of accessing and coordinating specific services related to the process of publication as a clear benefit for the self-publishing model. The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), the largest membership body for independent authors, established in 2012, takes this one step further, breaking the role into what they define as the 'seven practical processes' an author must master to self-publish: Editorial, Design, Production, Distribution, Marketing, Promotion, and Licensing[2]. This definition emphasises the different professional roles a self-publisher must take on – or delegate – during the process, serving as a reminder that self-publishing begins with the creative effort, but runs right through to the distribution and even legal responsibilities of publishing.

For the purposes of this study, these definitions have been united, taking the emphasis on the responsibility to both 'arrange and pay' for the process described by the Cambridge Dictionary, the

---

[2] To find out more about the Alliance of Independent Authors' 'Seven Processes of Publishing', select each process from the menu on the ALLi Advice website: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/

potential for empowerment given by the Baverstock and Steinitz description of 'personal responsibility', the connection to coordinating services introduced by Baverstock and Dillon-Lee, and recognising the undertaking of a fully rounded end-to-end publishing process shared by the Alliance of Independent Authors. The definition for the purposes of this study is therefore:

> Self-Publishing: Taking personal responsibility for the planning, funding and coordinating of the end-to-end publishing process in relation to a writer's own content.

For clarity, this study does not include producers of short-form content, such as posts on the X platform (formerly known as Twitter), blogs, vlogs, or other social media assets. Although this is no doubt a form of content publishing, and the process of publication is often driven by the content producer themselves, for this study, 'self-publishing' refers to authors publishing books in one or more forms (digital, print, audio, and any related future formats).

Similarly, the emerging trend of self-publishing 'low content' books, has flooded the market in recent years. These are often diaries, crafting templates, planners, or notebooks. Amazon describes them as having 'minimal or no content on the interior pages. Low-content books are generally repetitive and designed to be filled in by the user.'[3] Despite often being sold within the 'Books' section of platforms such as Amazon, these are rarely produced by self-published authors in the sense used in this study, rather by small online businesses looking to branch into the stationery market. They also do not require an ISBN as they are not considered alongside fiction or non-fiction books and although they are discussed within the self-publishing community, they are not considered within this study as self-published books.

---

[3] For further information on Amazon's definition of 'low content books' visit this Amazon KDP website 'Help' page: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GGE5T76TWKA85DJM

1.4 Validating the Published Book

Before exploring the publishing landscape since the year 1999, a summary of the key milestones in publishing will offer the context of a tradition of facilitated content production, as a model that has found longevity globally. It should be noted that due to the location of the researcher and the study data taken predominantly from the UK, US and Europe, the history outlined here focuses on the story of publishing from a Western perspective.

Early story and record sharing for commercial gain can be traced back to Ancient Athens and Rome, with publishing an essential social function for millennia, and crucial to the birth of science and culture (Bhaskar, 2013, p.195). Even in the earliest incarnations of publishing, the process was overseen by a range of specialists, including paid scribes working on behalf of authors, to produce and share written documents with friends or booksellers. However, after the fall of Rome, in the West this practice moved almost exclusively into the monasteries and would not emerge again until the twelfth century (Feather, 2006).

Then followed a slow redevelopment of this process until, in the early 1400s, the scribe was so established a role in England that they had their own London guild to represent their community. At this stage, a range of further publishing roles emerged, such as intermediaries selling books on behalf of the scribes to the book buyers, or the 'stationers' providing services such as book binding. With increasing literacy, came an increasing desire for books, creating commercial opportunities. In Europe, printed books were appearing at speed, with volumes from Germany, Italy and France being traded to England from around 1460. A growing market specifically for printed Bibles for home use and some key scholarly texts spurred on this development in book trading (ibid).

It was in 1476 that the merchant and bookseller William Caxton printed the first book in English, *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy*, printed in Bruges working with the Flemish printer Colard Mansion. Three years later Caxton established his first printshop in England, followed by a range of advancements across the next three hundred years, such as the development of integrating illustrations into print books in 1493, the design of the 'Roman' typeface in 1530, the establishment of the University Press in Cambridge in 1584, publication of Shakespeare's *First Folio* 1623, and the speed of printing advancing so far, and so fast, that the first daily newspaper launched in England in 1702 (American Printing Association, 2023).

This brings us to the 'age of the novel' (Baverstock, 2011) in the nineteenth century, with publishing focusing on books as entertainment, such as the penny-a-part novels, or children's books sold for entertainment rather than education. There is no surprise that this further boom coincided with one of the biggest rises in literacy. It is thought that around 40 percent of males and 60 percent of females in England and Wales were illiterate in 1800, but by 1900 this had dropped to around three percent for both sexes (Lloyd, 2007). Having slowly risen since the 1500s, it was the emergence of Sunday school, followed by wider options for day school, and eventually legislation for schooling for all, that impacted literacy profoundly, and by the end of the nineteenth century, novels were in high demand

from this newly literate public, with many selling in the hundreds of thousands. Alongside this change in the public reading habits, grew the prominence of the author. This in turn stimulated legislation to enshrine the author's rights over their written words, with the Copyright Act of 1814, and its follow up in 1842 which granted the author legal ownership of their work for the writer's lifetime and a period after their death. Just as the Scribe Guild had cemented the role of the scribe in the 1400s, the establishment of The Society of Authors in 1884, with Alfred Lord Tennyson as the first President, gave a final stamp of approval to the role of 'author' and with it a body to fight for and defend authors' rights (Baverstock, 2011).

The rise of the author to a professional position supported by a recognised body mirrored the further development of a carefully managed publishing process through a range of expert specialists and gatekeepers; with agents, publishers, legal support, and distributors sitting between authors and their readers. This process not only formalised support for authors, but also further monetised a range of activities that need to be completed to produce a book. The model therefore had practical benefits for both sides. For the author, the process offered expert support for their work and relieved them to write, and for the publisher, a share of the author's profits. But the role of the publisher goes beyond merely practical, positioned alongside other players in cultural production, such as critics, gallery directors, theatre owners, as a critical player in identifying and highlighting to the wider literary world (and readers) the meaning and value of the work they produce, identifying and verifying it as 'legitimate' art (Bourdieu, 1993).

To achieve artistic verification within this established order was and remains complex to navigate for any new author (Feather, 2006). For example, the process for fiction writers looking to receive a traditional publishing contract most often begins when an author completes a fully finished manuscript before sending the first three chapters – or specified word length sample – to a literary agent as a 'query' seeking representation[4]. Along with the sample, a one-page synopsis and covering letter fulfilling the specific agent's requirements must be sent. Requirements can range from identifying a genre and target audience for your work, to sharing comparable successful books in the market, or outlining your own social media reach or marketing plans as evidence of your potential audience engagement. It is worth noting that the specific stipulations for the content, formatting, and presentation of submissions to agents may in themselves become a barrier for authors. For example, authors without experience of submitting essays during college or university study or completing complex application processes for roles in a professional career, may find this process more complex and daunting or be more likely to make mistakes. Failure to comply with differing querying rules across agencies can mean an author's submission will be deleted or thrown away immediately, with no feedback given.

Should you make it through the submission process, an agent can receive submissions in the thousands across a year, with one website comparing a range of agents' data suggesting between 50 and 300+ a week is a fair estimate (LiminalPages, 2018). It can often be the case that an agent 'closes'

---

[4] Note that for non-fiction authors there are more opportunities to pitch directly to specialist publishers without agent intervention, for example where these publishers are seeking work in the author's niche.

their submissions window during busy periods to limit workload. When they are open for submissions, each one received must be sifted and read, or delegated to others for reading, to identify possible authors for acceptance. Top of the list of criteria is whether that agent feels they can sell that concept, style, and the author themselves to a publisher. Although agents often quote their personal passion for a project as the key driver for taking on a new author, without the certainty of high financial reward, the risk of adding a new writer to their workload is rarely worth it. As Literary Agent Maggie McKernan describes: 'An agent's job is to find the right publisher, and then to get as much money as possible' (McKernan, 2009), implying the direct link between taking on an author and securing financial results both for the author and themselves.

Based upon the criteria, few are chosen by an agent to submit their full manuscript for further assessment, and fewer still will then be taken on by the agent for representation and championing for sale to publishers. Work is then undertaken to prepare the manuscript for sale, and this can include several rounds of story development and rewrites. The manuscript is then put forward to suitable traditional publishers to bid for. The late Dan Poynter, often described as the 'father of self-publishing' (Coker, 2015), followed up his 1979 trail-blazing *Self-Publishing Manual* with a second volume which included an aptly titled section, 'Who Chooses This Stuff?' Here Poynter asked:

> Is there any other industry that chooses its newest offerings on the basis of the collective whim of a group of people (acquisitions editors) with practically no business experience? (Poynter, 2009, p.222).

Looking ahead from 2009 to today, the process has modernised in response to technological advancements and increased competition. A range of departments now play a role in the selection journey, from Marketing and Consumer Insights to Digital Sales and Data Analytics. To be selected, a submission must now not only be supported by Poynter's 'collective whim' but by a range of specialists seeking a sound business case supported by hard data. A submission may even be considered alongside wider platform representatives, for example, teams working in other markets such as translation, retail, TV, or film (PublishDrive, 2023).

This business-focused decision-making may on the surface appear a step on from Poynter's description of those without the relevant experience taking decisions of significant impact to the authors they represent and the markets they serve. However, there is the potential that as an increase in financial and business factors to consider across specialisms comes into play, so too does the avoidance of risk-taking, or the opportunity for decision-making based purely on an instinctive response to the creative work itself. This perhaps leads to a tendency to select work that has a proven precedent, for example representing a current favoured genre, an author with a famous name, or a story that the group feels can be marketed to a wide author readership. Basing decisions on current data and trends can paralyse the evolution of ideas, and the freedom to play and innovate needed for creative development. In particular, selecting stories that sit outside recognised genres or that are written by authors from backgrounds that do not immediately appear to suit a wide audience group

may be deemed risky. Therefore, opportunities for wider diversity in terms of author or story representation can also reduce, as will be explored further in this study.

In that context, it is easy to see why it is estimated by a range of author platforms and data gatherers that between 1% and 2% of books submitted to an agent are ultimately published (Talbot, 2023). If you are one of the fortunate writers to navigate the complex acquisition process, only then will you be offered some financial reward for your efforts. This is usually in the form of an advance in the low thousands (Publishing Perspectives, 2015), which is a loan[5], paid off by the first royalties for the book; a payment scheme that in itself may be a barrier for authors. Further royalties are only due to the author once the advance has been covered. The process now begins again, often with further story edits, followed by line edits and proofing, along with reader-testing via 'Advance Reader Copies' (ARCs) or proof copies. Marketing will be involved almost from day one, feeding into the decisions of teams, including Design, who will come on board to format the internal content and produce a cover that will reflect the genre or topic, and appeal to the target readers. The Marketing team will also be planning a comprehensive launch campaign, with associated digital and in-person events and advertisement placing.

However, the so-called 80/20 rule will mean that 80% of the marketing budget is likely to be applied to the top 20% of the books launched that year, often those by famous faces (not necessarily well known for their writing) so a new author must not rely on Marketing to push their book for them (Poynter 2009, Baverstock, 2001). Finally, Distribution will work on getting the books into the hands of readers both in print and digital formats (and potentially audio). It should be noted too, that a traditional publisher's timelines can also be governed by retailer calendars, with books presented to sales representatives as far as nine months to a year ahead to ensure promotional support. This lengthy process of submissions, sales, reworking, design, marketing, and distribution means it can take up to two years for a book in the traditional publishing model to move from the writer's laptop to the bedside tables of people around the world (Brewer, 2020). This lengthy process is specifically designed to protect the market (Dillon-Lee, 2018), by weeding out those books that will not sell and by carefully adapting and marketing those books the industry has faith in to turn a profit. As Clark and Phillips suggest: 'Ultimately a publisher has to operate a profitable business model that delivers sufficient return to enable the publication of authors' works, and offers to authors remuneration in terms of readership, money and status' (Clark and Phillips, 2019, p.119).

Thus, the literary agent and the publishing house are responsible for identifying and moving forward only those products that are most likely to sell or can be otherwise funded. The filtering processes are therefore focused on identifying financially viable products, which will earn enough to pay the publisher first (and their associated suppliers), then the agent, and finally the writer themselves. As the risk of investment is spread, the potential financial rewards are also spread. To sell books at this level, products must be either popular among a large reader audience on an ongoing basis, or aimed at a niche audience willing to pay a high retail price for a specialist product – such as high-end

---

[5] Note that if a traditionally published book does not make enough sales to pay off the advance loan from the publisher, it is technically due for repayment. Although this is rarely activated by a publisher.

illustrated books, academic guides or special interest books aimed at audiences with enough high disposable income. Because of this, particularly in the world of children's fiction, time and energy from traditional publishers can be focused on 'celebrity' writers, such as British comedian, David Walliams, or former Spice Girl, Geri Horner. In this genre specifically, these ready-made trusted 'authors' lower the financial risk yet again, and appeal not only to busy parents, but to the big advertising routes such as TV chat shows. As award-winning children's author Piers Torday noted: 'If harried adults don't have time to keep up with reviews, they'll just go into Sainsbury's and if they've heard of the name, they'll just grab it' (Torday, 2022).

Of course, a good many books submitted may not have been of high enough quality to move forward at all, but many more will simply have been too niche, too similar to another on the publishers' list, written by an author without wider profile, or of a genre not represented in the current bestsellers. In addition, they may simply land in the inbox with 200 others that day and are overlooked in the scrum. Many thousands of authors' dreams must have ended there and then, in the virtual 'slush pile' in an email folder – or dragged straight into the digital wastepaper bin. However, this is not true for everyone. Although 'Self-Published Author' may sound like a job title firmly rooted in the digital era, it is nothing new, with examples dating back to the nineteenth and early twentieth century to be found as the popularity of the novel grew. This is not just seen among minor players. The model can be traced back to such notable authors as Mark Twain, Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and Beatrix Potter, the latter famously self-publishing *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* when deciding to take control of her writing career following a score of rejection letters from publishers (Armistead, 2013). Potter felt so strongly that her own black and white images, rather than the fashionable colour illustrations of the day, should be used in the book, as well as the small size format suitable for a child's hands, that rather than bend to the publisher's view, she took the publishing process under her own control (Baverstock, 2011). Jane Austen self-published, with additional financial support of her brother Henry, both *Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility*. The rights to *Northanger Abbey* were sold to a publisher, but Austen bought the book back at a later date, having felt the publisher was taking too long to release it (Keymer, 2011).

These stories of early self-published authors are regularly shared throughout the self-publishing community as inspirational tales of success. Often called 'private publishing', the process was accepted and used by many authors early in their careers. However, beyond having to take on the costs of production, which limited the possibility of self-publishing to the higher echelons of society, those who did self-publish rarely achieved a career from it and the activity was usually peripheral to their careers and their final success (Winkler, 2014). Indeed, all the authors listed above, and many more in the early history of self-publishing, eventually used a traditional publisher, including Austen, who, with the help of her family, finally negotiated a serious sale to a publishing house. It was after this that her profile rose. Potter's sell-out print run led to a publisher taking on *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* soon after her foray into self-publishing, although it should be remembered that canny Potter retained the copyright to her characters and produced some of the early soft-toy merchandise related to children's books, with Potter potentially inventing character merchandising; big business even today (Lanzendorfer, 2017).

Perhaps because self-publishing was not at this time widely seen as career-building, it appears to have been deemed of little pressure to the established industry model. Consequently, there is no evidence that any stigma existed around the model at that early stage. Potentially self-publishing was viewed alongside any other wholesome craft pastime or small business enterprise. Some outliers in this era were those who utilised their publishing experience to establish their own presses. Virginia Woolf, with the support of her husband, Leonard Woolf, launched Hogarth Press to produce her own work and those of her friends. Similarly, Sam Clemens created his own writing persona, 'Mark Twain'. Unhappy with his publishers, he established his own company, Webster & Co., to sell books including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on subscription, door-to-door. Production was only set in motion when enough orders had been placed to ensure a profit (Baverstock, 2011).

It is the University of Illinois who claims the title for what could be considered the first ebook, when in 1971 *The Declaration of Independence* was typed up and made available to download on an early version of the internet by undergraduate Michael Hart, who had been inspired by a free printed copy he had received. His eagerness to share it with more people led to the idea of uploading it for others to download at their convenience (Illinois Distributed Museum). Hart's project was well ahead of its time, and it would be thirty years before the process of producing books for download became a truly viable standardised option both for producing and distributing digital books.

Before the ebook, however, there is one further writer who must be included in the history of self-publishing, Jill Paton Walsh. In 1994, Paton Walsh, best established as a children's author, could not find a buyer for her newest offering, a genre-defying fable written for adults, *Knowledge of Angels*, despite approaching around 20 publishers. Paton Walsh's story was familiar to many authors, reportedly saying at the time: 'British publishers wouldn't even say what they didn't like about it (…) so I couldn't even change it to suit them' (Genzlinger, 2020). Paton Walsh, however, came out on top in the end, when she chose to self-publish the book using her knowledge from the industry, having successfully published through a traditional publisher previously. Not only did it sell well, but the book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, one of the top awards in the literary world, and her profile grew in the adult writing arena. It is referenced as the first self-published book to make the elite Booker shortlist (Eccleshare, 2020)[6].

While Paton Walsh was blazing a trail in 1994, the evolution of the internet was continuing. However, at this time, and in the previous decades, there were many false starts in the digitisation of books, with the industry not clear what impact it would have on their established model, or how to become a part of the change. In 2005, Thompson looked back at the progress – or lack of it – made in previous years, reflecting that:

---

[6] It wasn't until 2010 that it is believed the first major writing prize was won by a self-published author; the Young Minds Book Award. This was won by Siobhan Curham's novel 'Dear Dylan', produced through a self-publishing service called AuthorHouse.

Since the late 1980s there has been a widespread feeling within the industry that digitization is bound to have a profound impact on publishing, even if it was never entirely clear just what the impact would be. 'The digital future' has been the subject of countless conferences arranged by organizations which have an interest in publishing (for many years it has been a running joke in the industry that the only way to make money out of electronic publishing is to organize a conference on it) (Thompson, 2005, p. 309).

The realities of this 'digital future' grew in 1999, when access to and production of the written word changed forever with the advent of Web 2.0. This 'new' internet offered content creators the opportunity to publish and share their stories directly with their audience; with no gatekeepers, no submissions, no waiting. This was a gift to the frustrated author. As Thompson observed in *Book Wars* in 2021, the internet offered the potential for a 'democratization of culture' that would provide a route for writers to reach readers directly and this was now possible as Web 2.0 emerged. However, while for the writer a new dawn offered new options and opportunities, for the industry, Web 2.0 was potentially its 'greatest challenge' since the introduction of print in the fifteenth century (Thompson, 2021). This introduction of digital distribution led to a philosophical shift in relation to how content is created and how it is appraised; a shift seeing a step away from the traditional gatekeeper roles for validation, to an opportunity for anyone to share their content, and for anyone to curate and validate it (Clark and Phillips, 2019).

It should be noted that Web 2.0 does not refer to a specific change in the technical way the internet developed, but instead the 'principles and practises' behind both the applications built on it and the way users use it (O'Reilly, 2009). Before Web 2.0 emerged, the internet was predominantly viewed as a passive experience; an information repository to be searched and utilised by the user for knowledge provision. Web 2.0 brought in a more active, two-way approach to internet usage, ideal for 'User Generated Content' (UGC) and mass interaction. Through Web 2.0, users can create content in all formats, share views and opinions, comment on others' activity and drive popularity of content by their consumption and distribution to followers and 'friends'. Content validation occurs through reader action or inaction. While viewers, readers and engagers can respond positively to the content they enjoy, thereby fuelling its growth and distribution, they can also ignore content they do not favour, resulting in it dropping down search results or promotional spots. In this way, social media platforms aiming to make money from the internet, including the giants Facebook or X (previously known as Twitter), are providing not information or content themselves, but spaces for their users to produce and share their own. Money is made from the advertisers who utilise the high levels of user data and views produced by content creators to reach audiences with targeted advertising content. Encouraging further content creation and engagement is therefore critical for the platform providers to continue to make money from ads placed alongside, and increasingly within, User Generated Content. Creators and platform providers themselves benefited from higher quality user generated content, leading to the development of web-based tools to improve the quality and the speed at which it could be created, shared and viewed. As part of this development, a range of attempts were made in the 1990s to launch e-reading platforms, with Amazon itself launching 'Ebooks' on the Amazon.com

website in 2000, with PDF and Microsoft Reader versions of thousands of titles available. A range of individual writers also attempted to build the ebook concept from the ground up, including Stephen King, who sold a novella as an ebook in 2000 with reportedly over 400,000 downloads in the first 24 hours (Carvajal, 2000). However, in the pre-Kindle era, without the infrastructure to upload and share books easily and at scale, the initial success did not last. King's second digitally delivered book *The Plant*, released online in sections, did not produce the same sales, and as a contemporary UK news article reported:

> King said he will stop writing if more than 75% of online customers for early chapters are freeloaders. More than 78% of his clientele either paid by credit card or promised to send cheques or cash (Ezard, 2000).

What is of most interest here is that there was no transparent and immediate way to ensure everyone paid at source, with some merely promising to send 'cheques or cash', demonstrating that ebook ambition was moving faster than the technology required to support it.

So, in this pre-Kindle period, it is significant to note that it was writers who were willing to accept unpaid gratification and feedback who took the leap to experiment further; finding ways to share directly with readers through free platforms such as Wattpad, a story-sharing website aimed at 'Gen-Z'[7]. These sites allowed writers to share sections of stories, receive feedback, and share again. From this experience, many authors found audiences who enjoyed a closer connection to their favourite authors, and the interaction they gained from direct contact. Stories shared on sites such as Wattpad, and others aimed at readers of specific genres, included creators paying homage to favourite tropes, TV shows and even existing novels. The biggest success story from this era is undoubtedly EL James with her *Fifty Shades of Grey* erotica series which began in 2011. The story was originally posted in parts on fanfiction sites and responded in its narrative to the *Twilight* franchise.

James proactively took a range of steps to elevate her work from fanfiction to worldwide bestseller (Spatz, 2018). This began as James moved the story into her own fictitious world and republished her work on her own website where she could share further information about her characters and story. Its popularity among online audiences caught the attention of The Writers' Coffee Shop, a virtual publisher based in Australia, who James used to release it in three parts as an ebook and a print-on-demand (POD) paperback. The publisher was what might be called now a hybrid publisher, in that they were paid by James to produce the book. However, its unexpected huge financial success through this route, and the fact that she had retained the rights to her work, meant that James was able to then sell the book to Vintage for a traditional publishing release one year later. In this way, James could utilise self-publishing to demonstrate the viability of her product, in a genre not typically produced by traditional publishers, before being taken on by one of the larger houses.

Finding her audience direct online, writing within a community, utilising her own contacts, and producing additional free content related to her universe and her own story, James had fast and

---

[7] To find out more about Wattpad, visit: https://www.wattpad.com

unprecedented success. Despite mixed reviews of the books themselves, her success was recognised by some in the publishing sector, perhaps because many traditional publishers bought and sold hundreds more books on this new, so-called 'Mummy Porn', micro genre she helped introduce. The phrase was even added to the *Collins English Online Dictionary* in 2012, so widespread was its usage (Evening Standard, 2012). This popularity was fuelled further by the film versions released 2015-2018.

In that same year, James won the Specsavers National Book of the Year Award with over 75% of the public vote, even while up against her were three celebrity authors, a TV presenter (Clare Balding's *My Animals and Other Family*), and two actor/comedians (*Is It Just Me?* by Miranda Hart and *Ratburger* by David Walliams). Whatever critics and commentators thought of the quality of the *Fifty Shades* series, there is no denying the popularity of her work as an entertainment form and an accessible step into, or back into, reading for many.

Even before the success of James, a small but significant range of early adopters identified the opportunity to build support systems needed by independent authors. One example would be the service provider Smashwords, established by Mark Coker as an independent competitor to Amazon in 2007, and still going strong today. As early as 2009, Smashwords' close links to the indie author community spotted the chance to distribute via other platforms, and they became the first independent distributor to open up the US book chain Barnes & Noble to self-published ebooks. Most recent figures released in 2022 suggest Smashwords has worked with over 160,000 authors and small presses to date (Coker, 2023). Similarly, early events, such as the Writing in the Digital Age conference coordinated by the Literary Consultancy in 2010, which included a talk exploring the emerging opportunities in the world of self-publishing, provided spaces for voices behind the growing movement, albeit at the fringes of the publishing orbit.

At the same time, other artforms, such as music, were more visibly and actively embracing the potential for creative democratisation that User Generated Content offered in the Web 2.0 era. For musicians, websites such as Myspace and later Napster provided freedom for people to make and discover music from around the world for free and became part of daily teenage life in the mid-noughties. Musicians could manage their own digital production and distribution via online platforms, and it was through the championing of their online fans that their profile grew, not through the support of an external agent, producer, or record label. However, early in the digital music evolution, concerns about the traditional model were shown by the industry, for example through discussions held at the International Entrepreneurship Research Exchange in 2010 regarding 'How can entrepreneurial musicians use electronic social networks to diffuse their music':

> "In less than ten years music labels will not exist anymore" (…) the industry structure is under enormous threat with the emergence of a new innovative era of digital music. Recent years have seen a dramatic shift in industry power with the emergence of Napster and other file sharing sites, iTunes and other online stores, iPod and the MP3 revolution. Myspace.com and other social networking sites are connecting entrepreneurial artists with fans and creating online music communities independent of music labels (Kaya et al., 2010).

While EL James appeared to be an outlier in authorship, those proving their commercial worth through self-production of music more often moved from fan-led platforms into the traditional music industry, and with no obvious industry stigma. Just one example at the highest end of commercial success is Ed Sheeran, who famously began his career through a combination of busking, self-producing EPs and posting videos online including on the SB.tv site run by the late web entrepreneur Jamal Edwards. It was through his own tenacity and self-advocacy, as well as the championing of friends, such as Edwards, that Sheeran was eventually signed in 2011. However, he has returned to his independent routes as recently as 2023 to produce his upcoming music under his own control again.

Stories such as Sheeran's demonstrate that music studios saw the opportunity digital music sharing platforms provided as a testing space for talent, where they could watch potential stars thrive while others dropped back to niche audiences, and then approach those with large-scale success to sign for a more traditional deal. The musicians themselves then benefited from the experience, contacts, and scale at which they could grow their following through a record label, and the chance to refocus on the music, not the business. In turn, the traditional music industry benefited from supporting artists with an existing following, and a proven product. Perhaps the history of music as being a bottom-up activity, with musicians previously 'paying their dues' in the pubs and clubs circuit, made this transition to digital sharing appear more seamless and provided a continuing sense of integrity to the 'discovery' of music artist by fans first.

In the world of TV, a similar story played out. In terms of short form content, YouTube channels often rival the biggest TV shows in terms of overall views, with influencers and content creators gathering audiences in the millions for niche content with a global appeal. The most recent industry data shows that almost half of YouTube content views happen through televisions (Konstantinovic, 2023), with more people viewing the content alongside terrestrial and streaming services, despite its user-led production. Those who make their name through their own YouTube content can find they are then picked up and transitioned onto the traditional TV model, for example, the YouTube celebrities being utilised on shows such as 'Strictly Come Dancing', including Joe Sugg, a YouTuber, participating in 2018. Sugg benefited from the show by growing a new and older audience demographic, while the BBC benefited from moving a younger digital-native audience to their primetime BBC One family show.

At a bigger-budget level, feature films launched online via subscription services, such as Amazon Prime or Netflix, have disrupted the TV and movie industry. In particular, the Netflix service provider moved from DVD postal delivery to online streaming with seeming ease, and its growth in membership was no doubt supported by the lockdowns of COVID-19, when digital delivery of entertainment content became even more important to those stuck at home. The only downside for Netflix is that its unprecedented success has inspired a wealth of competitors from the traditional film model, and thereby encroachment on their space, such as the launch of the Disney+ streaming service in 2019. In 2021, the number of subscription packages owned in the US overtook the number of

people, with nearly 340m subscriptions contracts versus a population of around 330m (Ampere Analysis, 2021).

These developments must have put pressure on the related entertainment industry models, and certainly on ticket sales for in-person cinema seats, but what followed was a fast-paced inclusion of new methods of production and delivery into traditional models of recognition. For example, the rapid inclusion of digital streaming content on the submission lists of big-name awards, such as the Oscars, where, since 2014 Netflix released content has received 132 nominations and 22 wins up to 2023 (Moore, 2023). Although the financial and production backing for streaming media is not comparable to those of self-published or digital-only authors, the point stands that from an early juncture in conception, emerging methods of developing, producing, and delivering a range of creative artforms such as feature films have been, publicly at least, embraced and integrated into established models, including those of industry recognition.

In contrast, if the award circuit creates a shortcut to the views of the establishment, The Booker Prize remains clear in its current entry rules that independent authors cannot participate, even if they run their own imprint or have fronted the costs in another way, with rules stipulating as of 2023[8] that:

> Self-published works are not eligible where the author is the publisher. If the publisher is a company which has been specifically set up to publish the work in question, and/or the author is the person who owns the majority shareholding or otherwise controls the company, the work is not eligible. Works which have been published via a commercial arrangement through which the publisher is paid by the author are not eligible. Where an author or his/her agent require submission as a condition of a work's publishing contract that work will not be eligible (Booker Prize website, 2023).

An award is in itself a way of consecrating a work of art and converting it from symbolic capital to economic capital, through the benefits the award offers the author and those who produced the work (Bourdieu, 1993). Thus, through the bestowing of the award, validation is not only given to the work itself, but indirectly to the production model that led to its creation (Dillon-Lee, 2018). Generously, it could be interpreted that the rule above is in place for reasons of time and resource management. However, given the community nature of the self-publishing sector, there could potentially be selection models to ensure the inclusion of indie novels; for example, one in which peers or readers could nominate a selection of representative indie books. However, to take this step would potentially undermine the carefully managed process of validation, which continues to benefit the traditional model and the key players within it. More broadly it would also signify an acceptance of the route by the establishment and further shift the balance of power from the publishing industry to the author (and readers).

---

[8] Note that it is unclear when the rules were clarified by Booker. As noted earlier in this chapter, at least one self-published author, Jill Paton Walsh in 1994, had been shortlisted before.

It should be noted that independent author prizes do exist, notably the 'Selfies' running since 2018[9] by the publishing news site 'Book Brunch', or the genre-specific Self-Published Fantasy Blog-Off (or SPFBO)[10]. Here, the Science Fiction and wider Fantasy community established in 2015 a grass-roots competition that is fast growing in credibility and participation. Judged by a range of genre-related blog teams through several phases of reviewing and shortlisting, the competition is as much about celebrating great writing, as surfacing more widely new indie authors (and the blogs that support them) to the enthusiastic Science Fiction and Fantasy community. However, the nature of these self-publishing specific awards, as outside of the traditional and recognised award schemes, places the independent author as different or other, and potentially not in the same classification as authors publishing through traditional routes.

Some more targeted awards are emerging that are open to authors of all publishing models. These are often genre specific, such as The Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker Award[11], and the Hugo Award[12] administrated by the World Science Fiction Convention for which authors cannot submit their work, but instead members of local World Cons both nominate and vote for the winners. The member-led process has made it a popular and respected prize in the Science Fiction community.

A small number of open awards aim to recognise the work of specific under-represented or marginalised groups, such as the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award[13] for Black writers, or the Lambda Literary Awards[14] celebrating queer excellence in writing, also known as the Lammys. Perhaps the reason these specific awards are more open in submission criteria reflects the expectation that under-represented groups may be more likely to take the indie route to publish their work. Whatever the reason, as niche award schemes allowing for fairer comparison between traditional and indie authors' work grow in number, it may be that a rise in the perception of self-published books they surface may also grow. Those awards that are currently closed to indie authors may begin to open their doors to stay in line with wider practice and access.

Where did self-publishing stigma come from and is there any truth to it?

As Web 2.0 began to change how people were producing, interacting, and sharing creative work, pressure began to mount on the established order. When Amazon launched its first Kindle eReader in 2007, it launched Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) alongside it and the pressure rose again. This free platform allowed anyone with a computer and the rights to a book to upload, design and launch it with its own unique ISBN, the number used to log and monitor published books. Other similar platforms followed: Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Apple and Google, all offering digital publishing opportunities. Not only authors, but those working within the traditional model will have observed the rise of these highly promoted and financed offerings, such as critics and commentators; established arbiters of taste in their role as cultural producers and reviewers. As Bourdieu states:

---

[9] To find out more about the 'Selfie' awards, visit: https://theselfies.co.uk
[10] To find out more about the SPFBO, visit: https://fantasy-faction.com/
[11] To find out more about the Bram Stoker Awards, visit, https://www.thebramstokerawards.com/
[12] To find out more about the Hugo Awards, visit: https://www.thehugoawards.org
[13] To find out more about the Hurston/Wright Foundation, visit: https://www.hurstonwright.org/awards/legacy-awards/
[14] To find out more about the Lambda Literary Awards, visit: https://lambdaliterary.org/awards/

(...) the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, i.e. *inter alia,* the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers; or, to put it another way, it is the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products (Bourdieu, 1993, p.42).

As new digital platforms supported self-publishing to move from the sidelines of the established model and onto the bestseller lists and award circuits, arguments against this new route to publication began to grow within the establishment. This often emotionally-charged critique of the process and work of self-published authors perhaps reflected an acknowledgement from the industry that a power shift had begun. Self-publishing could, if unchecked, encroach not only on the economic outcomes for the traditional industry but, perhaps more critically, on the role of individuals within the publishing industry as those who can uniquely 'consecrate producers or products' (ibid). The arguments made against self-publishing should be interpreted in this context, as responses to an activity that has the potential to shift access to and roles within an established model of cultural power.

An example of this rejection can be found in *The Cult of the Amateur* published in 2007, the same year as the launch of KDP. Here, internet critic Andrew Keen states that the wider potential for democratisation of information sharing offered by the internet risks belittling 'expertise', 'experience', and 'talent' (Keen, 2007, p.15). If it is accepted that facts exist in relation to objective information, being able to distinguish between fact, deliberate misinformation, propaganda, or downright rubbish is a recognised challenge faced by humanity today and something it is hard to disagree with (Zimdars and McLeod, 2020). But, as many seem to, Keen goes further, and applies this view not only to objective facts, but to creative endeavours. He asks of self-published books on platforms such as Amazon: 'Do we really need to weed through the embarrassing efforts of the hundreds of thousands of unpublished or self-published novelists, historians and memoirists?' later emphasising that these books have 'never been professionally selected for publication' (Keen, 2007, p.56).

A similar language choice has been made by others, such as Aarthi Vadde. In Vadde's article the digital 'amateur' is regarded not just as the creator but also as the critic. The word 'amateur' is used repeatedly to describe any writer producing work digitally without the facilitation of a publisher, although note that the article also looks to photographers, artists and other creators producing work digitally. Though a distinct definition is not given of the 'amateur' in the article, Vadde does introduce this group as those who produce content 'without necessarily identifying with a specialised guild or benefitting from its resources' (Vadde, 2017, p.27). The article does not explore why some writers or artists are not part of a 'guild' or similar traditional institution that may be seen to verify expertise (for example through choice or exclusion), or at what point a body, such as The Alliance of Independent Authors, could be recognised as a 'guild'.

When we are considering user-generated subjective content; music, art, literature, do the same rules of expertise that we would place on authorship of knowledge and factual information content apply? Is there 'fact' in novel writing? Who is to say they are an 'expert' in creativity? How much 'experience'

does a writer need to be deemed credible? And can one person distinguish the 'talented' from the 'untalented'? The inevitable one-star reviews, even for those novels long considered among the greatest works in their genre, demonstrate that judging creative work is subjective and what is deemed worthy by one person may not be by the next.

Content across the web has continued to perpetuate this negative view of those publishing independently. For example, *The Writing Cooperative* website has articles with titles such as: 'No, You Shouldn't Self-Publish Your Book: There are Already Enough Bad Books Out There' (Wilde, 2021). Within this article, one subtitle reads, 'The obvious reason why most indie books are bad', although the writer goes on to admit that some of their own favourite authors are indie and that they have also self-published. However, as they conclude in the article: 'if we keep putting poor quality work out there, how will we break the stigma?' (ibid).

These sorts of opinion pieces often begin with the assumption of low-quality content from self-published books, and the article from Wilde also highlights a view within the self-published author community itself that regardless of their own high standard, there is work out there that is of a low quality, and it impacts their own standing and supports the 'stigma'. Was Keen right; has Web 2.0 allowed those who lack 'talent', 'experience', or 'expertise' through the net that would otherwise have been blocked by the publishing process?

'Talent', as Keen labels it, is perhaps the most challenging of his criteria to test when reviewing creative content, so subjective is its definition. Keen's view, and those who agree with him, suggests that without an arbiter of quality, there is no other way to judge the talent of today's self-published work. However, as intimated earlier, platforms such as Amazon offer a direct route to the views of the readers and this information is used by platforms to surface popular content and help readers find the best available. Amazon is notoriously secretive about its data, but independent organisation k.lytics runs a monthly monitoring of front-end data, sampling close to 100,000 book titles across genres and sub-genres to collate and provide data to authors for their own marketing needs. As a result of this data gathering, they also provide regular information updates to the industry, including the finding that indie book ratings across a selection of 43,000 titles representing the top 100 Bestseller lists in 2020 - 2022 did not differ significantly from those of traditionally published authors with an average of 4.6 out of 5 stars for books from traditional publishers, 4.4 for Amazon imprints and, right in the middle, 4.5 stars for self-published books (k.lytics, 2022).

Commentators, such as Keen, may ask: how does this equalling of ratings happen without an established arbiter in the form of the publisher? When Keen says that there is the potential to have to 'wade through' the books placed on platforms such as Amazon, he does not acknowledge the algorithms that carefully select and serve books to users that may be of interest. As well as being able to proactively search for recommended, award-winning or classic literature, digital platforms curate and assist customers to find suitable books within the larger collections available due to self-publishing. This curation is based on previous purchases, personal characteristics, positive ratings of content and evidenced preferences. In this way, no matter a user's interest or preference for reading,

or their perceived taste level from the industry, an informed selection can be made from a much wider range on offer. This process is in opposition to Keen's ideal view of accessing a smaller selection curated by experts that fulfil an established measure of 'good', and that will then join a certified canon that has been reviewed and signed off for public use. As it always has been before.

When looking to 'experience' and 'expertise', there is an indication here too that self-published authors may not fulfil the expectations placed upon them. In perhaps the first survey of its kind with self-published authors, undertaken by Baverstock and Steinitz for their study reported in the paper 'Who are the self-publishers?' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a), the responses were analysed for education and knowledge levels of self-published authors with a key finding of surprise to the researchers and the industry. Those interviewed were identified as both highly educated and informed, with 76% of the sample holding a university degree compared with 37% of the 25–64-year-olds in the UK population at the time of the study (2011[15]). In addition, 44% of the sample held a postgraduate degree.

Traditionally published author, Rick Lauber, has noted that 'validation' is one of the major pros of being selected by a traditional publisher, suggesting those who do not have a publisher have their talent or expertise left unvalidated, or unproven. Lauber expands: 'A solid contract offer (and a green light to proceed) from a traditional book publisher acknowledges both your idea as having 'legs' (meaning it is viable…) and you, as a writer' (Lauber, 2021). Lauber is voicing many writers' own concerns, that without being selected, accepted, and championed by an agent, and then onwards by a publisher, the writer is not a proven or worthy recipient of the opportunity, and that a qualified professional has not validated them as a 'real author'. However, as will be shown in this study, the gatekeepers who are selecting these 'worthy authors' are not necessarily representative of the breadth and diversity of readers, genres, or authors themselves, and therefore barriers persist for many to access this 'validation'.

Without success through the traditional routes, a belief continues that those not accepted by a publisher may select self-publishing purely as a 'last resort' option (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.211), and this has historically been complex to challenge. One very personal paper, written by Chrissy Merton for the *Midwifery Digest*, offers an account of self-publishing, and even the articles name references this key element of stigma: 'Self-publishing: last resort or opportunity?' (Merton, 2008). Here, Merton reflects on the experience of her daughter Alice's birth and death, and the processes involved in writing, self-publishing and marketing the resulting book to tell her story, including the challenges and opportunities she found through the experience.

Despite some promising traditional publishing feedback, Merton's book was deemed too niche for the traditional model, and she decided to be proactive and 'choose' to self-publish. Merton does not speak of the experience as a disappointment or a final roll of the dice. On the contrary, the paper describes her delight in finding: 'It was fun learning about obtaining permission for the quotations I'd used, the legal deposit libraries, writing the acknowledgements and buying ISBN numbers' (Merton, 2018,

---

[15] The paper referenced the comparable 2011 education data from: Eurostat, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show

p.275). Having read several 'how-to' self-publishing books, Merton did all she could to find success; identifying her key audiences, producing flyers for local distribution, setting up a website, running a book launch at a local book shop, and utilising all her own contacts to spread the word. By the end of the process, Merton was able to produce a niche, but important work targeted at a specific committed audience and sharing a challenging subject. As Merton herself says, 'It's not simply that self-publishing is a last resort (…) With self-publishing, the control is in your own hands' (ibid).

A further factor in the self-publishing stigma has evolved from a phrase that was originally used as a catch-all for self-publishing, 'Vanity Publishing'. This label is most often used today in relation to self-publishing houses or the 'vanity press' who, rather than paying the writer, charges the writer for their services in order to produce their book. Vanity press can also label themselves as part of the 'hybrid' publisher business. Hybrid publishers also require some upfront payment and can offer a publishing service that suits some authors, particularly those who are looking to produce a one-off project without a financial goal, for example to produce a memoir or local history book for a niche group or to fulfil their own satisfaction. Those who are supplying this service professionally will be transparent with the costs and the reasonable outcomes to be expected and will support with professional covers, proofing, and other services. However, a vanity press masquerading as hybrid offers very little to the author beyond some activities which would be free should they choose to undertake them themselves, for example uploading to the Amazon self-publishing platform, KDP. The Alliance of Independent Authors' official definition to help build awareness among self-publishing authors reads:

> A vanity publisher is one that engages in misleading or, in the worst cases, outright deceptive practices, with the intention not of bringing books to readers, but extracting as much money as possible from the authors (Alliance of Independent Authors website, 2020).

Whether in reference to specific fraudulent outfits, types of publisher, or the wider self-publishing community, 'vanity publishing' suggests that without a traditional publisher, authorship becomes an activity that is about the author themselves and their own ego. Dillon-Lee defines this view as: 'books published by people with the money and/or the will to do it themselves but without, necessarily, the talent to attract a traditional publishing house' (Dillon-Lee, 2018, p.197). This opinion is repeated across many articles relating to a range of publishing and distribution activities, including identifying that even within libraries, a long-standing barrier associated with holding self-published works in public collections is that they have been synonymous with 'vanity publishing' (Hadro, 2013).

Rather than identifying whether it is vain to publish independently, a better question may be whether it is *more vain* to publish independently, rather than reaching the same goal through a publishing house? Perhaps both are as vain as one another? The artist Francis Bacon, in one of his final interviews re-published in *The Art Newspaper*, said:

> All artists are vain, they long to be recognised and to leave something to posterity. They want to be loved, and at the same time they want to be free (Bacon, 2003).

All public art could be viewed as a 'vain' pursuit; one that has a focus on sharing the 'self' with others for recognition and requires some level of self-confidence, self-delusion, or a need for validation. For example, moving your own painting from your bedroom wall and placing it into a gallery brings with it a sense of ego – or vanity – and a desire for recognition outside of yourself. This point has been made in different ways at a range of author events and talks, from Mark Dawson at the Self-Publishing Show in 2023, to Professor Alison Baverstock back in 2010 at the Kingston University conference entitled 'Self-Publishing: Last Resort or Heralding a New Era of Opportunity for Authors?'.

There is arguably no logical reason an artist's level of vanity should increase when sharing of your work is achieved through the creator's self-directed activity rather than through that of a facilitator, whether that be a gallery owner or a publisher, or that the level of vanity changes depending on the medium of expression, whether that is pictorial art, music, or the written word. A study in relation to this topic was conducted exploring the personal characteristics of those showing measurable creative achievements through the HEXACO model: 'Cantankerous creativity: Honesty–Humility, Agreeableness, and the HEXACO structure of creative achievement' (Silvia et al., 2011). The HEXACO model measures Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience. The research team found that, as well as creative personalities being curious and open to new experiences; they also displayed lower scores in Honesty–Humility, described as being 'consistent with past work on arrogance and pretentiousness among creative people' (ibid). This suggested that those who were less modest and more 'arrogant' showed a higher likelihood of creative endeavour and achievement.

While not fully aligned with vanity, arrogance is a related trait, with both linking to a person's relationship with their own importance and ego. On the surface, and as traits in everyday life, vanity or arrogance can be referred to as negative traits, linked to an interest in oneself and a sense of over self-importance. However, the finding in this study indicated that arrogance perhaps counteracts detractors and those who may be discouraging artistic people from pursuing a creative vision and taking creative risks. A level of arrogance, or vanity, can be the additional push needed. Perhaps everyone publishing their work, displaying their art, or performing on an elevated stage is a little vain, and that may be a critical factor in becoming a successful artist.

What is a 'low-quality' self-published book?

Self-publishing cannot be explored fully without acknowledging that there are inevitably, considering self-publishing is a free activity open to all, some books of 'low quality' available. As clarified earlier, measuring the quality of books, as with all art, could be seen as subjective in terms of measuring creative decisions, such as storytelling or characterisation, with the issue of personal taste further muddying the waters of quality rating. Books, however, do have measurable quality markers. A poorly managed book cover in particular can enable a quick estimation of the (likely low) level of care taken with the content. While, once the book is opened, a 'low-quality' book may demonstrate poor grammar and spelling or inaccessible design, with a fiction book containing narratives with

unintentional plot-holes, or a non-fiction book including incorrect information or guidance that cannot be easily followed. The perceived risk being that through bypassing the publishing gatekeeper quality control is lost (Baverstock, 2011, p.92). Assessing and improving your own writing is complex, and this has been proven under research standards. When comparing the quality of proofreading between those reviewing their own or others' writing (either familiar or unfamiliar) it has been observed that participants proofing their own writing produce significantly more errors in comparison to proofreading text by a different person (Daneman and Stainton, 1993).

As this research indicates, the results are not a sign of the person's own skill or knowledge, but the universal difficulty humans have with objectively reading and reviewing our own words. In simple terms, when it comes to our own words, we read what we believe we wrote. Unfortunately, those working outside of the traditional model may lack the knowledge of these issues – or budget required to resolve them – and can therefore fall foul of these universal challenges, losing readers quickly. In the early phase of self-publishing, with some authors eager to quickly release their work to market in a fast-paced and easily accessible digital world, this issue may have had a detrimental effect on the perception of the wider model which is still reverberating today.

However, with the tools, courses, communities, and platforms available to authors now, there is little excuse for such works to get through the net. On a basic level, the automatic testing of manuscripts by platforms such as Amazon's KDP product now assesses for inaccuracies including spelling or grammar mistakes prior to the point of publishing. As promotion of ebooks is largely driven by reader numbers and reviews on platforms such as Amazon, those books of low quality that make it onto the digital shelf will soon fall down the listings with few sales, while those of high quality will rise to the top. This in itself is a deterrent to authors who do not put sufficient time into the production of their book to gain traction. Later in this study, the survey will explore the professional support, such as proofing or editing, that modern self-published authors often seek.

In summary, against the counter arguments outlined here and despite the skills, knowledge and management of self-published work improving in recent years, stigma continues that self-published authors are potentially:

- **Lacking talent**, experience, and expertise.
- Self-publishing as a **'last resort'**.
- **Vanity artists,** publishing for their ego rather than their readers.

It is a combination of these beliefs, and the positioning of these as factors unique to self-published authors rather than other authors, that has perpetuated the negative depiction felt within and outside the self-publishing community and responded to by the latter defensively.

1.5 Why Do People Self-Publish?

Within the context set out in this chapter, it might be asked, why do people self-publish at all if such a stigma persists? The arguments for this can be broken into three key themes: negating the gatekeepers, making more money, and taking control.

Negating the gatekeepers

As outlined, from the outset of Web 2.0, digital evolution of interactive platforms meant the potential for disrupting the normative power structure of traditional publishing was high, as User Generated Content developed and those producing it could reach their audiences directly, removing the potential barrier of gatekeepers from their path.

Although little research has been undertaken to understand the demographics of authors themselves, those of the gatekeepers are regularly monitored. The Publishing Associations *UK Publishing Workforce: Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Report 2020* found that the make-up of those working in the publishing industry was predominantly white (77%), heterosexual (89%), women (64%). Specifically, women make up 78% of workers within Editorial teams, 83% of Marketing staff and 92% of Publicity, thereby leading arguably the three most powerful decision-making departments in terms of selection and advocating on behalf of authors. While the industry has seen some change, for example LGBTQ+[16] representation more than doubling since 2017, and representation of disabled people increasing four-fold in the same period, the report shows there is still a specific group of people gatekeeping the traditional publishing model. It should also be noted that in relation to ethnic background specifically, little change was seen in the *UK Publishing Workforce Report* from its commencement in 2017 to 2020, the most recent data released at the point this study began[17].

The concept of 'unconscious bias' is well documented, describing the way that humans bring their background and experience to interactions with others and the related decisions they make. This unintentional bias, alongside those who demonstrate conscious bias, can have a detrimental effect on challenges such as increasing diversity and inclusivity. People are more likely, the argument goes, to select, work with, and trust those who seem like them and those they know. Conversely, they will be less trusting or open to those outside of their experience. The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion describes it in these terms:

> Unconscious biases are social stereotypes regarding groups of people that individuals develop without their conscious awareness. They are usually developed through personal experiences, as well as through popular forms of media such as books, movies, and television. These biases may exist toward people of various races, ethnic groups, gender identities, sexual orientations,

---

[16] For Stonewall's LGBTQ+ terms, visit: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms. For more on language and acronyms used in this study in relation to other communities and groups, please go to Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Methodology.
[17] It should be noted that since this study began, the *UK Publishing Workforce Report* data released in 2020 to 2022 did demonstrate an increase in representation of respondents reporting an ethnic background other than 'white'.

physical abilities and more. Interestingly, unconscious bias can be positive as well as negative (The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion, 2023).[18]

This phenomenon may go some way to explain the underrepresentation of minority groups within publishing, both behind and in front of the scenes; those established in the industry may, without necessarily being aware, be selecting future teams and authors who mirror themselves. It is challenging to evidence this theory, particularly as there is negligible current author demographic information by publishing type, however some indicators can be taken from smaller studies and media analysis, including a *New York Times* 2020 analysis of 7,124 books published by traditional publishers for which the author's race was identified (So and Wezerek, 2020). This report found that 95% of books were written by people from a white ethnic background, despite only 60% of the US population identifying as white. As such, people of white ethnic backgrounds and their stories were disproportionately represented across authorship.

In relation to gender, sector analysis of the top 1,000 bestselling fiction titles from 2020 found that*:* 629 were written by women, 27 were co-authored by men and women, three were by non-binary writers, leaving 341 by men; making men a minority (Thomas-Corr, 2021). This hasn't gone unnoticed in the sector, for example with Charmaine Lovegrove, the founder of Dialogue Books, an imprint of Hachette focused on representing writers from marginalised communities, stating previously that she had been on the lookout for more 'young male writers'; not something that is often deemed necessary in art or other sections of society, from business to politics (Lovegrove in *The Guardian*, 2018). In the same article, Northern Irish writer Darran Anderson highlights the hidden barrier of class and how this intersects with a new emphasis on diversity of gender and ethnic background. He asserts that working-class men are unfairly feeling the backlash that should be aimed specifically against the big male classics, a very different group: 'Working-class male writers, largely kept out of writing for decades by a middle-class male literary establishment, are now expected to answer for a past that isn't ours' (Anderson in *The Guardian*, 2018). This argument raises the question as to whether gender may be a red herring in terms of some elements of diversity in authorship, with 'class' potentially a similarly pressing issue.

An argument could be made that publishers simply make books for those who want to read them, and as a UK poll in 2020 found, over a quarter (27%) of women read daily, compared to just a sixth (13%) of men, with 22% of men reporting they never read, compared to 12% of women. When looking at the big sellers in book sales, literary and genre fiction, women were found to be much more likely to prefer fiction (42%) than men (29%). While men are much more likely to prefer the lower selling non-fiction (24%) than women (16%) (Ibbetson, 2020).

Where once the argument made by publishing houses was that an author, or their story, was too 'niche' to warrant their time or investment, self-publishing offers the opportunity to press ahead nevertheless and build a smaller but dedicated fanbase. The resulting salary can potentially maintain a

---

[18] To find out more about unconscious bias, visit: enei.org.uk

one-author business, particularly when the increased royalty rate for a self-published author of up to 70% is considered and will be looked at next.

Making more money

With negative stories of author salaries regularly hitting the press, making money as an author, even with the support of an agent and publisher, has only become harder in recent years. The results from the author salary survey commissioned by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) in the UK stated the average (median) author salary now stands at just £7,000 ($8,800), showing a real-terms decrease of 38.2% since 2018 and demonstrating a worrying downward trajectory for authors in the traditional model (ALCS, 2020). This was found again in the *2023 The Authors Guild Author Salary Survey* where they stated, 'the median author income for full-time authors from their books was $10,000 in 2022, and their total median earnings from their book and other author-related income combined was $20,000' (The Authors Guild, 2023). However, it should be noted this data set combined all authors regardless of their publishing model.

By contrast, in the largest author salary survey of its kind, covering 2,000 self-published only authors, the Alliance of Independent Authors found in 2023 that the median salary for indie authors sat at $12,749, with a mean of $82,607 (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023), a clear improvement on those in the traditional publishing model. One argument that could be posed against comparing these figures directly is that both studies take the gross income of authors. For self-publishers, working as a small business, a percentage of their gross income will most often be directly invested back into their business. Another potential factor in the responses received may be that bestselling traditional authors of the six-figure sales point may not be making time for salary surveys; however, this could also be said for the top end of self-published authors, and though this lack of high-end representation in the figures may raise both means a little, it would potentially not make a significant difference to the overall comparison.

However, what is most compelling with these figures is that while traditional author salaries have been recorded as reducing consistently in recent years, the Alliance of Independent Authors survey found that self-published authors are seeing a consistent rise in salary. 53% of respondents reported an increase in income during 2022 in comparison to the previous year's figures. The prohibitive cost of traditional publishing requires purchases in high numbers for each and every book released by an author to make the economics add up (Vinjamuri, 2012). Agents and publishers are in the business of selling enough books to pay for an entire back office of people, buildings, and ongoing costs, before the profits trickle down to the author. Whereas self-published authors can choose to target much smaller, niche, or underserved groups, while making a good living due to far lower overheads.

The rise of digital ebooks supports this business model of targeting a smaller but committed readership. Those focusing on eReaders can produce a product with little to no cost for distribution thereafter. As an example, when self-publishing an ebook through Amazon's KDP platform, an author can select up to 70% royalties which are paid directly to the author on a regular basis, with access to a digital dashboard to monitor sales in near real-time. This figure makes an interesting comparison with

the approximately 10% upper-limit royalty offer for a traditionally published author (The Society of Authors, 2023), with many authors offered substantially less. In addition, due to the high level of data collected on eReaders, platforms such as Amazon have launched monthly subscription plans for their most prolific readers, and these users can access books submitted to the Kindle Unlimited programme to read at any time at no further cost. Payments per page read are then paid to all authors in the programme from a regular fund. With good money to be made through them, data suggests that self-published authors captured 51% of overall ebook unit sales in 2022, and more than 34% of ebook retail revenue, compared to 31% in 2021, equivalent to estimated ebook sales of $874 million in 2022 for self-published authors (*Publishers Weekly*, 2023). This is another sign that independent publishing is growing, along with the money to be made.

In addition, some authors and book types potentially fare better through ebook sales than others, and this study will explore whether genre and other factors play a part in who is self-publishing, where ebook sales are often the preferred route. Data from 2013, as the digital book market expanded, suggested that bestsellers often saw a decrease in print sales when an ebook option was available. However, a new segment of successful ebook titles that were not best-selling in print format also emerged. These books benefited from the new Kindle store and brought books not selling significantly in print to this new audience, thereby expanding the market (Bounie et al., 2013, p.52). This group potentially represents some of the self-published authors, producing works in genres or formats not on trend for publishing houses, but which can sell well when marketed direct to readers on digital platforms. In addition to this group, another, coined the 'print-preferred books', emerged at this time. These books perform well in the printed format but not when sold as ebooks because of the colour choices, graphics, or the need to navigate in a non-linear manner.

Many self-publishing authors distributing their ebooks through platforms such as Amazon also offer their readers a print option, often by selecting print-on-demand for their book. This offers wider reader choice, and the opportunity to order author copies for events and signings, as well as removing the risk of returns or pulping of large print volumes, which is taken on by a traditional publisher distributing through book shops, supermarkets, and other outlets. With print-on-demand, a book is printed only after being ordered and once the print cost is covered by the sale, the author receives the rest of the profit. Although this is often less than an ebook sale, by offering customer choice, the self-published author can further compete with those who are backed by the big publishing houses.

It should be noted that for academics or other information sharers there can be the opposite motivation for self-publishing when it comes to money. Professor Barbara Sarnecka at the University of California, for example, has noted that a key self-publishing motivation for her was to share her ideas for free:

> The problem was that I wanted to be able to give the book away for free—at least the electronic version of it. As an advocate for open science (more on this below), I make sure that all of my scientific research articles are available online for free, and I saw no reason why the book should be different (Sarnecka, 2022. p. 309).

This does not seem to be expressed across other fiction or non-fiction literature which are key to this study but is worth noting as an outlier motivation to publish independently specific to the academic community where support for open-source information can be high.

Taking control

For some, the publishing process itself can be a downside of the traditional model. The lengthy process to move from concept to the printed book, as well as limited control over the decisions taken at various stages of the publishing process, may not suit everyone. Publishing independently is an alternative that can bring the level of personal control and involvement in decision-making that some authors may seek, and this will be further explored through the results of this study.

Independent authors often see self-publishing as a sign of their individual proactivity and independence of thought, with 'control' as a key driver for taking the self-publishing route (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.7). This autonomy over your own work, and the opportunity to take sole responsibility, not just for the creative elements of your own writing, but the entire process of getting your work into the hands of readers was a mark of success for the authors they surveyed. But taking control does not have to mean feeling the weight of responsibility solely on your shoulders. Self-published authors have built communities to connect with one another, as if they sit within their own shared independent publishing house, to offer advice and guidance to one another on their publishing journeys. These take the form of global communities, such as the Self Publishing Formula, or 20Booksto50k, and local or niche groups, for example Facebook's 'Moms who write', alongside the opportunity to join official membership bodies, such as the Alliance of Independent Authors.

HarperCollins ran a project from 2008 – 2015 called 'Authonomy'. This new platform's goal was to seek out hidden talent by inviting authors to critique and rate each other's work, or as some critics at the time suggested, perhaps to provide free labour and data by trawling through manuscripts on the publishing house's behalf (Vadde, 2017). However, rather than critiquing each piece, a surprising finding of the project was that these independent authors began to support and advise one another, acting as one cooperative with a shared objective and a generous creative spirit, with many finding the advisory nature of the site more valuable than the competition itself (ibid).

In addition to the formal and informal advisory support from fellow authors found within even early author communities such as Authonomy, the independent author has no lack of wider – and paid for – support. Whether it is a course, a new cover design, a marketing package, or coordination of the full publishing process, everything along the publishing route can be bought and sold with the author's aim of improving their work and chances of success. Selecting preferred designers, editors, proofers, and marketeers can be an exciting prospect for many. Building a personalised team who work with you, not for you – or in the case of traditional publishing, on your behalf – allows the author to access and brief their team directly, collaborating to make the vision for their book a reality.

The communities built within the self-publishing world work together to improve the quality of work across the industry. For example, individuals and groups will protect one another from scams or 'rogue traders', highlighting those who are 'spamming' members in a community, flagging editors or illustrators who leave jobs incomplete and even providing, as in the case of the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), an official list of approved suppliers and those to avoid. One anonymous author spoken with during research for this study reported an important comradery found within independent author groups:

> One of the things that struck me about ALLi was that members seem to be part of a community; they talk to each other and seem genuinely pleased by each other's success. Perhaps because the wider world was initially inclined to scorn their efforts, they tend to encourage each other and share information on useful and reliable suppliers. It does seem to be a case of "all for one and one for all".

By working together to make good choices in terms of those they work with and how they approach their author career, an indie author can become a business owner, building their business for and around their books and approaching their work like that of an entrepreneur. This business-owner concept is referenced as far back as 1979 in the first self-publishing guide, Dan Poynter's *The Self-Publishing Manual*. Just a few pages in, Poynter uses the phrase 'entrepreneurial publishing' to describe the emerging self-publishing model (Poynter, 1979).

Not that becoming a business is a purely positive step. Moving from an entirely creative role to one of creative-and-business-lead can be daunting and represent risk, with up to 20% of businesses failing within the first year, and 50% in the second year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). If an author is to view their self-publishing efforts as a small business, then these are the potential figures they may be looking to for success likelihood. Despite these odds, self-publishing has continued to grow, and around 2011 a new word was created that encapsulated this concept, 'Authorpreneur', when it appeared perhaps for the first time in print with the publication of the self-published book from Kriss Tualla, *Becoming an Authorpreneur: Navigating a 21st-Century Career in Publishing*. Here, Tualla, in the book's sales description, defines an Authorpreneur as an 'author who creates a written product, participates in creating their own brand, and actively promotes that brand through a variety of outlets' (Tualla, 2011). This takes the definition of self-publishing outlined at the beginning of this chapter further, by adding a wider 'brand' element and focusing on the role of 'promotion' as a key part of the author's responsibilities. From here the use of the word grew; for example, in 2016, The Entrepreneur website, a self-described one-stop-shop for new businesses, posted the blog 'The Authorpreneur: 3 Paths to a Lifetime of Success' (Diggs, 2016). Here they developed the concept with a focus on finding new revenue streams, such as 'products or services', beyond the author's book, to further build the business. In 2017 the Alliance of Independent Authors recognised the growth in author-businesses when they created an Authorpreneur level of membership for joining the body. Authorpreneurs, in the membership definition, earn their living from self-publishing 'and associated business'. Alongside this criterion, authors must show evidence of 50,000 book sales in the past two years and/or Kindle

Unlimited page read equivalent, as evidence of a certain level of commercial success.[19] The term 'Authorpreneur' can now be found across self-publishing websites, books and blogs and has been firmly cemented in the self-publishing lexicon.

---

[19] Further details on ALLi membership levels can be found here: https://www.allianceindependentauthors.org/members/join/

1.6   Where is Self-Publishing Today? (2012 – 2023)

Although readers may not be aware, many bestselling books – ebooks in particular – that they purchase from platforms such as Amazon are now from authors in the self-published community. With more authors being publicly open about their indie status, such as Rachel McClean, LJ Ross, and JD Kirk, it could be argued self-publishing is starting to 'come out' and this may further be fuelling the growth in indie ebook production. This expansion is supported by Bowker data (see table 1.1) released in 2021, which tracked the number of self-publishing ISBNs selected in relation to ebooks.

With several peaks, the numbers appear to have stabilised at between two and three million per year during the last two years' data available, with Bowker noting that in 2019 one large order from a self-publishing organisation may have skewed the figures.

Table 1.1 ISBNs Issued 2011-2021 with BISAC code. Source: R.R. Bowker (Milliot, 2023)

Total Self-Publishing ISBNs Issued, 2011–2021*	
Year	ISBNs
2011	526,907
2012	452,381
2013	333,551
2014	259,456
2015	544,907
2016	611,090
2017	1,016,641
2018	1,551,391
2019	4,539,317
2020	2,700,511
2021	2,298,004
* Includes only ISBNs with BISAC codes	

This indication of growth in self-publishing is supported by the Alliance of Independent Authors 2023 author salary survey, where it was found that 87% had started self-publishing since 2010 and a full 25% since 2020, during the COVID lockdown period – indicating the ongoing desire of authors to join the self-publishing community, and specifically the opportunity more free-time and time at home gave aspiring authors to fulfil their dream of publication.

With stigma and recognition such an issue for the self-publishing community, the industry interest in self-publishing is also worth reflecting upon. Here again indications can be seen of growth in the past two decades, with a clear turning point in 2012. When searching *The Bookseller* archive for article titles relating to self-publishing, this leading publication for the publishing industry has produced content on self-publishing in an upward skew from averaging under ten articles a year between 2000 to 2011 to a jump in 2012 (59 articles) and a peak in 2014 (71 articles). Coverage, and presumably industry interest, became steady at around 20 articles a year between 2018 and 2021. Notably, articles

have been rising again during the period in which this study has been taking place, with 50 articles produced in 2023 alone. See Figure 1.1 for further data breakdown.
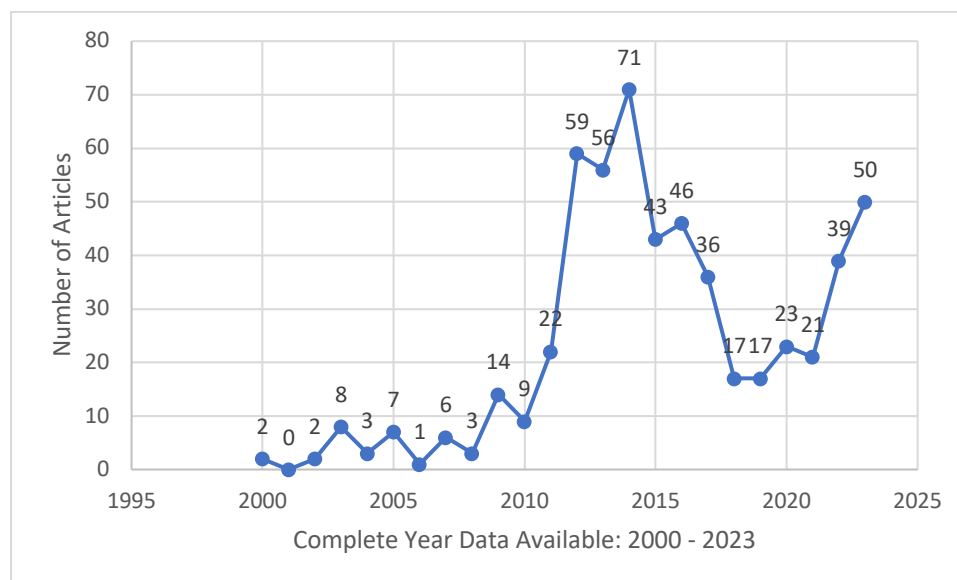
Figure 1.1: Number of The Bookseller publication articles referencing self-publishing in the title by year, 2000 – 2023

Another key development in the publishing landscape that began in 2012 is the growth of direct-submission publishing houses accepting submissions on an ongoing basis from authors without agent representation. These houses never or rarely close for submissions and allow authors direct contact with the publisher without the facilitation of an agent. Bookouture, which was founded in 2012, blazed a trail in this model with others following, such as Joffe Books launching in 2015 and Boldwood Books in 2019. These publishers, and others like them, offer open submissions to authors all year round, with a particular focus on genre fiction such as Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Crime, and Romance (Clark and Phillips, 2019). They promote and sell predominantly online, specialising in ebook sales and on-demand printing, originally the distribution approach favoured only by self-published authors, not publishing houses. The purchasing of Bookouture by Hachette in 2017 provides more evidence that new models of publishing have been capturing the attention of the mainstream industry. Although Hachette appears to have kept the business at arm's length in terms of brand and management, perhaps not quite ready to bring it into the traditional fold or conversely viewing its distance as of benefit for attracting a different kind of author.

In its 'commitment' pledge displayed on its website, Bookouture sells itself to authors as aiming 'to break down barriers between publishers, writers and readers' and they outline a goal to diversify their offer to readers, saying: 'We welcome submissions from everyone – agented or otherwise – regardless of age, faith, disability, race, gender, sexuality or socio-economic background' (Bookouture website, 2023). It should not be overlooked that to drive authors to them, Bookouture heavily promote their offer of a higher royalty rate to their authors of 45% net receipts, and a 'quicker publishing pattern', appealing to the drivers that led some who were self-publishing to skip the traditional model. This is only possible due to their ebook and print-on-demand focus, which allows Bookouture and publishers

like them to take more risks and target niche audiences, without the pressure of warehouses full of books to offload. It should be noted too that Boldwood Books has taken the step of promising the launch of books across all formats – ebook, audiobook, print – simultaneously and globally to its authors. A practise almost unheard of in traditional publishing, but reflective of the choices self-published authors can take when preparing their own launch.

The 2012 date has two further significant milestones for authors, as the founding year of the Alliance of Independent Authors, the membership body for self-published authors, launched at the London Book Fair by Orna Ross and Philip Lynch; and in the same year, a major acquisition was made when Pearson (then owner of Penguin Group and the *Financial Times*) acquired Author Solutions Inc., a provider of publishing services for indie authors. This acquisition made a public statement to the industry that self-publishing was on the up, and that even the big players saw that money could be made from it by those in the traditional publishing sector, if not by taking on the authors themselves, then by charging them for their expert services. However, Penguin divested themselves of Author Solutions in 2016, for unknown reasons (Page, 2016).

This growth in interest may also be suggested by the inclusion of self-published authors at The Society of Authors. This author body, established in 1884, lobbies for the interest of authors, whom they describe as 'anyone who creates work for publication, broadcast or performance', although it should be recognised that the inclusion is with the caveat that a self-published author must prove they have sold over 300 print copies or 500 ebooks in 12 months to become a full member, while no sales figure criterion is given to those published through a publisher.

As intimated previously, self-published authors often view themselves as their own community that is 'both positive and mutually supportive' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013b, p.280). Here too growth has been seen, as digital spaces increasingly made communications and gatherings easier to host and join. One example of a thriving self-publishing community is the US-based 20booksto50k Facebook page, launched in 2015 by Michael Anderle. It now has over 72,000 members, and a Las Vegas conference each year. These large and often boisterous events are an opportunity to share positive stories, celebrate successes and for suppliers to promote their wares. Other organisations are now taking a similar approach in the UK, such as the Self-Publishing Show Live from the Self Publishing Formula (SPF) team. SPF was established by the indie author Mark Dawson – himself originally traditionally published – in 2017. The organisation now has over three million downloads of Dawson's popular podcast and over 15,000 participants in his courses sharing what he has learnt from the process. One of Dawson's most popular courses is 'Ads for Authors', reflecting that marketing is where many indie authors now spend their time, budget, and energy to build their businesses.

A further milestone in the development of the sector took place in response to the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, when book data providers Nielsen reported that two-fifths of UK adults were reading more since lockdown started. One specific example in relation to ebooks is the data from Nielsen's synthesising of information from the *Books & Consumers UK Survey* along with bestseller data from PubTrack Digital. This stated that in April 2020, more than ten million ebooks were downloaded in

the UK, making it the highest month on record. This compared to under eight million downloaded the previous April. However, post lockdowns, figures quickly returned to 'normal' levels. Nielsen noted that in 2021, following the end of nation-wide lockdowns, the data had returned to a similar position as of 2019. However, they theorised that there was still some evidence that a longer-term impact would be seen across the sector that suggested further expansion was coming:

> Starting with those low prices: the share of ebooks bought for under £5, though still quite high, has dropped compared to 2020 and 2019. Nearly 30% of ebooks are still bought for under £1, so those discounts and deals remain important for the market, especially for heavy buyers, but price bands over £5 have all gained share. If we consider those more varied/higher prices, in conjunction with ebooks increasingly bought by light book buyers and decreasingly bought by those that prefer ebooks to print, that could point to growth for the more casual or novice ebook buyer (Nielsen website, 2021).

This is a useful general observation in terms of the ebook market overall. The low cost of production and therefore the higher rate of real-term profit per book in comparison to print have made them an ideal choice for self-published authors. The ease with which an author can set a 'countdown' price deal, or temporarily reduce the cost of their book around a key moment or promotion at the click of a button in the author dashboard has led to some very low-priced ebooks. Digital sales will be explored further in this study through the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller analysis.

The growth of #BookTok on social media has been identified as an indirect development arising from COVID-19, with lockdowns providing the space and opportunity for young people with the more introverted hobby of reading to learn from previous trends of TikTok, such as choreographed dances, that the platform can be a positive, community-building space and somewhere to share your passions (Carlick, 2019). #BookTok remains a major trending community on TikTok where readers can make or break an author through recommendations, reviews and content about books, authors, and genre-specific topics. Authors themselves can share their views on their favourite books and connect with their audiences through TikTok, as well as working with influencers on the platform to share their work.

The most recent milestone in the self-publishing journey relates to access to print distribution. Today, ebooks remain the bread and butter of many indie authors, due to the continued challenge of selling via bricks and mortar stores for those without a traditional publisher. However, print remains the biggest seller by format overall for books, with paperbacks beating ebooks by over two-to-one for reader preference (YouGov, 2021). Yet even accessing bookstores without a publisher is now changing for indie authors. Print-on-demand has long been an option for selling print copies via digital platforms, but not one that could bring indie books into stores. A 2021 evolution in the Amazon offer specifically is the opportunity to select 'Expanded Distribution' for print books. If an indie author enrols a paperback in 'Expanded Distribution', Amazon makes it available to distributors so that bookshops and libraries can find and order it through their usual routes, for example by ordering via Gardners or other book suppliers, just like any other traditionally published book. This opportunity

requires that the author takes a lower royalty cut to participate and has not yet been running long enough to understand its success or benefits for the author or Amazon itself. However, it does indicate a concerted effort from a key player in the industry to level the playing field for bookstore distribution for indie authors and will be a trend watched closely.[20] Alongside this development, the use of web-based sales add-ons to author sites, such as 'Shopify', appears to be growing, as authors experiment further with a new method of direct sales to their readers, bypassing both bookstores and established digital platforms altogether to sell print books from their own author sites with ease. A digital return to the author selling their books door-to-door or at markets direct, but this time from their own dedicated website, cutting out the intermediary bookseller altogether.

This chapter began by looking back at those authors who had set out as self-publishers and then moved to traditional publishing once their work had proven its mettle. Today, perhaps the biggest indicator of the importance of self-publishing is the emerging trend of traditional authors going independent (often referred to by the indie community as 'the other side'). Although gradual to date, there has been some movement towards this trend in the last ten years, as a small but sometimes vocal selection of authors have moved away from the traditional model, and this has been gaining coverage in the popular press. A range of examples are often referenced, such as Cornelia Funke's *Mirrorworld* series – for which Funke established her own imprint, Breathing Books, to publish her work. Funke had originally been published through Little Brown, a Hachette owned imprint, but as is quoted in the article, ongoing disagreements such as the age-range selected by the publisher, led Funke to choose a new route for her continued publishing journey. Here the 'taking control' opportunity of self-publishing appears to have been the biggest driver (Edelman, 2015).

Barry Hutchison, who writes Crime novels under his pen name JD Kirk, has also moved from a traditional to self-publishing model. For him 'making more money' seems to have been the key driver. In an interview with *Books from Scotland* magazine, Hutchison describes how his publisher asked him to run workshops with school groups demonstrating how to publish your own book. Not knowing how, he gave it a test with a short children's book uploaded to Amazon KDP, for which he undertook his own edit and made his own front cover. Then he headed off on holiday:

> By the time we were back from holiday, it was making something like £50 or £60 per day, and I thought I'm going to try and write a second one. When I wrote a second one then the sales of the first book skyrocketed, and by the time I wrote the third one I was earning more in one day on these three books than I was in six months on all my traditionally published books combined. I ended up writing twelve books in that series... (Hutchison, 2022).[21]

For Hutchison, the tables had turned from the times of Beatrix Potter, who utilised self-publishing to validate her experience, take control of her product and in time gain her traditional contract. For Hutchison, the traditional publishing experience had instead 'validated' his talent, and he could then

---

[20] For full details of the Expanded Distribution rules, visit: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GQTT4W3T5AYK7L45
[21] Note that this study has findings related to this anecdote, in relation to the correlation between the number of titles produced by an indie author and the commercial success of an indie author. See Chapter Seven.

choose to take back responsibility for his own work by becoming an indie author, thus reaping the benefits the model could offer. This included being able to move into adult Crime fiction with no gatekeepers to hold him back from deviating from his tried and tested model of children's books. Today Hutchison has an imprint of his own, Xertex, which he uses to publish all his novels. Further examples of authors testing the indie water grow each year, and include David Mamet for his *Three War Storie*s, Eileen Goudge for *Bones and Roses,* and Barbara Freethy, who released her own back catalogue independently after her publisher chose to discontinue her work.

Authors today have the opportunity to decide how they publish; through a facilitator (whether that be a traditional publisher or commissioned services), fully independently, or a combination of the two as a hybrid author. But is there any way to know which route will suit a writer's own preferences, motivations, and characteristics? That is one area to which this study can add valuable information.

1.7   Summary

The landscape in which self-published authors work has changed dramatically in recent decades, with seven landmark moments identified:

- **1999:** the advent of Web 2.0 and the rise of User Generated Content.
- **2007:** the launch of the Kindle eReader and Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) digital publishing software.
- **2011:** submission of the first UK academic research on the self-published author by Professor Alison Baverstock, alongside the publishing of *The Naked Author,* Baverstock's guide to indie authorship produced through Bloomsbury (Baverstock, 2011).
- **2012:** a range of actions in the sector indicating confidence rising, including the founding of the Alliance of Independent Authors, the launch of digital-only publisher Bookouture, Pearson's acquisition of Author Solutions Inc., and a rise in self-publishing related articles in the core industry publication, *The Bookseller*.
- **2013:** several key journal articles published exploring the self-published author, including: 'Why Self-Publishing Needs to be Taken Seriously' (Baverstock, 2013), 'Who are the Self-Publishers?' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a) and 'What satisfactions do self-publishing authors gain from the process?' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013b).
- **2019:** the COVID-19 pandemic leading to a growth in ebook sales, a resurgence of reading in general, and the emergence of new social media communities, such as #BookTok.
- **2021:** the launch of a range of print distribution options for indie authors, beginning to offer further viable solutions for distributing in print through bookstores or direct.

Today there is a vibrant self-publishing community, with an upward trajectory in sales, and a slow increase of traditionally published authors looking at the opportunities the model may hold for them. The key reasons authors are choosing to self-publish can be grouped as follows:

- **Negating the gatekeepers:** in search of swifter routes to sale and wider diversity and inclusion opportunities.
- **Making more money:** as a result of the higher royalties available when publishing independently.
- **Taking control:** of the creative and practical publishing process, timeline, and cost of publication.

However, those who self-publish do so against a continued backdrop of stigma that excludes them from the top awards, parity of access to distribution routes, and potentially – in perception at least – moving to a traditional publisher in the future. This stigma can be summarised into three themes:

- **Lacking talent**, experience, and expertise.
- Self-publishing as a **'last resort'**.
- **Vanity artists,** publishing for their ego rather than their readers.

This Reddit community member perhaps sums up the conversations still taking place online as recently as 2023. This comment was made in response to the topic, 'Do you think that self-published works will ever be viewed through the same lens?'

> Honestly, self-published books on average tend to be worse because there will always be tons of people with an ego who just chuck their book into the void and think it'll be a bestseller. With traditional you know there will be beta readers, editors, and it's (an) extremely difficult process. The book may not be for you, but at a minimum a traditionally published book is passable. They're not the same (Reddit, 2023).

Without evidenced counter arguments, this view will persist and therefore a study exploring in detail the role, profile, and potential for success of the self-published author is necessary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

As outlined in The Introduction, although much information is available in terms of advising authors how and why to self-publish, and increasingly on the history of the publishing industry, the author community is a topic little studied in academia (Knowles, 1981). Publishing in itself is often overlooked in favour of other academic subjects considered more 'highbrow' such as Literature and Fine Art (Bhaskar, 2013). Publishing Studies oftens sits within a related field, such as Librarianship, Communications or Cultural Studies and is therefore regarded as a 'fringe intellectual undertaking by groups themselves wedded to the principle of interdisciplinarity' (Murray, 2006, p.3).

Professor of Publishing, Alison Baverstock, recalls her experiences proposing academic exploration of the self-publishing community:

> Having jointly set up Kingston University's MA Publishing in 2006, I was well placed to experiment with academic-testing ideas. I was quickly disabused. "I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Stop talking about self-publishing. You are damaging your reputation. My wife has read 'Fifty Shades of Grey' and it's rubbish." (…) the very idea of self-publishing, as opposed to scholarly peer-review, was anathema. It followed that any association was reputationally damaging for my whole institution, not just me (Baverstock, 2023, p.2).

Baverstock's experience demonstrates that not only did a stigma exist for authors taking the self-publishing route, but also for academics looking to research the topic. Furthermore, the low regard and potential confusion by others will presumably have also led to lower academic funding and commissioning, which could offer some further explanation as to the lack of academic research available for this review. Equally, the nature of those interested in self-publishing, as those who work outside traditional models, may have resulted in fewer experts in the field being attracted to traditional academic frameworks of enquiry and information sharing.

However, where researchers have continued their work despite the stigma, they offer a strong basis for future study, alongside key gaps to fill. Returning to Baverstock, despite the negative response to her topic of interest, she did go on to explore this area further, and she remains one of very few academic voices on self-publishing, with her key thesis from 2011 and related papers up until today. Since then, just one thesis directly referencing self-publishing in the title has been published[22], that by Faith Dillon-Lee in 2018. In her own thesis, written some twelve years after the referenced observations regarding the confusion of publishing as an academic area of study, Dillon-Lee notes the continued absence of academic rigour in this area, identifying that the papers available in the

---

[22] Note that since November 2023 there has been an ongoing major cyber security incident at the British Library making final searches for theses through the usual repository, ETHoS, impossible at the time of this study's finalisation.

publishing sector tend to focus on the 'technology and processes of self-publishing, rather than the socio-political landscape', and they therefore do little to add to the conversation around who is self-publishing and why (Dillon-Lee, 2018, p.201).

Considering this small but significant selection of academic research, and the resulting coverage they received in industry publications such as *The Bookseller*, an interest in the study of this emerging independent publishing world was stimulated. However, rather than relying on the academic world, the self-publishing community has increasingly taken upon itself data collection, analysis, and consideration to fill this gap. These self-reflective studies, often led by suppliers to the industry, will be referenced in the thesis where they offer applicable information, but have not been selected for literature review, primarily due to the lack of transparent academic rigour and methodology being shared as context for the data. However, the Alliance of Independent Authors' Author Income Survey has been selected for use, as a partnership project run with Glasgow University support, and publicly shared methodology available.

This literature review was approached systematically, treating existing theory and knowledge as a data set itself, with the aim of gleaning as much contextual information and comparable results as possible from such a minimal source. This chapter will outline the process undertaken for the review, before introducing the findings and synthesising by theme, where it is possible to do so, as well as identifying gaps where it is not.

2.2   Systematic Review Process

Preparation for the literature review was undertaken using the following steps:

1. Identifying the review objectives
2. Defining the search terms
3. Undertaking literature search
4. Screening search results
5. Extracting and analysing data

1.   Review objectives

Identifying and summarising the breadth of existing academic study of the 'self-published author' was undertaken in the context of the three key research themes, phrased as questions in the title for this study:

1. Do profiles of self-published authors exist?
2. What factors influence self-published author commercial success?
3. Has self-publishing played a role in disrupting the publishing industry?

Note, that in relation to point two, due to the lack of current information in this area, the review aimed to identify and evaluate studies in two 'related worlds' – profiles and success factors for entrepreneurs and those in the creative arts; 'artists'. These two groups have been selected as representing the two sides of self-publishing, the creative act of producing the written product and the business role undertaken to publish and distribute the resulting book.

2.   Search terms

A range of terms, shown in table 2.1, were used to search the identified journals and databases.

Table 2.1: Themes and related search terms for systematic literature review

Themes	Terms
1. Do profiles of self-published authors exist? Who are self-published authors? Do profiles exist, including the demographics represented in self-publishing?	Self-published authors, self-published author profiles, self-published author success factors, self-published author personality types, self-published author demographics, self-published author motivations, self-published author investments, self-published author characteristics, self-published author behaviours.
2. What factors influence self-publishing commercial success? Have factors been identified that increase likelihood of commercial success through self-publishing and/or related worlds?	Self-published author success, do self-published authors make money, factors for self-publishing success, personality and self-publishing, success and self-publishing, commercial success and self-publishing, profiling entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs and personality traits, entrepreneur characteristics, entrepreneur behaviours, factors for successful entrepreneurs, profiling artists, artists and personality traits, artists characteristics, artists behaviours, factors for successful artists.

3. Has self-publishing disrupted the traditional publishing industry? Have studies been completed on this topic, and what outcomes or hypotheses have been identified?	Self-publishing disruption, publishing disruption, diversity in publishing, diversity for authors, ethnic background and authorship, gender, and authorship, protected characteristics and authorship, demographics and authorship, publishing changing, publishing in the digital age.

3. Exclusion criteria

For the purposes of this study, literature referring to 'How To' or the general history of self-publishing was not reviewed or included, although were referenced where applicable in The Introduction and will be further referenced in context throughout the thesis. The 'How To' books, many of them self-published, are by their nature aiming to support people to approach the self-publishing process positively, and therefore even introductory information may be biased. Information on these topics is also numerous and of mixed quality. Where the process of self-publishing is relevant, the recognised body for independent authors, the Alliance of Independent Authors will be referenced, along with key studies. Many books on the history of publishing are of high quality and are regularly referred to throughout the thesis but would not be appropriate for analysing and summarising due to the complex and lengthy nature of publishing history and its lack of direct impact on the study, beyond wider context.

4. Literature search

Three academic study databases were identified as holding suitable literature; Ethos, Scopus and ICAT (the Kingston University library collection). An additional journal ('Publishing Research Quarterly') was also searched directly to ensure no relevant articles were missed. Note that many of the relevant studies for this paper were published in 'Logos', the Journal of the World Publishing Community. One specific relevant report not available from the core journals and databases, was produced by the Alliance of Independent Authors. Google Scholar was also included to capture the often-called 'grey literature' which can fall outside of mainstream published journals. During the initial search, title and abstract (where available) were used to rule out any articles clearly not relevant to the project, as well as to remove duplication. Note that where a publication includes distinct content that clearly supports more than one theme, they are counted in multiple columns. The number of relevant papers were then recorded by the three review themes:

Table 2.2: Literature review summary of related studies and papers found by theme

	1. Profiles	2. Success	3. Disruption
ETHOS	1	1	1
SCOPUS	0	4	17
ICAT (KINGSTON UNIVERSITY)	1	20	10
Google Scholar	0	0	4
Publishing Research Quarterly	1	0	8
Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi)	1	1	0
TOTAL BY THEME	**4**	**26**	**39**

5. Screening search results

Further screening was undertaken to remove:

- unintended duplication,

- irrelevant literature, which on further investigation does not relate to this study,

- low-quality items (for example, items that were on further reading 'how to' guides, opinion pieces from those with little or no relevant experience, or press releases related to the topic but without substantive information included),

- papers analysing data or authors not predominantly based in the UK or US as the key groups for the survey data collected for this study,

- out-dated information: removed if date of publication indicated a more recent study or item was available.

Table 2.3: Literature review summary papers included following screening

Objective	Total papers pre-screening	Total papers after screening
1. Do profiles of self-published authors exist?	4	4
2. What factors influence self-published author success?	26	18
3. Has self-publishing disrupted the traditional publishing industry?	39	21
TOTAL	68	43

6. Extracting and analysing data

A spreadsheet summarised the contents of the remaining papers to identify trends and commonalities within each category and to assist with synthesising findings under the three themes. Finally, findings were summarised in this chapter, with key themes and gaps identified.

2.3   Literature Summarised and Synthesised by Theme

Literature review theme one: Do profiles of self-published authors exist?

Against this core topic for the study, two studies were identified as holding relevant results based on direct author data, with credible shared methodology to inform the study design and goals, and they will be synthesised here. The papers selected are:

- 'Who are the self-publishers?' Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013
- 'Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey'[23], 2023

In a field lacking academic exploration, the author survey of Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a) is a lone academic study produced prior to this that can be said to explore the profile of self-published authors. The Alliance of Independent Authors has since produced an Author Income Survey in 2023, following the completion of data collection and analysis in partnership with Glasgow University. Its findings are a useful comparison and reference point.

The Baverstock and Steinitz study utilised a quantitative survey with 120 author responses. The survey was distributed via three UK-based partner organisations in September 2012: Silverwood Books, a self-publishing support service; South East Authors, a UK regional author community; The Society of Authors, an author membership body with mainly traditionally published authors, but also recently opened to qualifying self-published authors. The data from the survey was primarily used to understand the motivations behind the choice to self-publish, and the conclusions specifically questioned a long-standing opinion that self-publishing was a 'last resort' option for authors who had failed to find success through traditional routes. Demographics were monitored, with gender, age, employment status, home environment, political inclination and education level monitored.

The Alliance of Independent Authors survey was distributed in February 2023 to their members and subscribers of their information newsletter, along with other self-publishing author organisations (unnamed in the study). The survey responses numbered 2,539, of whom 2,261 met the required criteria for analysis. Responses were globally representative, with an approximate breakdown of 60% located in North America, 21% UK-based, 8% from Australia, 8% from New Zealand and a final 8% from Europe (not including UK). The study aimed to build a picture of the income trends for self-published authors as a comparison with the data that already exists for the traditionally published authors. Self-published authors were defined as 'individuals who had self-published at least one book and who spent at least 50% of their working time on writing and publishing activities'.

---

[23] To view the full ALLi Author Income Survey results visit: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/income-survey-2023-media-links/

Demographics and self-published author profiles

The key finding from the Baverstock and Steinitz author survey data in relation to demographics was that 'Self-publishing is undertaken across the demographic spectrum'. In further detail, it was found that respondents spanned all the age groups, from 20 to 80, lived in all environment areas and held a range of political inclinations. However, respondents also showed a skew towards females (making up 65% of the respondents) and those aged between 41 and 70 were disproportionately represented in comparison to the UK population. The study also found that the respondents disproportionately held high education levels, again in comparison with UK data, with 32% holding an undergraduate degree, and 44% a postgraduate degree. This could be seen to indicate a higher socioeconomic group. Wider demographics, such as ethnic background, gender identity, parental status, and disability, were not monitored in this study and present an opportunity for wider exploration.

The Alliance of Independent Authors Survey was undertaken almost exactly a decade after the Baverstock and Steinitz study, in 2023. For the author survey, demographic monitoring was a key element of the project, as both a tool to collate data for the wider industry and for understanding the specific membership breakdown of the organisation. For this reason, a wider selection of demographic monitoring questions was asked, although it should be noted that this was an optional section of the survey and was answered by 82% of the qualifying respondents, with reasons for not completing unknown.

The findings for demographics for the Alliance of Independent Author survey included: two-thirds of respondents identifying as cis-gender female, more than 90% identifying as 35 years old or above with 43% aged 55 and older, 80% holding a graduate or post-graduate college degree, 11% considering themselves to be disabled, and just over 10% identifying as what the survey describes as 'LGBTQIA+'. Note that this study was international, in comparison to the Baverstock and Steinitz paper which had a UK-only cohort.

In terms of ethnic background, the Alliance of Independent Authors shared further detail with the following findings labelled using language from the study:

a.   Caucasian/white: 86.08%

b.   Prefer not to say: 4.37%

c.   Black/ Hyphenated-African / Person of Color: 3.25%

d.   Asian: 1.87%

e.   Bi/Multiracial: 1.44%

f.   Hispanic Latino: 1.39%

g.   Not Listed: 1.60%

In summary; across both surveys, findings aligned that self-published authors tend to be female and in older age groups, with high levels of education. In addition, the Alliance of Independent Authors monitored for ethnic background and sexual orientation, finding that the majority were 'Caucasian/white' authors, whilst 10% – a higher figure than the general population, as was pointed

out by the Alliance of Independent Authors at various related events – identified as part of the 'LGBTQIA+' community.

Motivations and self-published author profiles

Within the Baverstock and Steinitz survey (2013a), respondents were asked to identify the 'reasons' for self-publishing their current project, initially from a multiple-choice list of options, and then with a free text opportunity. Answers to the question identified that self-published authors do not always write for financial gain, and their reasons for publishing can vary greatly, both within the self-publishing community, and in comparison with their traditionally published counterparts.

While difficulty in finding a traditional publisher was named by some authors as a reason for publishing independently, other reasons, such as seeking further control and the desire to write as an end in itself were also identified as reasons for undertaking the process. Perhaps of most interest here, and worth exploring further, is the desire for control. The researchers highlight that this reason was the most often cited by respondents in the free-text option, whether that be to take control of the timescales for writing and publishing their work, or to make decisions on the final presentation of their work, such as cover design or distribution.

Comparable studies exploring the motivations of one of the core comparison groups, entrepreneurs, offer a broader picture of the possible themes for investigation. One entrepreneur study (Wach, Stephan, Gorgievski, 2016), set out, as Baverstock and Steinitz had in 2013, to interrogate the concept that the main or only factor of interest to entrepreneurs was financial gain. In this instance, two data collection methods were used; interviews with 185 German entrepreneurs, followed up by a quantitative survey to test the theory. The resulting inductively developed category system developed by the researchers consisted of 14 success criteria that were clustered into five factors representing features of entrepreneurial success: firm performance, workplace relationships, personal fulfilment, community impact, and personal financial rewards. Table 2.4 lists the criteria, with the five factors included in brackets alongside. These findings suggest a wide range of drivers and success criteria for entrepreneurs which could be utilised to inform any investigation into the drivers of self-published authors, who are likewise working independently on a micro-business model.

Table 2.4: Factors for entrepreneurial success (Wach et al., 2016) adapted for self-publishing success

Factors for entrepreneurial perception of success
Goals and challenges 1 (Personal Fulfilment)
Personal satisfaction 1 (Personal Fulfilment)
Creativity and innovation (Personal Fulfilment)
Work-life balance (Personal Fulfilment)
Firm reputation 1 (Community Impact)
Firm continuity (Community Impact)
Personal financial reward 1 (Personal Financial Reward)
Any kind of growth (Firm Performance)
Firm stability (Firm Performance)
Position in the market (Firm Performance)
Firm survival (Firm Performance)
Employee and co-owner satisfaction (Workplace Relationships)
Employment security (Workplace Relationships)
Customer satisfaction and loyalty (Workplace Relationships)

Additional insights identified regarding self-published author profiles

Wider findings of the Baverstock and Steinitz study (2013a) included identifying that self-published authors were investing in a range of services to support their self-publishing work, with questions included in the survey to identify those authors investing in marketing, legal or editorial support. The survey also invited respondents to rate their knowledge of self-publishing across a broad spectrum, from very little to a lot. Those who reported having the highest knowledge level were younger, writing full time, more experienced (i.e. had published several books), and were those who took the shortest time to publish their book (i.e. under three months). A substantial group of self-published authors responding to the survey had previously been traditionally published (42% of the sample), and there was also evidence that those who were currently self-publishing had done so repeatedly, with 37% self-publishing between two and four titles, and 24% self-publishing five or more books. This prolificacy of publishing was again identified in the Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey, where over half the respondents reported having published more than 10 books, and 20% reported publishing more than 30.

The Alliance of Independent Authors survey also identified the genres being produced by self-published authors, with Romance (25.38%), Fantasy/Sci-Fi/Speculative (18.07%) and Crime/Thriller/Detective (13.78%) as the top three primary genres selected, making up 57% of all respondents. This was followed by Historical Fiction (6.82%), Children's (5.28%), General Fiction (3.75%), General Non-Fiction (3.39%), LGBTQ+ (2.53%), Women's Fiction (2.48%) and 'How-To' (2.44%). All other options were selected by less than 2% of respondents. 8.27% selected 'Other'.

Although the survey utilised for 'Who are the self-publishers?' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a) did not explore genre in detail, it identified that within the study sample there was a skew towards fiction (75%) with the remainder split between poetry, biography, history, 'how-to', business help, reference, travel, memoir, and self-improvement books.

One final article of note is that of Carolan and Evain: 'Self-Publishing: Opportunities and Threats in a New Age of Mass Culture'. This included a theorised profiling of self-published authors based on informal observations of the sector. It divided authors not by their approach or goals, but by their success levels, which they describe as: '…big fish in the big pond, big fish in the small pond and small fish in the big pond' (Carolan and Evain, 2013, p.286). This referenced the sales levels within the wider publishing context, moving from those making sales in high numbers, then those who are finding success within a niche group of readers and finally those who sell just a handful of books. This theorised segmentation does not acknowledge the nature of the end goal for the authors in these groups, for example, are sales figures important for all of these groups, and/or are their success criteria different.

Gaps and opportunities identified: Do profiles of self-published authors exist?

The review identified a range of opportunities, including:

a. Widening the demographic data collected to encompass a broader spectrum of demographics, for example monitoring for all UK protected characteristics, the demographics against which it is illegal to discriminate.
b. Exploring the opportunity to re-test the reasons for self-publishing, as first included in the Baverstock and Steinitz author survey, to find whether these have changed in the intervening decade.
c. Further investigate the key self-publishing drivers of decision-making and taking control of the publishing process as motivators to self-publish as identified in the Baverstock and Steinitz study.
d. The impact of author experience and prolificacy also merits further exploration and could again be revisited in relation to success likelihood.
e. Neither study based on survey data segmented the groups and/or named them, which offers a gap for investigation.
f. Neither study based on survey data monitored for wider behaviours or characteristics, including intrinsic personality traits, either alone or in comparison to other groups (such as entrepreneurs and artists).
g. Neither study utilised survey data to identify correlations between author activities or characteristics and their likelihood of commercial success (see following literature review for further existing data on success factors).

Literature review theme two: What factors influence self-publishing commercial success?

This theme encompasses both self-published author success factors, and those from related worlds; entrepreneurs and artists. It should be noted that many opinion pieces not backed up by study evidence have been produced both from within and outside the self-publishing community, either anecdotally or hypothetically suggesting factors that may influence self-publishing success. These have not been included here, in favour of evidenced studies or articles, but may be referenced where relevant in the thesis' body.

It should also be noted that no models or complete theories exist within self-publishing studies that could be utilised for this study either as a benchmark or to offer context on which to design new research. Relevant information has instead been identified in the form of observations. Where related-world models of use could be identified, these have been included.

The review identified data that evidences success exists in the self-publishing sector. The Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey (2023) announced their key finding at the London Book Fair 2023 that self-publishing authors earn more than writers with third-party (or traditional) publishers and that incomes appear to be rising year-on-year. 41% of the self-published respondents reported earning more than $20,000 from their writing during the past two years, and income rose into the millions, with an average (mean) income finding of $82,600 and a median income of $12,749, suggesting a proportion of the group was reporting a high level of commercial success. As stated in the introductory information on the webpage hosting the results, this high level of author income was a 'world's first independent global' finding (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023), and this sets the context for the need for a wider exploration of commercial success. In addition, Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a) also stated a finding of a wide breadth of commercial success (measured through sales figures) in their sample, with some authors selling just a handful of copies, and others reaching the tens of thousands in sales.

In relation to commercial success, a further finding from the Baverstock and Steinitz survey, was that there seemed to be a relationship between the sales and downloads of a book and the levels of satisfaction for the author (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013b). This relationship suggested commercial success is of key importance to a proportion of the self-publishing community. Although, Baverstock emphasises, this did not appear to be 'clear cut', as there was a significant group with low sales also reporting high satisfaction, and here success seems to have a differing meaning for this group.

Personality traits and self-published author success factors

In this same Baverstock and Steinitz paper (2013b), a recommendation for future study suggests an opportunity to research the potential correlations between author personality and success, and whether that intersects with those of the entrepreneur. In relation to this theme of personality type and success, due to the lack of data in the self-publishing sphere, key recent studies in related worlds have been reviewed as comparable in terms of results and data collection methodology. These cover both entrepreneurs and artists, or 'creatives', to capture the dual business and creative roles of a self-published author.

Before reviewing related studies, it is critical to note that when building an understanding of human creativity, personality traits are just one set of measurable characteristics that have been explored in the wider study of the creative process. They are by no means agreed to be the only predictor or influencer of creativity, with some questioning their level of importance at all. Wider external influences, such as artistic processes, personal experiences, interactive activity, or serendipitous events, are just some of the further factors that have been identified as potential influencers of creative production (Vallee-Tourangeau and Vallee-Tourangeau, 2020). However, as a factor that is measurable through existing and replicable survey frameworks, the existing study findings synthesised here aim to provide a comparable data set when exploring the many facets of the self-published author profile. They should be viewed in the context of telling just one part of the story of creativity and indeed, entrepreneurship or self-publishing.

There is a wealth of published research relating to entrepreneurship and personality traits. One specific study has been selected to provide a benchmark, due to its recent completion and its use of the Big Five Personality Factors: 'Identifying personality traits associated with entrepreneurial success: does gender matter' (Hachana et al., 2018). This study aimed to identify the links between the Big Five Personality Traits and successful entrepreneurs and how gender may play a moderating role through an empirical study conducted with a sample of 174 Tunisian entrepreneurs. The study team used the open-source 30-item version of the NEO-FFI that captures six facets of each trait (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1992) with a five-point Likert scale used offering the option for respondents to select from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each item. A summary of the findings for successful entrepreneur personality traits are below. Note that the β figure relates to whether the score has a positive or negative impact on the likelihood of success and to what extent, with negative impact indicated by a negative sign (-) preceding the value. The p-value denotes the significance of the finding, with only those scoring below 0.05 showing significance:

- Openness: positive relationship between those high in Openness to experience and success ($\beta = 0.429$; $p < 0.001$).
- Conscientiousness: negative relationship between those high in Conscientiousness and success ($\beta = -0.190$; $p < 0.01$).
- Extraversion: no significant effect found ($p > 0.05$).
- Agreeableness: no significant effect found ($p > 0.05$).

- Neuroticism: negative relationship between those high in Neuroticism and success (β = - 0.256; p < 0.001).

The study team noted that the results were consistent with similar studies including those of Barrick et al. (1993), Barrick and Mount (1991), and Etemad et al. (2013). Here it was suggested that the more entrepreneurs are open to experience, emotionally stable, and conscientious, the more likely they are to achieve success. In this instance, the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial success in relation to personality was found to be Openness to experience (β = 0.429) (Zhao et al., 2010).

As Hachana et al. also report in their findings, other studies have found mixed results in relation to the effect of Agreeableness on entrepreneurial success, with some finding that high Agreeableness can decrease the entrepreneurial failure rate (Cantner et al., 2011). Hachana et al., also reference the Zhao and Seibert study which stated: 'high levels of Agreeableness may inhibit one's willingness to drive hard bargains, look out for one's own self-interest and influence or manipulate others for one's own advantage' (Zhao, Seibert, 2006, p. 261). As described by Hachana et. al, these studies could suggest: 'entrepreneurs score low on Agreeableness since they need to be manipulative, suspicious, and look out for their own self-interest' (Hachana et. al, 2018).

A more recent study, from 2022, produced a meta-analysis of previous studies exploring entrepreneurial success (Salmony and Kanbach, 2022). This review across 95 studies also found consistency with high Openness to Experience, high Conscientiousness, and low Neuroticism, but found across studies a mixed result regarding Agreeableness, as well as Extraversion. The research team hypothesised that this may be related to a lack of clarity and differentiation between entrepreneur sub-types across previous studies, with groups ranging from rural farmers to tech-industry start-up founders. It is of interest too that studies such as 'Personality Traits and Entrepreneurs: Does Gender Make a Difference?' (Author not stated, 2020[24]), reported in *Development and Learning in Organizations*, found that personality traits among entrepreneurs did not appear to differ between men and women. The lower level of take-up among the self-employed and entrepreneurial roles from women vs. men was theorised to correlate instead to the masculine image of business entrepreneurship rather than personal characteristics. This may have relevance here, as it is widely accepted that authors are more likely to be female than male, the opposite skew to entrepreneurs.

It should be noted that entrepreneurs have been explored using other models of personality and behaviour. One notable study (Duchek, 2018) explored the impact of resilience on entrepreneurs and attempted to identify a theoretical framework. Key findings from eight biographies of highly resilient entrepreneurs identified a range of factors that were common among the cases. These factors seemed to have an influence on entrepreneurial resilience. These included:

---

[24] The author or research team were not named in the reporting of this study. It can be found in the journal *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 34(3), pp. 43-45.

- A strong and trusted relationship with parents, as well as often having parents who were independent and may also be entrepreneurs or salespeople themselves.
- Often gaining knowledge and experience of their trade before going it alone, with experiential learning being viewed as important.
- Having a strong work attitude and behaviours, for example working long hours, showing passion for the work (Duchek, 2018).

This paper stated in its conclusions that it was just the beginning of this area of investigation, with recommendations for further research put forward. However, the early indications suggested that parental and personal factors influenced entrepreneurial success.

The second group for personality trait comparison is 'creative' people. Numerous studies exist that explore the possibility of personality traits as one of the characteristics that may influence the likelihood of creativity, with the study that is arguably of most relevance being a meta-analysis drawing together and synthesising the findings from over eighty similar papers (Feist, 1998). Comparisons on personality trait findings were made on three sets of sample groups: scientists versus non-scientists, more creative versus less creative scientists, and artists versus non-artists. The study found a repeated pattern of personality trait importance across the studies reviewed, and this aligned with the findings of Hachana et al. for successful entrepreneurship. With, perhaps unsurprisingly, a key finding that the strongest positive correlation to creativity was Openness to Experience (Feist, 1998), as is found with traits corresponding to successful entrepreneurship. Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were, as with entrepreneurs, found to have a negative association and the remaining factors having no significant association: Agreeableness and Extraversion. The same study looked further at the more subtle elements of each study reviewed and concluded that the data indicated: 'Creative people are more autonomous, introverted, open to new experiences, norm-doubting, self-confident, self-accepting, driven, ambitious, dominant, hostile and impulsive' (Feist, 1998).

A range of further studies has been completed since 1998, such as 'Relating Personality and Creativity: Considering What and How We Measure' (Puryear, J. S. et al., 2019) and 'Big Five Personality and Creativity: The Moderating Effect of Motivational Goal Orientation' (Kaspi-Baruch, 2019), as well as more general studies such as 'Big Five Personality Traits and Creativity' (Jirásek, M. and Sudzina, F., 2020). All studies reviewed in relation to personality and creativity, regardless of the main aim or methodology, concluded the key importance of the Openness Big Five personality trait to the creative personality.

As with entrepreneurship, passion and resilience have also been studied in relation to creative endeavour, although to a lesser extent than personality traits. In 2017 three studies were run with college and high school students measuring self-reported and teacher-nominated perceptions of passion and persistence against creative behaviour and success (Grohman et al. 2017). The study found that teacher-observed and nominated persistence demonstrated a significant predictor of creativity, above the Big Five personality traits. However, self-reported levels of passion and

perseverance did not predict creative achievement. The team also measured personality traits, again finding Openness the greatest predictor of creativity.

Additional insights identified regarding self-published author commercial success

Although no further studies explored specific success factors for indie authors, a range of studies and publications identified the need for a professional approach to the publishing process by the author, and a professional-looking resulting product (i.e. ebook or printed book produced for sale) to increase success likelihood. For example, an article produced for *Publishers Weekly* (Kirch, 2011, p.3) spoke with a range of bookshops in Mid-West America in 2011, where it was found self-published books were selling in the hundreds and thousands from small bookstores. Interviews revealed that the self-published books selling the best were those that were professionally packaged – for example with professional-looking covers and formatting – and aggressively marketed by the author. This aligned with a similar article (Alter, 2014) which ran an analysis of the work of a top self-publishing bestseller Craig Osso (pen-name Russell Black), who did not find success with his first ten self-published books but continued nevertheless. Osso then reviewed his marketing activity and tried what could be described as an 'aggressive' tactic, releasing a new book around every 30 days, offering his first book for free and building his sales through his 'backlist' as each new book came out. His success is proven by his ranking at the time of the interview at number six in Amazon's 'Action and Adventure' bestseller ebook category just behind Tom Clancy and Dan Brown. Further, a 2012 article (Lodge, 2012) tracked four self-published children's authors whose works were bought by major traditional publishers following self-publishing. While two had caught attention through high sales alone, two had produced a cover or internal design which had been the main selling point for the publisher, further evidencing the importance of the professional product.

One further factor of consideration relates to religion and resilience, which has been studied in depth across a range of topics. One study held with 203 Illinois students (Dolcos et al., 2021), indicated that those who identify as holding a religious outlook and who report utilising their religious framework for coping had positive associations for cognitive reappraisal and coping efficacy, and negative associations for symptoms of anxiety and depression. The conclusion here was that this approach played a 'protecting role' against symptoms of anxiety and depression and this was interpreted as indicative of promoting 'increased resilience'. This finding potentially complements those of resilience or perseverance playing a role also in both entrepreneurship and creativity[25].

---

[25] It is recognised that Professor Alison Baverstock has similarly shared anecdotally that in relation to her own research regarding self-publishing, Professor Adrian Furnham, then professor of Psychology at UCL, shared his findings on creativity, including an indication that those with 'faith' were more likely to persevere, and that this may reflect a strong sense of duty.

Gaps and opportunities identified: What factors influence self-publishing commercial success?

a. In general, the lack of specific studies relating to self-publishing confirms that further academic exploration into the relationship between author activities and behaviours, and commercial success is a gap that requires filling, as no study has yet explored this in detail.

b. Undertaking personality trait testing, which has not been undertaken for self-published authors representing a clear gap for investigation. The fairly consistent findings identified for personality traits for both entrepreneurs and creatives suggest a profile can also be found for self-published authors and also supports the use of the Big Five Factor model for this purpose.

c. Utilising the shared profile across the two comparable groups – entrepreneurs and creatives – as benchmarks for hypotheses development.

d. Remaining vigilant to indicators for resilience and perseverance from study data should be noted, to align with the importance of resilience which has shown early indicators for entrepreneurs and creatives.

Literature review theme three: Has self-publishing disrupted the traditional publishing industry?

The Baverstock and Steinitz 2013 study found an overwhelmingly positive response to self-publishing reported by authors. This included the average satisfaction score both for the experience and the product produced, the likelihood of self-publishing again and of recommending the practice to others scoring over four on a five-point scale. For this and other reasons, the paper suggested to stakeholders in the publishing sector that there would be a 'number of fundamental implications' for the industry, with a prediction that the numbers of self-publishing authors would 'snowball' as interest in the media increased, and technology progressed (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.10). This increase in the self-publishing community would therefore have an impact on the traditional publishing model with whom the authors compete. For example, the anticipated growth in self-published authors could, the study predicted, lead to an increased need and use of publishing services to support their work. This same paper predicted that due to the rise in profile of the self-published model, some traditionally published authors may move from that model to self-publishing, motivated primarily by the positive financial implications.

The 2022 paper, 'Fanfiction, Self-Publishing, and the Materiality of the Book: A Fan Writer's Autoethnography', explored the positive impact of self-publishing through the lens of fanfiction specifically (Price, 2022). Here, the writer reflects on their own fanfiction and in particular highlights a unique opportunity offered by self-publishing in that it can be utilised (rightly or wrongly) to publish work that may otherwise be 'unpublishable'. Price concludes there are five benefits of self-publishing for fanfiction writers:

1. the desire to publish a work that is technically, if not necessarily creatively, unpublishable (due to copyright laws);
2. the physical presence of the book bestows 'thingness', physical legitimacy, and the power of traditional notions of authorship to one's work;
3. the materiality of the book and the pleasure afforded by its physical, tactile, and haptic qualities;
4. books can be collectible (fan) items;
5. self-published books can act as signifiers both of the self-as-author and one's creative journey. (Price, 2022, p.1).

Beyond the fan-fiction-specific findings, the paper again reiterates the pleasure and satisfaction – and by extension positive experience – a self-published object can produce for the maker, as a signifier of a journey taken and completed. This reiterates the opportunities for a positive experience of self-publishing, and that this may, as Baverstock stated, further inspire others to participate, thus growing the sector (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.10).

Technological advancements since Web 2.0 in relation to self-publishing and disruption

Since the emergence of Web 2.0 at the turn of the millennium, the importance of new digital tools and capabilities to publishing has been identified across publishing literature, with the internet able to offer 'a powerful and new distribution channel for amateur cultural production' (Jenkins, 2006, p.135). However, some earlier papers – and some not so early – explore the digital potential in publishing with little or no reference to indie authors, instead speaking from within the established model. For example, in 2014, 'The Future of Book Publishing: Seven Technology Trends and Three Industry Goals' (Danet, 2014) looked ahead to how digital developments would impact the publishing world, with only one mention of the phrase 'self-publishing' and only in relation to the potential for it to add to the digital 'overwhelm' of information that will be accessible. No positive predictions were made.

This disconnect in identifying that digital developments in publishing could impact or inspire self-publishing can also be seen in reviews of other innovations of the time, for example, the Espresso on demand book printing service. This mobile unit was launched in 2007 and one key use expected for it was the possibility for self-published authors to print their own book. The process involved an author visiting a library then working with a support advisor face-to-face to print out their book from the machine (Koerber, 2012). Neither the inventors, nor the author of the article, appeared to foresee the importance of digital opportunities for self-publishers, both for digital distribution and print-on-demand solutions, rather looking to solutions more closely aligned to crafters looking for small-scale print runs of personal projects. The machines themselves did not take off in the way that was expected.

Despite the connection of digital and self-publishing being overlooked in some studies and innovations, the theme of digital publishing and self-publishing is by far the most explored, both academically and more widely. For example, in 2001, an early date in terms of the evolution of the internet, Henke introduced the concept of the internet providing access to books with no need for

writer or reader to engage with facilitators from the traditional publishing model and questioned what this may mean for the future of publishing (Henke, 2001).

This concept that the removal of the external publisher as the facilitator, due to the user-driven content opportunities digital offers, has threaded through a range of studies, reported both positively and negatively. One paper reviews existing data from the sector from a business perspective to identify the implications of the growth of self-publishing on the wider publishing business model (Hviid et al., 2019). The study proposes that one of the key implications raised by the data is that 'The risk of market failure has thus shifted focus to the implication of asymmetric information about the quality books, and future interventions may be necessary to ensure that the market functions in the interest of both readers and authors' (Hviid et al., 2019, p.375). Here, the paper notes the 'long-tail problem' as a key issue in relation to this identification and signposting of quality books to be managed or solved. 'Long-tail' refers to a business model focused on selling a large number of products in small amounts, as opposed to a small number of high-selling products (Anderson, 2010). This model has grown in response to digital opportunities and has impacted all areas of retail, as sellers discovered that selling numerous items in small numbers could equal or even exceed the financial outcomes of selling a few bestsellers (ibid). Given the high competition in book sales, and the impact this has on achieving a bestseller today, appreciation of this model is growing fast among the self-publishing community.

In the paper 'Self-publishing: Opportunities and threats in a new age of mass culture', Carolan and Evain introduce their investigation by listing key questions they had of the growth in self-publishing and the related implications for the traditional industry, and it makes for an anxious read:

> What effect will these developments have on the industry? In this environment, is quality control feasible faced with the speed of publishing? How will potential readers find their treasure in the sea of mass production? Will these developments lead to increased pulping? Will book publishing remain a cost-effective activity? (Carolan and Evain, 2013, p.285).

However, as they outline in the conclusion, their findings do not paint as bleak a picture as the questions at the outset may have suggested, stating: 'Book publishing remains one of the most economically friendly cultural industries' (Carolan and Evain, 2013, p.297). Their investigations found that, particularly due to the digital developments, as a route to artistic sharing and a career in culture, it has potentially the lowest financial barrier to inclusion. The study also concluded that contrary to reducing print book sales, it has been found that ebook reading was taken up alongside print-book reading, with the benefit that the low cost to produce and buy an ebook allowed for more risk and diversification of content. In fact, they counter that:

> Through this multiplication of voices and channels that are contributing to the conversation, the publishing industry could be considered to be reverting back to the oral traditions of the origins of storytelling (Carolan and Evain, 2013, p.299).

Carolan and Evain refer to the earlier work of Gabriel Ziad, the author of *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in the Age of Abundance* (Ziad, 2003), which explored the growth of the ebook. Here Ziad discussed the potential opportunities that the lower cost of ebooks could offer for widening of educational prospects both to read and express yourself in 'an ongoing conversation in which diverse subjects and interests multiply' (Ziad, 2003, p.134). This concept hints at an interconnection between the opening up of publishing through the ebook and the opportunity for diversification; here relating most explicitly to consuming diverse subjects and interests, but by association relating to diversifying authorship too.

The following year, further confidence was shown in the digital developments taking place in publishing in relation to the indie author. For example, in 'Storming the gatekeepers: Digital disintermediation in the market for books', Joel Waldfogel and Imke Reimers reviewed the sales and author make up of ebook products, concluding:

> New technology has reduced the costs of creating and distributing books and has given creators the opportunity to circumvent the traditional gatekeepers of publishing. Price reductions have spurred book consumption, with benefits to consumers on the order of $3.5 billion per year. Self-published works, along with new institutions for product discovery, have expanded the choice set available to consumers (Waldfogel and Reimers, 2015, p.57).

Other papers express that changes are not occurring quickly enough in terms of digital, for example in the digital listings open to libraries or bookstores to both find, and order, self-published books with the same ease as traditionally published alternatives. One study identified that a novel by Colleen Hoover (who was at the time self-published) that was number 14 in the bestseller listings was only held in eight libraries in the US. However, a novel by a comparable novelist with similar sales in the same genre published by Big Five traditional publisher Hachette was held in 2,762 libraries (Nardini and Schenell, 2013).

Another digital disrupter of note is the story-sharing site Wattpad, often used as a first step into self-publishing, whereby authors can share story samples or excerpts for feedback and engagement with potential readers. In one 'netnographic' study – a study used to understand online practices and behaviours – the role of platforms such as Wattpad and wider social networks in connecting authors and readers was explored (Bold, 2018). Findings suggested authors were achieving success through the site, particularly those targeting younger demographics, and that for this reason, new skills and mindsets were needed by authors taking this specific route to self-publish; authors could not rely on the content itself to find an audience, but instead required the practical skills to enable their work to thrive in this new digital world.

A key article, 'The Rise of the Citizen Author: Writing Within Social Media' (Johnson, 2017), brings a new angle to the impact of digital on self-publishing and therefore on the traditional publishing model. Here, Johnson describes a citizen author as one who connects with others beyond their story:

In defining the citizen author, the use of technology, social media, education, and socio-economic levels all play a role in giving the citizen author access to the global village where they develop relationships with each other and readers that further challenges the relationships in the wider discourse of the book (Johnson, 2017, p.136).

Due to the role of digital platforms in the citizen author activity, Johnson lays out the argument for an increasing reduction in the age of those self-publishing, as digital natives and early adopters begin to step forward, utilising social media platforms for their audience-building and marketing efforts, for example stating that the majority of social media users are estimated to be aged 18-29 (except LinkedIn). She also notes that 'digital migrants' – those born in the pre-digital era – are comfortably embracing the platforms and may therefore grow in numbers on story-sharing sites.

Further digital platforms of note to the self-published author, which again may benefit those more comfortable with the digital world, include those focussed on a crowdsourcing approach to funding new publications. In 'Crowdsourcing: A Platform for Crowd Engagement in the Publishing Industry' (Mustafa and Adnan, 2017), an analysis of how crowdsourcing platforms are used to attract active participation from the public during the publishing process was undertaken. This was explored in the context of the title development process, with reference both to crowdsourcing concepts for upcoming work and feedback on current work, as well as compensating participants either financially or with other creative compensations. The finding of most importance to this study, is that despite being written in 2017, when crowdsourcing was in its infancy, the study concluded that it can be seen as an option for those who feel 'under-served by their traditional publisher' and is even described as a 'solution' for self-published authors (Mustafa and Adnan, 2017, p.294).

Self-publishing services in relation to self-publishing disruption

Some papers reviewed during this study make assumptions that self-publishing requires working alone and that a third-party expert or quality control is never used. For example:

Self publishing would lead to more and shorter text of less quality. The lack of supervision and quality control by publishers would result in "crude", "less serious", "half done" and "repetitive" texts. The direct feedback from readers is not regarded as equally valuable compared to the editing by a publisher (von Rimscha and Putzig, 2013, p.327).

Here, it is implied that self-publishers utilise readers to edit or quality control their work, potentially launching a book without any wider editorial input and awaiting readers' response. This is as opposed to traditionally published authors who will be supported by a range of services at their publishing house. However, others in the sector have observed that there are supplier choices to be made by self-published authors, with approaches to supplier collaboration including the options to 'Make or Buy' and 'Do or Delegate' (Hviid et al., 2019, p.361), both involving identifying and selecting others to take responsibility for elements of the publishing process. In this same paper a connection is made between the digital era and publishing service provider growth, with the conclusion stating: 'The

Internet and in particular the development of the ebook has created new types of service providers and retailers' (Hviid et al., 2019, p.374). Supporting this observation is one core finding initially identified again by the Baverstock and Steinitz study (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a). Here, the author survey demonstrated a high level of use of publishing services by self-publishers, for example with paid-for editing being taken up by 59% of the sample. Baverstock concluded that this rise in self-publishers recruiting services and support from a range of publishing specialists had future implications for the traditional publishing sector, including that the increase in demand could limit the availability of suppliers for the traditional industry, with a wider implication of rising costs.

The role of the independent editor in the context of the growth of self-publishing was explored further in a key paper, 'How the role of the independent editor is changing in relation to traditional and self-publishing'. The research undertaken here involved an online survey with a sample of members from the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP), and professional organisations with which the SfEP had links. Those who received the initial invitation to participate were also invited to share the survey with other independent editors. 514 responses were received, mostly from the UK and US. The survey included multiple choice options and free text opportunities, and the resulting papers compared respondents' reported responses to practice in both 2010 and 2013 in order to identify trends over time. Key findings of relevance to this study, include a notable decrease in work undertaken by editors and proofreaders for publishing houses in 2013 in comparison to 2010, with conversely more time spent working with self-published authors than had been seen in the earlier data; 43% of self-published author clients in 2013, in comparison to 36% in 2010 (Baverstock, Blackburn and Iskandarova, 2015a).

The reasons for this shift in clients were also explored in the survey, and include financial benefits, such as a higher mean score out of ten for self-publishing vs. traditional publishing clients when asked to rate their agreement with the statement 'I was able to charge a fair rate for the work I did'. Here, where 1 was strongly disagree, and 10 was totally agree, the mean score for working with traditional publishers was 6.19 in comparison to 7.11 when working with first time self-published authors, and an even higher 7.78 when working with established self-published authors who had published several books.

Respondents also rated their time spent on contracts above the agreed budget using the same 10-point scale. When responding to the sentence 'I regularly found that contracted work took longer than was budgeted', the 2013 data showed that the mean response was 6.34 when working with traditionally published authors, vs. 6.3 for first time self-published authors and, at the lowest rating, 5.51 for established self-published authors, meaning the final group was the most reliable in terms of working to agreed timelines and therefore keeping within the budget for the project. These results indicate both a rise in use of service providers by independent authors, and the positive outcomes for suppliers themselves when working with the self-publishing group, potentially indicating that Baverstock's earlier prediction was correct, and demand will increase for these services and disrupt the traditional model of service-supply. This is summed up in one verbatim response shared in the paper from the free text option in the survey:

> Publishers... haven't yet learnt that they are competing with self-publishing and unsigned authors for our services – authors who are often willing to pay more for our services and accept more reasonable schedules for the work (Baverstock, Blackburn and Iskandarova, 2015, p.129).

The implication here is that editors and other service providers may select clients primarily based on payment and how the specific job fits around their own schedule, not for example the profile of the client or publishing house. Even the biggest publishers may not therefore be protected by their name or profile from competition that fulfils the primary needs of the provider.

In the same study, the research team identified the interest service providers showed in working directly with an author who may require support to grow, with one written comment by a survey respondent sharing that they believed:

> One may also need to do more teaching as part of the editing process, since the client may not be familiar with how a book is produced (Baverstock, Blackburn and Iskandarova, 2015, p.130).

Diversification of author voice and storytelling

Before exploring the few studies investigating diversification in self-publishing, it should be acknowledged that self-publishing as a 'democratising' force for the publishing sector has been referenced and explored in a range of articles and books. It must be stated however that this is most often an assumption based on the lack of gatekeepers and financial barriers to participation, rather than an evidenced theory, and therefore is most often referenced in terms of what it can potentially offer, not in terms of what it has proven to have delivered. For example, Dillon-Lee's 2018 thesis analysed the self-published authors' response to the archetypal representations of women within High Fantasy. Here she discusses self-publishing accessibility from the feminist viewpoint:

> Moreover, from a feminist perspective, self-publication offers a shift in the power dynamic of the publication industry, bringing forward voices that otherwise may not be heard, offering these voices different rewards (Dillon-Lee 2018, p.210).

Here it is the opportunity itself that Dillon-Lee has identified as disruptive; an opening up of the process to offer different voices a new route to be heard and based on a wider range of 'rewards' which are not always reflected in the traditional model. However, in terms of disruption, little has been completed to investigate the reality of the opportunities that self-publishing could offer marginalised voices, or indeed whether the unheard voices are finding their place in the world of self-publishing beyond micro-niche audiences that may already have engaged with that group through other means. Findings so far are predominantly theories stated, and opportunities identified, not necessarily evidenced realities.

Although Dillon-Lee's study did not set out specifically to explore the demographic make-up of the self-publishing author community, she touched on this when exploring how self-published high Fantasy works have responded to self-publishing in terms of the removal of financial gatekeepers in comparison with the traditional model. Dillon-Lee muses on the benefits of self-publishing this work and highlights one of the key disruptive creative possibilities in relation to diversification of storytelling for the independent model:

> Not being subject to concerns over marketability or costs of production that can hamper traditional publishing houses, I was granted the freedom via self-publication to explore these issues with only my own financial outlay and reputation at risk (Dillon-Lee, 2019, p.194).

This opportunity for diversification when publishing outside of the restrictions of the traditional model is implied again in a small number of additional studies that explore diverse representation within specific genres, such as 'Diversity in Romance Novels: Race, Sexuality, Neurodivergence, Disability, and Fat Representation' (Nankervis, 2022). In the paper, a selection of Romance authors and titles is explored, including a comparison between those traditionally published and those self-published. As context, Nankervis states that:

> These authors were told in the past that there simply was not a market for their novels, that people wouldn't want to read about heroes or heroines that were not straight, cis, or white (Nankervis, 2022, p.160).

This implies that the traditional model saw these authors and their stories as too 'risky' in terms of the financial outlay to support them within what the system deemed a niche genre or audience. The finding of most significance in this paper counteracts this concern through a review of high-selling work and of significant award winners. This, for example, identified that the first Black authors to win a RITA Award, a prominent award presented by the Romance Writers of America (RWA) and named for their first president, Rita Clay Estrada, were self-published by Kennedy Ryan and M. Malone. Nankervis reports that prior to these wins, criticism had for many years been aimed at RITA awards for 'refusing to acknowledge BIPOC authors' (Nankervis, 2022, p.160). Here 'BIPOC' is understood to refer to the mainly US-based acronym indicating Black, Indigenous, People of Color[26]. It should also be noted that the award ended in 2019 and has not been revived by any other organisation since.

---

[26] A useful article exploring the complex linguistic and historical nature of the acronym BIPOC can be found on the art, culture and politics explainer website: https://www.vox.com/2020/6/30/21300294/bipoc-what-does-it-mean-critical-race-linguistics-jonathan-rosa-deandra-miles-hercules

Gaps and opportunities identified: Has self-publishing disrupted the traditional publishing industry?

a. Revisiting satisfaction with self-publishing and likelihood to recommend, concerning the growing nature of the model as a positive option to traditional publishing as first asked by Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a).

b. Revisiting the prediction of traditional authors moving to the self-published model for financial reasons to see if evidence can be found of this or to verify it may happen in the future.

c. Further exploring the anecdotal concept that self-publishing has offered marginalised voices a new way to be heard and whether the level of this disruption can be identified in study conditions.

d. Further exploring, a decade on, the use of self-published authors of publishing service providers and therefore the potential impact on the traditional model and the suppliers they require.

e. Seeking further understanding of the motivations self-published authors have to take the independent model rather than the traditionally published route and identify what self-publishing can learn from these findings that may change what they offer authors or how they work in the future.

2.4 Summary

The Literature Review has demonstrated that all three of the research areas for this study have significant gaps in knowledge, particularly from an academic perspective. The overarching lack of academic investigation, due in part to the lack of support for the topic within academic circles in early years, offers the opportunity to identify new evidence and develop new models to better understand the self-publishing community and the impact it has, and may have in the future, on the wider sector.

In relation to profiling the self-published author (theme one), two key surveys, that of Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a) and the Alliance of Independent Authors (2023) have offered benchmarks for a range of self-published author attributes, including indicators for demographic breakdowns, reasons for self-publishing and the services used. However, there is also the opportunity to revisit key data from these previous studies, explore questions they raised, and introduce new concepts into the understanding of the self-published author community. Specifically, there is the opportunity to segment, describe and name the self-published author clusters.

There is a lack of knowledge in terms of measurable factors that influence author likelihood of commercial success (theme two), whether that be experience, investments, demographics, or personality traits, and this has provided a clear gap in knowledge for further investigation.

Finally, although disruption of the industry by self-publishing (theme three) has been fairly well discussed in relation to the impact of digital and to a lesser extent in relation to the need for service provision, wider representation of authors who may have been marginalised through the traditional model has been assumed at best and provides another gap in knowledge to explore.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework & Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining research aims and questions based on the gaps identified in The Literature Review and the context outlined in The Introduction.

It then offers an overview of the overarching research paradigm and design, followed by an outline of the theoretical models used for the study, based on findings from the existing literature in the field and comparable studies. It then summarises the research methodology, including potential limitations, for data collection and analysis by data type:

- Author Survey Responses (collected September – November 2022)
- Kindle Ebook Bestseller Figures (monitored January – June 2023)

The chapter ends by refining the research hypotheses (H1 – H4), with alphabetised sub hypotheses where necessary. Each hypothesis has been developed where possible with baseline data that has emerged from the methodology development. These will then be used as guiding statements for exploring the data results in each of the Findings & Discussions chapters (Chapters Four to Eight) that follow.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

Based on the findings from the systematic literature review, and related introductory context, the following research aims and questions have been defined.

Research aims:

1. **To provide authors with a segmentation model and comprehensive record of factors that may influence the likelihood of commercial success.** It is intended that this information can be used by prospective authors to determine whether self-publishing may be suitable for them, identify their 'segment' and therefore what additional support may improve their chances of commercial success, should that be one of their goals.
2. **To provide traditional publishers and self-publishing service providers with data to better understand the expectation, challenges, and potential for working with self-published authors**. This includes identifying what, if anything, the traditional publishing sector may need to review should they want to attract authors who are currently deferring to the independent model or who may move to it in the future.
3. **To provide the wider publishing industry with a picture of the self-publishing landscape today.** This will include identifying opportunities or challenges associated with the disruption self-publishing has – and could continue to have – on the traditional model in terms of how, who and what is being published. Here additional research opportunities to further this understanding will be identified and shared.

Research questions:

1. **Commercial success in self-publishing:** Can it be proven that, despite scepticism, self-published authors can find commercial success?
2. **Author segmentation:** Who are self-published authors today, and can they be segmented into clusters with shared characteristics?
3. **Commercial success factors for self-published authors:** Are factors – including personality – shared by 'commercially successful' self-published authors?
4. **Disruption of the traditional publishing model:** Has self-publishing disrupted the traditional publishing model in terms of the role of the author and those whose stories are told?

3.3   Research Paradigm and Design

The research paradigm, or philosophical framework, held by the researcher has directed the theoretical development and methodology selection. In this case, the research paradigm most closely aligns with the fundamental principles of Postpositivist philosophy (Phillips, 2000). In summary, the study is based on an assumed position that factors probably determine effects or outcomes, and that evidence should be collected, or experiments held, to test those factors and refine the ideas before testing again. However, the study approach also acknowledges that there will be an unintended impact of the researcher's experience or knowledge on the interpretation of results. To mitigate this, the study is data-led, with quantitative data comprising the majority of results to limit the outside interpretation of the findings, for example through free-text answer interpretation, and thus the impact of the researcher themselves. Where interpretation is offered, for example, to develop an actionable outcome from a result, this is actively open for academic debate. In a sector with little academic research, the study aims to invigorate discussion and further develop the understanding of the impact of self-publishing.

A postpositivist approach denotes that a study is undertaken from the position that: 'Research seeks to develop relevant, true statements, ones that can serve to explain the situation of concern or that describe the causal relationships of interest' (Creswell, 2003, p.7). This relates to the research design for this study, in that each of the hypotheses will outline a statement describing an anticipated causal relationship which the study data will be used to prove or disprove where possible. Further, in a practical sense, postpositivism can be seen in the research design in relation to the substantial amount of original data collected consisting of numeric measures and the studying of behaviour and actions of individuals to come to conclusions on the subject.

A key potential limitation of a postpositivist paradigm is that taking a linear stance from the outset – that factors can determine outcomes – may discount more nuanced concepts, such as the marginalisation of certain groups or individuals. To mitigate this, where relevant, the study draws on the Advocacy and Participatory Worldview which reflects a range of philosophies, notably and most recently the work of Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998). This approach is summarised by Creswell thus:

> An advocacy/participatory worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda. Thus, the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life. Moreover, specific issues need to be addressed that speak to important social issues of the day, issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation (Creswell, 2003, p.9).

To support this approach, the study includes activities of enquiry seeking to identify and analyse participatory and related data reflecting marginalised groups within the publishing sector and exploring how these intersect with other factors, as well as providing evidence that will aim to

promote debate to inspire change in the industry. One of the intended outcomes of this study is to bring attention, where it can be objectively identified, that any group or individual is being marginalised within the publishing process, and either propose possible answers to those challenges or pose questions for further study. This includes recommending further participatory actions and research that could take place as a next step, outlined in Chapter Nine.

A study can take either a qualitative or a quantitative paradigm in terms of research design, or a combination of the two; a 'mixed method'. In this instance, a mixed method approach has been taken. This allows exploration of the research questions from different angles and through different lenses. This triangulation seeks to create the opportunity to test the project hypotheses in multiple ways and bring further validity and credibility to the findings (Creswell, 2003).

The study has taken a deductive, top-down, approach, for example beginning with the researcher's hypotheses to build a potential model for profiling the self-published author, which is based on previous studies, wider literature on the subject, personal experience, and informal discussions with those in the sector at the outset of the study. Original data were then sourced in two ways to test these theories and create pathways to new areas of exploration. Specifically, two methods were chosen that offered personal insight from authors themselves, alongside real-world data from sales platforms.

Summary of two-phased research design:

Phase One: Survey Responses (Quantitative & Qualitative data)

15-20-minute online survey distributed to self, traditionally and hybrid published authors via a range of routes. Questions included personality trait analysis, demographics, and experience and skills. This included free text boxes to gain qualitative data. See Appendix 1 for the full survey copy.

Phase Two: Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller Figures (Quantitative data)

Data taken weekly from Amazon Kindle Bestseller records across a six-month period, analysed for two demographics (gender/ethnic background), price, genre, publishing route and publisher type.

3.4   The Theoretical Model: Self-Published Author Segmentation

Although a formal segmentation of self-published authors has not been undertaken before, a definition set by Baverstock and Steinitz (2013b) gives a solid basis for exploration. Here the study sets the context that three segments to satisfaction should be considered when seeking to understand the experiences of self-published authors: 'financial, personal, career/reputational'. Later in the same paper, Baverstock and Steinitz add further detail to the concept of author 'personal' satisfaction, noting that the act of being published in itself was a satisfying end point for many, describing this as the act of 'completion'. This is a very different meaning to a traditionally published author who may see completing the manuscript as 'completion'. For self-published authors, completion does not take place until it is published, and their end-to-end role has been completed. This helps to further define what 'personal satisfaction' may be in terms of measurements for this study, and completion was therefore selected as the core marker for personal satisfaction when analysing results.

In relation to the 'career/reputational' segment, for the purposes of this study, this has been focused to 'reputational success'. This distinguishes it clearly from questions relating to building a career, which could be interpreted as also linking to 'financial success'. As such, reputation will be explored from the point of view of public recognition from the sector and/or from readers. Financial success has been relabelled as 'commercial success'. This phrase is a recognised descriptor within the wider business world and aligns with the concept of the 'Authorpreneur' which is closely linked to the business concept of the entrepreneur. Measuring commercial success is explored further in 3.5 of this chapter.

In summary, for the purposes of the author profiling element of this study, three adapted segments from the Baverstock and Steinitz study (2013a) were used to select the sections of the survey to be utilised for cluster analysis, anticipating that groupings will cluster around one or more of the following themes:

- Completion success
- Commercial success
- Reputational success

3.5   The Theoretical Model: Self-Published Author Success

Defining and measuring the dependent variable

This variable is used for both analysing whether the commercially successful self-published author exists and used as the dependent variable when identifying the factors that influence the likelihood of commercial success for independent authors.

Rating commercial success in relation to self-published authors is more complex than it may appear. Whereas for a traditionally published author, a rating could be taken by selecting a level of annual earnings and/or rates of advances or average royalties, for self-published authors this is more nuanced. Many authors publishing in this way will be investing back into their 'business', particularly in the initial years of trading. In this way they could be viewed as more closely aligned to start-up small businesses in terms of criteria for commercial success.

Small and micro business owners, as with authors, have a wide range of success definitions, influenced by their characteristics, goals and outlook. In terms of commercial success, the study recognises continuity of a standard of living as a key identifier (Toledo-Lopez et al., 2011). In addition, there are a range of financial figures that can be selected from to measure financial success, including profits, income, sales turnover, number of employees etc. From this, two measurable points that are suitable for online survey responses and applicable to authors have been identified:

a. **Profit:** a business/individual's ability to <u>generate a profit.</u>
b. **Continuity of a standard of living:** a business/individual's ability to <u>make the money required to live and continue in business.</u>

For this study, respondents were segmented via this two-pronged definition to establish commercial success, with the survey including one question for each area. The answer to these two questions were combined to create a score from 1 to 6, with the rating system shown in table 3.1. It should be recognised that the nature of digital surveying means that the results utilised for the commercial success scoring system designed are based on self-reported data. However, the anonymous nature of the digital survey, versus formats such as case studies or interviews, should act as an incentive to honestly report financial results, based on findings from previous studies investigating the disclosure of sensitive data (Murdoch et. al., 2014).

Table 3.1: Scoring system for 'commercial success' scores 1-6 based on survey responses

Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Final Rating
'In terms of investment in publishing and distributing your writing, have you…'	'Do your current approximate earnings from writing match your financial needs?' rated from 1 to 5	Coded from 1 (not commercially successful and negative about the future) to 6 (very successful).
4: in profit	5: I make more than I need	6: Very Successful
4: in profit	4: I make what I need	5: Moderately Successful
4: in profit	3: I don't make what I need	4: Slightly Successful
4: in profit	2: Unsure	4: Slightly Successful
4: in profit	1: Do not need financial support	4: Slightly Successful
3: break even	5: I make more than I need	3: Breaking even
3: break even	4: I make what I need	3: Breaking even
3: break even	3: I don't make what I need	3: Breaking even
3: break even	2: Unsure	3: Breaking even
3: break even	1: Do not need financial support	3: Breaking even
2: Invested more BUT positive about future	5: I make more than I need	2: Not successful BUT positive about future
2: Invested more BUT positive about future	4: I make what I need	2: Not successful BUT positive about future
2: Invested more BUT positive about future	3: I don't make what I need	2: Not successful BUT positive about future
2: Invested more BUT positive about future	2: Unsure	2: Not successful BUT positive about future
2: Invested more BUT positive about future	1: Do not need financial support	2: Not successful BUT positive about future
1: Invested more AND negative about future	5: I make more than I need	1: Not successful AND negative about future
1: Invested more AND negative about future	4: I make what I need	1: Not successful AND negative about future
1: Invested more AND negative about future	3: I don't make what I need	1: Not successful AND negative about future
1: Invested more AND negative about future	2: Unsure	1: Not successful AND negative about future
1: Invested more AND negative about future	1: Do not need financial support	1: Not successful AND negative about future
0: UNSURE	ALL ANSWERS	999: DISCOUNTED

In addition to the study questions regarding success, an analysis was undertaken of bestseller Kindle store books across a six-month (26 week) period to identify those authors who had self-published and to monitor the percentage overall of self-published authors in the top 100 ebooks across that defined period.

In terms of making an educated hypothesis, the *Longitudinal Small Business Survey: SME Employers (businesses with 1-249 employees)* released data in August 2023 looking back on 2022. This offers a comparable time to the data received through the survey, as the small business analysis was run between 1 November 2022 and 30 April 2023, while the survey ran September to November 2022. The study found that 79% of SME employers stated they had made a profit in their last financial year. It is noted that this was six percentage points higher than in 2021 and 12 percentage points higher than in 2020.

The closest comparison with a self-published author is to look to the data specifically for micro businesses (those with staff figures of 1-10 maximum). Here, the study notes that the figure reporting a profit also matched that of the general SME population, with 79% of micro businesses reporting a profit (up seven percentage points on 2021 and 11 percentage points on 2020). The data used for this estimate is based on all those not reporting a loss and therefore should encompass both those making a profit and those breaking even (who may then report a very minor profit to ensure they do not report a loss). Therefore, an estimate for the purposes of hypothesis could be made of 79% of self-published authors reporting not having made a loss.

It is more complex to estimate how many self-published authors may be found in the Amazon Kindle Bestseller lists. But one comparison might be the number of micro businesses making the top turnover figures. Data are limited here, but one study utilising data from Experian in 2021 found that just over 235,000 micro businesses from a total of 5,472,000 have a turnover of more than £1 million. This makes up approximately 23% of the micro business population. This percentage could also be used as an estimate for the proportion of self-published authors making it to the top level of authorship and sales, for example making bestseller lists. The caveat with these comparable figures is that micro businesses as a broader community are made up of businesses sitting within established and well-supported models, such as consultancies or caterers, with long established support structures in place to aid success, whereas self-published micro businesses are early in their emergence and without such support. It would be expected for the actual figures to be below that of the micro businesses, and these comparable broader micro business figures could indicate future projections.

3.6 The Theoretical Model: Commercial Success Factors

The theoretical model for success factors has been built primarily in relation to those scoring as 'commercially successful' self-published authors only. It is this group that can be segmented not by their aspirations, but by the reality of the commercial outcome of their work. Commercial success is also an outcome that is of most interest to the author community in terms of understanding if and what factors may influence their own commercial success likelihood when considering a possible career option.

As little literature was available that defined the commercially successful self-published author, or authors in general, a wide net was cast in terms of the factors to be tested and included retesting and building upon themes explored in the author survey held by Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a). These were: motivations, investment activities and demographics (widened to encompass all UK 'protected characteristics').

In addition, personality traits were selected as a new area of research as yet unexplored in terms of understanding the profile of the self-published author. Personality traits have been studied in a range of related fields under the understanding that a person's beliefs, actions, and behaviours are in some way connected to their underlying, and largely unchanging, personality traits (McCrae et al., 2000). Finally, questions related to previous experience, such as sectors worked in before self-publishing, were included, to capture the potential impact of transferable skills and knowledge.

The study will investigate independent variables under five themes: personality traits, protected characteristics, previous experience, motivations, and investment activities.

Independent variable one: personality traits

Personality traits were measured against the Big Five personality model, utilizing the 50-Item set of International Personality Item Pool ('IPIP') Big-Five Factor Markers (Goldberg, 1992). This is based on five x 10-item scales that are designed to measure each of the Big Five factors: Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N), often described as the OCEAN model. For each of the factors, ten fragment sentences, such as 'I am easily disturbed' were scored by the respondents on a five-point Likert scale:

- Very Inaccurate
- Moderately Inaccurate
- Neither Accurate nor Inaccurate
- Moderately Accurate
- Very Accurate

A benefit of utilising the Big Five factor model is its open-source nature, ensuring that results can be compared across studies or replicated in the future. The questions and marking structures were obtained from the IPIP digital hub which is in the public domain and available to researchers globally in ten different languages.[27] Studies have been undertaken to test the validity of the IPIP scoring system, with findings suggesting the IPIP, rather than the TIPI (a shorter form of the test) showed more consistency and a stronger relation to major dimensions of personality (Ypofanti, 2018). For this reason, the longer version of the test was utilised.

Two comparable groups were identified as having been studied in relation to personality traits: Entrepreneurs and Creative people. These were selected as comparable groups both for the commercial element of self-publishing (entrepreneurs) and the creative element of authorship (creatives).

For 'creative' people, the following profile was identified through a meta-analysis study synthesising a range of previous studies (Feist, 1998). This is explored in more detail in the literature review, but the core markers in summary by association are shared here for clarity, noting that reliability was not reported due to the combining of a range of studies:

1. Openness: a positive association (the highest marker of all traits)
2. Conscientiousness: a negative association
3. Extraversion: no association
4. Agreeableness: no association
5. Neuroticism: a negative association

As those choosing to write, by any route, will require some creative skill or inclination to produce their work, it could be reasonably assumed that similarities would be found between this 'creatives' profile and that of the wider self-publishing population.

---

[27]For more information on the IPIP opensource Big Five measurements, see: https://ipip.ori.org

For 'successful entrepreneurs', the following profile was identified which could give an indication as to how the 'commercially successful' author personality traits may differ from the general self-publishing population. This was broadly the same as the creatives profile but differed in terms of mixed reporting of findings for potential negative association for Agreeableness and a potential positive association for Extraversion (Hachana, Berraies, Ftiti, 2018). Again, the studies themselves are explored further in The Literature Review along with their reliability scores where known, but in summary the trends across the identified studies are:

1. Openness: a positive association

2. Conscientiousness: a negative association

3. Extraversion: no association (some mixed findings for a positive association)

4. Agreeableness: no association (some mixed findings for a negative association)

5. Neuroticism: a negative association

Independent variable two: demographics

As noted in The Literature Review, studies have explored the makeup of the publishing sector, and in part the demographics of self-published authors (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a). However, a comprehensive analysis, covering all nine UK protected characteristics has not been undertaken previously and therefore this study has included questions monitoring for all nine of these demographics. Those used have been based on the most recent UK Census 2021 and cover: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ethnic background, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The purpose of the named 'protected characteristics' concept in the UK was to build a reference framework for the Equality Act 2010, which protects everyone from discrimination based on any of the above characteristics when in a range of contexts and environments including at work, in education, as a consumer, when using public services, or as a member of a private club or association.

There are some characteristics not anticipated to have an impact on the experience of a self-published author, for example marriage or maternity; however, for avoidance of doubt all have been included in the data collection.

Language and approach to protected characteristics

During this study, the social model of disability is being assumed as the context for discussing and analysing disability in relation to authorship. This is a model developed by disabled people, including the language used to describe disabled peoples' experiences of the world and self-descriptors. Therefore, the term 'disabled people' will be utilised throughout. The model assumes that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their 'impairment or difference' (Scope) and therefore has moved away from the term people *with* disabilities, which had been commonly used in the UK previously.[28]

In terms of ethnic background, guidance has been taken from a range of recent studies, including the NHS Race and Health Observatory study[29] which surveyed over 5,000 respondents and whose findings support those from a range of other sources, including the most recently updated UK Government current 'ethnicity style guide'. This guidance advises moving away from the previously used term BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) or similar as a catchall for people who do not identify as part of the white ethnic background grouping[30], instead recommending language used should be as specific as possible regarding the ethnic background being described or analysed. This is also supported by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities who tested a range of language with people from different ethnic backgrounds during the research period for the UK's COVID-19 disparities held in 2021[31]. Here the report also advised that people should avoid, unless it is absolutely necessary, binary analysis. Where groupings have been used in this study, for example due to the small numbers of respondents not reporting to be from the white ethnic background, or where this is necessary to compare with other data, a further breakdown by ethnic background has been sought where possible and where implications are relevant to a specific group, this has been clarified. Terms relating to groupings in relation to ethnic background have been selected from the UK Government style guide which recommends, 'white ethnic background' and 'all other ethnic groups combined'.

At the time of this study, there remained a range of views on the capitalisation of 'Black' in relation to information regarding ethnic background. For this study, the advice provided by the Associated Press Style Guide has been taken. This guidance was last updated in 2020 based on consultation with global stakeholders. The consultation resulted in the view that:

> There was clear desire and reason to capitalize Black. Most notably, people who are Black have strong historical and cultural commonalities, even if they are from different parts of the world and even if they now live in different parts of the world. That includes the shared experience of discrimination due solely to the color of one's skin.

---

[28] Scope offers a useful overview of the social model of disability: https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/
[29] To read the NHS Race and Health Observatory study visit: https://www.nhsrho.org/news/survey-finds-bame-bme-and-ethnic-minority-not-representative/
[30] For more information on the UK Government 'ethnicity style guides', visit: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/
[31] To read the COVID-19 disparity report, visit: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/

There is, at this time, less support for capitalizing white (…) there is considerable disagreement, ambiguity and confusion about whom the term includes (…) capitalizing the term white, as is done by white supremacists, risks subtly conveying legitimacy to such beliefs (John Daniszewski, 2020).[32]

When referencing people from the LGBTQ+ communities, the term 'LGBTQ+' has been selected, as one recommended by Stonewall in its list of current terms; live as of July 2023. The term aims to capture the sexual and romantic orientations of those outside the heterosexual majority. Wherever possible, specific language will be used to reference a specific group, to recognise that this is not one homogenous grouping. [33]

The survey will also monitor for socioeconomic background. The UK census records this via questions concerning the employment status and employment type of respondents. However, this was deemed not appropriate for this study, where authors and writers' current roles do not always reflect their socioeconomic background, as they are often part-time roles, temporary roles, or ones that do not fit the usual 'levels' of employment for their background or education. Instead, household income in comparison to the UK National average, personal education level, and parental education level were used as markers to test for author profiling and for correlations with success.

Geographic location was also reported for respondents, with UK nations and regions, US and Other as choices, noting that survey distribution was focused on UK and US communities.

As the Literature Review highlighted, demographic data has not been collected or analysed regularly for authors taking any publishing route, particularly those who are self-publishing. However, based on the concept that 'self-publishing' is an opportunity to democratise story telling (Carolan and Evain, 2013) an expectation from this data were that there may be an increase seen in those authors under-represented either within publishing gatekeepers (i.e. because the gatekeeper as potential barrier is not present in the self-publishing model) or within traditional publication in general.

Independent variable three: experience

Within the self-publishing community, a belief has long been shared that marketing activity is the biggest difference between those who have success and those who do not. Anecdotally, it appeared that many commercially successful writers have come from a background of publishing, writing, or marketing – all skills you would anticipate being of value when publishing outside the traditional routes. It has not to date been established whether there is any validity in this belief. For this reason, testing for previous experience gained by self-published authors would be critical to ruling in or out these beliefs.

Similarly, many suppliers offer training courses in either creative writing or publishing skills, the assumption being that this would increase quality of work and therefore increase likelihood of success.

---

[32] John Daniszewski, AP Vice President for Standards, outlines the Associated Press consultation and advice on the capitalisation of 'Black', here: https://blog.ap.org/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white
[33] For Stonewall's LGBTQ+ terms, visit: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms

As this investment has also not been measured before and is specific to the industry, the options for this question were designed based on the considerable experience of the researcher and the supervising team. As with all questions, the options were then tested with a sample of authors before distribution.

To limit the length of the survey, the questions regarding any previous experience, career, training or otherwise were grouped into one focusing on 'experience'. For example:

Before publishing your book/s, had you completed any of the following? (select all that apply)
- o   Undertaken a course related to publishing skills (i.e. proofing, marketing, editing)
- o   Undertaken a creative writing course
- o   Had a job in publishing
- o   Had a job involving writing
- o   Had a job involving marketing
- o   Had connections in the publishing industry
- o   Other (please specify_____)
- o   None of the above

In this same 'experience' factor, a second set of questions was posed to explore the writing experience of the respondents themselves (i.e. the number of times they have produced a book from start to finish). This would then build a picture of prolificacy among the self-publishing group, and specifically those who are finding commercial success. Some within the writing community have previously identified that commercially successful self-published authors may write and release more regularly than others, with a so called 'rapid release' approach. Most famously perhaps, Michael Anderle tells a personal story of how, as a struggling author, he had a realisation that he could not make a living from his average of two sales a day (roughly $7). However, if he had 20 books released making two sales a day each, he could potentially make around $50,000 a year. This experience led to the popular '20Booksto50k' concept and similarly named Facebook group and US conference bringing together like-minded authors.

To measure this writing experience and prolificacy, two questions were asked relating to how many books the author had written and how long ago they had released their first book. Prolificacy could then be estimated by dividing the number of books published by the number of years writing, to find an average number of books written per year.

This was calculated using the results from two questions:

- In which year did you publish your first book?
- How many books have you published to date? (up to '50 or more')

Independent variable four: motivations

To measure motivations for publishing, authors were asked to rate a range of statements to measure how important they saw each activity in terms of their 'success criteria'. This intended to explore both what success means to authors and what motivates them to write a book. A set of statements defined in an entrepreneur-based study, noted in the Literature Review (Wach, Stephan, Gorgievski, 2016) were adapted. From this study, based on both interviews and digital surveys, five broad success factors emerged: firm performance, workplace relationships, personal fulfilment, community impact and personal financial rewards. These were further broken down into 18 statements which could then be rated by a respondent to measure which factor was of most importance to them. Personal financial rewards were identified as relating to the 'commercial success' definition in this study; with 'personal fulfilment' relating to the completion success variable in this study. The three other categories found by Wach et al. in their 2016 study were not anticipated to have such a significant impact on the author sample: firm performance, workplace relationships and community impact. However, the survey tested across all five for consistency, comparison, and to identify any unexpected success drivers that may influence success likelihood.

The complete set of success criteria from the Wach et al. study, including the five overarching factors in brackets, are in column one of table 3.2. These were then translated into statements of relevance to the author community (see column two). Respondents were asked to rate each statement on a five-point Likert scale from 'Not at all important' up to 'Extremely important'. A five-point scale ensures consistency with the rating system of the personality test earlier in the survey. In some instances, the original criteria were adapted by dividing into further options to gain deeper information. For example, 'Goals and challenges' within the 'Personal fulfilment' factor was divided into one statement referencing setting your own goals, and another having goals set externally.

Table 3.2: Factors for entrepreneurial success (Wach et al., 2016) adapted for self-publishing success

Factors for entrepreneurial perception of success	Factors translated to author perception of success
Goals and challenges 1 (Personal Fulfilment)	Having the freedom and autonomy to set my own writing goals and challenges
Goals and challenges 2 (Personal Fulfilment)	Being challenged by others to achieve goals set externally
Personal satisfaction 1 (Personal Fulfilment)	Gaining enjoyment from the process of writing the book
Personal satisfaction 2 (Personal Fulfilment)	Gaining enjoyment from the wider publishing process to produce my book
Personal satisfaction 3 (Personal Fulfilment)	Seeing my work finalised
Creativity and innovation (Personal Fulfilment)	Being able to successfully put my own ideas in place to help make my book a success
Work-life balance (Personal Fulfilment)	Getting a good balance of my working time and my free time
Firm reputation 1 (Community Impact)	Public, positive feedback from my readers
Firm reputation 2 (Community Impact)	Public, positive feedback from the industry (i.e. reviews, publishers, awards)
Firm continuity (Community Impact)	Leaving a legacy through my writing for the future
Personal financial reward 1(Personal Financial Reward)	Earning a comfortable income from my writing
Personal financial reward 2 (Personal Financial Reward)	Earning a high income from my writing
Any kind of growth (Firm Performance)	Increasing the sales of my books
Firm stability (Firm Performance)	Building a stable living as an author
Position in the market (Firm Performance)	Gaining a positive sales position in relation to competitor authors in my genre
Firm survival (Firm Performance)	Building a long-term career as an author
Employee and co-owner satisfaction (Workplace Relationships)	Building harmonious relationships with the people I work with to publish my book/s
Employment security (Workplace Relationships)	Providing a stable income for those who work with me to publish my books
Customer satisfaction and loyalty (Workplace Relationships)	Building a satisfied and loyal readership

Independent variable five: investment activities

To identify the key investment activities undertaken by self-publishing authors, the sector advice given by the UK membership body, the Alliance of Independent Authors, was reviewed. The body divides self-publishing a book into seven processes, outlined in their member publication 'Creative Self-Publishing'. These processes then follow through as the divisions for their paid services directories: Editorial, Design, Production, Distribution, Marketing, Promotion, Rights licensing (Ross, 2019). These processes were not labelled specifically in relation to investments but could be used as a framework for identifying costs as each process is completed. For example, 'Marketing' was divided into specific actions, including 'blog tours', 'social media' and 'launch event', and 'Rights licensing' was generalised to 'paid for legal support' to include all legal advice including those for rights. 'Distribution' was removed as a cost associated activity, as the majority of self-published authors will publish ebook formats and/or use print-on-demand (POD). One additional cost was added, based on feedback from test survey users which was 'My own writing time unpaid' to reflect the hidden financial cost of writing time.

It should be noted that investment has been explored before, in the Baverstock and Steinitz survey (2013a). In this study the services were divided into three categories only: Editorial, Legal, Marketing. The results here offer a snapshot of the key areas of author investments in 2013 but does not attempt to correlate this to success likelihood, which this study looks to explore further.

The resulting options offered to respondents for this factor were:

- My own writing time unpaid (i.e. without advance), during which paid employment couldn't be undertaken
- Paid for cover design
- Paid for editorial advice
- Paid for proofreading
- Paid for blog tours
- Paid for social media marketing
- Paid for launch event
- Paid for other marketing activity
- Paid for legal support
- Paid for audio version
- No financial investment made in writing so far
- Paid for other activity (please specify)
- Other (free text option)

3.7 The Theoretical Model: Disrupting the Publishing Model

As outlined in The Introduction and The Literature Review, alongside the substantial stigma held against self-publishing in some circles, there are a range of vocal advocates for self-publishing who theorise that the model has, and will continue to, disrupt the traditional publishing industry. This is often explored in relation to either genre representation (Dillon-Lee, 2018), or digital developments, for example exploring how digital and ebooks have changed the publishing world, and as part of this, has stimulated the self-publishing community to grow (Thompson, 2005 and 2021). This area of exploration has naturally been approached with a narrative methodology rather than data led. However, this study focuses on how data can be utilised to identify and understand themes of disruption that have been brought to attention previously, or those that have yet to be identified.

Disruption for the purposes of this study draws on the model of Clayton Christensen, who some credit as the first person to bring the concept of 'disruption' into the mainstream in *The Innovator's Dilemma* (Christensen, 1997). Christensen's definition of disruption in business can be summarised into three themes:

1. **It contains an enabling technology**: One or more elements serve a core function in the offering. Importantly, it doesn't need to be new, just applied in a new way.
2. **It creates a new business model or market segment:** The technology is applied in a different way, or different people use the product than before.
3. **It inspires a value network:** Other people in the value chain are incented[34] (sic) to help by providing resources or consuming the service, and this drives adoption of the product (MacCullum and Gleason, 2018, p.1).

The context set so far for this study has identified the part that the 'enabling' role technology has played in the self-publishing community, offering low-cost access to both publishing tools and sales platforms not previously available outside of the traditional publishing model. This study will therefore focus on points two and three from the definition to explore new business models, market segments (note that this phrase is used for both audiences for the books, and authors themselves adopting the model) and value networks that have been stimulated by self-publishing. Data from both the Author Survey and the Kindle Ebook Bestseller analysis will be analysed with this model as context, remaining alert to identifying disruptive forces that have encouraged self-publishing or shown the impact that self-publishing is having on the wider industry. Although evidence of disruption will be monitored across the data, some specific areas have been prioritised for analysis based on gaps identified in previous studies:

---

[34] Note that use of the word 'incented' has been interpreted here to have been intended to mean 'incentivised'.

Creating new business models

- The author-led business model: has the changing role of the author within the self-publishing business model, with particular reference to the potentially increased responsibility for decision-making, changed the author role and/or impacted the expectations of authors across the industry?

- Adoption of the model by those who would have traditionally published in the past: can it be quantified how many self-published authors now bypass the traditional process entirely, with the potential implication that the model will increase in adoption and result in fewer authors available for the traditional publishing sector?

- Hybrid models and selective rights licensing: has the adoption of new models, whereby the author chooses which element of their work to license and/or publish different work in different ways grown? What might this mean for the wider sector?

Creating new market segments

- Inclusivity and representation: due to the enabling technology on offer and the resulting low cost to entry, has adoption of the model been driven within otherwise underrepresented groups and what impact may this have on traditional publishing?

Value networks driving adoption

- Adoption of service providers: has the use of publishing service providers by self-published authors grown and what might this mean for the wider sector?

In addition to the key themes above, views on the experience of self-publishing in general will be analysed in this theme to identify whether the model is delivering satisfaction and/or commercial success and thereby will remain a viable option for authors.

3.8   Methodology Data Set One: Author Survey

Author survey: data collection methodology

At the outset of the study, options for the delivery of the survey were considered, including face-to-face and phone interviews, as well as virtual workshops. However, a survey delivered online was selected as an appropriate means of obtaining large amounts of data in a format comfortable for most respondents, in a timely manner when reaching large numbers (Churchill, 1992), and in a way that could be easily distributed and shared by author communities and membership bodies which exist primarily online.

As personality traits and demographics were key data sets to gather, a digital survey was deemed an efficient way of delivering the high number of questions needed to produce a full picture of each of these factors. In addition, completing self-perception or subjective elements of the survey through interview or similar, such as the IPIP 50-statement test for personality traits, would potentially have risked unintended bias prompts from the interviewer based on expectations (Potter and Hepburn, 2012). Finally, data protection would have been challenging if not delivering online, due to the data required to source and contact respondents for the study.

It should be noted that in relation specifically to the personality testing, the decision to use the digitally delivered IPIP test was further supported by the successful utilising of the model by Kingston University's Associate Professor Smirti Kutaula in her research exploring personality as a driver for the purchasing of Fair-Trade products and other ethically minded behaviour (Kutaula et al., 2022). Here the research team, for the first time, successfully identified the importance of personality traits on Fair-Trade purchasing habits utilising the online IPIP personality test along with monitoring questions.

Author survey: design

The survey was designed to be completed within 15-20 minutes depending on whether a participant chose to complete the optional free text questions. This was intended to fit the time it takes to have a tea break from writing or work.

Three authors, as well as a representative from the Alliance of Independent Authors, completed and fed back on a pilot version of the survey to ensure any issues were identified and rectified before it was distributed. This included reviewing question order and language used. Changes from this included moving the personality and demographic testing to the front of the survey to ensure their importance to the study was clear and that they were completed, as well as clarifying the language used to describe some publishing houses as 'hybrid' (referring to publishers who both traditionally publish and take payment to publish), to avoid confusion with 'hybrid' used by some authors to describe themselves if they both self and traditionally publish.

Many of the survey questions used a five-point Likert scale to determine the level of the respondents' agreement with a statement or the importance of the statement to them. Other sections used predominantly forced-choice questions, in which a number of options are provided from which respondents could select one or 'all that apply' as appropriate. To ensure the forced-choice approach did not create false opinions by limiting the range of answers available, where appropriate 'unsure' and/or 'other' with a prompt to describe more was included. At analysis, these 'other' answers were reviewed individually and categorised into the original options where possible, for example where people had missed, or misinterpreted the option available that would have been appropriate their choice. The benefit of using the forced-choice questions was decided to outweigh the potential negative of limiting choice, as it is believed that where a survey or questionnaire is long, or respondents motivation to answer may not be high, forced-choice questions can ensure more survey completions as they are quicker to answer (de Vans, 1996).

By utilising forced-choice questions, it was also ensured that coding and interpreting results would be less subjective, as fewer answers relied on the interpretation of the researcher. Optional free text survey responses were offered sparingly to give participants the chance to expand on their answers and help identify layers of nuance that may be challenging to surface through multiple-choice and Likert scale data alone.

Author survey: qualifying questions

Whether someone had published a book was utilised as the qualifying question for the survey (i.e. the respondent must have not only written a book, but have undertaken the full publishing process, and completed to sale or distribution). This was critical, as there are potentially many as yet unpublished writers active within the self-publishing community. Including those in the early stage of writing or planning publication would risk gathering data from those who will never fully complete the publishing process.

Alongside this key question, initially three further questions were included. This was due to the substantial number of partners distributing the survey; a concern was held that there may be too many responses to manage in terms of data. Therefore, an initial two-week testing period of survey distribution took place limiting those who could answer further by asking qualifying questions to select only those who were UK-based, and writing fiction. Following this pilot period, fewer people than anticipated had responded (under 100). In addition, interest was being shown from active self-publishing groups in the US, where narrowing down their communications to just UK-based authors was impossible. A decision was taken to remove these questions, and instead to record where the author was based and whether they were writing fiction/non-fiction/both. No questions within the body of the survey were changed after the pilot period.

Author survey: distribution

The digital survey platform 'Qualtrics' was used for producing and distributing the survey. This platform offers a data-safe way to produce, distribute and collect survey responses. It has been utilised by teams across Kingston University and is a trusted provider both to the University sector and to other UK public bodies, such as the NHS. Data received by Qualtrics follows UK data protection laws.[35]

The Qualtrics platform also allowed for quickly producing and sharing one simple anonymous link with all partners and groups. This ensured the study collected the smallest amount of personal data possible from respondents as best practice for ethical research. Distribution was focused on membership bodies and author communities, with the two largest UK membership bodies – the Alliance of Independent Authors or 'ALLi' and The Society of Authors – distributing the survey via their newsletters and social media platforms. In addition, two genre specific groups were selected representing Romance and Crime, both having an active online presence and representing what are generally considered to be two of the most popular genres for readers[36]. A wider search of Facebook author groups was conducted with eight groups demonstrating regular engagement with their author members and targeting either different types of authors or different regions. Specifically, the Self-Publishing Formula and 20Booksto50k are focused on self-published authors only, with a wide, engaged reach. Table 3.3 lists all partners contacted for distribution.

Table 3.3: Self-publishing groups contacted to distribute the survey

Group	Type
Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi)	Global Membership body (UK-Based)
The Society of Authors	UK Membership body
Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB)	UK Membership Body
Romantic Novelists' Association	Genre specific global association
Crime Writers' Association	Genre specific global association
Self-Publishing Formula	Global online writers' community
20Booksto50k	Global online writers' community
The Writers Forum	Global online writers' community
Moms Who Write	Global online writers' community
Writers' HQ	UK online writers' community
Writers Network UK	UK online writers' community
Nottingham Writers' Club	Local UK forum
Sheffield Novelists	Local UK forum
Just Write Bristol	Local UK forum
Swansea & District Writers' Circle	Local UK forum
Leeds Writers' Circle	Local UK Forum
Cardiff Writers' Circle	Local UK Forum

---

[35] For more information about the Qualtrics platform for researchers visit: https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/strategy/research/
[36] Fiction sales figures January 2023: https://wordsrated.com/fiction-books-sales/

During data collection, authors were asked where they heard about the survey, and a choice was included labelled 'word of mouth'. This captured those people who may have heard from friends, colleagues, or from those who had received the link through their network and sent it on directly to their own contacts. It should be noted that after the initial distribution of the survey, partners were responsible for sharing the links again during data collection and just before closing. It is estimated each partner shared the link one to three times each. Some overlap between membership or engagement with each group by authors may be possible but was not recorded.

During testing of the survey prior to distribution, two participants (notably both traditionally published) reflected that they would not have given 15-20 minutes of their time to the survey completion without a clear 'thank you' from the researchers, particularly where the output of the study was perceived by these authors to disproportionately benefit those who are self-publishing. Due to this, a small 'thank you' incentive was offered to those participating to reflect the time taken to participate voluntarily. This involved the chance to choose the option to share an email address at the end of the survey to be entered into a randomly selected draw for 3 x £20 book vouchers. This amount was selected to represent the thanks felt from the study to those taking part but kept small enough so as not to incentivise people whose participation would not be appropriate. 389 people entered into the draw. A week following the close of the survey, three people were drawn by random using the random selection system on Excel. They were contacted by email by the researcher and offered the book voucher. To participate in the draw, a participant must choose to share an email address at the close of the survey which was stored separately from the answers to the survey to ensure anonymity. It was only used for the purposes of the voucher draw.

Author survey: information recorded

The final survey comprised one qualifying question, alongside consenting to take part, followed by six sections with 104 separate questions in total. The total number of questions differed slightly depending on which publishing method the user chose at the halfway point – self-published, traditionally published or a combination of the two (hybrid authors).[37]

A combination of established scales, amended scales, and new questions designed specifically for the study, where established scales were not appropriate or did not exist in order to elicit the data required to test the hypotheses, were used. Key questions were outlined in more detail in the methodology section of this chapter. Note that 'about you' was used as a label for the personality testing element of the survey as a more accessible description of the questions in that section.

- QUALIFYING QUESTION
- SECTION ONE: About You
- SECTION TWO: Your protected characteristics
- SECTION THREE: Your writing experience
- SECTION FOUR: What does publishing success mean to you?

---

[37] The full final survey text is available in APPENDIX 1.

At this stage question routes divided depending on which type of author was responding into three routes: traditionally published, self-published, or hybrid authors.

- SECTION FIVE: Your experience of publishing

At the end of the survey, participants were invited to email the researcher directly to share their contact details should they so wish. This offered participants the opportunity to request updates on the project, related articles and/or to be involved in the research in the future.

Author survey: data analysis methodology

Responses from the survey were extracted in the form of Excel spreadsheets from the survey provider, Qualtrics. All data were then anonymised as needed (i.e. removing the email details if responders had chosen to share). Some analysis continued in Excel where it was more appropriate for the level or type of data. The data were also input into the IBM SPSS system for more complex analysis. From this point, responses were identified by an ID only. SPSS is an IBM software package offering statistical analysis, as well as machine learning algorithms and text analysis. This programme was selected as it allows the data to be grouped into clusters, correlations to be found between variables, Chi-Square Tests for Independence to be run, and multiple regression to be performed where needed.

Survey responses, both quantitative and qualitative, were compared across and between the following groups to identify trends, and the exact comparisons made will be highlighted throughout this paper:

- Self-published authors
- Traditionally published authors
- Key demographic groups (to include gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background)
- Authors identified as sharing the same 'success' criteria
- Authors reporting differing levels of commercial success

To ensure analysis of the qualitative data can be replicable, free text answers were extracted by question then annotated to identify trends in language used and experiences shared. Trends were sought by analysing:

- Words and phrases related to the five personality factors (see table 3.4) and whether they were used in a positive or negative context.
- Words and phrases referencing any of the nine protected characteristics, socioeconomics, or geographic location, to identify personal stories or views that may add depth to the demographic data (see information on protected characteristics in the methodology section of this chapter).
- Wider personal experiences shared (previously unknown) which may indicate an unexpected trend or theme within a/some groups.

Sample adjectives related to the Big Five personality traits

Adjectives relating to the Big Five Personality Traits were gathered to assist free text analysis. Originally any and all possible adjectives were listed in descending order of correlation on a significance level of p=.001; the list in table 3.4 has been limited here for ease of reference to the top ten answers for each trait, or fewer where fewer were offered (Heinström, 2013).

Table 3.4: Sample adjectives related to the Big Five personality traits as identified by Heinström, 2013

Trait	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
High levels of trait	dreamy, imaginative, humorous, mischievous, idealistic, artistic, complicated, enthusiastic, original, inventive, versatile, excitable	efficient, thorough, resourceful, confident, organised, precise, methodical, ambitious, industrious, enterprising, determined, persistent	friendly, warm, sociable, cheerful, affectionate, outgoing, pleasure-seeking, talkative, spontaneous, aggressive, assertive, self-confident	forgiving, trusting, warm, soft-hearted, gentle, generous, kind, tolerant, friendly, sympathetic, intelligent	anxious, fearful, worrying, tense, nervous, irritable, impatient, excitable, moody, pessimistic, shy, timid
Low levels of trait	mild, conservative, cautious	confused, absent-minded, careless, distractible, lazy, fault-finding, hasty, impulsive, impatient, immature, moody, defensive	aloof, withdrawn, shy	suspicious, wary, pessimistic, hard-hearted, complicated, demanding, shrewd, autocratic, selfish, stubborn, headstrong, impatient	confident, optimistic, gentle, contented, confident, clear-thinking, alert, efficient

Note: Synonyms or antonyms of each were also identified within the data and categorised under each of the factors to ascertain use of similar language.

Author survey: data analysis stages

Survey data were analysed through five stages: firstly to produce descriptive statistics of the responses received, followed by cluster analysis to bring self-published authors into segments, then to identify if self-published authors are commercially successful and in what numbers. A range of factors were then analysed to establish which ones were impacting reported commercial success specifically for the self-published author respondents. Finally, a range of results from both data sets, author survey and ebook sales, was analysed under the theme of disrupting the traditional model. Each step is outlined below.

1. **Profiling self-published authors (descriptive statistics**)

Responses to the survey were analysed for general breakdown and presented as charts to illustrate findings, with Chi-Square Tests for Independence undertaken to validate indicative observations where appropriate:
- By publishing route (i.e. self-published, traditionally published, hybrid)
- By publishing type (i.e. fiction, non-fiction, both etc)
- By genre
- By source (i.e. where they found the survey)
- By location (UK, US, Other)
- By protected characteristics

2. **Segmenting self-published authors**

Cluster analysis was selected as a practical way to classify multivariate data into subgroups (Everitt, 2010). In this case, cluster analysis was undertaken to segment self-published authors into 'profiles' based on similarities observed within the psychographic related factors recorded in the survey, including those relating to commercial, completion and reputational success drivers as per the hypothesis. IBM, SPSS software was used to undertake Two-Step Cluster Analysis. This method first runs pre-clustering and then runs hierarchical clustering. This was chosen, rather than K-Means or Hierarchical Cluster, as Two-Step Analysis offers a range of benefits, such as analysing large data sets and offering broad application, for example, including ordinal data (Pallat, 2020).

The six steps to cluster analysis were as follows:
Step 1: Select and run cluster analysis for key behavioural trait variables.
Step 2: Identify predictors from the tested variables with the highest level of impact on clusters.
Step 3: Refine and reduce to find the best fit for natural clusters at a fair or good level at a minimum.
Step 4: Divide original data by the clusters to produce distinct sets of data.
Step 5: Review correlations within the profiles using the wider survey data (i.e. demographics, previous experience etc.) and conducting Chi-Square Tests for Independence where appropriate, to identify any additional similarities within the clusters that can be used to add further depth.
Step 6: Name and describe the resulting clusters as 'profiles'.

3. Identifying commercially successful self-published authors

The responses to the two commercial success definition questions were scored and combined, with authors then categorised into one of six levels of commercial success to identify the relevant figures. These figures were compared across publishing routes: self-publishing, traditional publishing, and hybrid publishing.

4. Identifying factors shared by commercially successful authors

Bivariate Pearson's Correlations were processed across all potential data groups to identify the relevant factors from the independent variables that show statistically valid impact on a self-published author's commercial success scoring, based on self-reporting data. A multiple regression analysis for personality traits specifically was processed against commercial success variables scores. Note that in all instances scores for commercial success were treated as pseudo-continuous.

5. Exploring disruption of the publishing industry

A range of questions which add wider context and depth to the understanding of self-publishing and its impact on the publishing industry were analysed, including reviewing comparisons of the two models taken from data provided by the hybrid author group – those who have published in both ways. This included:

- Percentage of authors who did not approach an agent or publisher before self-publishing (i.e. directly self-published).
- Percentage of self-published authors who would recommend the route.
- Percentage of traditionally-published authors who would recommend the route.
- Percentage of self-published authors who would change to traditional publishing.
- Percentage of traditionally-published authors who would change to self-publishing.
- Author reasons for choosing to self-publish / traditionally publish / hybrid publish.
- Current perceptions of self-publishing.
- Rates of satisfaction by publishing route.
- Opinions from all routes on the decision-making process when self-publishing.
- Perceptions of the self-publishing model by publishing route.

Additional data from the 'hybrid' author group – authors publishing in both ways:

- Preference of hybrid authors regarding each publishing route.
- Which route was taken first by hybrid authors?
- Compare hybrid author group satisfaction with resulting books, and decisions and time taken to produce books between self-publishing and traditional publishing.

Author survey: potential limitations and mitigations

In reference to the use of survey data as a tool for testing the study hypotheses, the following potential limitations and restrictions were identified. Alongside each one, mitigations have been recorded where applicable:

1. **Distribution management:** Surveys distributed online are commonly sent and passed on through a range of methods, for example individual emails, mailing lists or social media posts. It can therefore be difficult to track who is responding and the validity of those responses as confirmed participants from the intended population. However, at a minimum, it is generally accepted that it should be possible to generalize from the sample of a large digital survey to the population from which the sample was drawn (Andrade, 2020).

   To mitigate the potential risk of having an 'unknown population' response, a comprehensive partner list was drawn up of key organisations and groups to support survey distribution across platforms that targeted authors specifically, and for the most part self-published authors. Priority was given to supporting membership bodies, which offer the strongest route to a recognised target respondent list (ibid). These groups include a process for joining that would deter those people who did not fit the key criteria of having published a minimum of one book. When completing the survey, participants then had to select how they had heard about the study to ensure this could be measured during analysis.

2. **Selection bias:** There are a range of reasons that people may or may not self-select to take part in this study. In relation to the use of digital surveys, those who complete the survey will necessarily have the means and ability to access a digital data collection method (i.e. a laptop or similar, email address and digital skills to complete a survey). However, as this study is specifically targeting those people who already have the means and ability to publish a minimum of one book, the risk of discounting potential suitable participants is low, if it exists at all.

   There was anticipated to be some bias in terms of the age and gender of those who chose to take part in the survey, which would be representative of the author community as a whole. Although it is noted that limited information exists about the demographics of authors, particularly among those people who are self-publishing, sector analysis suggested that in 2020 629 of the 1,000 bestselling fiction titles were written by women, 27 were co-authored by men and women, and three were authored by non-binary writers. This left 341 titles written by men (Thomas-Corr, 2021). If removing those who were co-authored, the expectation for this survey was to find a breakdown of approximately 64% female, 35% male and 1% identifying in another way.

   The final area of selection bias anticipated is in terms of the traditionally published group. Traditionally published authors do not interact with one another as if part of a 'community' in the way those independently publishing do. For example, they do not tend to have public social media groups or forums, whereas those for self-published authors are numerous both within demographics and focused on niche topics, such as genres or reasons to write (e.g. 'Moms that

Write' Facebook group). Traditionally published authors were therefore approached through The Society of Authors membership group, with a smaller sample being obtained. Where genres have a strong community, these groups were also targeted, for example the Romantic Novelists' Association and the Crime Writers' Association.

It should also be noted that, as the study has a key focus on the impact on 'commercially successful' authors, groups including authors seeking financial success were targeted for survey distribution, such as the 20booksto50k Facebook group. Although this offers a wider representation of successful authors for that element of the profiling, this may impact responses to generic questions, for example in terms of percentages who recommend self-publishing. It is hoped that as the interest in self-publishing continues to grow, future research can retest the concepts in this study with wider author groups to further test or validate the findings.

3. **Positive response bias:** Those people who self-publish are often passionate about the process, and this may impact the positive nature with which they would report their experiences and/or sales. By using an anonymous process, and measuring commercial success in a range of ways, the study aims to mitigate this risk.

4. **Non-response bias:** There may be unknown reasons that particular groups may not participate. For example, people who write around a full-time job may have less time to participate, or those with parenting or caring responsibilities for the same reason. By reaching out to a range of groups for distribution, and limiting the survey to 15-20 minutes, the survey process was designed to engage a cross section of the community. However, it should not be assumed that this study is representative of the whole 'universe' of authors, and it may not be possible to generalise from the sample to the author population precisely in some instances.

3.9 Methodology Data Set Two: Ebook Author Sales Figures

Ebook sales data: collection methodology

Analysing ebook sales data intends to support findings made through the author survey which sits at the heart of this study, by providing objective, real-world data regarding the success rates of authors from all models, alongside the demographic data that can be gleaned from this second author sample.

The Amazon platform was selected as, when Kindle Unlimited is included, it is estimated Amazon has an 83% market share of US ebook purchases which can be taken as indicative of UK and global figures (McLoughlin, 2022). The Amazon distribution system delivers direct to reasonably priced Kindle devices and apps which can be located on tablets, smart phones, and other digital devices. Another appeal of the Amazon platform for ebooks is for authors, with Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) platform which is free for authors to use to upload their content, and royalties of either 70% or 35% can be selected by the author depending on the price point of the ebook uploaded. The platform can be accessed on any internet enabled device and is quick and easy to use, with many tutorials and books produced to assist aspiring authors to use the platform.

It should be noted that Amazon is protective over their data and does not offer open-source sales data in the public domain. Amazon was contacted online in a range of ways, as well as in person at the 2023 London Book Fair, with confirmation that no sales figures would be shared for this study. Therefore, an alternative, manual data collection method was developed utilising the information shared on the 'front end' public-facing side of the website. This 'Kindle Bestseller'[38] webpage lists ebooks across the site into the top 100 products based on activity in relation to the book. This updated on a regular basis throughout the day, all day, and as often as every hour. Therefore, for this study a regular time and date to record the top 100 ebooks weekly for a six-month period was selected, covering January 2023 – end June 2023. The time selected was Wednesday between 10am-12noon. The time itself was inconsequential and was selected as a point that could reasonably be booked weekly for a six-month period for live monitoring.

Data were recorded by drawing listing information from the webpage and inserting it into an Excel spreadsheet. Each week a new sheet was added to the workbook to ensure data could be reviewed across time, as well as build to a final database of bestsellers across the period. Any book that fell out of the top 100 each week was moved to listing groups below, grouped by publishing type to keep a running total of books from each publishing type as the analysis continued across the weeks and months. Note that the bestseller list itself on the Amazon website does not share all the information required for this study, but by clicking on each book, the user can access full listing details, which include the areas recorded (see below). The aim was to build up a six-month snapshot of the current sales figures across both self-published and traditionally published authors via ebooks.

---

[38] To access the current Amazon Kindle ebook bestseller listings, visit: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Best-Sellers-Kindle-eBooks/

At this point, it should be acknowledged that utilising the data from Amazon does not endorse all of their practices or position in the market. A well-discussed concern regarding Amazon's domination of the book market is summarised thus: 'regulatory policies that were devised for an earlier era of capitalism need to be reconsidered in a new era in which the accumulation and control of information have come to form a crucial basis of corporate power' (Thompson, 2021). However, as a source for an up-to-date and far-reaching sample of sales figures, it was the most appropriate platform for the aim of this study.

Ebook sales data: information recorded

Information for each book on the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller list was recorded as follows:

- Book name
- Author name
- Genre category
- Publisher name / self-published
- Author gender (self-identified where possible – further research often required)
- Author ethnic background (self-identified where possible – further research often required)

During the data recording, each book was also categorised by the following groupings:

- Self-published – without an imprint named
- Self-published – with a personal imprint named
- Published through a publisher that accepts manuscripts direct
- Traditionally published – 'Big Five' publisher (Penguin/Random House, Hachette, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan)
- Traditionally published – Amazon own imprint
- Traditionally published – another publisher

This further breakdown aimed to explore a more nuanced difference between self-publishing and traditional publishing, for example, that there are a growing number of publishers who accept submissions without agent representation which removes some of the 'gatekeeper' barriers to publication.

Ebook sales data: data analysis methodology

Data were recorded in a spreadsheet at the allotted time each week. This allowed for sorting and analysis of the data collected as the weeks passed and after the six-month period ended. Cleaning of data then took place which involved checking for inadvertent duplication of records and deeper research where a writer's gender or ethnic background was not clear from the original listings recorded.

Data were then analysed for:

- Number of books by publishing type
- Percentage of authors by gender and publishing type
- Percentage of authors by ethnic background and publishing type
- Percentage of books by genre and publishing type
- Percentage of previously known authors (i.e. presenters, singers, actors etc.) by publishing type

Ebook sales data: establishing gender and ethnic background

Gender identity and ethnic background is not routinely recorded or publicly shared by sales platforms. However, for the purposes of this study, it was important to identify as closely as possible the demographic breakdown of both gender and ethnic background for comparison with the survey findings. Therefore, after collecting the name of each author, the author's gender and ethnic background was ascertained by analysing in order: the Amazon's 'Author Bio', the description of the book itself, by visiting the author's website, by further researching the author (i.e. via their agent or interviews). Self-described information was prioritised whenever possible. Where the gender was declared, but the author in other ways hid their identity (i.e. through the use of illustrations, avatars, and pen names) this has been identified as a specific characteristic in the relevant chapters.

Ebook sales data: potential restrictions and mitigations

The use of ebook sales data as a tool to explore self-publisher success has the following potential limitations. Alongside each limitation identified, mitigations have been recorded where applicable:

1. **Ebook only:** The data only reflects ebook sales, not print sales. Print-on-demand is on offer to all self-published authors utilising the KDP platform; however, this relies on users buying predominantly through the platform. Print books from self-published authors being seen in traditional print shops, such as Waterstones for the UK, is far less common (although as outlined in the introduction, a growing area due to new suppliers in the market) and it should be recognised that if this data were sourced through print book sales top 100, the representation of self-published authors would be lower. In addition, certain books, even when self-published, will be better suited to print distribution rather than ebooks (such as illustrated books) and may therefore be under-represented in the sample from all authors.

2. **Length of monitoring:** As a six-month data collection period, potential patterns across a full year will not be visible. Data should therefore be viewed and reported as a snapshot only.

3. **Lack of demographic data:** There is no requirement for authors to declare their gender or ethnic background on the Amazon sales platform or elsewhere. These elements have therefore been researched using online sources in good faith. At a minimum, it will aim to give an indicative breakdown of bestseller ebook author demographics, but should not be seen as verified and have been described in the findings as 'estimates'.

4. **Amazon algorithms:** Amazon's bestseller rankings can be influenced not just by sales, but by other factors, such as the book's activity in relation to other similar books' lack of activity. In addition, sales of a less well-known book may have more impact on its ranking than those of a well-known or consistently high-selling book.[39]

[39] A full description of the sales ranking process is located here: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201648140

3.10 Ethics Statement and Summary Data Management Plan

Ethics statement

Throughout research development and delivery, the potential ethical implications of undertaking data collection from human participants were considered and revisited when any methodology or research design change was made.

The biggest impact of the ethics review process was the decision to anonymise the survey, to ensure the minimum amount of identifying personal data were requested and stored. All participants had access to an informed consent form, participation information sheet and privacy notice. A randomly generated number at the end of the survey could also be recorded by the participant and used to request their input was removed from the study at any time. To date, no requests have been made.

Summary data management plan

The full data management plan was provided to the Kingston University Ethics Board prior to study commencement and approved. A summary of the plan divided by the two data sets is below:

1. Ebook sales data

Data: Publicly available Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller figures comprising information including book title, author, retail price, publishing route, publishing house (where applicable), author gender where known, and author ethnic background where known.

Data was organised and analysed using Excel and resulting tables and charts. No datasets were anticipated to be deemed sensitive, as records exist in the public domain, updated regularly.

2. Author survey data

Data: Digital responses to an anonymous digital survey for self and traditionally published authors.

Data were extracted in the form of Excel spreadsheets from the survey provider. The extracted spreadsheets were password protected and saved on the secure Microsoft One Drive provided by Kingston University. The data were not in quantities as to be costly to store.

There is the small possibility that participants who responded to the survey may be identifiable by the data they shared (e.g. if they provided free text-based stories of their experience in publishing). Key data that cannot identify people is available in the thesis itself for reference by wider research. Data that could identify people was redacted before use in the thesis and/or before being passed to the Kingston University repository at the end of the project. If participants chose to share their email to enter the voucher prize draw or emailed the researcher directly to share their contact details, such details were saved in a password protected Excel spreadsheet also on the secure Microsoft One Drive provided by Kingston University. This ensured they could not be connected to the survey responses or accessed by anyone outside of the researcher.

3.11 Study Hypotheses

Based on the concepts and comparable data identified during methodology and research development, including the literature review, each research question has been refined into a related hypothesis statement. They are as follows:

Successful self-published author figures

Hypothesis 1 (H1): A significant proportion (maximum of 79%) of self-published authors will report not making a loss; self-published authors will also be represented on the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestsellers listings (up to 23%).

Self-published author clusters

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Self-published authors can be segmented by their success drivers, with segments representing authors motivated by three factors: commercial success, completion success, reputational success.

Self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Factors shared by commercially successful authors will be drawn across the following variables: personality traits, demographics (protected characteristics), motivations, previous experience, investment activities.

Hypothesis 3 has been supplemented by sub-sections exploring the anticipated outcomes for each variable based on the evidence explored in the field:

Personality traits: self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): The self-publishing population will show similar personality traits to other 'creatives', including high Openness. For those who are commercially successful, a profile closer to the entrepreneur will be found, with negative associations for Agreeableness and positive associations for Extraversion (note these traits have mixed reporting in the literature but have been found by some to impact success):

1. Openness: a positive association (creative and entrepreneur)
2. Conscientiousness: a negative association (creative and entrepreneur)
3. Extraversion: a positive association (entrepreneur)
4. Agreeableness: a negative association (entrepreneur)
5. Neuroticism: a negative association (creative and entrepreneur)

Demographics: self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Demographic characteristics will have no impact on the likelihood of success, given authors are taking full personal control for their careers and are not impacted by gatekeeper interventions.

Experience: self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): Those with work experience or training within the practical areas of publishing (writing, marketing, publishing) will show a higher likelihood for commercial success. Similarly, those releasing more books more regularly will show a higher likelihood for success.

Motivations: self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3d (H3d): Those motivated by financial gain will show a higher likelihood for commercial success.

Investment activities: self-publishing commercial success factors

Hypothesis 3e (H3e): Increased investment in supporting activities for self-publishing will increase the likelihood of success, specifically those investing more in marketing.

Hypothesis 4: The key question of whether self-publishing has disrupted the traditional model has been divided into two hypotheses:

The traditional publishing model adaptations

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Publishers need to make further changes to their model to continue to attract a wide range of authors, including involvement of authors in the process of publication, such as decision-making.

Self-publishing and diversification of authorship among marginalised groups

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Those publishing through the self-publishing route will demonstrate a more diverse representation of authors than those publishing through traditional routes with reference to protected characteristics.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has laid out the theoretical framework and methodology underpinning the study, including the approaches taken to data collection and analysis for both the author survey and the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller data analysis.

In summary, the study takes a data-led approach to investigating the research questions and to ultimately prove or disprove the related hypotheses. Care has been taken both in a practical sense, such as data protection and ethical practice, and in a research sense, such as utilising best practice planning and data management from the outset. These actions intend to bring integrity to the findings. However, where there are potential limitations to the study, this has also been shared. Further, throughout the research period, any learnings for future researchers in this area will be recorded, including recommendations for future study. As a still emerging area of study in the academic sphere, further research is anticipated, and the hope is that this data, along with the research learnings, can support and inform future studies. Learnings and recommendations are collated in Chapter Nine.

Finally, the context and comparable studies explored so far have refined the study hypotheses (H1-H4) which will underpin the narrative and reporting structure of this study from this point.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion – Who are Self-Published Authors?

4.1   Introduction

This chapter provides context for the further results in terms of the author survey respondents as a sample of the wider author community. Where relevant, this chapter also identifies and explores trends that can be isolated among the groups representing different publishing models: Self-Publishing, Traditional Publishing and Hybrid Authors – those taking both publishing routes. Each section is formed of context, finding or findings and brief discussion points which explore potential interpretations of this finding and comparable data or theories.

This analysis of the overarching composition of the respondents offers perspective for the Cluster analysis and profiling undertaken in Chapter Five and exploration of the associated commercial success factors undertaken in Chapter Six. Descriptive data sets analysed include how respondents heard about the survey; their chosen route to publish; the type of book published and genre choices.

In addition, data were analysed to identify the demographic breakdown of the responses received in relation to UK protected characteristics as outlined in the Theoretical Framework & Methodology chapter, to consider the diversity of responses and what this might tell us both about the study and about the self-publishing sector. Demographics reported upon are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ethnic background, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Socioeconomic markers are also reported: household income, parental education, personal education.

4.2   Survey Respondents by Type, Route, and Location

Respondents by publishing route

The majority of respondents (609) were only self-publishing their work, with 10% of respondents (84) traditionally published. The remaining 15% (126 respondents) were hybrid authors – meaning they chose to publish both through traditional routes and independently for different books or publications.

This third category, 'hybrid author', has offered an opportunity to explore comparable information from individuals who have experienced both models, for example, which route this group preferred based on their unique experience.

Table 4.1: Publishing route taken by survey respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Self-Published	609	74.4	74.4
Traditionally Published	84	10.3	84.6
Hybrid	126	15.4	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

How did respondents hear about the survey?

The largest distribution method was sharing the study through 20Booksto50k, a global online community of around 72,000 people, predominantly consisting of self-published authors, and doing this through the social media channel Facebook. A high response rate led to this source making up half of all survey responses. Table 4.2 breaks down responses via all sources, listed alphabetically by the group name. The second largest group was the Alliance of Independent Authors, who have 16,000 followers on Facebook. This was far higher than responses from the other largest UK-based author organisation, The Society of Authors.

An additional small selection of responses came from two of the larger genre associations, the Crime Writers' Association, the Romantic Novelists' Association, and finally 'Word of Mouth'. Those in the 'other' category are anticipated to have captured people from much smaller online groups and forums contacted via social media specifically to reach out to different areas of the UK, for example, or different genres. The full list of all groups involved in distribution, and their reason for selection, is included in the Theoretical Framework & Methodology chapter. As a community driven sector, individuals are expected to have shared the link to the survey into further smaller groups.

Table 4.2: Survey response figures regarding how the respondent heard about the research

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20Booksto50k Community	450	54.9	54.9
The Alliance of Independent Authors	185	22.6	77.5
Crime Writers' Association	18	2.2	79.7
Romantic Novelists' Association	18	2.2	81.9
Self-Publishing Formula Community	26	3.2	85.1
The Society of Authors	7	0.9	86.0
Word of Mouth	25	3.1	90.5
Other	90	10.9	100.0
TOTAL	819	100.0	

Geographic location: all responses

Reflective of the global community of authors, a wide variety of countries were represented in the sample. The majority, just over half (50.3%), were from the US, a further 30% from the UK and the remaining 20% from other countries. This is a similar geographic makeup to the Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey respondents completed in 2023, which saw 60% of those completing the survey based in the US, 21% in the UK and the further 19% based in other countries (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023).

Table 4.3: Survey respondents by location selected

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
UK	241	29.4	29.4
US	412	50.3	79.7
Other	166	20.3	-
TOTAL	819	100	100

Geographic location: by publishing route

When divided by publishing route, a larger proportion of respondents from the US were represented in the self-published group and those publishing in both ways, in contrast to the traditionally published group who were far more likely to be UK-based.

This could be attributed to the nature of reaching self-published authors through self-managed online communities, where geographical barriers are low, and where major groups originated in the US, for example, the 20booksto50k Facebook group. This skew to the US is seen in the self-published group, and will be reflected where this is identified, specifically where the information on demographics is analysed, and here data will be compared with both UK and US local population benchmarks.

	Self-Published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
UK	21.5	72.6	21.5
US	56.7	14.3	56.7
All other	21.8	13.1	21.8
TOTAL	100	100	100

Content type: all respondents

The majority of those responding wrote only fiction, at 70%. A further 23% were writing a combination of fiction and non-fiction, with 7% writing only non-fiction content. Again, this is a similar finding to the Alliance of Independent Authors survey, which found that approximately 7.9% of respondents wrote non-fiction as their primary genre (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023). This may therefore be a fair representation of the makeup in the self-publishing community in terms of the type of books being written, with the vast majority focused on fiction.

Table 4.5: Survey respondents by type of book selected (fiction, non-fiction, both fiction and non-fiction)

	Frequency	**Percent**
Fiction	572	69.8
Non-Fiction	55	6.7
Both Fiction and Non-Fiction	192	23.4
TOTAL	819	100

Content type: by publishing route

Once the three groups are divided, the self-published group demonstrates a stronger inclination to produce fiction, rather than non-fiction, in comparison to the traditionally published group. A wider spread if authors across the different content types is seen for traditionally published authors, for example with non-fiction rising from 6.1% with the self-published group, to 17.9% of traditionally published responders. To begin a trend seen throughout the descriptive statistics, the hybrid group appears to be one made up of authors trying many routes and approaches, with over 40% of this group publishing both fiction and non-fiction. Full data is included in table 4.6.

When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that book type differed significantly between author groups, $c^2(6, N = 819) = 144.85$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.30.

Table 4.6: Survey respondents by type of book and by route taken to publish

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Fiction	74.1%	58.3%	57.1%
Non-fiction	6.1%	17.9%	2.4%
Both fiction and Non-fiction	19.9%	23.8%	40.5%
TOTAL	100	100	100

Genre representation

For this question, the genres listed by the UK-based Amazon website – Amazon.co.uk – were used as a basis for the multiple-choice options available to the respondents. This was selected as all authors publishing through this key sales platform must select a genre for their book and Amazon is the largest platform for ebooks globally. An 'Other' option for respondents, with a free text space to add further genres if needed was included. Young Adult, Children's and Humour were not automatically included in the Amazon list used, and during analysis, all three were found to be added regularly by respondents as an 'Other' option. When reporting the responses, therefore, these three additional categories were added and recorded individually to reflect their importance. This resulted in the following: Children's (37 responses), Humour (17 responses), Young Adult (13 responses).

All genres mentioned remaining in the 'Other' category either did not have a description added by the respondent or had under five respondents reporting; an example would be 'Paranormal Romance'. However, some people were seen to have already selected other related genres, in this case 'Romance', which would ensure their overarching genre was collected in the figures. Therefore, these negligible genres remain recorded together as 'Others' and amounted to 28 overall (0.01% of the total genres submitted). Results showed a wide spread of genres covered by the respondents with 33 genres selected. Note that numerous authors wrote across several genres, and there were 2,316 instances of a genre being selected in total.

Table 4.7 outlines the total and percentage breakdown by genre, where it can be seen that three genres were disproportionately represented: Romance (311 responses), Fantasy (281 responses) and Crime, Thriller, Mystery (236 responses). This third category is a portmanteau for a wide range of sub-genres; from cozy/cosy murder mysteries and police procedural to gangland thrillers and espionage. This combined grouping is based on the Amazon categories as outlined above. The reason Amazon groups in this way may reflect that various works of fiction in this category will sit across several sub-genres (i.e. the majority of Crime or Thriller novels will have an element of Mystery). At the other end of the spectrum, three genres listed by Amazon received five or under responses: Disability Fiction, Lad Lit and Sport. The top ten selected genres are highlighted in table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Genres selected by survey respondents

Genres	Total responses	Percentage of responses
Romance	311	13%
Fantasy	281	12%
Crime/Thriller/Mystery	236	10%
Science Fiction	156	7%
Historical	149	6%
Adventure Stories	135	6%
Short Stories	124	5%
Non-Fiction Other	116	5%
Contemporary Fiction	94	4%
Women's Fiction	89	4%
Myths And Fairy tales	66	3%
Literary Fiction	59	3%
Horror	55	2%
Non-Fiction (Writing and Publishing)	55	2%
LGBTQ	52	2%
Erotica	43	2%
Children's	37	2%
Religious And Inspirational	37	2%
Family Saga	35	2%
Poetry And Drama	30	1%
Other	28	1%
Humour	17	1%
Westerns	17	1%
Metaphysical And Visionary	16	1%
War	14	1%
Young Adult	13	1%
Biographical Fiction	13	1%
Psychological	13	1%
Political	8	0%
Medical	7	0%
Disability Fiction	5	0%
Lad Lit	4	0%
Sport	1	0%
TOTAL	2316	100%

Genres: by publishing route

When dividing the group by publishing route, it can be seen that the high percentage of self-published authors skews the overarching figures. The top three genres for self-published authors are Romance, closely followed by Fantasy and then by Crime, Thriller, Mystery. While, for traditionally published authors this order changes significantly with Crime, Thriller, Mystery leading the genre choice, at 17.3% of respondents, the highest number for any genre across all three groups. However, it remains important to note that this is a smaller sample overall.

Table 4.8: Top five genres selected by publishing route

	Self-Published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
Genre 1	Romance (14.7%)	Crime/Thriller/Mystery (17.3%)	Romance (11.3%)
Genre 2	Fantasy (13.2%)	Historical (9.7%)	Fantasy (10.6%)
Genre 3	Crime/Thriller/Mystery (9.4%)	Romance (7.6%)	Crime/Thriller/Mystery (10.2%)
Genre 4	Science Fiction (6.5%)	Fantasy (6.5%)	Science Fiction (7.7%)
Genre 5	Historical (6.0%)	Science Fiction (5.9%)	Adventure Stories (6.9%)
TOTAL TOP 5	50.2%	53%	53.3
All other genres	49.8%	47%	46.7%

The top five genres in the study are supported by the findings from the Alliance of Independent Authors data released in 2023, which found the top five primary genres for the respondents to their 'Author Income' survey were: Romance (25.38%), Fantasy/Sci-Fi/Speculative (18.07%), Crime/Thriller/Detective (13.78%), Historical (6.82%), Children's (5.28%). The higher placing for Fantasy in the Alliance of Independent Authors study may reflect the combination in their questions of Fantasy with Science Fiction and Speculative. If the three had been combined in this study, the grouping would have scored higher than Romance.

The high position of the Children's genre in the Alliance of Independent Authors study may reflect the difference in genre monitoring. Respondents could choose a primary and secondary genre, giving more specific data on core and supporting genres. For the current study, authors were invited to choose all genres, regardless of priority, and this may have impacted the position of some genres which were primary choices but could not compete with genres such as Romance which many authors may write alongside their primary choice. This could be explored further for verification in future research.

Table 4.9 illustrates the similarities and differences between the three groups of authors; self-published, traditionally published and hybrid published. This list is ordered by self-published author results from highest to lowest.

Table 4.9: Full genre list by publishing route

	Self-Published		Traditionally published		Hybrid	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Romance	243	14.7%	14	7.6%	54	11.3%
Fantasy	218	13.2%	12	6.5%	51	10.6%
Crime/Thriller/Mystery	155	9.4%	32	17.3%	49	10.2%
Science Fiction	108	6.5%	11	5.9%	37	7.7%
Historical	99	6.0%	18	9.7%	32	6.7%
Adventure Stories	91	5.5%	11	5.9%	33	6.9%
Short Stories	86	5.2%	8	4.3%	30	6.3%
Non-Fiction Other	78	4.7%	10	5.4%	28	5.8%
Contemporary Fiction	68	4.1%	11	5.9%	15	3.1%
Women's Fiction	61	3.7%	10	5.4%	18	3.8%
Myths And Fairy tales	51	3.1%	2	1.1%	13	2.7%
Horror	43	2.6%	1	0.5%	11	2.3%
LGBTQ	42	2.5%	2	1.1%	8	1.7%
Literary Fiction	36	2.2%	7	3.8%	16	3.3%
Non-Fiction (Writing/Publishing)	35	2.1%	5	2.7%	15	3.1%
Erotica	34	2.1%	1	0.5%	8	1.7%
Religious And Inspirational	28	1.7%	1	0.5%	8	1.7%
Family Saga	28	1.7%	3	1.6%	4	0.8%
Children's	26	1.6%	4	2.2%	7	1.5%
Poetry And Drama	19	1.2%	3	1.6%	8	1.7%
Other	15	0.9%	5	2.7%	8	1.7%
Westerns	13	0.8%	0	0.0%	4	0.8%
Humour	13	0.8%	2	1.1%	2	0.4%
Metaphysical And Visionary	12	0.7%	2	1.1%	2	0.4%
Young Adult	11	0.7%	0	0.0%	2	0.4%
War	10	0.6%	1	0.5%	3	0.6%
Psychological	8	0.5%	3	1.6%	2	0.4%
Biographical Fiction	7	0.4%	2	1.1%	4	0.8%
Political	5	0.3%	2	1.1%	1	0.2%
Disability Fiction	4	0.2%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Lad Lit	4	0.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Medical	1	0.1%	2	1.1%	4	0.8%
Sport	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
	1652	100.0%	185	100.0%	479	100.0%

KEY

Green = genres one-five   Blue = genres above 2%   Red = genres below 1%

Amber = genres six-ten   Yellow = genres above 1%

Number of genres selected by individual authors

The average (Mean) of genres written by one author was 2.85, with a Median of 2.00. This included authors who had chosen to write in up to 15 different genre styles.

Table 4.10: Average genres selected by all authors surveyed

	Number of genres
Mean	2.85
Median	2.00
Std. Deviation	2.07
Minimum	1
Maximum	15

When broken down by genre amounts, there is a reduction of authors represented after four genres, and from that point onwards under 10% of respondents had selected each of the following numbers of genres (5-15). It should also be noted that outliers sat at the top end of the spectrum, with only one person selecting 12 or 15 genres and no respondents selected 13 or 14.

Table 4.11: Number of genres selected by survey respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	284	30.7	34.8	34.8
2	154	16.6	18.9	53.7
3	130	14.0	15.9	69.6
4	105	11.3	12.9	82.5
5	54	5.8	6.6	89.1
6	38	4.1	4.7	93.8
7	20	2.2	2.5	96.2
8	15	1.6	1.8	98.0
9	6	0.6	0.7	98.8
10	6	0.6	0.7	99.5
11	2	0.2	0.2	99.8
12	1	0.1	0.1	99.9
15	1	0.1	0.1	100.0
TOTAL	816	88.1	100.0	

When divided by route to publish, self-published authors reporting a Mean of 2.73 genres each, in comparison to traditionally published authors producing 2.23. Hybrid authors had a far higher mean (3.80) and median (4) than either of the other groups, perhaps again reflecting their nature as authors enthused by trying different activities in different ways. See table 4.12 for the full breakdown.

Table 4.12: Number of genres selected by survey respondents by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Mean	2.73	2.23	3.80
Median	2.00	1	4
Std. Deviation	2.011	1.674	2.294
Minimum	1	1	1
Maximum	12	10	15

The rise in genres covered by self-published and hybrid authors, versus those traditionally published, may reflect the greater control a self-published author has over what they produce; they have the freedom to choose to experiment with different styles, genres, and audiences and consequently to write what they wish. In contrast, a traditionally published author can feel directed by their publisher to focus on the first genre that proves profitable, with any new genres considered anew. As Alison Baverstock notes:

> Publishers tend to pigeonhole writers; not out of a desire to entrap but because it takes time to get a reading public established for a particular writer, and it helps get their name known if they are producing a particular type of book (Baverstock, 2011, p.36).

Thus, one strong reason for considering self-publishing, particularly if an author is currently with a traditional publishing house for other work, is the opportunity to try something new, such as a new or different genre, without the pressure from a publisher to stick to the current trend or proven financially viable genre.

4.3 Survey Respondents by Demographics

1. Protected characteristic: age

Age was recorded in the following categories: Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 34-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+. Very few respondents, just 7 of 819, or less than 1% of the total group, were in the 18-24 age group, and only 1 under 18.

Age groups: all respondents

The entire group skewed to the mid-range, with an uneven distribution leaning towards the older age groups. The three groups representing the 35-64 age range demonstrated similar figures, with around a quarter of the total respondent numbers each.

Table 4.13: Age of survey respondents by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 18	1	0.1	0.1
18-24	7	0.9	1.0
25-34	87	10.6	11.6
35-44	204	24.9	36.5
45-54	209	25.5	62.0
55-64	202	24.7	86.7
65+	109	13.3	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

Age groups: by publishing route

When publishing route is considered, a different picture emerges. The largest bracket for the self-published group is 35-44 at 28.6%. This shifts considerably for traditionally published, with 55-64 as the largest bracket. Over 35% of the traditionally published group sit in this age range. The overall picture for survey respondents is that for traditionally published authors, 84.6% were aged over 44, in comparison to 58.4% of those who are self-publishing.

Although a relatively small number of respondents were traditionally published in this sample, this finding reflects data shared for the study by the Society of Authors. This membership body is predominantly representative of traditionally published authors. As of the time of study completion, June 2024, the society had a membership average age of 59, with the average age of new joiners in the previous three years of 44 years. Note that this entry age may have dropped in recent years in response to opening up of membership to self-published authors.

In the hybrid group, a higher age range, 55-64, was found to be the age bracket with the largest representation, with over 38% of the respondents sitting in that bracket. This may reflect the fact that to have published in both ways, more time producing work is generally required. There is a drop off

across all publishing routes at the 65+ range, presumably reflective of the average retirement age, for example in the UK the current state pension age is 66 for both men and women. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that the ages represented differed significantly between the author groups, c^2(10, N = 818) = 108.02, p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.26. Note that due to the small number of cases in the lower age brackets, in these instances ages were grouped where necessary to run the Chi-Square Test appropriately.

Table 4.14: Age of survey respondents and publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Under 18	0.2%	0%	0%
18-24	1%	0%	0.8%
25-34	11.8%	7.1%	7.1%
35-44	28.6%	8.3%	18.3%
45-54	25.3%	34.5%	20.6%
55-64	20.4%	35.7%	38.1%
65+	12.8%	14.3%	15.1%
	100%	100	100%

These figures seem to suggest that those choosing only to self-publish are selected by the younger end of the author spectrum in comparison to traditionally published authors. As self-publishing is a relatively newly emerging model, and one with close relations to digital delivery, this may reflect the higher levels of digital literacy and confidence at the lower age groups. This confidence could be traced back to the development of computer literacy (often called IT or ICT) in the school curriculum which developed from the 90s and the early 2000s.

An increase in focus on 'computing' was seen following 2012, a landmark year for self-publishing identified in The Introduction. For example, the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, gave a speech in 2012 highlighting the importance of computing for all young people, and in September 2014, 'Computing' became a compulsory national curriculum topic in England from the age of five. And further emphasis was given to the subject from the beginning of secondary school at age 11.[40]

Alongside this new focus on digital and computing skills, publishing skills, in particular editing and proofing, have also become a focus of formal education from as early as Primary Key Stage 2 and equivalent programmes of learning (ages 7-11). For example, the Key Stage 2, year 3 and 4 English curriculum[41] states that a student must:

- evaluate and edit by:
  - assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing and suggesting improvements

---

[40] For more information on the computing programme of study, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-computing-programmes-of-study
[41] For the complete Key Stage 2 English Curriculum, visit: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7de93840f0b62305b7f8ee/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_English_220714.pdf

- - proposing changes to grammar and vocabulary to improve consistency, including the accurate use of pronouns in sentences
- proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors

Understanding the fundamentals of revising, editing, and correcting your own work are all key areas both in terms of skill and personal confidence for self-publishing, and will potentially support more young people taking personal responsibility for their work in the future.

Those pupils who were aged 11-16 in 2014, would be 19-24 at the time of the survey. This may go some way to explaining why 1.2% (a small but important group) of responders who had self-published, equivalent to eight responses, were aged under 24 while no traditionally published authors at all fell into this age-bracket. It may also suggest that as more of these young people come of age in the next decade, a further increase in the proportion of younger authors in the self-published community will be found. Consequently, there may be some argument, in relation to the diversity of human story sharing, that actively supporting people from older age-groups to build knowledge and confidence in digital literacy skills would help to ensure those who did not have access to traditional publishing models before do not rule out sharing their own stories unnecessarily now.

There is potentially a role to play here for libraries or adult education establishments in terms of supporting those who lack the digital skills needed to indie publish simply due to missing the opportunity to engage during their formative years. Adult learning for older people has indeed been a growth area in the 'lifelong learning' sector (Findsen and Formosa, 2016). The motivations for undertaking digital skills building at an older age are varied, from those who actively do not want to participate, to those who are motivated by being able to undertake everyday tasks more easily, and a small minority who train as a hobby (Pihlainen et al., 2022). Age UK, a core provider of skills development for older people in the UK, provides a typical example digital skills scheme. Here, a participant can select what is of most use to them as the focus with the following example activities: 'keeping in touch with friends and family', 'doing your shopping' and 'banking'. Other guides are provided for activities such as 'sending an email' or 'downloading an app' (Age UK, 2023)[42]. There are no guides, suggestions or encouragements related to using digital skills for storytelling, publishing, or creativity more broadly; digital is viewed as a practical tool primarily, presumably as a cost-effective way of prioritising the most critical activities in the schemes provided.

Supporting older people to build broader digital skills for personal growth activities, such as creative writing and self-publishing, may require a different approach, marketing route and understanding of the target audience, one potentially highly educated and motivated, but lacking specific digital skills due to age bracket trends. Opportunities for further exploration here will be outlined in the final Implications, Reflections & Recommendations chapter of this study.

---

[42] For more information about the Age UK digital programme, visit: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/

2. Protected characteristic: gender

Gender breakdown: all respondents

Survey respondents were disproportionately female, with 77.8% female overall, versus 22.2% male. Although more women do write overall, this remains higher than findings across data available on self-publishing. This includes the Alliance of Independent Authors 2023 Author Income Survey, which found that 66.36% of respondents identified as Cisgender female (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023), and the Baverstock and Steinitz author survey (2013a) which found that 65% of respondents selected 'female'.

More broadly, studies – often exploring low female participation in STEM activities and careers – have found that while men show more interest in activities working with 'Things', and showed a higher likelihood to be interested in activities that were 'Investigative', women were more likely to prefer working with 'People' and show an interest in activities that were 'Artistic' (Su, Rounds and Armstrong, 2009). These differing preferences were identified through meta-analysis of a range of studies and may explain the higher level of women publishing their creative writing through all routes.

It was considered that findings may be skewed further by indicators in a range of studies that women tend to be more likely to complete self-completion surveys than men. One study suggesting this surveyed a comparable set of participants to this study, (i.e. a predominantly educated group), in this case at a university. Here it was found that the response rate for female participants was 36%, compared to a response rate for male participants of 24% (Smith, 2008). The limitation of this study was that it was only held within one community and only once. However, it was noted that results reflected anecdotal findings from previous studies, including the work of sociologist Nancy Chodorow (1978) who theorised that females were more likely to value the connective selves, or in other words to highly rate their connection and value to the work of others in comparison to men who may relate more to the 'separative selves'. This may explain a higher female willingness to participate in a study of value to another researcher or wider community. However, whereas Smith was finding a response rate of 12% more between female and male respondents, as can be seen below, female respondents in this study outweighed males by 55.6%. Therefore, although the exact figure should be read with caution, the overarching finding of increased female representation in authorship still stands. This was also tested from a different viewpoint through the Amazon Kindle Bestseller data analysis.

Table 4.15: Survey respondents by gender

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Male	182	22.2	22.2
Female	637	77.8	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

Gender breakdown: by publishing route

When breaking down into the publishing routes, female representation rises further to just over 80% of respondents in the self-publishing category, an indication that female authors are more likely to consider self-publishing. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that gender representation differed significantly between the author groups, $c^2(2, N = 819) = 7.65$, $p < 0.022$, Cramer's V = 0.97.

Table 4.16: Survey respondents by gender and by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Male	19.9%	29.8%	28.6%
Female	80.1%	70.2%	71.4%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Gender identity: by publishing route

When gender identity was analysed, figures overall were small for respondents who identified as a gender that was different from that assigned at birth (16 respondents from a total of 819, or 2%). This may reflect the possible size of this group in the population in general. There are currently no accurate estimates of gender identity figures for the global population, but UK estimates are available based on the most recent ONS figures. These put this group overall at 0.05% of the UK population. This was recorded for the first time in the 2021 census, when 262,000 (0.5%) of people living in England and Wales answered 'no' when asked 'Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?'. This compared to 45.4 million (93.5%) who answered 'Yes'. The remaining 2.9 million respondents did not answer the question.

This information is not recorded using the same language in the US, but a 2022 study estimated 0.5% of the US population identified as transgender (Herman, Flores, O'Neill, 2022). Therefore, it could be viewed that across authorship, a 2% representation, though small on the surface, does demonstrate a positive representation of this group among authors; at a minimum, around four times as many people represented from this community as in the population of countries of highest representation from the study (UK and US).

With 1.8% found for self-published authors and 2.4% each across the other two groups, there is no indication that authors whose gender identity differs from that assigned at birth are seeing more traction through self-publishing than through traditional or hybrid publishing, and potentially less so. Note that due to the small number of respondents selecting that they identify as a gender different to that assigned at birth, a Chi-Square Test was not run.

Table 4.17: Survey respondents gender identity different to that assigned at birth by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Identify different from gender assigned at birth	1.8%	2.4%	2.4%

3. Protected characteristic: sexual orientation

Sexual orientation: all respondents

Sexual orientation when analysed for all responses (i.e. authors from all publishing routes) showed representation from straight (83.4%), gay/lesbian (10.5%) and bisexual (2.2%) respondents, as well as 3.9% who selected the 'other' option in relation to their sexual orientation.

Table 4.18: Survey respondents by sexual orientation

	Frequency	Percent
Straight	683	83.4
Gay/Lesbian	86	10.5
Bi	18	2.2
Other	32	3.9
TOTAL	787	100

This again showed a disproportionate representation of people among the LBGTQ+ group in comparison to estimates in the wider population; for example, the most recent UK census (2021) in recorded the following:

- 748,000 (1.5%) described themselves as gay or lesbian
- 624,000 (1.3%) described themselves as bisexual
- 165,000 (0.3%) selected 'Other sexual orientation'
- 3.6million (7.5%) chose to not answer the question

The US equivalent data does not break down the data by 'type' but does offer an overall percentage for LGBTQ representation in the US of 4.5% identifying as other than straight (Herman et al., 2022); a useful comparison total for the UK and study data. Full figures for these comparison data sets are available in table 4.19.

Table 4.19: Sexual orientation for survey respondents compared with UK and US data

	Study findings	**UK Data**	**US Data**
Straight	83.4	89.4	-
Gay/Lesbian	10.5	1.5	-
Bi	2.2	1.3	-
Other	3.9	0.3	-
Not Answered	N/A	7.5	-
TOTAL	100	100	-
All choices other than straight	16.6	10.6	4.5

Another way to view this dataset is to divide the sample by the accepted majority (straight) and then by all other orientations (including other). In this way, the numbers show that 16.6% of respondents overall identified as a sexual orientation other than straight. An over representation in comparison to UK census figure of a maximum of 10.6% of all those who chose not to answer are included in the 'other than straight' group, acknowledging that some of the people in this group may be straight so this may be an overestimate for the UK population.

One confounder for this is age. It has been reported that those identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community had an average age of 37.3, in comparison to 47.9 for those who identified as straight (Herman et al., 2022). Another factor, if not confounder, is the potential disproportionate representation of LGBTQ+ communities across the creative arts in general. Although little academic literature has been produced on this topic, there has long been a narrative within the creative industries that gay men in particular, and LGBTQ+ or queer communities more broadly, play a key role in the sector. One rare paper on this topic from Christine Charyton (2008) explored the historical, empirical, and present literature on the relationship between sexual orientation and creativity to better understand the reality behind the assumptions and recommend future research. The study found that little literature existed, and Charyton reported that the study itself was conducted against a backdrop of little faculty support. However, Charyton did identify some evidence to support the assumption that LGBTQ+ communities are disproportionately represented in the arts in general, for example noting a previous study (Lewis and Seaman, 2004) which found that 'sexual minorities' were significantly more likely to attend events and activities related to the arts than demographically similar heterosexual people.

Sexual orientation: by publishing route

When divided by publishing type, traditionally published authors showed more variation of sexual orientation within this study, with 20.2% sitting outside of the 'straight' category, as opposed to 16.6% in the self-published category and 13.5% in the hybrid category. Again, this seems to suggest that self-publishing, although over representative of the LGBTQ+ community in comparison to the UK and US population, is not necessarily attracting a wider representation of sexual orientations than traditionally published routes already reach. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of

this finding, it was demonstrated that no significant difference was found in sexual orientation reporting between the author groups, $c_2(2, N = 818) = 1.69$, $p < 0.431$, Cramer's V = 0.05.

Table 4.20: Sexual orientation of survey respondents by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Straight	83.3%	79.8%	86.5
Gay/Lesbian	10.5%	11.9%	9.5%
Bi	2.1%	3.6%	1.6%
Other	4.1%	4.8%	2.4%
Total for 'all other orientations'	16.6%	20.2%	13.5%

4. Protected characteristic: disability

Disability: all respondents

The first question on disability asked if the respondent had a disability that limited their daily life, and whether this was limited 'a little' or 'a lot'. The total for respondents who answered 'Yes' either a lot or a little in terms of limiting daily life was 36.8% of respondents. This was nearly double when compared with the 17.8% figure found by the ONS in the 2021 census of the UK population as a comparable sample[43]. With a higher estimate, of 27%, given for the US population in the Disability Impacts All of Us report by the US Centre for Disease Control Prevention (data last reviewed May 2023).[44]

Table 4.21: Disability selected by all survey respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Yes – limited a little	223	27.2
Yes – limited a lot	79	9.6
No	517	63.1
TOTAL	819	100.0
Yes (Total)	302	36.8%

Disability: by publishing route

When disability is divided by publishing route, very little difference is found. Therefore, again, although disability representation is high across all publishing routes in comparison to US and UK population data, there is no indication that those identifying as having a disability which affects the author either a little or a lot, are represented more highly in the self-published community. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that no significant

---

[43] For more information on disability and the UK census, visit: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/disabilityenglandandwales/census2021#disability-england-and-wales
[44] For more information on disability in the US, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html

difference was found in overall disability reporting between the author groups, c^2(2, N = 819) = 0.06, $p < 0.969$, Cramer's V = 0.01.

Table 4.22: Survey responses for disability by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Yes – limited a little	27.1	26.2	28.6
Yes – limited a lot	9.7	11.9	7.9
No	63.2	61.9	63.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
Yes (Total)	36.8	38.1	36.5

The high rate of representation across all publishing routes in comparison with UK and US population averages is not reflective of the literature on disabled representation in the arts. Studies tend to focus on the marginalisation of disabled people in the artistic fields such as theatre, film, or music, with little available on disability and authorship, beyond the positive findings of writing for differently abled children. This could be an area for further study.

5. Protected characteristic: religion

Religion: all respondents

Note: some confusion was shown by a small number (two) of respondents as to the difference between 'no religion' and 'atheist' choices. For the avoidance of doubt, the difference is recognised in this survey as:

- 'Atheist' refers to 'someone who does not believe in any god or gods, or who believes that no god or gods exists' (Cambridge Dictionary, reviewed 2023).
- 'No religion' would indicate that someone does not follow a religion but has also not taken a position on the existence of a deity. It is sometimes recognised under the word 'agnostic', which is described as 'someone who does not know, or believes that it is impossible to know, if a god exists' (Cambridge Dictionary, reviewed 2023).

For analysis purposes, the two phrases are reported individually, and also grouped to bring together those who do not follow any religion. Table 4.23 demonstrates that out of those who do not follow a religion, far more identified with 'No religion' (42.5%) than 'Atheist' (8.5%).

Table 4.23: Survey responses by religion compared to UK and US data

	Frequency	Percent	UK Census Data 2021 (%)	US Religious Landscape Study 2014 (%)
No religion	348	42.5	37.2	19.8
Atheist	70	8.5	n/a	3.1
Buddhist	12	1.5	0.5	0.7
Christian (All)	312	38.1	46.2	70.6
Hindu	2	.2	1.7	0.7
Muslim	1	.1	6.5	0.9
Sikh	0	0	0.9	0
Jewish	11	1.3	0.5	1.9
Other	63	7.7	0.6	1.5
Not answered	n/a	n/a	7.1	0.6
TOTAL	819	100.0	100	100
Religion total	378	46.2	56.3	76.5
No religion total	441	53.8	37.2	22.9
Not answered	n/a	n/a	7.1%	0.6

When dividing by publishing route, 46.1% of self-published authors followed a religion, in contrast to 38.1% of those who are traditionally published. Those in the hybrid categories showed the highest likelihood of being religious (51.6%). When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that no significant difference was found in religion, when grouping all those with any religion and all those without any religion, between the author groups, c^2(2, N = 819) = 3.69, $p < 0.158$, Cramer's V = 0.07.

Table 4.24: Survey responses by religion and by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
No religion	41.7	53.6	38.9
Atheist	8.5	7.1	9.5
Buddhist	2.0	0	0
Christian (all types)	38.9	33.3	37.3%
Hindu	0.2	1.2	0
Muslim	0.2	1.2	0
Jewish	1.5	0	0.8
Other religion	7.1	3.6	13.5
TOTAL	100.0	100	100
Religion total	46.1%	38.1%	51.6%
No religion/atheist total	53.9%	61.9%	48.4%

Based on numeric figures alone, it may appear that traditionally published authors are potentially more likely to be non-religious. However, as far more respondents who were self-published

participated from the US in comparison to those who are traditionally published, this finding could reflect the higher rates of religious affiliation in the US. It is estimated that 65% of US citizens identify as Christian, and 73.2% are affiliated with any religion (Pew Research Centre, 2019), in comparison to 46% of UK residents selecting Christian as their religion, and 62.8% affiliated with any religion (UK Census, 2021). For reference, the breakdown by publishing route by geographic location is repeated in table 4.25.

Table 4.25: Survey responses by geographic location

	Self-Published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
UK	21.5	72.6	21.5
US	56.7	14.3	56.7
All other	21.8	13.1	21.8
TOTAL	100	100	100

6. Protected characteristic: ethnic background

Ethnic background: all respondents

When white (English/Welsh/Scottish/NI/British), white (Irish), and any other white background is combined, 91.1% of respondents selected descriptors in this group. Table 4.26 shows a breakdown of the ethnic background groups for all respondents. In the case of most ethnic groups outside the white ethnic group categories, representation was so small as to not be significant enough to analyse further characteristics in any additional detail.

Table 4.26: Survey respondents by ethnic background

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
White – English/Welsh/Scottish/NI/British	506	61.8	61.8
White – Irish	22	2.7	64.5
Any other white background (i.e. US etc)	218	26.6	91.1
Multiple groups – white and Black Caribbean	2	0.2	91.3
Multiple groups – white and Black African	1	0.1	91.5
Multiple groups – white and Asian	7	0.9	92.3
Any other multiple ethnic background	20	2.4	94.7
Asian – Indian	2	0.2	95.0
Asian – Pakistani	1	0.1	95.1
Asian – Bangladeshi	1	0.1	95.2
Asian – Chinese	2	0.2	95.5
Any other Asian background	8	1.0	96.5
Black – African	9	1.1	97.6
Black – Caribbean	2	0.2	97.8
Any other Black background	4	0.5	98.3
Any other ethnic groups	14	1.7	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

In the UK census, those making up 'all other ethnic groups combined', comprised 18.9% of the population. The most recent US census, held in 2020, found that what is described in their data as the 'white alone' category comprised 61.6% of the population, with over 38% sitting outside that group as other ethnicities or what is described in their data as 'multiracial' ethnicities. For comparison with US provided data, the survey data has been divided in this combined way as can be seen in table 4.27.

Table 4.27: Survey responses for ethnic background compared with UK and US census data

	Frequency	Percent	UK Census 2021 (%)	US Census 2020 (%)
All white ethnic backgrounds combined	746	91.1	81.1	61.6
All other ethnic backgrounds combined	73	8.9	18.9	38.4
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0	100.0

When dividing the data by publishing route (see table 4.28), a slight increase in diversity was found in the self-published group. For example, authors from Black African and Black Caribbean and 'other Black backgrounds' made up 1.9% of the self-published group, 1.6% of hybrid authors, and 1.2% of traditionally published authors.

Figures for most groups were at such low numbers that tests for significance were not suitable. However, across all routes, it is clear that the white total group was overrepresented and when running a Chi-Square Test to test against grouped data for those reporting as white and those

reporting as any other ethnic background, no significant difference was found between the author groups, c²(2, N = 818) = 2.09, $p < 0.352$, Cramer's V = 0.05.

Table 4.28: Survey respondents ethnic background by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
White – all groups	90.3	91.7	94.5
Multiple groups – white and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Multiple groups – white and Black African	0.3	0	0.8
Multiple groups – white and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Multiple groups – white and Asian	0.8	2.4	0
Any other multiple ethic background	2.5	2.4	2.4
Asian – Indian	0.2	1.2	0
Asian – Bangladeshi	0.2	0	0
Asian – Chinese	0.3	0	0
Asian – Pakistani	0	0	0.8
Any other Asian background	1.3	0	0
Black African	1.3	1.2	0
Black Caribbean	0.3	0	0
Any other Black background	0.3	0	1.6
Any other ethnic group	2.1	1.2	0
TOTAL	100	100	100

7. Protected characteristic: marital status

Marital status: all respondents

The majority of respondents (71.2%) selected married or in a civil partnership, with single as the next most selected option (12.6%), and all other choices rated below 10%.

Table 4.29: Survey respondents by marital status

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	103	12.6	12.6
In a relationship	62	7.6	20.1
Married / in a civil partnership	583	71.2	91.3
Separated	12	1.5	92.8
Divorced/dissolved	43	5.3	98.0
Widowed/surviving partner	16	2.0	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

Marital status: by publishing type

When divided into the three different publishing types, self-published authors and hybrid authors were 10% more likely to be married or in a civil partnership than those traditionally published. This could be explained by the older age range represented in the traditionally published group, in which more respondents may have been more likely to have selected another option due to having been divorced or as a surviving partner now in a new relationship. Here, traditionally published authors were substantially more likely to select that option, with 15.5% rather than 6.1% of self-published authors. Data also suggests that in the general population, the proportion of those 'co-habiting' or single is growing markedly in the older age groups, for example, 12.9% of 50- to 64-year-olds in England and Wales reporting they were single and had never married in 2017, a significant increase from 6.1% in 2002 (Office For National Statistics, 2018).

In all age groups, both in the UK and US, the number of those married has fallen steadily, in the UK from 58.4% in 1991 to 46.9% in 2021 (Office For National Statistics, 2021a) and similarly US data suggests marriage has dropped to 45% (Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, 2022). In comparison the survey respondents across all author groups appear to be more likely to be married than the general population.

Table 4.30: Survey respondents by marital status and publishing route

	Self-published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
Single	13.3	11.9	9.5
In a relationship	6.1	15.5	9.5
Married / in a civil partnership	72.2	61.6	72.2
Separated	1.5	2.4	0.8
Divorced/ dissolved	5.3	7.1	4.0
Widowed/ surviving partner	1.6	1.2	4.0
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 4.31: Survey respondents by age and publishing route for reference

	Self-Published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
Under 18	0.2	0	0
18-24	1	0	0.8
25-34	11.8	7.1	7.1
35-44	28.6	8.3	18.3
45-54	25.3	34.5	20.6
55-64	20.4	35.7	38.1
65+	12.8	14.3	15.1
TOTAL	100	100	100

Though the health, legacy and financial benefits of marriage have been studied, there are few significant current studies into the impact of marriage on personal achievements or outcomes, such as creativity. One that could be relevant here is the 2017 study exploring the connection between marriage and increased creativity at work (Tang, Huang, Wang, 2017). Here the research team were exploring whether psychological resources generated in a satisfying marriage facilitated creative activities. The study took the form of a survey of married employees from 43 companies, and the outcomes did indicate that what they describe as family-work 'spillover' took place, with those in a satisfying marriage showing enhanced creativity in the workplace, which increased further if the spouse was also satisfied in the marriage. Exploring this theory in relation to marriage and authorship may be a potential area for further study in terms of our understanding of the author and the broader author profile.

It should be noted that although numerically there was a 10% difference in the likelihood of marriage or civil partnerships for those outside the traditionally published only group, an indication which was deemed worthy of further exploration above, when running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that the difference between the groups was in this instance not statistically significant, with the following result; c^2(2, N = 819) = 3.93, $p < 0.140$, Cramer's V = 0.07.

8. Protected characteristic: parental status

Parental status: all respondents

The majority of those responding to the survey (63.2%) have children. Parental status is measured in a range of ways in census and similar data and no comparable data for this question, which was asked of all respondents regardless of age, could be found. However, the closest comparison from a report covering the period 2015-2019, found that 56.7% of women and 44.8% of men aged 15–49 had a child (Martinez and Daniels, 2019, p.4). This would not cover the substantial respondents above 49 who responded to this survey, which may explain the higher rates of parental status found in these results.

Table 4.32: Survey respondents by parental responsibilities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	518	63.2	63.2	63.2
No	301	36.8	36.8	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0	100.0

Parental status: by publishing type

When divided by publishing type, an interesting difference is found – with a 12-13% difference between those self-publishing or hybrid publishing and those traditionally publishing. This could reflect the fact that self-publishing offers a flexibility in approach and self-management of decision-making and time that traditional publishing may not offer, and, therefore, those with children may be more drawn to the model. As more women are represented in the self-published group, it may also be that women are writing around parental responsibilities while taking time out of work, or while being

a stay-at-home parent. Although a changing figure, it remains more likely that a woman would stay at home to parent than a man, with around one in five men versus four in five women taking this role (Kelly, 2022), and this may have influenced these figures.

As with marital status, it should be noted that although numerically there appeared to be around a 12% increase in the likelihood of parental status for those outside the traditionally published only group, an indication explored further above, when running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that the difference between the groups was in this instance not statistically significant, with the following result; c^2(2, N = 819) = 4.78, $p < 0.092$, Cramer's V = 0.08.

Table 4.33: Survey respondent parental status by publishing route

	Self-published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Yes	64.4	52.4	65.1
No	35.6	47.6	34.9
TOTAL	100	100	100

9. Protected characteristic: pregnancy and parental leave

Pregnancy and parental leave: all respondents

It was not anticipated that this variable would highlight any specific finding, but the question was included in the survey to ensure all UK protected characteristics were covered in the data and in case of any unexpected results. However, as anticipated, pregnancy and parental leave does not appear to have any significant impact on publishing among the respondents, with a small amount of people across the survey reporting being pregnant (0.7% or six people) or on parental leave (0.2% or two people).

Table 4.34: Survey respondents by pregnancy/parental leave

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Currently pregnant	6	0.7	0.7
Currently on parental leave	2	0.2	1.0
No	811	99.0	-
TOTAL	819	100.0	100.0

Pregnancy and parental leave: by publishing route

There was also little difference found between groups in terms of pregnancy and parental leave, with 98.9%, 100% and 99.2% on parental leave. These groups where so small in numbers as to not warrant a Chi-Square Test for confirmation but has been reported here for completion.

Table 4.35: Survey respondents by pregnancy and parental leave, and publishing route

	Self-published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Currently pregnant	0.8	0	0.8
Currently on parental leave	0.3	0	0
No	98.9	100	99.2
TOTAL	100	100	100

10. Additional monitored characteristic: socio-economic status

This characteristic was monitored through average income, personal education level and parental education level. More information is available in the Theoretical Framework & Methodology chapter.

Income: all respondents

Those responding to the survey were disproportionately earning above the UK household income average, suggesting that, whether publishing through a publisher or independently, a writer appears to require a level of financial resources or support to complete a manuscript before moving to the next stage of publication. Note that this is also true of a first time traditionally published author, who will not be paid an 'advance' until a full manuscript is submitted and accepted by the due process (see The Introduction for more information on the process of the traditionally published model). This must undoubtedly influence whether someone chooses to write at all.

Table 4.36: Survey respondents by average household income

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below UK average household income	111	13.6	16.8
About the same as UK average household income	47	5.7	23.9
Above UK average household income	502	61.3	100.0
TOTAL ANSWERED	660	80.6	
Unsure	93	11.4	
Prefer not to say	66	8.1	
TOTAL NOT ANSWERED	159	19.4	
TOTAL	819	100.0	

Income: publishing route

When looking across all publishing routes, those earning about the same or above UK average remain very similar across all three groups. However, figures for those earning below the UK average rose in the traditionally published category, and when running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that a significant difference was found in household income reporting between the author groups; c^2(4, N = 598) = 23.56, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.20.

Note that the Chi-Square Test was run by processing only data from those respondents who reported their income level. The lower reporting of earning below the UK average in the self-published group, may reflect the rise in the figures for the unsure/prefer not to say responses for self-published authors. In the self-published group 21% chose these options, which may reflect people who would prefer to choose 'unsure' than select the 'below' category. Despite this, what can be taken from the findings is that there is no evidence in this study that self-publishing has engaged those earning below the national average household income in any significant amount than the traditional route.

Table 4.37: Survey respondents by household income and by publishing route

	Self-published	**Traditionally published**	**Hybrid**
Below UK average household income	13.1	22.6	9.5
About the same as UK average household income	5.3	6	7.9
Above UK average household income	60.6	59.5	65.9
Unsure/Prefer not to say	21	11.9	16.7
	100	100	100

Personal education: all respondents

In relation to socio-economic status, the survey monitored for personal education level, with a finding that authors across all routes demonstrated a high level of academic qualifications. This further confounds the traditional notion of self-publishers as potentially less educated or informed than their traditional counterparts, an assumption first questioned by Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a) with similar findings in their own author survey. At the top end of education levels, 8.7% of authors reported holding a doctorate, with 28.9% holding a Master's degree and 37.7% an undergraduate degree. 7.2% reported not completing secondary school. Table 4.38 outlines the full data.

	Frequency	Percent
Doctorate or above	71	8.7
Master's	237	28.9
Bachelor's	309	37.7
Trade/technical/vocational training	33	4.0
Completed secondary school or equivalent	107	13.1
Some secondary school completed	59	7.2
TOTAL ANSWERED ABOVE	816	99.6
Other	3	0.4
TOTAL	819	100.0

Personal education: by publishing route

When dividing by publishing route, a significant difference is seen among those who are self-published and traditionally published, with the latter being over 12% more likely to have a degree or above. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that a significant difference was found in personal education level reporting between the author groups when comparing those whose education was below degree level with those educated to degree level or above, $c^2(2, N = 816) = 6.30$, $p < 0.043$, Cramer's V = 0.09.

Table 4.39: Survey respondent by own education degree or above/no degree and by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally Published	Hybrid
Degree or above	73.9	85.7	75.4
Below degree	25.8	13.1	24.6
Other/unknown	0.3	1.2	0
TOTAL	100	100	100

When broken down by degree level, the largest discrepancy was found in those holding a doctorate, where 14.3% of those traditionally publishing were found to be educated to that level in comparison to 6.6.% of self-published authors. This may reflect the higher figure of traditionally published authors who are writing non-fiction in comparison to the self-published sample. There does however seem to be some indication of self-publishing offering those with a lower level of formal education a route into sharing stories than the traditional model, despite the figure for degrees and above remaining above the UK and US population level, with only 4.8% of traditionally published authors reporting not completing secondary school.

Table 4.40: Survey respondent by own education level and by publishing route

	Self-published	Traditionally published	Hybrid
Doctorate or above	6.6	14.3	15.1
Master's	29.2	33.3	24.6
Bachelor's	38.1	38.1	35.7
Trade/technical/vocational training	3.9	4.8	4.0
Completed secondary school or equivalent	14.4	3.6	12.7
Some secondary school completed	7.4	4.8	7.9
Other/unknown	0.3	1.2	0
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Parental education: all respondents

Many monitoring forms include parental education as an indicator of historic socioeconomic advantages. For example, in the UK, UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) asks for this on the application process for monitoring. They describe the reason for this as 'putting into context' the application. For example, if someone is a first-generation university student, they are less likely to have had the advantages of the knowledge and confidence in the process as someone who has parents who went to university. The 93% Club website in the UK is a members' club for those who went to state (non-fee paying) schools[45]. The founder of the organisation, Sofia Tyson, describes some of the barriers found by those who do not have parents who attended university when they themselves choose if they should attend:

> First-generation students may also experience feelings of imposter syndrome. They're often left feeling like they don't belong because they aren't smart enough, or posh enough, to be in certain universities or on certain courses (Tyson, 2023).

This 'imposter syndrome' may be relevant to other activities and roles thought by some to be for those with certain backgrounds or experiences, such as being an author. In this instance, the survey respondents overall were more likely than not to have had a parent attending university, with a quarter educated to undergraduate level, 17% completing a master's and 8.7% educated to doctorate level or above.

---

[45] You can find out more about the 93% Club here on the website: https://www.93percent.club

Table 4.41: Survey respondent by parental education level

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Doctorate or above	71	8.7	8.8
Master's	139	17.0	26.0
Bachelor's	202	24.7	50.9
Trade/technical/vocational training	80	9.8	60.8
Completed secondary school or equivalent	201	24.5	85.7
Some secondary school completed	116	14.2	100.0
Other	10	1.2	
TOTAL	819	100.0	

Parental education: by publishing route

When divided by publishing route, as with household income, there does not seem to have been a closing of the socioeconomic gap in terms of those self-publishing vs. those traditionally publishing. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that no significant difference was found in parental education level reporting between the author groups when comparing those whose parent's education was below degree level with those whose parents were educated to degree level or above; $c^2(2, N = 810) = 1.58$, $p < 0.455$, Cramer's V = 0.04.

When looking in more detail at the data, it should be noted that figures may be impacted by the age difference between the author groups. The age of parents in the self-published group could reasonably be assumed to be significantly younger than in the traditionally published group, to reflect the younger skew in the respondents themselves. In which case, the parents for the self-published author group are more likely to have had the opportunity to attend university. A UK Parliamentary briefing paper synthesised a range of sources on the development of education and covered the growth of university access during this period, noting an illustrative set of comparable figures sixty years apart:

> In 1950 17,300 students were awarded first degrees and 2,400 were awarded higher degrees at UK universities (…) In 2010/11 331,000 full-time students were awarded first degrees at UK universities and 182,600 (all modes) were awarded higher degrees (Bolton, 2011, p.4).

It is complex to estimate how many authors may reasonably have a parent with a degree, and there are not definitive figures for the general population in either the UK or US, but, it is estimated that 33.8% of UK residents aged 16 and over hold a level 4 or above qualification; for example, a Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor's degree or post-graduate qualifications (Office for National Statistics, 2021b).

For the respondents of this survey, all publishing types reported a higher rate of parental degree holding, noting that this would represent each respondent has/having two parents. With table 4.42 showing that over half of those who self-published had a parent who held an undergraduate degree or higher.

	Self-Published	Traditionally Published	Hybrid
Hold a degree or higher	51.6	46.4	46.8
Do not hold a degree or higher	47.3	52.3	52.4
Other/Unknown	1.1	1.3	0.8
TOTAL	100	100	100

When broken down by publishing type, around 10% of people who self or traditionally published had parents with a doctorate or above. This compares to around 2% estimated for both the UK and US and similar figures across many other countries (World Population Review, 2022). The implications of this perhaps hark back to the point made by The 93% Club; that the confidence, support and understanding of cultural activities may be heightened for those who have parents with a greater personal experience of related activities, such as academia.

Table 4.43: Survey respondent parental education level in detail by publishing route

	Self-Published	Traditionally Published	Hybrid
Doctorate or above	9.2	10.7	4.8
Master's	17.2	15.5	16.7
Bachelor's	25.1	20.2	25.4
Trade/technical/ Vocational training	9.5	7.1	12.7
Completed secondary/High school	25.1	22.6	23.0
Some secondary/High school	12.8	22.6	16.7
Other/Unknown	1.1	1.3	0.8
TOTAL	100	100	100

4.4 Summary

General descriptive data found that the survey responses were:

- Representative in the majority (75%) of authors self-publishing only, with 10% of respondents traditionally published and the remaining 15% hybrid authors, publishing in both ways.
- Responses were globally representative, with the highest response from the US followed by the UK.
- The majority of those responding wrote fiction, followed by those writing a combination of fiction and non-fiction, with around only 1 in 20 writing only non-fiction.
- Genre choice was fairly similar across all publishing routes, with Romance, Fantasy, and Crime/ Thriller/ Mystery consistently high.
- Self-published authors reported writing in a higher number of genres in comparison to traditionally published authors. However, this figure rose significantly for hybrid authors.

The demographic breakdown between self-published and traditionally published respondents found no significant difference for the majority of protected characteristics. Only points of clear significance or findings of interest are therefore recorded below:

- **Age:** Those respondents who were self-publishing were significantly more likely to be aged 44 and under when compared with those in the sample who were traditionally published.
- **Gender:** Across all publishing routes, women out-weighed men in response numbers, but there was a higher likelihood for male representation in the traditionally published group in comparison with the self-published group.
- **Sexual orientation:** Those who reported their sexual orientation as different to the straight majority were over-represented across all publishing routes in comparison to the population averages.
- **Ethnic background:** Across all publishing routes the 'white' group was over-represented in comparison to population figures.
- **Disability:** Across all publishing routes, respondents reporting a disability were higher than population averages.
- **Socioeconomic markers: own education:** Those traditionally publishing were more likely to have completed a degree or above than self-published authors, although this was higher than the population average across all three groups of authors.
- **Socioeconomic markers: parental education:** Those publishing across all groups were more likely than the population average to have a parent with a degree or higher, with no significant difference between groups. This was more likely than the author themselves attaining the same high level of education and may denote a link to influences on authorship as a chosen activity or career.

Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion – The Commercially Successful Self-Published Author

5.1   Introduction

Chapter Five aims to establish the likelihood of commercial success through self-publishing, and how this compares to those publishing through the traditional or hybrid models. The findings relate to Hypothesis 1 (H1).

The chapter begins by reporting the author survey data that identifies the likelihood of commercial success among the self-publishing respondents and, when relevant, in comparison to those publishing through other models. The survey results are then supplemented with real-world figures analysed from a six-month sample of Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller lists.

By investigating the question of author success from two different data sets, the chapter aims to build an accurate figure for the likelihood of success an author could expect when taking the self-publishing route to independent publishing.

5.2 Do Self-Published Authors Report Commercial Success?

To define commercial success, the participant responses to the two commercial success definition questions were scored and combined, with authors then categorised into one of six levels of commercial success. Scores were compared across publishing routes: self-publishing, traditional publishing, and hybrid publishing. Full details of the scoring system are included in the Theoretical Framework & Methodology chapter. As outlined in that chapter, it should be noted that the figures used for the scores are self-rated by the respondents.

Analysis of commercial success scores revealed that 13% of self-published authors reported being, under this studies definition, rated as 'Very Commercially Successful', 10% as 'Moderately Commercially Successful', and 19% as 'Slightly Commercially Successful'. This combines to form a total figure of 42% of self-published authors rating as commercially successful at some level based on their success reporting. Out of the remaining authors, 'Not Commercially Successful (but positive about the future)' was selected by over a third (37%) of self-published authors, resulting in this rating being the most common overall. A further 9% had the lowest rating, 'Not Commercially Successful and negative about the future'. A full breakdown of scores is shown in table 5.1.

Note that in a small number of instances a respondent had not answered one or both criteria, and these responses were removed before analysis to leave only valid percentages. For the purposes of this chapter, the valid percentage is used throughout with percentages relating to the 587 authors who could be scored for this element of the study. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest percent.

Table 5.1: Survey respondents reporting as self-published scored by commercial success

	Frequency	Percent
6: Very Commercially Successful	79	13
5: Moderately Commercially Successful	59	10
4: Slightly Commercially Successful	109	19
3: Breaking Even	66	11
2: Not Commercially Successful (but Positive)	219	37
1: Not Commercially Successful (and Negative)	55	9
TOTAL	587	100

Publishing success by route

Commercial success results from respondents to the survey were also scored for those who are traditionally publishing and who are hybrid publishing; publishing through both models. Figure 5.1 demonstrates the results across the three groups and how they compare by percentage.
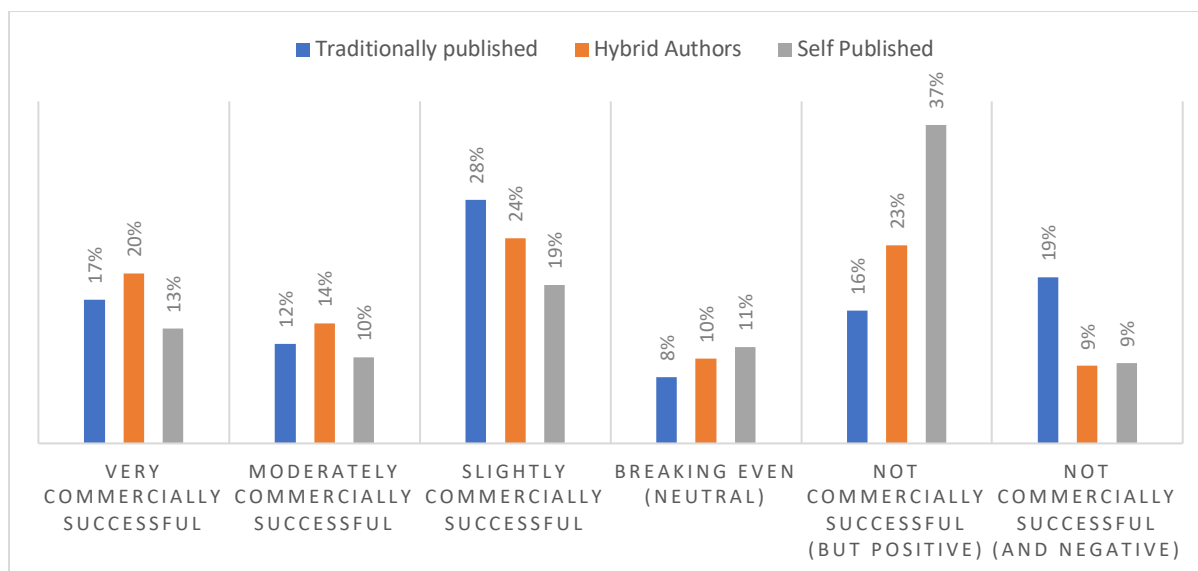
Figure 5.1: Survey respondents scored for commercial success and divided by publishing route

The evidence showed that those supported by a publisher either for all or some of their work did indicate a higher likelihood of commercial success. However, it should be recognised that despite having a traditional contract, and the resulting additional publishing support this is presumed to offer, over a third of those traditionally published (35%) reported not being commercially successful, with a similar amount of hybrid authors also in this position (32%).

Of those traditionally published respondents not finding commercial success, more felt negative about the future than positive about the future. This was in contrast to the self-published and hybrid groups, where those not finding commercial success were far more likely to feel positive than negative about their future prospects.

Why might self-published authors feel more positive about the future?

Previous studies have identified a link between autonomy over a person's life or career and more positive outcomes for mental health. Specifically, it has been found that well-being is higher for entrepreneurs compared to other workers:

> Despite the stressors associated with operating a small business, well-being has found to be higher for entrepreneurs compared to other workers (Shir, Nikolaev & Wincent, 2019). The autonomy of the work, and the choices regarding their work, may meet many psychological needs with positive implications for mental well-being (Parker, 2014). Small business owners are often self-motivated, driven, enterprising and have clear objectives for their business. This may help to make them more resilient to the pressures associated with the running of a small enterprise (Visentin, Cleary and Minutillo, 2020, p.461).

In this context, the levels of control independent authors have over their own publishing output versus that of the traditionally published author group may indicate why they are more likely to feel

positive about the future of their publishing despite evidence, such as low sales figures, indicating the contrary. For example, it is within the self-published author's control (and to an extent the hybrid author's control) to make direct changes to their publishing output and approach and try again. In contrast, an author working for a publisher may feel a lack of self-control over their career trajectory and may on the contrary feel their future is in the hands of others. In a very practical sense, this is true in relation to copyright, with the vast majority of traditionally published authors passing copyright ownership of their work to their publisher as a key element of their contract.

Further, the self-published author's role as decision maker, and the process of continued learning regarding the steps and measures activities required to complete their publishing activity, may impact the positive outlook of the author. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, indie author Chrissy Merton's positive experience publishing her own book was not just related to the book itself, but the process she took to produce it: 'It was fun learning about obtaining permission for the quotations I'd used, the legal deposit libraries, writing the acknowledgements and buying ISBN numbers' (Merton, 2008). Some self-publishers revel in the process itself and the learning opportunities that come with it. In their 2013 study, Baverstock and Steinitz (2013a) identified the high level of satisfaction for self-published authors, noting a mean (average) of 4.1 score out of five when asked how satisfied they were with self-publishing. Though indicative of the positive response to self-publishing, no specific studies exploring the mental well-being benefits of the independent publishing route have been identified. This could prove a fruitful area for further study and is detailed further in Chapter Nine.

A related question in the survey appears to support this finding of a more positive outlook for the self-published group. Following the section of the survey in which respondents rated the importance of different success criteria, authors were then asked to rate their success against their own defined criteria; reflecting how they feel they have succeeded against whatever goal or goals they may have personally set. Findings showed that 41% of self-published authors felt 'very' or 'extremely' successful against their own success definitions, while only 3.4% selected 'not successful at all'. This compared positively with the other two publishing groups, for whom over 7% felt 'not successful at all' in both instances, more than double the figure for self-published authors. Self-published authors were also the group that was most likely to feel either very or extremely successful against their self-defined success criteria.
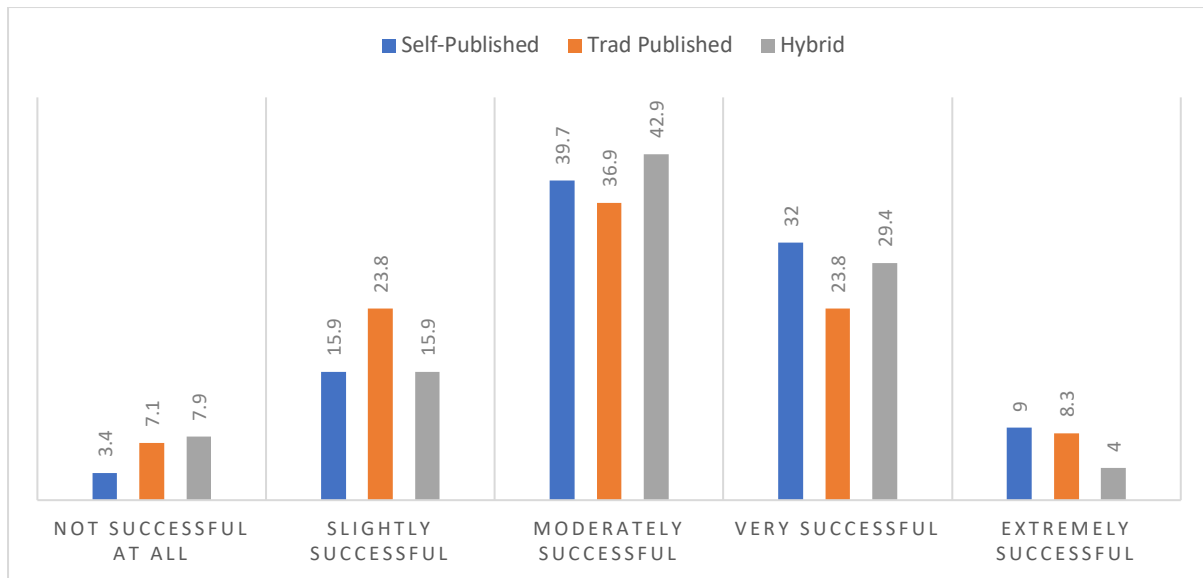
Figure 5.2: Survey respondents by publishing route % scores for perceived success against self-defined criteria

A closer look at profit and loss

When the data related to the specific question of profit and loss is extracted, the difference between each publishing route is less stark. 47% of those self-publishing reported making a loss. However, significant losses were being made across both other routes, with 32% of hybrid authors, and 35% of traditionally published authors reporting a loss. The reason for this high proportion of traditionally published authors making a loss may lie in the decreasing profits made by authors in the industry as a whole. Figure 5.3 highlights those making a loss across each publishing model.
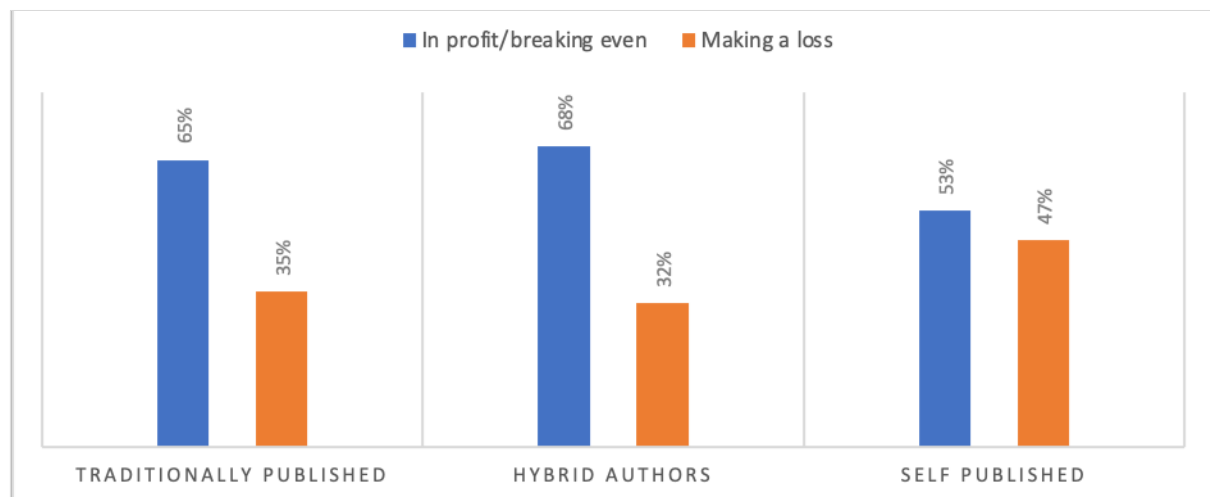
Figure 5.3: Survey respondents making a loss by publishing route

One author earnings survey[46] from 2022 found that median (typical) earnings from self-employed writing among primary occupation authors in 2022 was £7,000, well below the UK minimum wage if

---

[46] To explore the CREATe survey data in full, visit: https://www.create.ac.uk/blog/2022/12/07/uk-authors-earnings-and-contracts-2022-a-survey-of-60000-writers/

broken down by hourly pay. What is more concerning for authors here may not be only the low average salary itself, but the trend to a downward fall in salaries year-on-year. Data suggests there has been a 38.2% (in real terms) drop since 2018, with salaries decreasing from £11,329 to £7,000 in just four years, and against a difficult national financial backdrop (Thomas, Battisti, Kretschmer, 2022).

This drop has also had a major impact on how an author can sustain their authorship, with the number of authors earning all of their income from writing decreasing from 40% of the total sample in 2006, to 28% in 2018, and 19% in 2022, raising challenging questions about the future of writing as a sustainable profession (ibid).

In contrast, the Alliance of Independent Authors Author Income Survey found that when only self-published authors were surveyed, a steady increase in salary year-on-year was found. The two surveys' income figures are not fully comparable, as the Alliance of Independent Authors used a gross figure, which will not reflect the final take home pay of an indie author after funding the business growth. However, this comparison of a decline for traditional authors and a steady rise for indie authors may predict the salary gap closing further in future years if both trends continue.

5.3   Publishing Routes and the Amazon Kindle Bestseller Lists

To verify success-related data from the survey findings, Kindle Bestseller listings were analysed. Due to a lack of data available directly from Amazon, the sales reports were manually monitored from the publicly available pages. Full methodology is included in Chapter Three. The data set offered an objective snapshot in time taken at a similar point to the survey data collection (September – November 2022), with bestseller listings recorded weekly across a six-month period closely following the survey closure: January – June 2023.

Five categories were used for recording the publishing origin of each book in the top 100 chart:

1. **The Big Five**: Penguin/Random House, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, and all related imprints.
2. **Indie Traditional Publishers**: any publishing house outside the big five using a traditional model (i.e. paying authors via advances and/or royalties), and all related imprints.
3. **Direct Author Submission Publishers**: publishers who take submissions not presented via an agent on an ongoing basis. Note many publish only ebooks.
4. **Amazon Imprints**: 47North, Amazon Encore, Amazon Crossing, Amazon Crossing Kids, Amazon Original Stories, Amazon Publishing, Grand Harbor Press, Jet City Comics, Lake Union Publishing, Little A, Mindy's Book Studio, Montlake, Skyscape, Thomas & Mercer, TOPPLE Books, Two Lions, Waterfall Press.
5. **Self-Published Books**: both those published under the author's name and a named imprint owned and/or managed by the author.

When classifying the sample of ebooks in the top 100 bestseller list by publishing type, the following distribution was found:

Table 5.2: Summary results for Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller listings by publisher type

	Total ebooks in Top 100	% of total	Total authors in Top 100	% of total
Big Five	528	57	374	56
Self-Published	126	14	90	13
Direct author submission publishers	125	13	98	15
Amazon Imprint	79	8	48	7
Indie Trad Publisher	74	8	62	9
TOTAL	**932**	**100**	**672**	**100**

From the nearly 932 ebooks that made the top 100 across the sample period, self-published authors represented the second largest group on the list, just above those publishing through direct author submission publishers. In percentage terms, this represented 14% of all books in the top 100 during this period, a figure that matches that of the 'Very Commercially Successful' group closely (13%) as identified in the survey data.

The disadvantages of bestseller data for understanding self-published authors

An often-quoted statistic, first recorded in a study from *Publishers Weekly* (2014), suggested that up to 35% — 40% of money spent through Amazon on books goes to self-published authors. Therefore, it may be questioned why the top 100 representation is not higher than 14%.

This conflict between potential self-published success levels and bestseller levels may in part be explained by the publishing models used by many self-publishing authors; for example, the 'rapid release' strategy. As previously described, this is a favoured book-launch model among indie authors, based on releasing a series of books quickly over a short time-period. Books will be in a series, often Romance, Crime or Fantasy, and will be promoted to a niche but dedicated following every two to three months for the period of the series. This dynamic and agile approach to publishing is possible for independent authors as there is no need to consider some of the traditional publishing constraints, such as conflicting with other releases, fitting wider marketing schedules, or the focus on bookstore distribution and hence longer print timelines (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023b).

These authors may make a substantial living from their books by targeting their niche audience carefully with regular products at reasonable prices, rather than aiming for 'big hitter' one-off bestsellers. This prolificacy of many self-published authors is explored further in the following chapter, where the number of books released in relation to indie authors is explored during segmentation of the self-publishing author group.

Price points by publishing route

During Amazon data collection, the cost of each book was recorded. For marketing reasons, online book prices change regularly. When a book remained in the top 100 for several weeks, only the cost taken when it was first recorded in the bestseller list was retained.

Table 5.3: Kindle bestsellers by mean (average) price and by publishing type

	Mean price by publishing route
Big Five Traditional Publishers	£3.21
Self-Publishers	£3.38
Direct Author Submission Publishers	£1.78
Amazon Imprints	£2.03
Other Traditional Publishers	£3.49

The price point chosen by self-publishing authors closely aligns to the Big Five author price point and sits just below those of other traditional publishers. From a quality perspective, this suggests that readers are prepared to pay as much for a high-quality self-published book as a traditionally published book, regardless of whether they are aware or not of the publishing route that has led to the publication of the book they purchase[47].

From an author perspective, when it is considered that the independent publishers will receive a much higher percentage of royalties – up to 70% vs. approximately 10% for traditionally published authors (Society of Authors, 2023) – the 14% of indie authors reaching the bestseller list will receive a far higher overall payment per listing than those sitting alongside them for whom both the agent and publisher will take a cut.

There is a drop in price when looking first to Amazon imprints and then to the direct author submission publishers. For both groups, a business model where ebooks may be the only distribution method for some publications, with no investment made in print books, is common. This model comes with far fewer overheads than print production and distribution and therefore may in part explain how they can offer ebooks at a lower price point in comparison with competitors while still running a sustainable business.

---

[47] Note that no academic or industry data could be found for this study to further investigate whether readers are aware of the publishing model utilised by an author in relation to a book they purchase.

5.4 Representation and Bestseller-Level Success

The Kindle bestseller data offers the opportunity to look again at diversity in the publishing sector, supplementing the information identified from the survey. This data gives us a snapshot of the make-up of the most successful group of authors – those hitting the bestseller level of sales. To do this, the data from the Kindle bestseller monitoring was recorded and analysed for key trends in two protected characteristics: Gender and Ethnic Background. In terms of trans representation, as this element of the study looked at gender based on self-identification, this was not identifiable as a specific demographic through the Amazon dataset. Trans people identifying as a specific gender will be grouped with that gender. No non-binary authors, or those publicly identifying in other ways, were identified through this element of the study, although that does not mean that they are not represented in the group.

It should be noted that not all authors could be established in terms of gender or ethnic background, and this places a restriction on the data to analyse. Some authors appear to have gone to great lengths to hide one or both characteristics. This is also explored later in section 8.6.

Gender by publishing route

Women outweigh men across all publishing routes when analysing the Amazon Kindle Bestseller data. However, as evident in the figure 5.4, male representation increases when there is the intervention of an agent and publisher in the process. Thus, indie traditional publishers had the highest representation of men, followed by the Big Five publishers, whereas the Direct Author Submission Publishers represented the highest percentage of women, followed by the self-publishing group. No studies were identified that could bring to light why men are seeing higher representation through traditional publishers than other routes. It may be that men seek more formal validation for their artistic work and therefore pursue these routes more actively than women, or conversely that the publisher themselves may look for a balance between men and women on the books, whereas those publishing routes without an intervention are taken by all who choose to participate.

The strong female skew in the Self-Publishing and Direct Author Submission categories may also reflect the focus on genre fiction in these two publishing routes, including Crime and Romance, which are primarily read by and written by women, dating back as far back as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction (Blake[48], 1990). This result may indicate that female authors writing in popular fiction genres and who are unable or unwilling to find a traditional publisher may find a higher-than-average likelihood of continued success through approaching a direct author submission publisher or taking the self-publishing route, where competition for female space on a 'list' will be less – if at all – important and a focus on genre fiction can be found.

---

[48] Note that Carole Blake, who wrote *From pitch to publication* (1999), is an agent herself, and the book was sold as offering an 'insider's guide' to getting published.
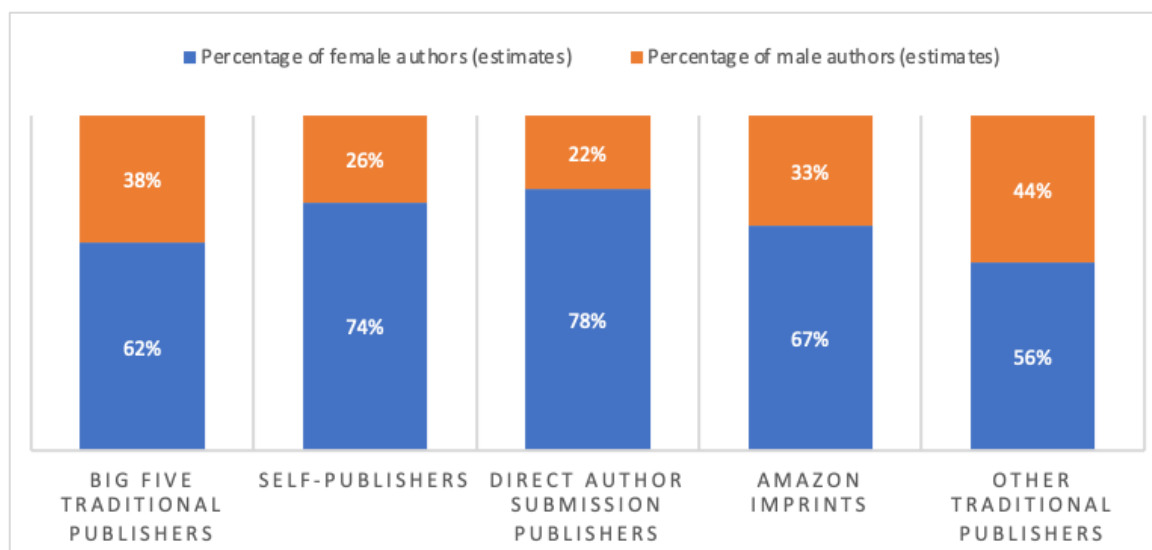
Figure 5.4: Kindle bestsellers by gender and by publishing type

Ethnic background by publishing route

Regarding representation in relation to author ethnic background by publishing route, the results reflect the survey findings, and wider sector estimates. Of the 932 books named in the top 100 across the sample period, just 52 were identified as having been written by an author with an ethnic background other than white, just over 5.6% of all books.

In this instance, Amazon Imprints showed the greatest diversity, with 13% of authors represented by Amazon imprints identified as having an ethnic background other than white. This was followed closely by other traditional publishers (10%) and the Big Five publishers (9%). Self-Publishers showed the lowest rate of ethnic diversity with 4% representation from those identified as having an ethnic background other than white. Direct-to-publisher submissions had the lowest level of diversity, with 0% representation identified in this sample, noting that the sample represents one six-month period only.
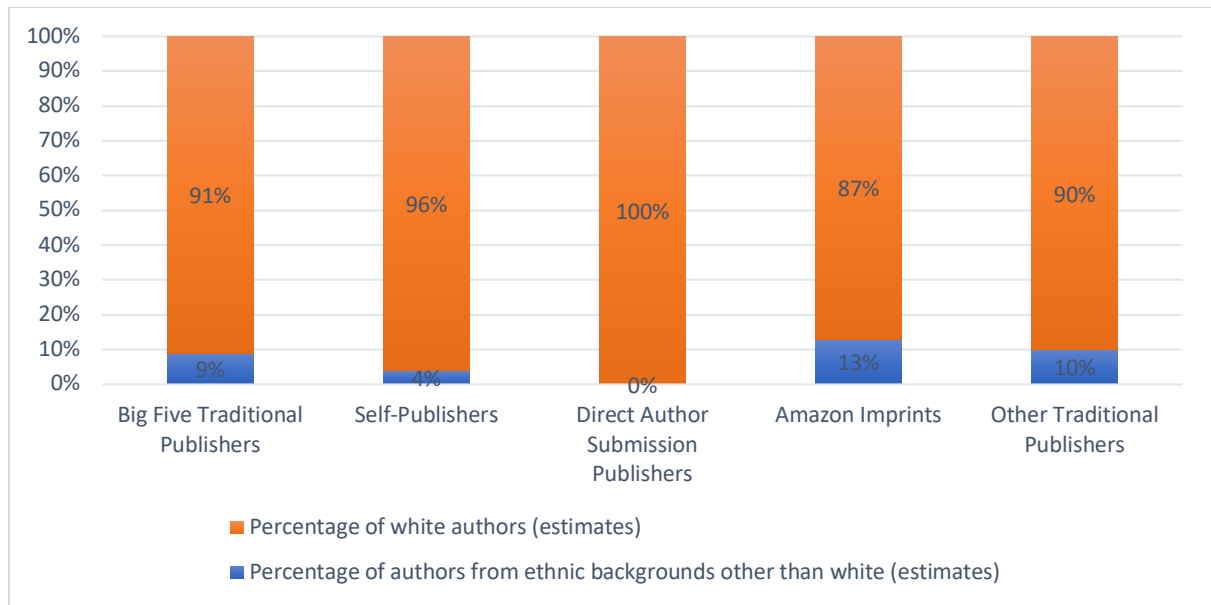
Figure 5.5: Kindle bestsellers by ethnic background and by publishing type

5.5   Additional Observations: Amazon Kindle Bestseller Lists

Outside of the main hypotheses investigated through the Kindle Bestseller data, four more observations were made that add further detail to the narrative of the highly successful self-published author. These are noted here to identify wider trends for the self-published community.

The 'celebrity author'

As outlined in The Introduction, the growth of the celebrity author continues to be a concern for independent writers in terms of their impact on their own success likelihood. Competing for readers against those with previous fame and/or a large social media following can be viewed as offering an uneven playing field and even described as a barrier to approaching other publishing options, such as publishers and agents. One free text response shared by a respondent to the author survey reflected this concern:

> The longer I write, the less impressed I am by most traditional publishers and all literary agents. I am a reader as well as a writer, and 'celebrity' authors get pushed, though the books may be badly edited with multiple plot holes.

Celebrity authors have been considered both in the positive and negative. On the positive side, it could be argued that celebrity authors, particularly for children, inspire an interest in reading from those who may not otherwise engage. One classroom-based survey held in 1998 with 900 students, found 90% said they would be interested in reading stories written by their favourite celebrity (Towell, 1998). However, for some, celebrity authors signal a decline in quality of content or symbolise the lengths to which publishing houses need to go to make the numbers add up. In just one example of the more negative side of the media coverage on this topic, an article entitled, 'The Unstoppable March of the Celebrity Author', was published in *The Spectator* in January 2023. This identified that celebrities are selling not just their own life stories, as has been a trend for many years, but also branching into fiction. Interestingly, this article saw indie authors not as a group negatively impacted by this growth in celebrity fiction, but as a potential *cause* of the rise:

> The literary aspirations of non-celebrities are no doubt helped by a burgeoning industry in self-publishing, which gives everyone a way of fulfilling their ambition to get that third-rate Crime Thriller or substandard 'steamy' romantic fiction into print while avoiding seeing their efforts turned down by a host of publishers for the simple reason that it's rubbish (Solomons, 2023).

Indie authors themselves view the issue differently, and celebrity authors are discussed at length in the indie author community. Just one example of this position is represented in this article from back at the advent of self-publishing in 2011, when authors were beginning to discuss the challenges when seeking a traditional contract:

...publishers will only invest in what they consider guaranteed money-makers. Proven authors, celebrities, and big named politicians have no trouble getting contracts because, financially, publishers can't take the risk of investing in an unknown quantity. One source I checked claims the current rate of traditional publishers accepting previously unpublished authors is one percent (Author not stated, Self-Publishing Review, 2011).

To explore the validity of these concerns, the Kindle Bestseller data were analysed for those authors with a substantial existing 'profile' outside of and previous to being an author. The following was found:

Table 5.4: Kindle bestsellers also 'celebrity' authors by publishing type

	Percentage of 'celebrity' authors	Number of books
Big Five Traditional Publishers	9%	34 books
Self-Publishers	0%	0 books
Direct Author Submission Publishers	0%	0 books
Amazon Imprints	0%	0 books
Other Traditional Publishers	6%	4 books

The data showed that during this six-month period, nearly one in ten bestseller ebooks from the Big Five publishers was written by a 'celebrity' turned author, with a further 6% of those published through other traditional publishers. There was no representation of this group in the other publishing routes.

As outlined in The Introduction, traditional publishers are under pressure to find authors who can make a profit at the lowest cost and the fastest speed. With the marketing and promotion savings that can be made when there is an established celebrity following and media profile to work from, it is no surprise that those already in the public eye are attractive to traditional publishers. In opposition to the traditional model, they may even be approached by the publisher through their agent; their profile of more importance than the content of the final book itself.

It can also be the case that the name on the front of a book is not the writer of the words inside. As one article on the modern ghost writer points out in reference to Becca Grischow, many successful authors receive no public recognition for their writing: 'Grischow's books have appeared more than a dozen times on the *New York Times* bestseller list. But you won't find her name on any of them' (Griffin, 2022). In the same article ghost writer Haylee Justine, who also produces memoirs, describes her route into the sector through her contacts in the indie publishing industry, having been previously self-published. She describes her memoir salary for a six-month project of between $75,000 and $100,000. In these instances, the writer is paid for a freelance project, rather than via advances or royalties, so there is substantial money to be made. These high payments to ghost writers are also indicative of the high sales figures from a celebrity tome, and its subsequent value to the publisher.

Those prospective celebrity authors who can offer an existing profile to a publisher may not even consider a self-publishing route. Furthermore, they may not be aware that it exists, or the benefits to the authors it offers, such as higher royalties. This lack of knowledge of the industry, as previously unpublished people, may be of benefit to the traditional publisher looking for a profitable next author for their books with little knowledge of what to expect. Perhaps as the profile of self-publishing rises, more potential celebrity authors with an existing following will explore the independent route. However, it may be more likely that for many celebrity authors the opportunity is only considered once approached, and they would not have a proactive appetite for authorship otherwise.

Early indications of indie authors building their imprint businesses

When identifying those publishing under imprint names or their own name, it was observed that a minimum of seven of the named imprints showed evidence of having already, or planning to soon, open up to other independent authors. In these instances, the self-published author themselves is looking to widen their business model to publish other authors in their genre or outside their genre; to develop from self-publisher to publisher. This has been undertaken occasionally before, for example as previously noted by Virginia Woolf and her imprint, the 'Hogarth Press'. However, as this endeavour was in the context of playing a key role in the local literary circles, and with support from family wealth, this was perhaps not such a financial risk for Woolf and her husband in 1917, compared to a self-published author in 2023. This is an interesting development for the indie author business model and would present an opportunity for commercial impact, specifically to the smaller independent publishers without the influence of the Big Five. These indie-author owned imprints may well flood the market while also offering the first-hand understanding of the indie author mentality to the authors they take on.

As the summary case studies below suggest, both based on authors identified in the Amazon Kindle Ebook bestseller data, those moving from self-published author to imprint owner will perhaps follow a new model, whereby authors are supported in their self-publishing journey and will purchase services from the imprint but retain all royalties. This would bring this model closer to the 'hybrid' publishing model than the traditional model but critically is led by an active indie author, supporting their own further creative work.

Inchgate Publishing[49]

Inchgate Publishing was set up initially to publish the work of bestselling self-published British author, Keith A Pearson. Pearson describes on his website how he began writing his first book following a bet with friends. After approaching agents and waiting several weeks with no answers, he moved straight to independent publishing, with a focus on selling via Amazon only. His website references sales of over 600,000 and he is now a full-time author, with 12 novels released to date.

---

[49] Inchgate Publishing's website, under construction as of February 2024 can be found here: https://inchgate.com

Originally Pearson utilised an audiobook publisher for his audiobooks but has now also brought those under his own publishing imprint[50].

In 2022, Pearson announced that Inchgate Publishing would be opening up to wider authors as its own independent publishing house, although with no indication yet of the exact business model. As of November 2023, a new website is in development with the note: 'We are currently in the process of opening our doors to other authors, and we will be offering a range of publishing and marketing services. Please come back soon to find out more.'

Hudson Indie Ink[51]

One example of a more established indie author led publishing house is Hudson Indie Ink, founded in 2020. The company describes its goal as helping 'both new and established writers to get their books published and marketed to readers all over the world'. From this brand story, it is evident that the publisher is targeting both those new to indie publishing and those who have previous experiences of publishing, presumable both independently and traditionally.

Hudson Ink is a paid-for service provider, competing with the likes of Troubador and other hybrid publishers. Therefore, to appeal to these new and established authors, they sell their products on the skills of the owners as successful indie authors themselves. The description in the 'About Us' section of the Hudson Ink website focuses on the unique experience and understanding Stephanie can bring to authors:

> After almost a decade of self-publishing since her first book 'Afterlife', Stephanie was very much aware of the trials and tribulations of being an Indie Author. Following continued success which has seen Stephanie sell her books to an ever-growing fan base all over the world, she wanted to use her experience to create a team that would help other budding authors strive towards their goals (Hudson Ink, 2023).

The three packages offered by the publishing services provider focus on elements such as cover design, web design and social media assets. However, in terms of publishing itself, they provide a 'guide' for the author. Perhaps in the understanding, as found in this study, that a self-published author often needs support to professionalise their offer but takes pride in their own decision-making for other business activity. The company's tagline is 'Publishing Together' and this model of hands-on for professionalisation, but hands-off for activation, is encapsulated by their service packages.

Self-published authors have long offered advice to indie authors as part of their own revenue streams, one example being Dale L. Roberts who runs a successful YouTube channel with over 80,000 followers and daily posts with topical advice, tips, and discussion on all things related to independent publishing. However, his experience began as an indie author himself, and he has books released

---

[50] As this study was completed, AI generated audio narration options were increasing rapidly, offering further opportunity for self-published authors to produce the full range of formats and release simultaneously.
[51] Hudson indie Ink's website, can be found here: https://www.hudsonindieink.com

across genres and in both fiction and non-fiction. Similarly, Mark Dawson, the founder of the Self-Publishing Formula, began his career as a writer, but now runs a dual business as writer and adviser.

The evidence suggests that the dual role of writer and advisor now appears to be developing for some towards a dual role of indie author and indie publisher, and is mirrored, albeit in lower numbers, by the findings from the 2023 Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey which found that 2.38% of respondents answered that they used a 'Publisher Model' for their author business, meaning that they publish other authors' books as well as their own (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023).

The impact of television coverage for bestseller listings

During data collection, it was noted that many of the books from traditional publishers included the phrase 'As seen on BBC Between the Covers' or referenced the BBC Two Book Club in the subtitle for the book, and this appeared to have improved the chances of bestseller status. Data indicated that 19 books in total used this as a promotional tool on the Amazon site during the sample six-month period, and the breakdown by publishing route is shown in table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Books referencing TV or radio review shows in title by publishing route

	BBC Between the Covers	**BBC Two Book Club**
Big Five Traditional Publishers	11	2
Independent Publishers	0	0
Direct Author Submission Publishers	1	0
Amazon Imprints	0	1
Other Traditional Publishers	3	1
TOTAL	15	4

The BBC's book review show 'Between the Covers' is a weekly UK TV show, in a prime spot at 7pm on BBC Two. It is hosted by established UK radio and TV host, Sara Cox, and is based around a book club model with Sara's famous friends visiting her 'living room' to share their recommended reads. Celebrities bring both their favourite classics and recent releases, and until November 2023, when a Mark Dawson Thriller was brought in by comedian Chris McCausland, it does not appear that any indie author titles were included on the show. *The Cleaner* is the first book in Dawson's 23-book thriller series, and although it is hard to judge the practical impact of such a promotion as it occurred outside of the sample period, looking at the ratings data, it has 18,317 ratings on Amazon as of December 2023, a substantial engagement for even a traditionally published book. For comparison, the Ian Rankin Thriller and bestseller from 2021, which was promoted as a similar product to Dawson's series, *A Heart Full of Headstones*, has 15,208 reviews. Access to these high-profile recommendations will undoubtedly be achieved through agents and publishers; the traditional model. The process will be a pitching of books by publishers to the TV production team either formally or informally. However, with this particular show, through inviting guests to share their own personal favourites, Dawson's *The Cleaner* made it around the system and this perhaps indicates the tide will turn in the future.

5.6   Summary

This chapter has outlined that both the survey response data and the Amazon Kindle ebook bestseller analysis demonstrate the successful self-published author does exist. In terms of the survey data, it was found that 42% of self-published authors were rated as commercially successful at one of three levels, with a further 11% breaking even. In addition, the vast majority of self-published authors who reported a loss felt positive about their future prospects.

Focusing on the top-end of success, a snapshot analysis of Amazon Kindle ebook bestseller data, found that those publishing outside any traditional publishing model represented 14% of bestseller ebooks on the largest ebook seller platform. This compared favourably to other independent traditional publishers, Amazon owned imprints and those publishers seeking author direct submissions. However, the Big Five traditional publishers still dominate this top end of author success.

Some key benefits were identified for those authors with the Big Five publishers. These included additional coverage on critical marketing routes such as television review shows, and 'celebrity' authors filling multiple slots in the Big Five author lists, and therefore in the bestseller listings.

Additional trends identified in this chapter are noted in regards evidence of indie authors establishing their own imprints, and the lack of ethnic diversity demonstrated by successful authors identified through all publishing routes, and specifically through self-publishing, counter to the current discourse regarding the diversifying of access to all (explored further in Chapter Eight).

Summary finding against original hypothesis (H1)

In conclusion, the data shared in this chapter answers the question set by Hypothesis 1 (H1): A significant proportion (maximum of 79%) of self-published authors will report not making a loss; self-published authors will also be represented on the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestsellers listings (up to 23%).

The study findings indicate that approximately 42% of self-published authors will find commercial success through self-publishing, rising to 53% if divided purely by those making a loss or not making a loss. This is below the comparable small business success rate of 79% but a substantial percentage of the overall author group. A snapshot analysis of Amazon Kindle sales figures suggests that approximately 14% of bestselling ebook authors comprise self-published writers.

Chapter 6: Findings & Discussion – Segmenting Self-Published Authors

6.1   Introduction

A key objective of the study is to identify whether the self-publishing community can be segmented into core groups with shared characteristics. To achieve this, the self-publishing responses were separated from the wider group, and a cluster analysis was undertaken to segment the self-published authors into 'profiles' based on similarities observed within the related psychographic variables recorded in the survey.

This analysis was undertaken to respond specifically to test Hypothesis 2 (H2) outlined in the methodology. The hypothesis referenced the findings from the Baverstock and Steinitz survey (2013a), which theorised that a three-segment breakdown of self-published authors could be made: commercial success, completion success, reputational success.

Based on the cluster analysis findings, this chapter puts forward a model for dividing self-published authors into two distinct segments, describes their differing characteristics, and makes recommendations regarding how the sector could name these segments for future consistent use and discussion. Segmentation could also be used to support those looking to work with self-published authors, either in an advisory or supplier capacity, to target and communicate effectively with them.

6.2   Author Segmentation Results

Cluster analysis was undertaken to segment the self-published authors into 'profiles' based on similarities observed within the psychographic factors recorded in the survey, including those survey variables that related to commercial, completion and reputational success drivers as per the hypothesis. The data from survey questions related to each of these variables were run individually and together through a two-step cluster analysis via IBMs SPSS software, as described in the Theoretical Framework and Methodology chapter. The survey data tested for clustering were grouped under:

- motivations (success criteria),
- previous experience,
- answers to 'why did you self-publish rather than traditionally publish?'

Next, the predictors from the tested variables were reviewed to identify the top predictors, with the finding that factors from the motivation (success criteria) variable demonstrated the highest impact on cluster differentiation. Motivations were therefore selected as the sole variables to test through a further cluster analysis. Looking at the different statements in more detail, Motivation 18 ('making a comfortable living') and Motivation Two ('building a stable living') showed potential duplications of the same concept and therefore Motivation Two was removed from the model.

This process refined the model to the following eight statements:

- Earning a comfortable living
- Earning a high income
- Increasing the sales of my books
- Building a long-term career as an author
- Providing a stable income for those I work with
- Gaining a positive sales position in relation to my competitors
- Building a satisfied and loyal readership
- Being able to successfully put my own ideas into place

The final analysis identified two fairly evenly sized clusters. Cluster A contained 300 cases (49.3%), while Cluster B contained 309 cases (50.7%). The silhouette coefficient, which measures the clustering quality, was 0.4, indicating that the clustering solution was a fair fit for the data, with the clusters being fairly distinct. Note that all other cluster testing returned a poor result, and no test increased the silhouette coefficient above 0.4.

Table 6.1 displays the mean values of each variable (i.e. centroids) by cluster. This demonstrates that the two clusters were characterized by different profiles in relation to their motivations to indie publish, with significant differences between mean scores for each variable.

Table 6.1 Cluster analysis results by variable

	1. Earning a comfortable living	2. Earning a high income	3. Increasing the sales of my books	4. Building a long-term career as an author
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Cluster A	2.68	3.30	2.14	2.20
Cluster B	1.14	1.52	1.13	1.07
Combined	1.89	2.39	1.63	1.63

	5. Providing a stable income for people I work with	6. Gaining a positive sales position in relation to my competitors	7. Being able to successfully put my own ideas into action	8. Building a satisfied and loyal readership
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Cluster A	3.67	3.47	2.15	1.84
Cluster B	2.45	2.54	1.67	1.19
Combined	3.05	3.00	1.90	1.51

It is worth noting that the first four variables identified as the most important predictors of the cluster definitions are all directly related to commercial success: careers, sales figures, and income. No variables were identified that related to 'reputation' or 'completion', with all variables in these areas being so close in importance level between the authors surveyed that they were not found to have significance in producing a final model. The following factors of importance (five and six) also relate to sales indirectly, in relation to earning enough to provide for people the author works with and gaining a positive sales position against competitors. It is only when the two least important factors in the model are observed that criteria outside of the commercial sphere are represented, with the seventh factor relating to 'Building a satisfied and loyal readership' and the final eighth factor relating to personal control, 'Being able to successfully put my own ideas in place', which reflects a level of personal autonomy for the author.

To demonstrate the motivation score differences further, figure 6.1 displays visually the distribution of scores for each motivation by cluster through related histograms. Note that the respondents' rating of the statement increases in importance from left to right, with the furthest column on the right representing 'Extremely Important' answers, and the furthest column on the left representing 'Not Important At All' answers. The findings for the indie author survey sample as a whole (i.e. when scores from both clusters are combined) are demonstrated through the shadow histograms by factor for ease of comparison.

**Cluster A (49.3%)**   **Cluster B (50.7%)**
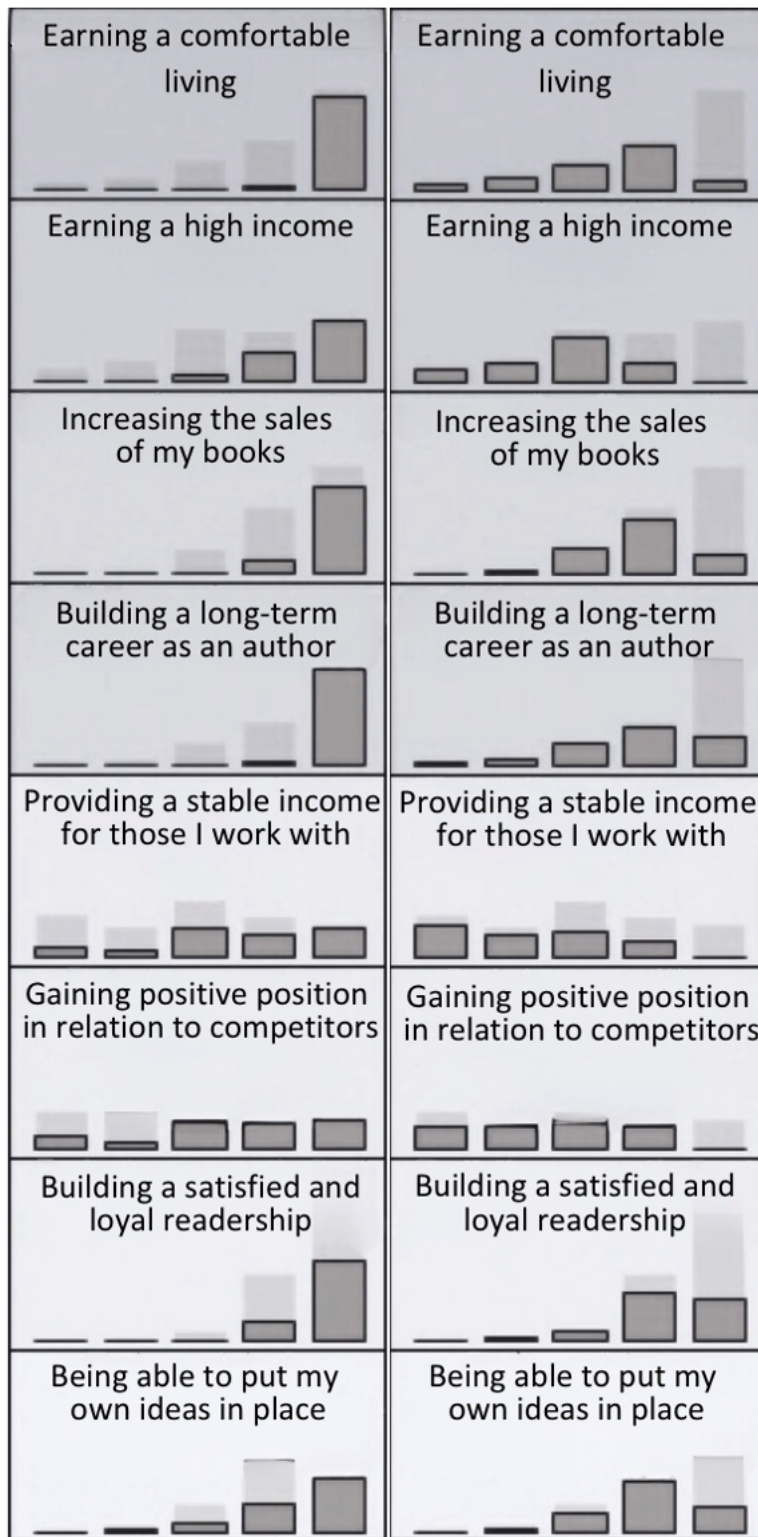
Figure 6.1: Histograms demonstrating survey responses for each factor by Cluster groups (A and B) and by the whole sample as comparable shadow histograms

Defining the Two Clusters

Cluster A

Cluster A is a highly motivated cluster, most often rating all success criteria as very and extremely important. Peaks were most prominent in relation to extreme importance in reference to three commercially successful related criteria:

- 'Earning a comfortable living'
- 'Building a long-term career as an author'
- 'Increasing the sales of my books.'

In addition, a high proportion of this cluster rated 'Earning a <u>high</u> income' as extremely or very important, in contrast to Cluster B.

Is Cluster A the 'Authorpreneur?'

The importance of commercial gain for this cluster in terms of their own definition of success prompted reflection on the 'Authorpreneur' definition outlined in the introductory chapter of this study. Could these findings be interpreted as identifying those who are: 'an author treating their work as a business, using an entrepreneurial mindset to build a sustainable living' (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2017) as was set out when reviewing the historic use of the label 'Authorpreneur'?

The consistent level of ambition across success criteria found in this cluster reflects the idea of 'building a sustainable living'. Furthermore, this motivation is reflected in both of the top criteria differentiating the groups: 'Earning a comfortable living' and 'Building a long-term career as an author'. This cluster also consistently considered financially supporting others involved in their work as important, indicating a wider business mindset looking beyond their own success to their suppliers and services. Therefore, this cluster does appear to show links to the assumed 'Authorpreneur' mindset, and this would be an appropriate label for Cluster A.

Cluster B

For Cluster B, no one motivator was identified as holding a consistently high rating from the variables that formed the model (i.e. no criteria showed high levels of 'extremely important' ratings across the cluster). The majority of criteria peaked at a score of three ('moderately important') or four ('very important'), with a particular contrast to Cluster A when comparing the financial related factors. Even when rating the reader-focused statement, 'Building a satisfied and loyal readership', a key motivator across both clusters, Cluster B rated its importance lower than Cluster A.

This agnostic approach to external motivations, with people in this cluster rating most success criteria as moderately important on average, suggests a segment without the same high level of ambition and drive as Cluster A.

Is Cluster B the 'Author-artisan'?

Despite not showing the same level of ambition as Authorpreneurs, this second cluster does show interest in commercial gain, but at a lower level. Therefore, it is not appropriate to describe them as hobbyists or amateur authors, which would suggest writing purely or predominantly for fun. Instead, the evidence suggests they remain concerned with the publishing process; aiming to produce and sell at a lower level in comparison with Authorpreneurs in terms of their financial and wider goals for their writing long-term. They seem to manage this within their own time, not driven by external constraints and market deadlines. They are also less likely to view building a writing career as of extreme importance.

This emergent author cluster has not been identified or discussed in literature before. This study is therefore putting forward a recommended naming approach referencing the established concept of an 'artisan' producer and applying it to this specific author cluster. One definition for an artisan which summarises the role succinctly would be:

> Artisan: Producing handicrafts, usually as a job. It can also include people or groups who produce food or drink using traditional methods (Cambridge Dictionary, referenced 2023).

Note that although the current definition of the 'artisan' does not specifically mention storytelling or authoring, and is more often applied to the food, drink or handicraft sectors, this study is suggesting the concept of an artisan could and should also apply to a substantial group of authors who choose the self-publishing model and fulfil the Author-artisan profile.

A note on previous uses of the word 'artisan' in relation to authors

One recorded use of artisan has been identified as a term to informally describe authors. In the self-publishing guidebook 'Creative Self-Publishing' produced by the Alliance of Independent Authors, short descriptors of the general types of self-published authors that may be found in the sector are given. This included: The artist author, the career author, the entrepreneurial author, and the artisan author. The brief description given for the 'artisan' described a group that 'see success as achieving a perfection of truth and beauty' (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023a, p.7) and suggests this group would be found at locations such as craft fairs. For this study, the term 'artisan' is being used to encapsulate an overarching outlook of a group in terms of scale of commercial ambition and product production as identified through the cluster analysis and not in relation purely to sales method[52].

---

[52] A note on naming selection: During a supervision meeting for this study, the researcher and supervisor team brainstormed a range of options. Holly Greenland brought both 'craft' and 'artisan' for discussion in relation to group B, with Professor Alison Baverstock mentioning Faber & Faber offering an 'Artisan Lunch' at writing events. This prompted further discussion, and

Cluster findings in detail: by factor

1. Earning a comfortable living

Authorpreneurs overwhelmingly rated 'Earning a comfortable living' as a top motivator for taking up self-publishing; with almost all respondents rating that as 'extremely important'. On the other side of the division, Author-artisan rated this criterion in a more widely distributed pattern, with very few regarding it as 'extremely important'. Instead, the results show a spread of rating predominantly distributed across 'moderately important' and 'slightly important'.

2. Earning a high income

Authorpreneurs were less consistent in their response to the statement regarding earning a 'high income' rather than a 'comfortable living'. However, the highest selected response remained 'extremely important'. Again, in the Author-artisan cluster, this high rating reduces, and in this instance disappears altogether, with respondents instead distributing answers across the mid and lower ratings. This demonstrates again that whereas most in Authorpreneur cluster were seeing a 'high income' as a top measure of success, those in the Author-artisan cluster found it less important to their own definitions.

3. Increasing the sales of my books

Both clusters rated this criterion fairly highly, with the majority on both sides rating it as 'moderately important' or above. Authorpreneurs rates this as more important, with most respondents choosing the top rating. Regarding this specific statement, as the question does not define how many 'more' means, it may be that the definition or ambition in relation to 'more' is different between the two clusters. For example, Authorpreneurs, who rated comfortable living and high earning as of higher importance than Author-artisan, may be interpreting 'more' as referring to reaching bestseller status, whereas Author-artisans may be interpreting 'more' as referring to selling in the tens or hundreds to reach their sales goals. This is purely an assumption based on the previous answers around comfortable and high income but is worth considering in terms of the definitions and how they may have been interpreted.

Regardless of interpretation, the evidence suggests both clusters are interested in selling more books. This may seem an obvious assumption but having confirmation that most self-published authors are looking to increase sales, rather than, for example, distribute solely to friends or family is a useful finding for understanding the level of ambition within these publishing clusters. Regardless of overall business or income ambition, both clusters have an interest in increasing their sales within their own definitions and view this as a reflection of their success.

'Author-artisan' was selected. Professor Alison Baverstock remembered the moment thus: 'As we were sitting in the Agile Hub at Kingston University, it seemed the right place for inspiration to strike. I think we all went away feeling very satisfied.'

4. Building a long-term career as an author

In this third variable, again Authorpreneurs demonstrated a greater emphasis on building a career, with the vast majority rating this as 'extremely important'. Author-artisan, in comparison, were more likely to place it as only 'moderately important'. This is potentially critical in understanding the overarching goals of the authors in these two distinct clusters – one which rates a career from writing highly, the other which is more agnostic about this as an outcome of their self-publishing activity. They potentially view their writing activity outside or alongside their wider aspirations and career goals.

5. Providing a stable income for those I work with

For this factor, both clusters become more similar in relation to scoring. However, it should be noted that whereas a fairly significant portion of Authorpreneurs rated this at the highest level, practically no-one in Author-artisan did so. Authorpreneurs, therefore, seems to have more of an overarching view of their 'business' in terms of recognising the importance of others who work for them or supply to them as part of their work and rely on them for financial support.

6. Gaining a positive sales position in relation to my competitors

The picture here looks similar to the previous two criteria, with both clusters having answers spread across the options, but with Authorpreneurs more likely to rate it at the highest level than Author-artisan, demonstrating a higher level of motivation derived from competition.

7. Building a satisfied and loyal readership

For this reader-focused criteria, the closest alignment so far between the two clusters can be found. Almost all authors in both clusters rate this criterion as extremely or very important to their author success. The only difference is that, following previous patterns, Authorpreneurs was more likely to rate it as the very highest level of importance.

8. Being able to successfully put my own ideas into place

Again, here both clusters are aligning more closely, with almost all authors, regardless of which cluster they sit in, rating this criterion as very or extremely important to their indie author success. But again, Authorpreneurs was most likely to rate it at the very highest level of importance.

Control: personality vs. mindset

As noted, the differences found in scores by author cluster across factors demonstrates a variance in the level of ambition and targets, with Authorpreneurs rating all motivations more highly than Author-artisan. This raised the question of whether there was a risk that the evidence was potentially identifying a difference in personality impacting the ratings given rather than the specific motivations. For example, those rating higher in Extraversion and Agreeableness have been theorised to be more likely to have a positive response bias in related studies (Mbiyu, 2023).

To test for this, an analysis was run for both clusters against their total personality trait results, for which the Big Five traits were measured via the author survey utilising the IPIP open source 50 question questionnaire to measure: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. This found little difference between the mean results of each group by personality trait; further, those identified in the Authorpreneur cluster, where higher levels of positive response (i.e. marking factors as 'extremely important' more often), rated slightly lower in terms of mean scores than the Author-artisan in relation to both personality factors. This suggests the clusters reflected a difference in motivation importance, rather than how they may have completed the survey due to personality type.

Table 6.2: Personality test results by clusters: Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans

	Authorpreneur Mean Score	Author-artisan Mean Score	Authorpreneur Standard Deviation	Author-artisan Standard Deviation
Total Extraversion	27.92	29.09	9.10	9.01
Total Agreeableness	40.15	40.66	6.38	5.57
Total Conscientiousness	36.05	35.24	7.60	6.70
Total Neuroticism	30.52	31.70	9.22	8.64
Total Openness	43.33	42.29	4.38	4.54

6.3 Additional Testing: Self-Published Author Clusters

To further test the two proposed segments and naming conventions, additional relevant variables in the survey were revisited. The three core questions were:

1. **Reasons for self-publishing:** Why did the authors in each cluster select self-publishing over traditional publishing, and specifically did each cluster choose those options relating most closely to the identified clusters?
2. **Time spent per book:** What is the time spent per book on average for each cluster? Is there a difference in time spent by group and what implication may this have on our understanding of their approach to their writing work?
3. **Commercial success rating:** What were the rates of commercial success in each cluster, and in particular in relation to earning 'what they need' or 'more than they need' from their writing?

Cluster comparison: reasons for self-publishing

When comparing the results for statements regarding 'reasons for self-publishing' by cluster, no significant difference was found between the two clusters, with the exception of one factor: retaining a higher royalty percentage. Here, a significantly higher proportion of Authorpreneurs (76.3% total) selected retaining a higher percentage of royalties as a reason for self-publishing over traditional publishing, versus 57.3% of Artisans. This supports the notion that those placed in the Authorpreneur cluster are more likely to see themselves as a business and therefore has a greater interest in financial success as part of their business model. When running a Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, it was demonstrated that the importance of royalties differed significantly between the two groups, c^2(1, N = 606) = 24.4, p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.20.

Table 6.3: Importance of higher royalties: Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans

	Authorpreneur Frequency	Author-artisan Frequency	Authorpreneur Percent	Author-artisan Percent
Higher royalties not a reason to self-publish	71	131	23.7	42.7
Higher royalties a reason to self-publish	228	176	76.3	57.3
TOTAL	299	42.29	100	100

Cluster comparison: engaging with the wider publishing infrastructure

When comparing results across all investment factors investigated in the survey, table 6.4 demonstrates that the percentage of those in the Authorpreneur group investing is higher in every area of investment tested in comparison to the Author-artisan group. However, it is notable that the Author-artisan group also invest in each area, suggesting that many Author-artisans recognise the value of investing financially in their publishing activity regardless of their ambition level. This offers some indicative support for the notion that this cluster does not represent 'amateurs' but are instead a group often running a business all be it at a potentially lower level of commercial ambition than the Authorpreneurs.

Table 6.4: Percentage of those making self-publishing financial investments by clusters

	Authorpreneur percent	Author-artisan percent
Cover design	84	80.6
Editorial advice	70.7	68.9
Proofreading	55.3	49.8
Blog tours	22.7	18.4
Social media marketing	57.7	45.6
Launch event	24.3	22
Other marketing/advertising	77.3	67.3
Legal support	11.3	6.1
Audio version	28	23
Course in publishing	25.3	21
Course in creative writing	41	36.2

Cluster comparison: time spent per book

The survey asked authors 'Approximately how long did your last book take to produce, from identifying the concept for your book to your first sale?', with results shown in figure 6.2.
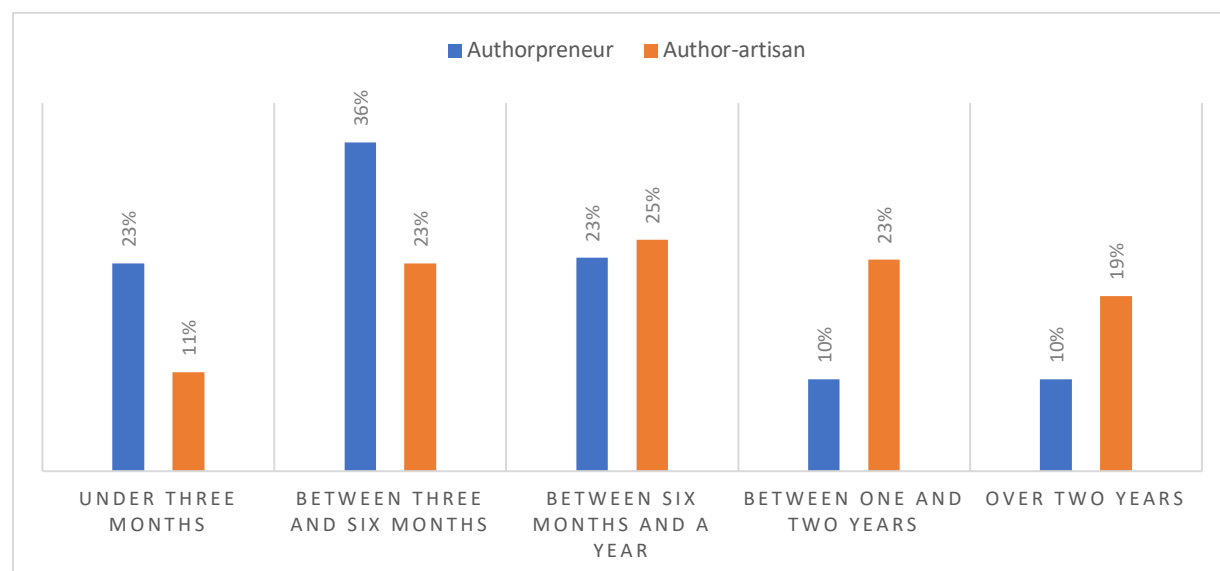
Figure 6.2: Percentage of cluster by time spent per book: Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans

Authorpreneurs are producing books on average at a far faster rate than the Author-artisans. With the majority, nearly 60% or three in five, completing their last book in under six months. At the other end of the spectrum, 42% of Author-artisans are taking over a year, double those who sit in the Authorpreneur group. A Chi-Square Test to test the validity of this finding, demonstrated that the length of time taken to write a book when comparing those completing in under six months and those completing in six months or more, differed significantly between the two groups, c^2(1, N = 608) = 38.86, p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.25. This supports the naming conventions proposed, with Author-artisans taking more time to work on the craft of writing and/or publishing, in comparison to the Authorpreneur group.

Cluster comparison: likelihood of commercial success

Finally, both clusters were analysed in relation to their commercial success scores under the definition used in this study. When looking at the data for the Authorpreneur cluster, out of a maximum of six in the commercial success criteria, this cluster rated a mean of 3.46, placing them on average above 'breaking even'. In comparison, the Author-artisan cluster dropped to a mean commercial success score of 2.98, as shown table 6.5, an average rating of just below breaking even.

A Chi-Square Test demonstrated that commercial scorings did indeed differ significantly between the two clusters when comparing those at break even or below with those above break even (i.e. all those scoring as commercially successful at some level), c^2(1, N = 590) = 7.20, p < 0.007, Cramer's V = 0.11.

Table 6.5: Authorpreneur and Author-artisan cluster results for commercial success scores

	Authorpreneur	Author-Artisan
Valid	296	294
Missing	4	15
Mean	3.46	2.98
Median	3.00	2.00
Std. Deviation	1.60	1.52
Variance	2.57	2.32

When looked at in further detail, the results show that over 17% of the Authorpreneur cluster are sitting at the 'very commercially successful' level and further 29% as 'slightly commercially successful' or 'moderately commercially successful', meaning 46.7% were in some way commercially successful. Among those sitting below breaking even, only 5.3% felt negative that this would change, with just over 35% feeling positive that they were going in the right direction.

Table 6.6: Commercial success scores in detail for Authorpreneur cluster

Commercial success level: Authorpreneurs	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not Comm. Successful (and negative)	16	5.3	5.4
Not Comm. Successful (and positive)	106	35.3	35.8
Breaking Even (Neutral)	34	11.3	11.5
Slightly Commercially Successful	58	19.3	19.6
Moderately Commercially Successful	29	9.7	9.8
Very Commercially Successful	53	17.7	17.9
TOTAL ANSWERED	296	98.7	100
Missing	4	1.3	-
TOTAL	300	100	-

In contrast, the Author-artisan segment sees a more than halving of the 'Very commercially successful' score with 8.4% at this level, as demonstrated in table 6.7. At the other end of the spectrum, those Author-artisan authors who are not commercially successful in this cluster are more than twice as likely to feel negative about making money in the future. This may also reflect that a higher proportion do not have as their key criterion for success the ambition to make money.

Table 6.7: Commercial success scores in detail for Author-artisan cluster

Commercial success level: Author-artisans	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not Comm. Successful (and negative)	40	12.9	13.6
Not Comm. Successful (and positive)	115	37.2	39.1
Breaking Even (Neutral)	32	10.4	10.9
Slightly Commercially Successful	51	16.5	17.3
Moderately Commercially Successful	30	9.7	10.2
Very Commercially Successful	26	8.4	8.8
TOTAL ANSWERED	294	95.1	100
Missing	15	4.9	-
TOTAL	309	100	-

Although there is some clear difference in commercial success between the two clusters, it is telling that there is commercial success at some level represented in both. This perhaps indicates that regardless as to your motivations, mindset or approach, some great writing will rise to the surface and bring commercial success, and counter to that, despite taking a positive business approach, some creative work will not cut through, whether that is due to skill, professionalism, trends, or other challenges.

The 'self-published' author or the 'indie' author?

Throughout cluster analysis of both groups, a theme has surfaced repeatedly. Regardless of approach, rarely is a 'self-published' author working by themselves as the name implies. They are more often than not working with suppliers across the spectrum through the publishing process. Authors in both the Authorpreneur and Author-artisan clusters are engaging services such as proofreaders, editors, print distributors, designers, and marketing professionals. And for hybrid authors – explored further later in this study – they may be working both independently and with a traditional publisher for one or more of their book formats.

An argument could therefore be made that the sector should proactively change the labelling used within and outside of the community for the self-published author in general, moving away from the concept of a 'self-published' author. A change in nomenclature was included in the final recommendations of the paper 'Who are the self-publishers?' where the suggestion of 'independent publishing' was included, alongside an alternative proposal to remove the distinction between models completely, referring to any and all publishing routes as purely 'publishing' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.13).

This study would suggest instead that as there are specific needs and information required from those self-publishing that differ to those working with a traditional publisher, and a naming convention continues to be beneficial to ensure this community can identify and communicate with one another and find the information and suppliers they require. However, the recommendation would be to unite

behind the label of the 'independent author' or 'indie author'. Retaining 'author' in the title ensures there is no confusion with the 'independent publisher', which generally refers to those publishing houses that sit outside of the 'Big Five'.

This is not a new label for the sector, but is currently used interchangeably and arguably less often than the 'self-published' label; examples of the latter being the 'Selfies' for the self-published book awards, the 'Self-Publishing Advice Centre' for the digital advice hub from the Alliance of Independent Authors or the 'Self Publishing Formula' for Mark Dawson's training and advice community. Reframing those in the model as indie or independent authors would also align with language used in the wider art for the entertainment sector, such as music and filmmaking, who produce work outside of the larger, traditional models and organisations.

6.4   Summary

This analysis was run to respond specifically to test Hypothesis 2 (H2): Self-published authors can be segmented by their success drivers, with segments representing authors motivated by three factors: commercial success, completion success, reputational success.

In answer, the study has segmented and named self-published author clusters for the first time. The data demonstrated that these authors can be grouped into two fairly evenly sized, distinct clusters based on their success drivers, with financial and career led motivators being of most importance to defining the two clusters. Neither Completion nor Reputational success were found to define these two clusters as had originally been hypothesised. The clusters in summary are:

- **Cluster A – the 'Authorpreneur':** indicates a highly ambitious mindset across all success drivers and is highly motivated by building a long-term and sustainable career, publishing more work, and increasing sales, with a fair proportion looking to make a 'high income' from their books. This cluster produce multiple books at high speed, often as quickly as a book every six months, and indicate a higher likelihood of both seeking and finding commercial success in comparison to Author-artisans.

- **Cluster B – the 'Author-artisan':** indicates a low-to-moderate commercial ambitious mindset and is more likely to produce work at a smaller scale, in terms of their ambition for their writing career and the speed at which they produce their work. Those belonging to this cluster indicate a lower likelihood for both seeking or finding commercial success in comparison to Authorpreneurs and are slightly less likely to invest in professional services in relation to their work, although they still demonstrate a commitment to increasing sales of their writing at a level on their terms.

Both clusters hold a similar view in relation to building a loyal readership and putting their own ideas in place, showing a shared importance for fulfilling their readers' needs and taking autonomy for their work that sits across all independent authors regardless of segment.

An additional finding is that across clusters, self-published authors are not working alone, and the potential to shift labelling from 'self-published' to 'independent' or 'indie' author more proactively and consistently could be considered for clarity in relation to changing perceptions of the indie author community and the work it produces.

A final note on crossover within the segmented clusters

It should be noted, that by defining two clusters, the intention is not to suggest that there is no crossover between the two personae. Those who are Authorpreneurs will also want to hone their craft alongside focusing on business goals, and those who are Author-artisans have also shown an interest in making or increasing sales (albeit at a lower level of ambition) and may also want to build a career in this area. However, their mindset in terms of financial and career goals, as well as their general levels of ambition when approaching their independently published work, differ – as evidenced in the study.

The naming conventions recommended in this study aim to sum up the primary drivers by group to help build an understanding of those who are independently publishing and offer a consistent way of discussing these two distinct groups, which may be of use both for authors and for those targeting them with information or services most relevant to their needs and interests.

Neither group should be considered of more importance than the other, and all independent authors, regardless of lead motivation, have chosen to take the next step of publishing their written work, rather than leaving it in the notebook by their bedside, or purely sending a print-out to family and friends. This is an act that ensures their content is available to all, exists in the future, and can be shared with readers at a level that suits the author's goals.

Chapter 7: Findings & Discussion – Factors for Self-Published Author Commercial Success

7.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to test Hypothesis 3 (H3). This stated that factors shared by commercially successful authors will be drawn across the following variables: Personality Traits, Protected Characteristics, Previous Experience, Motivations, and Investment Activities. Identifying these factors could support author choices when independently publishing.

Having established in Chapter Five that there are indeed commercially successful independent authors, including representation across Amazon Kindle bestsellers in 2023, the next step for analysing the survey responses was to identify independent variables more likely to be shared by those who are commercially successful under the definition of this study. Chapter Six then identified two clusters, the Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans, with differing levels of financial motivation. However, it also identified that financially successful authors sat within both clusters. Therefore, data in this chapter has been analysed with independent authors as one group to identify shared trends for success, regardless the segment within which an author sits.

Respondents' commercial success scores, based on the self-reporting author data, were analysed via IBMs SPSS system against the independent variables using Bivariate Pearson correlations to identify the relevant factors demonstrating statistically valid impact on an independent author's commercial success scoring. A multiple regression for personality traits specifically was processed to identify the traits of most importance to commercial success by level.

Note that when reviewing results for correlations, a negative sign before the strength of the relationship figure denotes a negative relationship between the variable and the statement. The following scoring for strength of relationship has been used (Pallant, 2020): Small: 0.10 – 0.29, Medium: 0.30 – 0.49, Large: 0.50 – 1.00. The confidence levels in the strength of relationship between the factors being correlated are shown by the significant (sig.) results, those returning a significant confidence level indicated by a score of: < 0.05

7.2   Personality Traits and Self-Published Author Success

This section sets out to test Hypothesis 3a (H3a): The indie author population will show similar personality traits to other 'creatives', including high Openness. For those who are commercially successful, a profile closer to the entrepreneur will be found, with negative associations for Agreeableness and positive associations for Extraversion.

As shown in figure 7.1, initial analysis of the personality test data for all independent authors responding to the survey was undertaken to produce a baseline for independent author personality traits and identify the mean (average) personality trait score, from a maximum of 50 points, for each of the Big Five personality markers. This identified a profile with Openness as the highest identified trait (mean score of 43), down to Extraversion (mean score 29) at the lowest point.
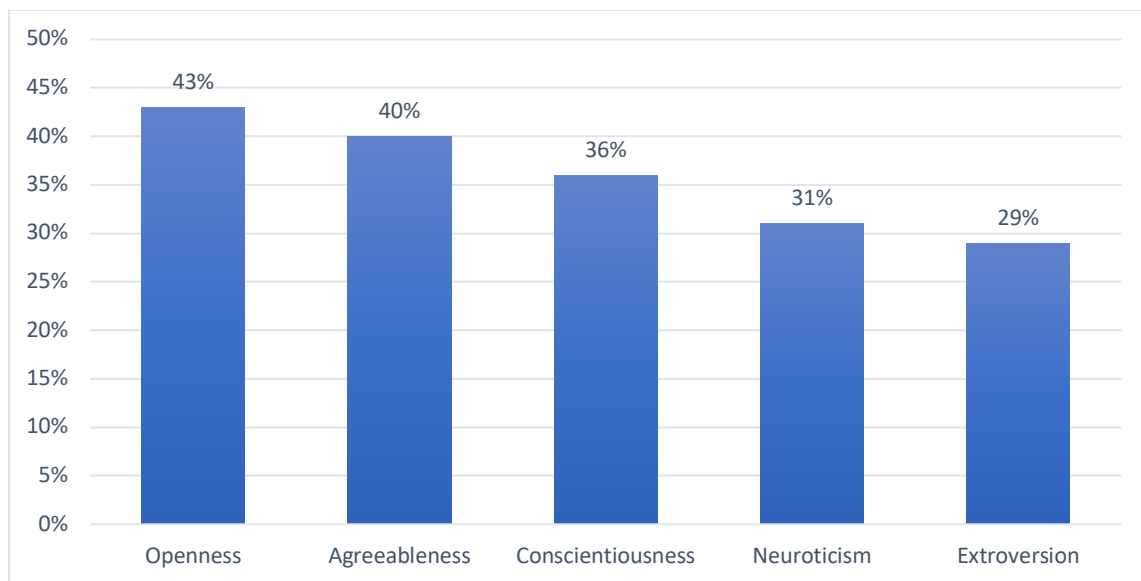
Figure 7.1: Average (mean) scores for all independent respondents combined.

For further detail on these figures, see table 7.1 detailing a range of supporting frequency data. Of note here is that the standard deviation – the difference between the highest score and the lowest score given – is wide in some instances, for example, with over a 9-point difference for Extraversion, whereas for Openness, there is more consistency of scoring, with a standard deviation found of 4.49.

	Total Openness	Total Agreeableness	Total Conscientiousness	Total Neuroticism	Total Extraversion
Valid	609	609	609	609	609
Mean	42.80	40.41	35.64	31.12	28.52
Median	43.00	41.00	36.00	31.00	28.00
Std. Deviation	4.49	5.98	7.16	8.94	9.06
Minimum	23	18	13	10	10
Maximum	50	50	50	50	50

This baseline profile for all independent authors responding to the survey demonstrates a similar skew for high Openness shown in the profile identified for the 'creatives' and for the 'entrepreneurs' outlined in the methodology for this study. Similarly, Neuroticism, identified as a low-scoring trait may demonstrate a similarity with the comparison profiles, where Neuroticism had a negative association. This score recognises creativity and curiosity, a finding that is supportive of the creativity of the independent community as authors producing creative works.

Once the above benchmark personality profile for all independent authors responding to the study was produced, further data were analysed to explore whether the respondents themselves self-reported that their personality impacted their success level. To achieve this, all authors were asked: 'To what extent do you believe any of your characteristics have negatively or positively impacted your experience when publishing your book?' In the first instance this was asked in relation to 'Your personality characteristics (e.g. your outlook on life or work)'.

Respondents could select from a five-point Likert scale: Extremely Negative, Somewhat Negative, Neither Positive nor Negative, Somewhat Positive, Extremely Positive. Table 2.2 demonstrates how much of an impact in general authors felt their personality characteristics had on their success:

Table 7.2: Results for independent authors in relation to the perceived impact of their personality traits on success

	Number of respondents	Percentage	Combined score categories	Combined scores
Extremely Negative	8	1%		
Somewhat Negative	78	13%	All Negative	86
Neither Positive nor Negative	142	24%	All Neutral	142
Somewhat Positive	216	36%		
Extremely Positive	158	26%	All Positive	374

The positive responses did not add further detail to the original hypothesis in terms of referencing specific personality traits. However, the 86 respondents (13%) who felt their personality had an extremely or somewhat negative impact on their success did reveal a indicative trend in perception.

From this group, 45 respondents had chosen to add a free text comment regarding their characteristics and their impact on publishing. These comments were analysed to identify those comments utilising adjectives relating to one or more of the Big Five personality traits (see Chapter Four for further methodology information). No trait had a significant number of comments related to it, at one to three comments each, and have therefore not been described in detail here. However, 12 comments could be identified as related to the Extraversion trait, with examples shared below:

- *Very introverted, makes it hard to self-promote or build relationships with potential reader groups, leading to low visibility and low sales*
- *I'm very introverted and that often feels like it's holding me back*
- *Being an introvert, it's difficult to put myself out there for promotions/marketing purposes.*
- *As a shy, introvert I do not pursue marketing like many other authors*
- *My character is not forceful enough to acieve (sic) success and in my attitudes and actions I am my own worst enemy*

These comments, direct from independent authors, further support the hypothesis that those rating highly in Extraversion (i.e. those not restricted by introversion) would be found to be more likely to succeed when independently publishing.

To investigate the potential impact of personality traits on the likelihood of success, a multiple regression analysis was run where commercial success was the outcome variable and the five personality traits were used as the predictor variables.

Table 7.3: Results for multiple regression run for Big Five personality traits against commercial success scores for independent authors

	Mean	Standard Deviation	β	Standard Error	p (Sig.)
Financial Success	3.22	1.581	-	-	-
Extraversion	28.52	9.063	0.001	0.008	0.947
Agreeableness	40.41	5.980	-0.031	0.011	0.006
Conscientiousness	35.64	7.162	-0.011	0.009	0.225
Neuroticism	31.12	8.941	0.018	0.008	0.016
Openness	42.80	4.489	0.022	0.015	0.134

Through a one-way ANOVA, the model was found to be statistically significant, $F(5, 584) = 3.067$, p = 0.010, explaining 2.6% of the variance in the outcome variable. Among the five personality traits only agreeableness ($\beta = -.031$, $p = .006$) and neuroticism ($\beta = .018$, $p = .016$) were significant predictors of commercial success. This indicated that as an author rated lower in Agreeableness, they were slightly more likely to have an increased score for commercial success, and conversely as an author rated higher in Neuroticism, they were slightly more likely to have an increased score for commercial success.

Despite demonstrating personality having a small (2.6%) impact on the likelihood of commercial success, the findings specifically for a small negative association for agreeableness and small positive association for neuroticism are noteworthy considering the size of the sample in this study and that personality traits have not been identified as a potentially significant factor in success prior to this. This may indicate that these small differences in personality for the commercially successful group are worthy of future exploration.

Regarding the previously noted lack of clarity and conflicting findings in relation to the ideal level of Agreeableness for entrepreneurial success, one paper suggested that those high in Agreeableness may find business success, as the trait offers them the skills to gain partner and customers' trust (Bandera and Passerini, 2020). The counter argument to this suggests that low Agreeableness may offer a focus on competitiveness and oneself that aids commercial success, and that those who are too agreeable, may be 'gullible' in business, which may impact success likelihood (Zhao et al. 2010, p.388). Potentially, depending on the type of business someone is aiming to build, and their requirement to work for or with others, the difference in Agreeableness will impact in different ways. As independent authors are working primarily alone in terms of decision-making, time management and funding, bringing in services and individuals only when needed and under their own direction, it would follow that low Agreeableness would support this independent business model and ensure a focus on their own work, while protecting them from potential missteps or scams. In addition, the findings relating to a small increase in neuroticism for those scoring as commercially successful, indicating an increased propensity to anxiety and impatience among other traits (Heinström, 2013), may further support the profile of an author who is highly focused (for good or bad) on their own work and striving for completion to alleviate impatience.

What is perhaps more significant when reviewing these findings, is that Extraversion specifically showed no impact on the likelihood of success, with those both commercially successful and unsuccessful authors rating consistently low in relation to this trait. As noted by the free-text responses, a general sense in the community is that, as marketing and sales is a significant part of the publishing business, those authors who are not extraverted find these activities more difficult and are therefore less likely to undertake them and succeed. This study does not provide evidence to support that assumption.

To explore this in more detail, each individual question used for the personality testing was processed via the Pearson correlation against financial success scores (1-6). This aimed to identify if specific elements of each personality trait might be found to impact success, beyond the overall scores for that trait. The following findings identify those specific statements from the personality testing with significant differences found between those who were commercially successful (scoring 4, 5 or 6) and those who were not (scoring 1, 2 or 3).

Extraversion specific items:

Two statements relating to the Extraversion trait showed a small negative association for two statements related to interest in other people: 'Am interested in people' and 'Feel others' emotions'.

Table 7.4: Correlations for two Extraversion statements and commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Am interested in people (Extraversion)	Pearson Correlation	-.108**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009
	N	590
Feel others' emotions (Extraversion)	Pearson Correlation	-.107**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009
	N	590

The negative impact of these two statements could again suggest an internal focus, rather than an external focus, in terms of personality traits for commercially successful authors. However, as the statements have small ratings in terms of the strength of relationship, motivation questions relating to external validation were also processed against commercial success scores. This found that when asked to rate views on industry feedback, a negative association for success was found, albeit at a low level. Note that no correlation was found for positive reader feedback, showing no significance in importance for this success motivator between authors of different commercial success levels:

Table 7.5: Correlations for two external validation statements and commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Public, positive feedback from readers	Pearson Correlation	0.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.468
	N	590
Public, positive feedback from industry	Pearson Correlation	-.140**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	590

The evidence suggests a negative relationship with industry feedback rises as commercial success grows, indicating that those highly seeking industry validation were slightly less likely to find success, and those rating it lower were slightly more likely to find success. The causal relationship is unclear here, as it may be that as success grows, interest in external validation wanes. However, it may also relate to the wider trend observed during this analysis, that those finding success are more internally focused and motivated, independently minded, with a lower level of interest in others' feelings and potential opinions.

All other personality items:

All other personality testing statements showed no correlations for success, with the exception of two further statements evidencing a negative correlation with commercial success, as demonstrated in table 7.6.

Table 7.6: Correlations for two additional statements of significance and commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas (Openness)	Pearson Correlation	-.124[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003
	N	590
Worry about things (Neuroticism)	Pearson Correlation	-.116[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005
	N	590

The negative relationship with commercial success scores for these items suggests authors who are more open to abstract ideas are also more likely to find commercial success. This supports the concept of being 'open' in general which has already been identified as positively impacting success.

The second statement of significance suggests that those who are less likely to 'worry about things' in general than their counterparts are also marginally more likely to find commercial success. Although small, this shift in outlook in relation to worry specifically within the neuroticism trait may be enough to make a difference for some in terms of success likelihood, even when overall neuroticism may be slightly more likely within the commercially success group.

In summary: trends identified from personality profiling

The data indicated that personality could explain just 2.6% of the difference in commercial success levels amongst indie authors, with the following observations for those independent authors scoring more highly for commercial success:

1. **Openness: No association for success** – overall, commercially successful independent authors demonstrated a high level of Openness, a trait shared with all independent authors, alongside a small positive association specifically for reporting a high level of understanding of abstract ideas.
2. **Conscientiousness: No association for success** – and no wider findings.
3. **Extraversion: No association for success** – overall, commercially successful independent authors mirrored the wider indie author community with a skew to low Extraversion, specifically demonstrating a slight negative association for interest and empathy for others.
4. **Agreeableness: A small negative association for success** – and demonstrating similarities to some personality profiles of successful entrepreneurs, where Agreeableness is still in contention in the literature, but some find a lower level can increase success.

5. **Neuroticism: A small positive association for success** – and demonstrating a slight propensity to report lower levels specifically against the 'worry' element of this trait in comparison with those not finding commercial success.

Though demonstrating a small impact overall on commercial success likelihood (2.6%), the findings in relation to personality traits – and the related behaviours and outlooks they lead to – may be worth authors reflecting upon as indicative of actions within their own control. This may be empowering within a challenging sector where many factors for success can be outside of the authors influence.

7.3   Demographics and Self-Published Author Success

This section sets out to test Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Demographic characteristics will have no impact on the likelihood of success, given authors are taking full personal control for their careers and are not impacted by gatekeeper interventions.

Initial analysis processed all demographic data against the full scale of commercial success (1-6), using Pearson correlations to identify if any demographics were finding a greater likelihood of success over others. This analysis found that, as anticipated, no significant strength of relationship was found between a higher score for commercial success when correlated against the majority of protected characteristics, including age, gender, ethnic background, caring responsibilities, disability and so on. Meaning that these characteristics showed no significant negative or positive impact on the likelihood of success.

It should be recognised here that levels of diversity of the responses, reflective also of the diversity findings from the Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller analysis, was low in general, specifically among ethnic background representation. However, it can still be viewed as indicative of the wider author community and is in line with other data, such as the Baverstock and Steinitz paper which found that the demographics they monitored had no significant impact on the likelihood of taking the independent route as a whole, with the outcome finding that self-publishing is undertaken across the demographic spectrum (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a).

However, two markers against socioeconomic background did demonstrate an impact on commercial success: household income and parental education. Those who had a parent holding a degree or higher had a minor increase in likelihood of commercial success if household income was above national average, or if parents completed school, as demonstrated in table 7.7.

Table 7.7: Correlations for household income and parental education against commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Income below average/same/above	Pearson Correlation	.125[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.007
	N	468
Parents education - completed school/not completed school	Pearson Correlation	.107[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009
	N	584

In relation to parental education, as already discussed, across the publishing communities it was found that authors were more likely than the general population in either UK or US to have parents who have completed a degree and further a doctorate, which would also indicate a higher level of school completion. Specifically in relation to success, it was found that school completion increased the likelihood of success, or the inverse, that parental school non-completion decreased the likelihood of commercial success. Comparable data has found that, while 82% of those with parents holding a bachelor's degree or higher enrolled in college, only 36% of those whose parents had not received their high school diploma (equivalent to completing secondary schooling in the UK) enrolled in college (Wirt et al., 2001). Those authors coming from an upbringing where education was traditionally completed and therefore may be seen as of higher value, or at a minimum viewed as 'the norm', may have found more support for their writing activity, often viewed as a more intellectual pursuit, from the outset. This may come in the form of practical and financial support for completing a book, or emotional and motivational support to build the resilience and confidence needed to complete the publishing process and share your story.

In general, parental education levels, as well as above average household income, are also indicators of higher socioeconomic status, and with that status will come advantages, not only a higher likelihood for financial flexibility, but in relation to increased levels of good health, increased overall quality of life, and a broader more diverse network of social connections (Nutakor, 2023). These advantages may explain the slight increase in success likelihood for those pursuing publishing through the indie route.

7.4 Experience and Self-Published Author Success

This section sets out to test Hypothesis 3c (H3c): Those with work experience or training within the practical areas of publishing (writing, marketing, publishing) will show a higher likelihood for commercial success. Similarly, those releasing more books more regularly will show a higher likelihood for success.

Involvement in relevant work experience and impact on commercial success

All previous experience was processed through the Pearson correlation against commercial success scores, with the unexpected finding that there was no discernible increase in the likelihood of financial success for those who have had a job in a related field, such as writing, publishing, or marketing, or for those who had contacts in the industry. This is at odds both with the hypothesis, which assumed that those moving into independent publishing with existing related knowledge would have an advantage over others. It is also at odds with author perceptions. Several examples have been selected here from the survey free-text responses in relation to work experience:

- *(In relation to positive impact of experience) Can do it attitude and background in marketing.*
- *I had experience with graphic design and book cover creation, so that saved me a lot of money on my own book covers and marketing.*
- *My main business revolves around selling content to business owners, so I have a lot of existing writing experience. I was also a digital agency owner for 14 years, so have a lot of experience with web design, graphic design, and marketing. It was easy to transfer those skills into writing a book, creating a cover, marketing and so on.*
- *My degree and previous professional career help me run my business successfully.*

The study itself cannot directly account for why related work experience did not appear to offer an advantage to independent authors. However, it may be explained by the proliferation of information available to the community, which potentially levels the playing field quickly for those entering the market from other sectors. For example, the main body for independent authors, the Alliance of Independent Authors, offers over 2,000 informative blog posts and podcasts on their website for free targeted at first time publishers, as well as those growing their business. The advantage therefore may quickly be evened out across the community as authors and support groups share information and teach key skills for free.

Training and impact on commercial success

Taking courses in publishing showed no significant impact on commercial success likelihood, while the data showed specifically that those taking creative writing courses were slightly less likely, albeit with a small impact, to find commercial success:

Table 7.8: Correlations for undertaking a publishing or creative writing course against commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Undertaken course - publishing skills	Pearson Correlation	-0.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.081
	N	590
Undertaken course - creative writing	Pearson Correlation	-.109[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008
	N	590

There are no identified studies into the impact of creative writing courses on the skill or quality level of the writers themselves. However, some debate has taken place between academics at a range of events and in articles, for example during a talk given in Bath by best-selling *Buddha of Suburbia* author and at the time Kingston University Creative Writing Professor, Hanif Kureishi. Kureishi shared his view that 99.9% of his students were not talented in their chosen field and implied that any teaching he could share with them would not dramatically change that position. He continued:

> A lot of my students just can't tell a story. They can write sentences but they don't know how to make a story go from there all the way through to the end without people dying of boredom in between. It's a difficult thing to do and it's a great skill to have. Can you teach that? I don't think you can (Kureishi as shared by Flood, 2014).

Counter views have also been shared, for example by novelist Matt Haig:

> Creative writing lessons can be very useful, just like music lessons can be useful. To say, as Hanif Kureishi did, that 99.9% of students are talentless is cruel and wrong. I believe that certain writers like to believe they arrived into the world with special, unteachable powers because it is good for the ego (...) Of course, it is always important to know your limitations. For instance, I could have 7,000 guitar lessons but I wouldn't be Hendrix, though I would be a lot better than I am now. Like most artforms writing is part instinct and part craft. The craft part is the part that can be taught, and that can make a crucial difference to lots of writers (Haig as shared by Alison Flood, 2014).

Without a relevant study to refer to it is not possible to come to a rounded conclusion on the reason for the negative association, but the views from established authors above offer a theory that some who seek a creative writing course may not have the natural storytelling ability to find success. They may improve their craft but may be less likely to reach the top heights of author success. It should be noted that authors from across the success levels attended creative writing courses, however, so it should not be inferred from the finding that it is an actively negative action to pursue a creative writing course as part of the author's learning-journey, but that consideration should be taken as to

the realistic outcomes of such a course, particularly in comparison to the cost and time it takes to complete.[53]

Prolificacy and impact on commercial success

The survey asked respondents how many books they had published and for how many years they had been publishing. To select the number of books produced, authors were given the option of individual figures from 1 to 49 and then '50 or more'. Therefore, those who selected 50 or more may well have produced many more than the top figure. This was anticipated at the outset to represent a small number of authors. However, 38 of the responding independent authors reported publishing 50 books or over, representing just over 5% of all authors. This finding will be reflected in the learnings from this study for future researchers as continuing to request more detailed book figures over the 50 books marker may yield new information regarding author prolificacy. In this instance, however, it can be assumed the numbers at the top end of the figures are conservative representations, as any author reporting 50 or more books has been rated as a 50 but may well have produced more.

In terms of analysing the prolificacy data, first the total number of books produced was analysed by level of success to find the mean (average) number of books per success level. This data produced the following breakdown in the figure 7.2. As the data shows, this demonstrates a relationship between the number of books produced on the commercial success score. Those rated as very commercially successful reported producing over 27 books each on average, versus those at the other end of the spectrum reporting just under five books on average.
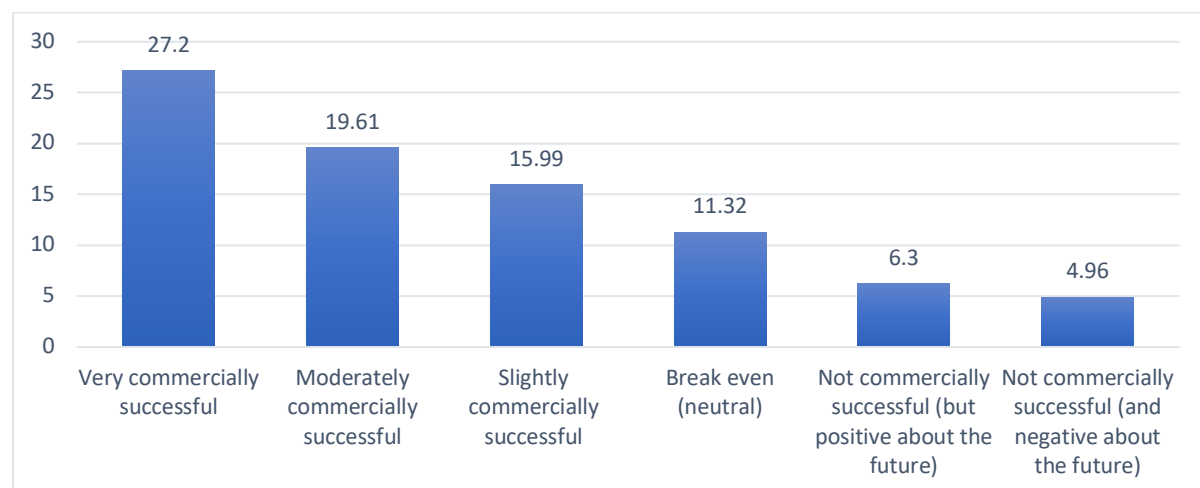
Figure 7.2: Mean (average) number of books produced by commercial success score

Turning to the number of years over which they had been involved in publishing, this figure was analysed with the mean (average) number of years for each group by success rating compared in the

---

[53] One further possibility, as yet unstudied, is that pursuits such as creative writing courses can be used as displacement or procrastination activities for those seeking to complete a book. Dr Jo Royle, now Head of the School of Creative and Cultural Business at Robert Gordon University, has informally previously commented on her time communicating with writing magazine subscribers that this was potentially evidenced in 'Letters to the Editor' content she received. This may merit further investigation.

following corresponding chart. Here, a difference between groups is less clear, and although the highest number of years is shown by the most successful group, all other groups have also been publishing for over five years on average. It therefore seems unlikely that length of time publishing alone is impacting the likelihood of success.
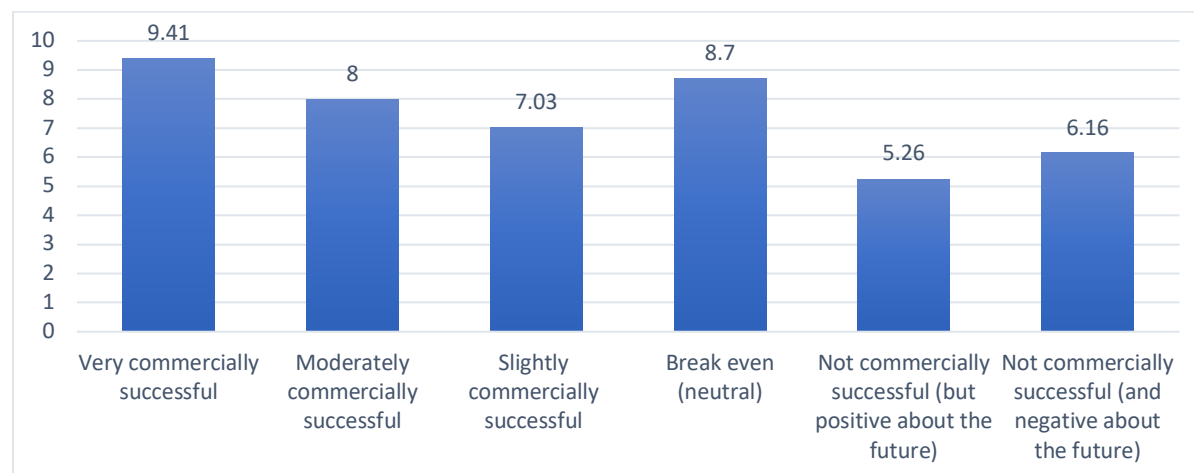
Figure 7.3: Mean (average) number of years writing by commercial success score.

However, it is when these two figures are used in combination that the importance of the second question – related to the number of years' involvement in publishing – becomes more critical to understanding success. When dividing the number of books produced by the number of years active, it can be seen in Figure 7.4 that the mean number of books per year is significantly higher for the three groups who are finding commercial success in comparison with the break-even group and the groups who are not finding commercial success. The highest level of books per year (mean of 3.44) can be seen for those who are rated at the very highest level of commercial success, over three times the number of books per year active than the lowest rated group who are not commercially successful and feel negative about the future, at 1.1 books per year.
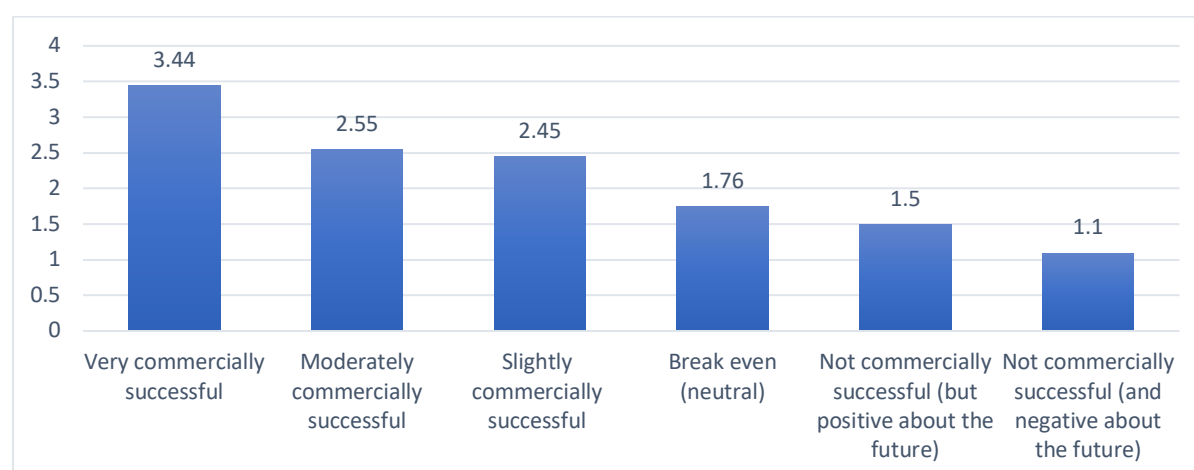
Figure 7.4: Mean (average) books per years by commercial success score

The data therefore suggests that although years of experience may have some impact on the chances of success, it is the prolificacy of publishing each year that is of more importance. This could indicate that producing more written works more regularly increases a writer's experience, knowledge, and skill, contributing to success, or it more likely indicates a marketing impact from being able to offer more products to your niche audience which may increase financial success year-on-year. As previously noted, in the publishing sector this is known as the 'read through' effect (Cavannagh, 2019), whereby you produce a series, with each book marketing the next to a committed audience. Often a publisher, or indie author, will offer the first book at a low cost, or for free, on their chosen platform or their website as a 'reader magnet' to entice a reader to start the series and then continue the read-through journey. This is only possible with a critical mass of books produced and available for marketing.

No academic literature has been produced on reader preference for series. However, Written Word Media, a book promotion service, has run a survey with a sizeable proportion of their reader membership regarding reader preferences when selecting books. On series popularity, their findings were:

> Authors like writing in series. Marketers like marketing series. But how do readers feel? The overwhelming majority of readers are indifferent with 60% of respondents saying that they have no preference between series or standalone books. 14% said they prefer series while 26% said they prefer standalone books (Noblit, 2021).

14% may seem a small figure, however, if this 14% is a more prolific reader group, then they may be of disproportionate importance to an author in terms of read through on their books and repeat business. In 2016, for example, it was found by Kobo, the eReader platform, that 16% of their most enthusiastic customers bought one ebook 'almost every day' (Flood, 2016). And for these readers, though they may make up a small number of readers overall, they buy a much greater number of books in total. Kobo's data also revealed that 75% of the most active readers (those reading at least 30 minutes a day) were women, and the biggest search in prolific ebook reading was among those aged over 45. This group is the most likely to read Romance and Crime, the two genres in which series publication is often found and two of the top five most often selected genres by the independent authors responding to the author survey.

7.5 Motivators and Self-Published Author Success

This section sets out to test Hypothesis 3d (H3d): Those motivated by financial gain will show a higher likelihood for commercial success.

To analyse the impact of motivators on the likelihood of success, all statements in the motivator section of the survey (success driver statements) were processed for correlations with commercial success scores. Data evidenced that all those statements related to financial motivations rose in importance as the success rating for the author rose: Building a stable living as an author; Gaining positive sales position in relation to genre competitor; Building a long-term career as an author; Earning a comfortable living; Earning a high income. Table 7.9 demonstrates the correlation score and significance in column three.

Table 7.9: Correlation for success drivers against commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Building a stable living as an author	Pearson Correlation	.215**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590
Gaining positive sales position in relation to genre competitor	Pearson Correlation	.138**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	590
Building a long-term career as an author	Pearson Correlation	.127**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	590
Earning a comfortable living	Pearson Correlation	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590
Earning a high income	Pearson Correlation	.251**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590

The data confirms that being motivated by commercial success does have a positive impact on the reality of finding it. This could reflect an approach by the financially motivated author to build business models focused on financial gain. This finding may also reflect the higher prevalence of the Authorpreneur group in the more highly commercially successful levels. It was found in Chapter Six that those in this cluster showed a higher likelihood for commercial success, alongside a higher financial and business focus.

7.6　Publishing Investments and Self-Published Author Success

This section sets out to test Hypothesis 3e (H3e): Increased investment in supporting publishing activities will increase the likelihood of success, specifically those investing more in marketing.

In the survey, respondents were asked to mark all those investments they had made in relation to their writing. It should be noted that on reflection, some services may have been provided to authors free-of-charge by friends, family members or other contacts, and these services may not be captured in the data. In this context, as table 7.10 demonstrates, the following investments showed positive correlations with commercial success: Proofreading, Social Media Marketing, Other marketing/advertising, Legal support, Audio Version.

Table 7.10: Correlations for investing in supporting products or services against commercial success scores

		Correlation for Commercial Success
Invested in proofreading	Pearson Correlation	.146**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590
Invested in social media marketing	Pearson Correlation	.112**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.006
	N	590
Invested in other marketing/advertising	Pearson Correlation	.153**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590
Invested in legal support	Pearson Correlation	.147**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590
Invested in audio version	Pearson Correlation	.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	590

As hypothesised, two of the significant investments were related to marketing activity: 'Other marketing/advertising' and 'Social media marketing'. It is notable that 'Other marketing/advertising' is the most impactful of these marketing factors, suggesting those thinking beyond the usual channels were finding positive results.

The finding that producing an audio version was the most significant of all choices on success likelihood was unexpected as no data had indicated this before and may indicate the importance of audio versions to an indie author's business. However, it should be acknowledged that it is complex to identify if the audiobook finding is a causal relationship; it may be that rather than producing an audio book contributing to the likelihood of success, that as people become more successful, they then

branch out into audiobooks. This possible relationship may also be applicable in terms of the findings for 'legal support', which was placed as holding the third highest correlation with success. Potentially, those who are successful find they require legal support earlier in their careers and have therefore invested. Or it may be that those who are considering their work as a business are more proactive in seeking legal representation for their decision-making.

Despite non-conclusive findings in terms of the causal relationship of these investments, there is an indication from the data that investment in professional services and marketing support in general either creates the right environment for success, or is undertaken by those who find success, and so could still be viewed as indicative of the more critical investments for those undertaking indie publishing.

The final finding of significance is the positive impact of proofreading. Investing in a professional proofreader not only increases the quality and professionalism of your work, but perhaps also indicates a fully rounded appreciation of the skillset required for publishing. Those not investing in a proofreader may also find that despite following all other success factors, once readers find the book and discover mistakes, the negative reviews will downgrade the book on sales platforms in terms of marketing space offered to them and therefore customer visibility. This is a risk it is not advisable to take if you are looking to make savings. For example, investing in professional proofing over investing in another creative writing course may be a wiser investment.

7.7   What Role Might Luck Play in Author Success?

Each potential influencing trait, behaviour or similar explored in this study represents one small factor in the story of a self-published author's success. Beyond those that can be measured, or self-reported, other events and factors will be at play. For example, while it has been reported that 'passion, perseverance, imagination, intellectual curiosity and openness to experience' are traits that surface repeatedly when studying successful people in a range of sectors, researchers in this field also acknowledge a gap in understanding of the impact what can be labelled as 'luck and opportunity' (Kaufman, 2018).

Attempts have been made to quantify the importance of luck to success; with one study of particular relevance (Pluchino, Raspisarda, Biondo, 2018). In summary, the research group produced a digital model populated by a representative sample of hypothetical 'people' (called units within the study) with different degrees of 'talent' as estimated in the population. The model played out across a period of time loosely based on a career's length of activity. During this time period a range of simulated interventions took place to represent luck and opportunities that anyone can find or be found by in a lifetime. Kaufman has succinctly summarised what happened within the model:

> All agents began the simulation with the same level of success (10 "units"). Every six months, individuals were exposed to a certain number of lucky events (in green) and a certain amount of unlucky events (in red). Whenever a person encountered an unlucky event, their success was reduced in half, and whenever a person encountered a lucky event, their success doubled proportional to their talent (to reflect the real-world interaction between talent and opportunity) (Kaufman, 2018).

The study identified a range of findings, with the most relevant to this research being that the units within the model that were set at the highest level of talent were rarely the most successful. The results demonstrated that rather it was the 'mediocre-but-lucky' individuals who were far more likely to end the test period highly successful than the 'talented-but-unlucky'. At the end of the simulation, the most successful group of individuals in the model tended to be those who were 'only slightly above average in talent but with a lot of luck in their lives'.

A further ten-year study into the nature of luck identified four key principles for increasing your luck:

- Creating and noticing chance opportunities
- Following intuition
- Maintaining positive expectations
- Adopting a resilient attitude about their luck (Wiseman, 2011).

In relation to this study, it could be inferred from these principles that by increasing your openness to experience related to your authorship, a writer may be able to increase their chance of finding 'luck'. Commercially successful authors demonstrate characteristics that may suggest this focus on creating

and noticing chance opportunities, as well as maintaining resilience. For example, the finding that those who produce more work appear to increase their likelihood of success. It may be that along with providing more products and building skills, prolificacy improves an author's chance of creating and noticing opportunities relating to each book. As a community spending time discussing shared interests, challenges, and opportunities both through digital communities and increasingly at events, the authors may also be building their own likelihood of noticing chance opportunities by proactively staying open to useful discussions, meetings, information gathering and collaborations.

Luck has also specifically been investigated in relation to entrepreneurial success and perceptions of success. Notably, one study identified a long history of research into entrepreneurial success, summarising that findings suggested a combination of skill, effort, preparation, alertness, and timing were important (McGahan and Porter, 2002; Morgan and Rego, 2009; Rose et al., 2008). Critically, the study identified that research consistently finds no explanation for more than half of the variance in performance related outcomes. Luck could be a contributing factor to this gap in understanding. To explore this further, the study analysed interview data from 70 successful entrepreneurs. Their findings showed a range of perceptions, from believing luck played little or no role to believing it paid the most significant role. Despite this range, only four out of the 70 interviewees, approximately 6%, indicated they believed that luck had no influence at all on their success when prompted (Brownall et al., 2023).

Regarding this study, when the free text answers from commercially successful authors were analysed for references to luck, none explicitly mentioned 'luck' as a factor in their success. However, it should be noted that as this study used a digital survey, there was no opportunity to prompt further on this subject. The lack of reference to luck may also be explained by the 'Black Swan' theory (Taleb, 2010). 'Black Swan' is used to describe an event that lies outside the realm of regular expectations, carries an extreme impact, and that humans produce explanations for after the fact, making it appear explainable and/or predictable. This theory can relate both to mass global events and individual events and can therefore be applied to author success on a personal level. It proposes that the reason for not recognising the importance of luck is related to the human condition of simplifying and narrating what is happening to us and around us and therefore an unwillingness to identify and label chance events (ibid).

This study seeks to find measurable and activatable factors to produce options for authors that can be selected to potentially increase success likelihood, but perhaps it is prudent not to underestimate the importance of being open to, and even proactively seeking, chance encounters that may have a disproportionate impact on success. Independent authors may also benefit from not dwelling on the stories of 'outliers' in the sector, who have found success potentially through unexplainable events, or 'luck', but who may now explain their success using a narrative that makes sense to themselves.

7.8 Summary

This chapter has explored each of the five key factors that formed Hypothesis 3 for this study (H3). The hypothesis stated that 'Factors influencing the likelihood of commercial success will be drawn across the following variables: personality traits, demographics (protected characteristics), motivations, previous experience, investment activities'.

Findings confirm that elements of all five variables outlined in the original hypothesis have indicated some level of impact – or relationship with – increased likelihood of commercial success as scored by the author survey. Some details differed from expectations, most notably that as Extraversion rose, success did not. The findings produce the following emerging selection of characteristics for authors to consider:

- **Personality Traits:** Demonstrating lower than average scores for Agreeableness and higher than average Neuroticism scores, combined with the high Openness seen across independent authors indicated a small increase for the likelihood of commercial success.
- **Protected Characteristics:** Those with parents who finished school and those earning over the average household income, showed a slight increase in likelihood to find commercial success.
- **Previous Experience:** Those producing more books more regularly appeared to benefit positively in terms of commercial success, potentially from the broader experience this brings, as well as the resulting number of books they could offer for sale.
- **Motivations:** Those driven by commercial gain and building a long-term career were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commercial success.
- **Investment Activity:** Key investments focussing on professional proofing, additional marketing support, and offering audio format options to the reader raised the likelihood of commercial success. Note that almost all respondents, regardless of success, had invested in cover design and therefore the importance of this activity could not be accurately judged and would be advisable to all authors.
- **Luck:** It should also not be forgotten that staying open to opportunity and 'luck' may supplement the proactive steps an author can take to improve success likelihood.

As a final reflection on this chapter, it should be noted that these findings represent early indications, and a full profile of a successful indie author is not yet found. Findings may, however, prove useful considerations for authors looking to find commercial success through their work. Similarly, the potential for interdependence between these shared factors identified has not been tested in this study but could be in future based on the indications found here.

Chapter 8: Findings & Discussion – Self-Publishing and Disruption of the Traditional Publishing Model

8.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter reporting on survey findings responds specifically to the two parts of Hypothesis 4. Firstly, Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Publishers need to make further changes to their model to continue to attract a wide range of authors, including involvement of authors in the process of publication, such as decision-making. Secondly, Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Those publishing through the self-publishing route will demonstrate a more diverse representation of authors than those publishing through traditional routes in reference to protected characteristics.

Thus, this chapter first explores whether there is a risk of traditional publishers losing authors to the independent model, as well as other related disruptions, such as the impact on publishing service providers. It will then move to outline what the data suggests are the expectations of authors today and how this may conflict with what the traditional publisher can offer, followed by an overview of what the data suggests can be learnt from the 'hybrid' author. This group is unique in having published both independently and through traditional publishers and can therefore offer a view of both approaches.

Key data from across the study sources will then be synthesised in the context of what the potential impact may be for authors and the wider publishing industry, and specifically whether the growth in independent publishing has disrupted the traditional model, and/or could it do so further in the future.

8.2   Are Traditional Publishers Missing Out?

Sections 8.2 – 8.4 have been explored in relation to Hypothesis 4a (H4a) as outlined above. The data related to actions taken by independent authors prior to publishing suggested that just over half of independent authors today (52%) are proactively choosing to publish without approaching an agent or publisher first. This group are completely negating gatekeeper roles, potentially resulting in traditional publishers missing out on reviewing and representing lucrative authors. This possibility is supported by Amazon Kindle Ebook Bestseller data which demonstrates that a considerable number of independent authors are producing work at the highest commercial level (14% of the total top 100 bestsellers in the sample data), in particular in comparison to publishers outside the Big Five. It may be reasonably assumed that this will continue to rise as the independent author community grows.

The survey also asked traditionally published authors whether they would consider moving to indie publishing in the future, with one in four (25%) answering 'yes' and a further 44% answering 'maybe'. This brings into question whether those using a publisher may begin to defect in greater numbers as the benefits of indie publishing become more visible, particularly for those with an existing following and wider knowledge of the publishing process, who may have little to lose from leaving a publisher but a lot to gain in terms of higher royalties.
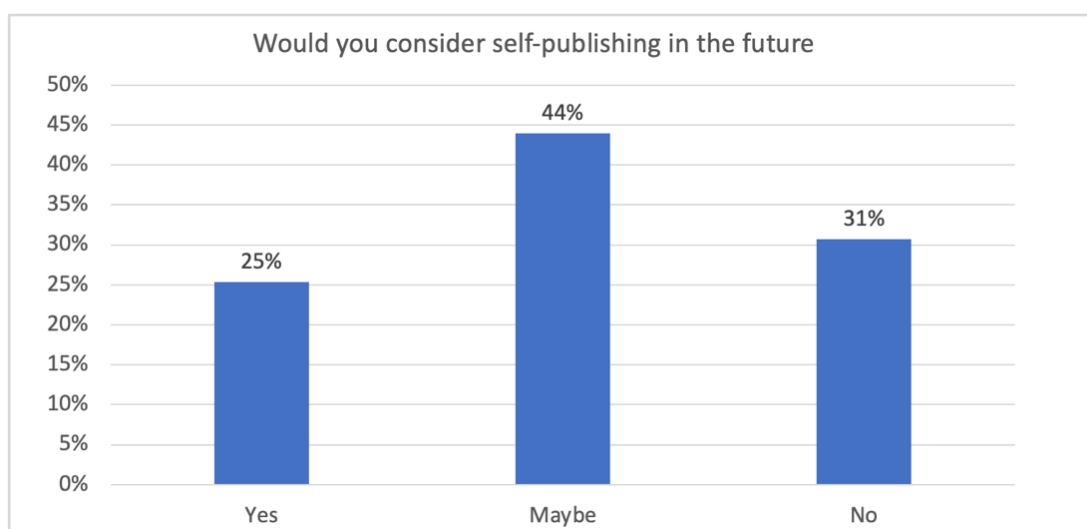
Figure 8.1: Traditionally published author survey respondents considering self-publishing in the future

All authors were asked whether they would recommend the publishing route they had taken to other authors. When traditionally published authors were asked, 65% recommended the route, 6% were undecided and chose 'maybe', while 29% would not recommend traditional publishing to other authors. There is potential overlap between the 29% of authors who would not recommend publishing through a publisher, and the 25% who would consider independent publishing in the future, indicating further that there is the possibility of some authors moving from the traditional to the

independent model, potentially up to a quarter of those traditionally publishing if this sample is indicative of the wider author population.

In contrast, when the same question was asked of the indie authors, just one author said they would not recommend independent publishing to others, with the vast majority (86%) selecting 'yes' and the remaining authors (14%) selecting 'maybe'. This result reflects the high figures found in the comparable Baverstock and Steinitz study (2013a) where a high mean (average) score of 4.2 out of 5 was found for this question which was answered through a five-point scale in the Baverstock and Steinitz survey.

Another indicator of those moving between routes can be found in the free text option when asking independent authors why they chose to independently publish over traditional publishing. 15 authors, unprompted, mentioned issues with traditional publishers in the past. Although a small overall proportion of the sample, this may offer useful information for traditional publishers considering their reputation among authors. It is worth noting that when the size of the publisher is mentioned, they are described as 'small' or 'indie'. Some comments included:

- *Had bad first experience with small indie press with my first book and knew I could do at least that if not better on my own.*
- *I had been published through a small publisher but it wasn't a good experience and I now prefer to be in control of my books.*
- *I started my career with a traditional publisher, but I didn't like the lack of creative control and the inability to effectively run advertisements with minimal royalties.*
- *I used to work for trad pub and was not impressed.*
- *I work in traditional publishing and everything I've seen, convinced me to self publish.*
- *I've had several publishers which have gone under financially. Or with whom I have become disenchanted.*
- *Published with a few small presses and learned fast I'd rather do it all on my own.*
- *Started with a major NYC publishing company, switched into Indie authorship due to issues saw with trad pub. I wanted control of the whole enchilada.*
- *The gatekeeping in traditional publishing is intense, and obnoxious tired of the traditional pub process.*
- *Was traditionally published and wanted more control and increased short and long term revenue.*

The feedback shared here, along with the wider findings from the survey, suggest an author group which is often disenchanted with the process, decision-making and timings offered by traditional publishing, and a general sense of disappointment with the experience which they hoped to be positive. The bigger question here may go beyond the specific issues raised and instead question why this negative perception of the process exists within the author community.

Project management methodologies have long extolled the importance of communication and positive teamwork for successful project delivery and perhaps this could shed some light on the experience of the author in this process. For example, The Association for Project Management, states that projects are more likely to reap success through 'effective communication' alongside 'strong teamwork', with a lack of communication classed as the biggest contributor for project failure (Palmer, 2021). It could be that publishing teams view their author not as one of the team, but as a supplier or as 'the creative' only; providing the book and then taking a step back. While the 'team members' may be kept abreast of and included in the project management elements of the process, such as key milestones and decisions, the author may not. This would reflect with challenges identified in the publishing sector previously, or as Baverstock observes in her 2007 guide to book marketing: 'To be frank, many publishers are not good at communicating with authors (or even each other)' (Baverstock, 2007, p.9).

Building communication skills among the publishing team, alongside viewing authors as part of the team, not outside of it, would potentially eliminate a range of author concerns. This may not only benefit author relationships by providing the shared decision-making opportunities some authors appear to be looking for, but may also improve wider project management delivery that would shorten timelines; a further concern for authors. This is particularly relevant here, as this chapter will explore further, because the indie author model removes these frustrations altogether. By taking the lead role in the project management process, the author also takes the lead in project communication and coordination, removing the frustration that can be found if they are left out of the loop, find delays, or feel disappointed by the process itself. They are in control.

Author expectations for their publishing role

Continuing the theme of how the author perceives their role in the publishing process, the survey offered respondents a number of statements relating to decisions that need to be made during the publishing steps. Authors could rate each statement on a scale of one to four, with the statement rated one on the scale being: 'I was the only decision maker'. The scale then moved to 'I was the main decision maker', 'I was partly involved in decision-making', and finally a four rating being 'I was not involved in decision-making'. The mean scores from these questions have been compared across the two key groups – the independent author group and the traditionally published group – to gain an insight into the autonomy of authors publishing through the different routes.

At the creative end of the process, in terms of narrative and characters, when asked about their decision-making role, a modest 0.5-point difference was found between the independently published and the traditionally published group. However, the difference increased with the more practical or business elements of the process. For example, where the book was sold, or the price point chosen. Here, as demonstrated in figure 8.2, the greatest difference between the two author groups was found. Note that the higher the mean figure, the *less* involved an author reported being in that decision-making process.
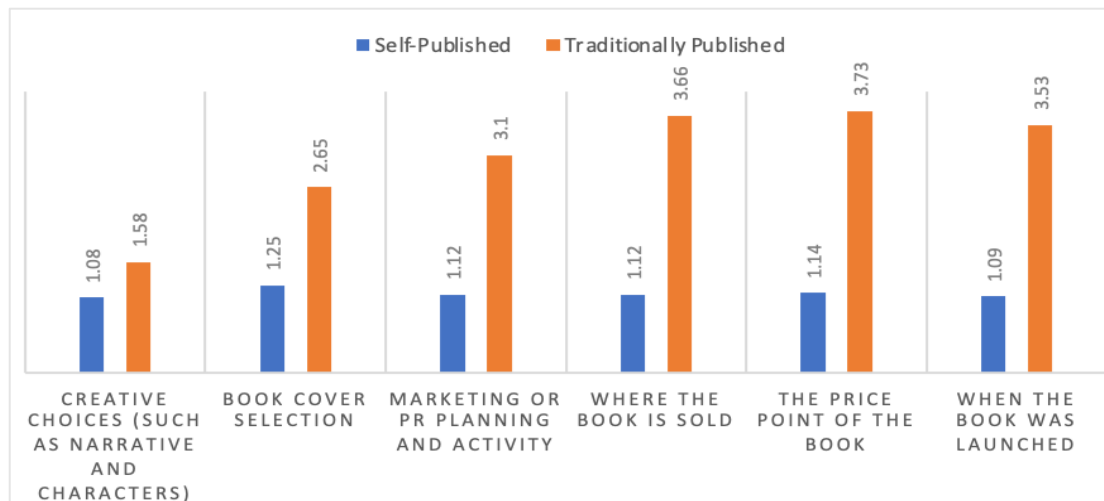
Figure 8.2: Survey respondents and the authors' role in decision-making by publishing route

Author decision-making opportunities may not be an issue for the traditional publishing industry if this is not a need or desire of the authors they represent. However, the data showed that, while 56% were satisfied, 17% – nearly one in five – traditionally published authors were not satisfied with their role in the decision-making process, with a further 27% only somewhat satisfied. This indicates that not involving authors in decision-making when they are interested in doing so could become a challenge in terms of author satisfaction and therefore retention. For this group of authors, the autonomy offered by indie publishing may be more appealing.

This finding becomes more significant in the context of the reasons people chose to independently publish over taking the traditional publishing route. The data here (see figure 8.3) demonstrated that the most popular reason, selected by 76% of indie author respondents, was 'Wanted to retain power over decisions for my book'. This was followed by 66% of respondents looking to retain a higher percentage of royalties for their book. It should also be observed that nearly a third (31%) of respondents selected that they had 'Heard negative things about traditional publishing' in contrast to the 56% who 'Had heard positive things about self-publishing'. Note that respondents could select all options that applied.
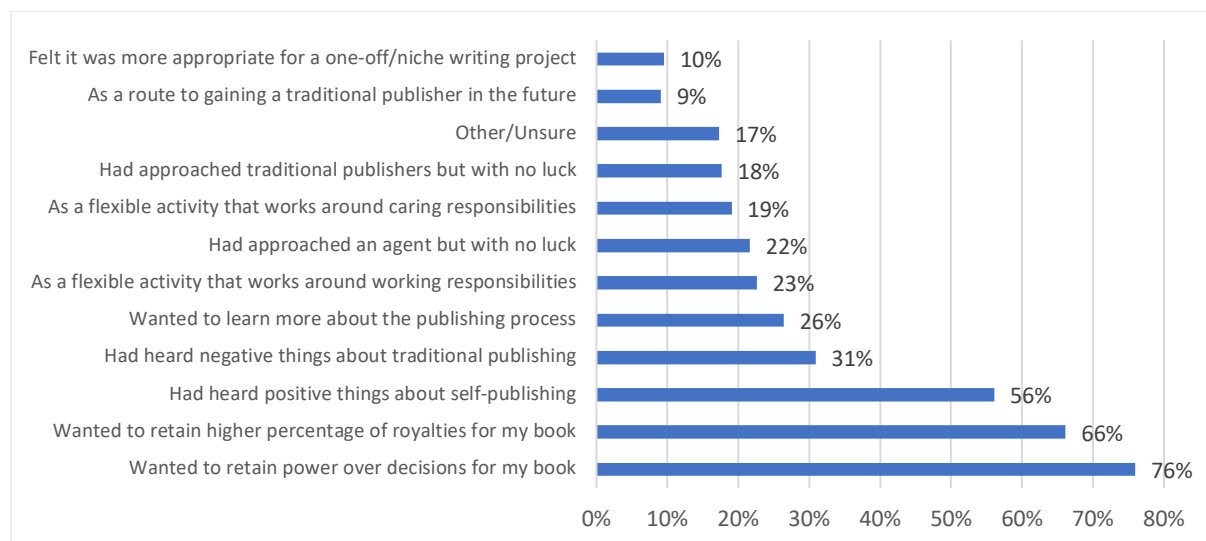
Figure 8.3: Independent and hybrid author survey respondents and the reasons to self-publish

Within the 'Other' option available for this question, the free text added a further dimension to understanding the practical reasons independent authors choose this publishing route. 44 authors offered (unprompted) 'speed' as a key issue with the traditionally published model. Had this been an option for authors in the study, this may well have found more prominence in the results, but as an unprompted response, this could be seen as significant.

Some typical examples of the free text responses on speed of publication were:

- *Didn't want to waste my precious time waiting for a trad publisher.*
- *Faster time from end of story to hitting the shelves.*
- *I did not like the process and timeline of finding an agent, very inefficient.*
- *I had a deadline and didn't want to waste time submitting manuscripts.*
- *I had an idea that was time sensitive.*
- *(…) I wanted to be able to control what stories were published and when, without any worries about traditional publishing timelines or rights grabs.*
- *I'm notoriously impatient and didn't want to waste time waiting for an agent to respond. So I never queried.*
- *Impatient for the timeline of traditional process.*
- *Irritated with long-winded attempts to find a publisher (finding agents wasn't a problem).*
- *Length of time to publish through traditional publisher and I wanted to see income sooner than that. I did not even explore querying agents due to this.*
- *(…) I wanted to publish my book without waiting years to get noticed.*

When analysing the responses from authors taking the traditional publishing route to support or refute this issue, one in 10 (10%) were not happy with the time it took to produce their book, while one in four (25%) were somewhat happy. This may indicate that those who are in the traditional system are also demonstrating frustration at the speed of the process.

The evidence from both groups combined builds a picture of an author community where a significant proportion are looking for a faster publication period than that commonly offered by traditional publishing houses. This could be reflective of the speed at which publication of digital content now takes place, and a changing expectation in terms of speed of creative production more widely. Therefore, the timeline from contract to publication may be a wider consideration for the industry, particularly for authors who favour fast-moving processes.

8.3   What Can Traditional Publishers Offer Authors?

The survey data offered an insight into the unique selling points traditional publishers could emphasise in terms of what they can offer to authors. In particular, when traditionally published authors were asked why they had chosen that publishing route over any other, three benefits were regularly highlighted as being of most importance: 'Offering support for creative decision-making', 'Offering qualified recognition', and 'Offering support for practical publishing activities'. The full details of the responses are shared in figure 8.4.
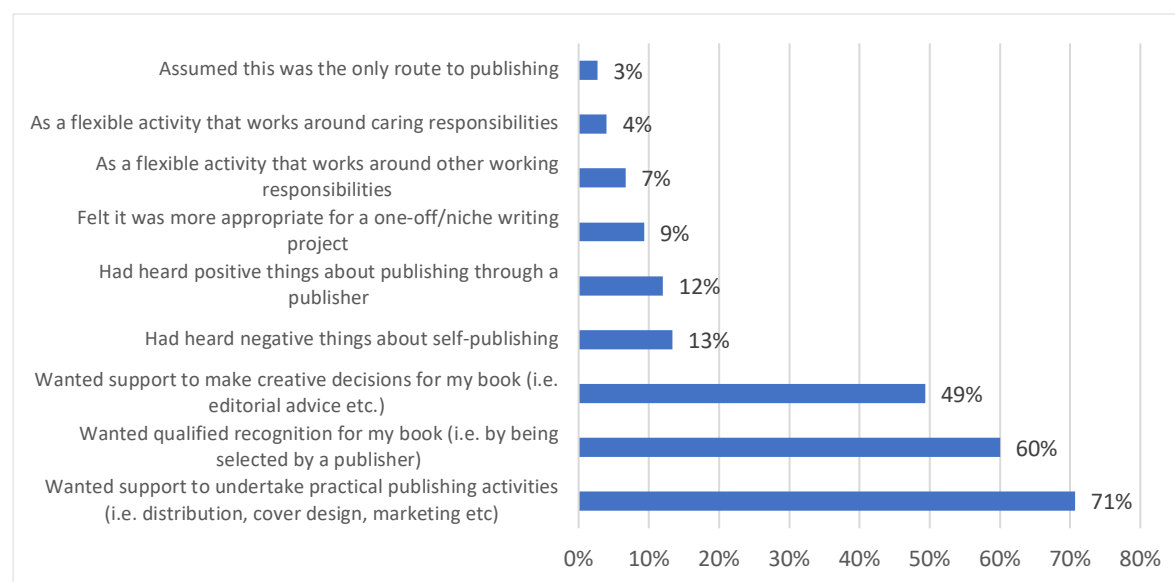
Figure 8.4: Percentage of traditionally published survey respondents selecting from reasons to publish via this route

This finding suggests the unique selling points of the traditional model that could be utilised by a publisher to attract or retain authors if other models continue to grow in appeal. However, there is a second implication from this finding: that some authors in this traditionally published group appear to have an intrinsically different view of control and decision-making than those in the independently published group. As reported previously, the independent author respondents indicated a proactive interest in taking personal responsibility for decision-making and control of activities in relation to their books, and 76% viewed this as a positive reason to select the independent route. However, many authors who are currently traditionally published indicated receiving help with publishing activity (71%) and support with creative decision-making from a publisher (49%) as a reason to select the traditional route. This may indicate differing needs between the two groups.

Note also that the importance of flexibility around caring or working responsibilities drops for the published group vs. the independently published group. This may indicate that when looking to work with an independent author, or when negotiating with an author who may be considering both routes, a publisher may want to proactively discuss and support flexible working.

One other finding of interest from this data is that, whereas 56% of authors who had independently published a book selected hearing positive things about the independent publishing route as a reason for that choice, this reduces to just 12% of traditionally published authors hearing positive things about their route. Similarly, whereas 31% of authors who have independently published had heard negative things about traditional publishing, only 13% of the traditionally published group selected hearing negative things about independent publishing. This difference in perspectives may reflect the expectations of each group; for example, an author may feel negative about indie publishing until they hear a positive story, whereas traditional publishing is already viewed as a positive route to publication. Alternatively, this may reflect the strong, collaborative indie author community who, for example, share their experiences and tips in forums and writing groups to work together and motivate one another. This is in contrast to the traditionally published authors, who tend to view themselves as individual artists and even potential competitors to one another. For example, various posts, articles, and blogs can be found on the subject of author jealousy. One personal account from a writer traditionally published through Bloomsbury begins:

> Okay, I'm just gonna say it: Jealousy is rampant in publishing. Like, out-of-control rampant. It's hard not to be jealous when you see an author get a seven-figure deal for a book that sounds just like yours (…) I've seen authors get jealous about money, book covers, press— pretty much everything. And I've seen first-hand how jealousy can eat away at writers—how it turns them into monsters (Maas, 2011).

Working in such a competitive environment may not facilitate conversations between authors sharing the positives and selling points of the traditional publishing process and model. Some authors may even want to deter those who could be competitors for their place on the list of the next publisher looking for a bestseller, or end writing collaborations even when this may be to their own detriment (Maas, 2011).

8.4   Increased Competition for Publishing Services

A further activity of potential sector disruption is the increase in the publishing services offered in response to the professionalising of independent authors. It has already been explored that a trend for bestseller indie publishers moving to launching publishing imprints appears to be growing, which may have increased pressure on the traditional industry in terms of competition. However, this is further added to by the wider use of publishing service providers by indie authors, providers who may previously have worked only for the traditional model.

Data from the author survey suggested that 70% of independent authors were investing in editorial advice and 53% in proofreading services. From a potential author population in the thousands, this is a large market for the publishing services industry. This use of professional services will be motivated by both sides of the transaction, from authors as the indie publishing community professionalises further, and from the service providers who have identified a gap in the market. As an earlier study raised:

> (editors) are increasingly independent of the traditional publishing industry. Most have been independent for a long time, and in general they both resource their own training, seek support from a professional organisation, and work for clients outside of the traditional publishing environment (Baverstock, Blackburn, Iskandarova, 2015b, p.52).

Baverstock et al. evidenced that this independence of the editing and proofing providers is due in part to professionals who had worked internally at a publishing house having been increasingly removed from the internal team – presumably for cost-saving measures – and have therefore found themselves working more often as small businesses and freelancers. In addition, it was found that rates of pay across traditional and indie author clients differed, with 50% of editors agreeing that when working with traditional clients 'I was able to charge a fair rate for the work I do' in comparison to 63% when asked the same question in relation to self-publishing; a rise of 13% (ibid). This positive skew to indie authors in terms of fair pay may also indicate that as demand from the indie author community grows, editors will further focus their time on the higher paying independent author client-base, further disrupting service provision within the traditional model.

8.5   What Can be Learned from Hybrid Authors?

Alongside data from those authors who are independently and traditionally publishing, information has been gathered from those responding to the survey called 'hybrid authors', meaning they indie publish some of their work and traditionally publish others. In terms of responses to the survey, it was unexpected that a higher proportion, 126 (15.4%), were hybrid authors versus 84 (10%) of those who were traditionally published only.

These authors have experience both in the independent and traditional models and take this route for many reasons. Although academic literature does not exist on this specific group of authors, case studies do offer some insight. For example, Sara Rosett, a hybrid author who began with a traditionally published contract for the first eleven years of her career, before adding indie novels alongside this for the following six years, outlines the reasons she moved to a hybrid model:

> (...) after licensing the rights to 10 books to a traditional publisher, I decided I liked the creative control and the freedom of indie publishing, not to mention the higher royalties and the ability to control my intellectual property. The chance of me getting the rights back to my traditionally published series is slim, so I've focused on creating new intellectual property—two cozy mystery series and one historical mystery series. I have final say on covers, formatting, pricing, discounting, as well as formats. I've brought out two of the series in audio and also licensed the rights to one of my indie series to a traditional audiobook publisher (Rosett, 2023).

In this instance, Rosett has utilised what she has learnt from her traditionally published experience to take 'creative control' and have 'final say' on the practical elements such as pricing and formats, two areas that have been raised repeatedly in this study as important to successful indie authors. However, she has left the rights to her original books with her publisher, although she explains this is purely because the chances of getting the rights back would be 'slim'. In addition to gaining the positives of independent publishing, it should be acknowledged that Rosett, and authors like her, may benefit reputationally from having been traditionally published, as well as a building of personal confidence, having been 'verified' by the traditional publishing industry. As was found in the reasons for traditionally publishing in the author survey responses, wanting 'qualified recognition' was sought by 60% of the traditionally published authors.

The combination of learning from a traditional contract, building confidence from recognition, and being able to take a higher level of control of your own career and products by moving to independent publishing perhaps gives hybrid authors the edge in terms of commercial success. This can be seen when the commercial success of this group is compared with the other two groups within the study, where they demonstrate greater success at the two top levels 'Very commercially successful' and 'Moderately commercially successful' in comparison to either the traditionally or independently published groups, as demonstrated in figure 8.5.
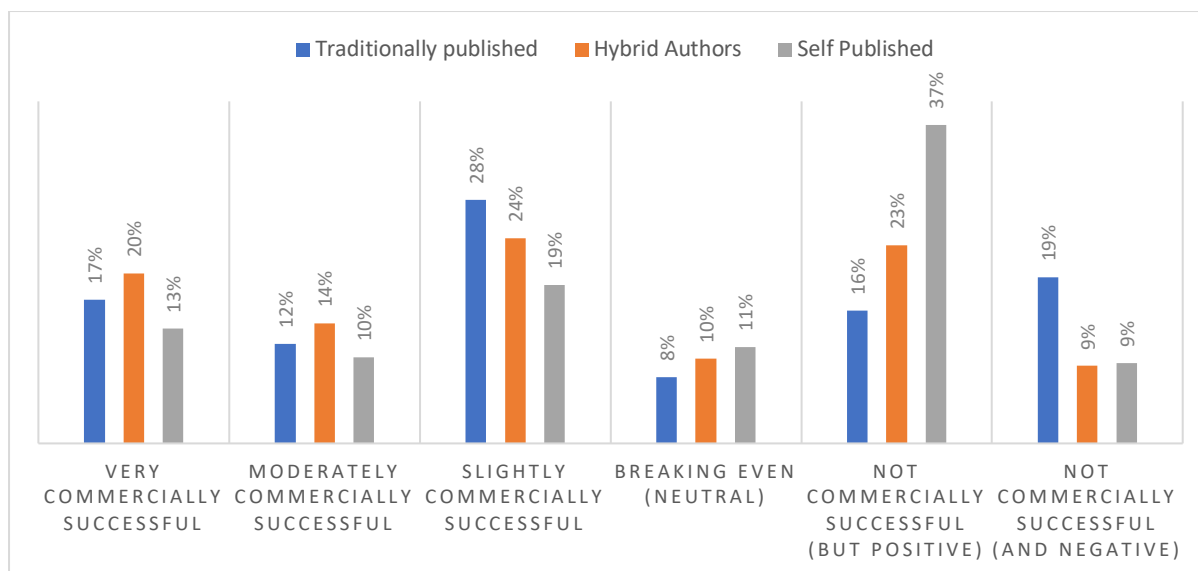
Figure 8.5: Survey respondents and commercial success scores by publishing route

The survey also asked the hybrid author group which route they had taken first, finding a similar amount had taken either the independent route first (49%) or traditional route (46%), before broadening out to take the other route alongside. This is a significant finding for two reasons. Firstly, this bucks the assumption that those who publish independently cannot then find success through traditional publishing should they wish to, and, secondly, that those who traditionally publish do so because they are not interested in publishing independently. The small representation in the 'other' group, making up 5% of the responses, noted starting by writing for magazines, anthologies or short stories published online in a variety of ways, which they saw as 'other' to the two options.

With this unique dual perspective, the hybrid authors were asked which of the two publishing routes they preferred taking for their publishing activity, with nearly half of the group (48%) selecting 'self-publishing'. Over a quarter (26%) enjoyed both approaches equally, with a further 10% unsure. The remaining 16% of authors selected traditional publishing as their preferred approach overall.

This could be skewed by the nature of the study. With a focus on indie publishing, it may have attracted those people who are more positive in general about that approach. Nevertheless, these authors have experience of both routes and at a minimum suggests that those experiencing both publishing routes are no more likely to prefer the traditional publishing process over indie.

To bring further understanding to these findings, the free text option attached to this set of questions for hybrid authors was analysed for trends. Out of the 59 authors who chose to expand on their selection with free text answers, 15 (or 25%) mentioned the value they place on the marketing support and/or distribution specifically into bookstores that traditional publishers can offer, demonstrating again the appeal of marketing support to authors.

A sample of statements include:

- *Marketing is the difference between self-publishing and traditional. The time and effort required to do it oneself is prohibitive and the results are poor.*
- *For me, traditional publishing is only worth it for very specific reasons – e.g. marketing expertise in that genre or the production of audiobooks.*
- *They have a wide reach within my genre and take care of all the marketing that I could do, but would rather use my time writing.*
- *I find the stigma and prejudice against self-published books hard e.g. getting my book to be stocked in shops or libraries which happened automatically with my trad published book.*
- *I found the hardest part of self-publishing was marketing and my current publisher is very good at that and apart from a bit of social media advertising doesn't ask for input very much.*
- *I like that my publishers handle marketing now, but I don't love that we split the profits 50/50.*
- *Traditional publishing is important to me to get books into bookshops. Otherwise, I prefer everything about self-publishing—much more creative control, packaging and pricing control, and more royalties coming to me with self-publishing. If forced to choose between one path and the other, I'd choose self-publishing.*
- *While I love the freedom of self-publishing, I do like the marketing dollars and experience the publisher brings to the table.*
- *You need to do a lot of marketing for self-publishing and it's not something that comes easily to me. It seems to be a lot of work for little return so far.*

The above statements reaffirm the previously reported finding from traditionally published authors that they rated highly 'Support from a publisher to undertake practical publishing activities', with examples for this statement including 'marketing'. However, five authors expressed that the marketing support offered by traditional publishers has changed in recent years, and marketing is now not covered exclusively by the publisher. Often the expectation, particularly with smaller publishers, is that the author will take on much of this responsibility through their own networks and followers.

- *Now things have changed, marketing is in my hands (which I hate), so if I need to do the dirty work anyway, then self-pub at least means it's all mine - decisions, choices and rewards/loses.*
- *People think that trad publishing means no sales work on your part. In fact, the marketing expectations on the author are just as high and I find at times I knew more than my account manager about Amazon listings in particular.*
- *The small press who published my book deal with cover, editing and sales, but most of the marketing is up to me.*
- *There is the perception that using a publisher means that you don't have to do as much marketing for yourself, because they will do that marketing for you. In my experience over the years I've seen that to be patently untrue. Many smaller publishers will do nothing as far as marketing but keep half the profits.*

- *While I love the ability to make my own creative decisions regarding my self-published books, marketing does not come easily to me and being able to have someone who "knows what they're doing" to rely on makes the journey less stressful. That being said, I'm not certain that I will continue publishing traditionally with the small press I'm currently at because they do not actually help with the marketing as I had hoped they might.*

This expression of frustration at the lack of marketing support is palpable. While publishers must prioritise their precious resources across their authors, it may be that by not investing time and money in the marketing effort of new or niche authors, this could be the highest risk area for losing authors to the indie author model. This potential risk could either be mitigated to keep these authors within the traditional model by reviewing and adapting the model to better serve the authors' concerns or could be accepted by the industry. This would create a two-tiered system, whereby the traditional industry is provided for high-selling authors (including 'celebrity authors' with existing followings) and literary fiction, which is most suited to many award programmes, while faster-moving genre fiction and niche audience fiction grows within the indie author model. This two-tiered approach has already been identified as emerging through analysis of the Kindle Ebook Bestseller data and has perhaps begun to take this direction organically. However, if traditional publishers are looking to bring the authors stepping outside the system back in, now may be the time to act before a tipping point is reached.

One example of mitigation already taking place is the purchase of Bookouture by Hachette in 2017. This digital-first publisher has a focus on genre fiction (particularly Romance and Crime, the mainstay of indie publishing) and can work at a faster pace due to the reduced print requirements. They also offer specialist digital marketing to their authors, which again can be targeted and delivered at a fairly low cost and a fast turnaround in contrast to outdoor marketing, such as billboards or train and bus advertising, or bookstore or television marketing campaigns offered to the highest-end authors. Therefore, Bookouture could be seen as a 'half-way house' between self and traditional publishing, offering the expertise of a traditional house, alongside the speed and collaboration favoured by some independent authors. Bookouture specifically sell themselves based on the best elements of the indie and traditional models: 'Higher royalty rates', 'Professional attention', 'Quicker to market'[54].

As with those who are independently publishing alone, several hybrid authors mentioned the importance of time and autonomy to their indie experience. They have been noted here to supplement the understanding of these elements of publishing and their importance to many authors and why those using both routes may prefer the indie model.

- *I love the autonomy of self-publishing where I can work faster than the publisher and not have to manage the minefield of corporate politics with editors, salespeople, marketers, and their narrow views of what makes a good book.*

---

[54] For more information on Bookouture's offer to authors, visit: https://bookouture.com/why-publish-with-bookouture/

- *Far, far prefer indie publishing to traditional publishing. Love having creative control, getting higher royalties, being hands-on, and not having to deal with the crap inherent in trad publishing.*
- *I earned in a single morning during my second month of self-publishing what I earned in the first 6 months from trad. I love the creative and business control of being a self pub and would never turn back now. It has changed my life.*
- *I have total control of all aspects when I self-publish.*
- *I like them both for different reasons. The speed of self publishing, the greater access to the audience, and the higher levels of control are all reasons I love self publishing.*
- *I love the control of self-publishing. I have one series with a publisher (they approached me about an existing self-published series) and not being able to see sales figures or even know when the books are being promoted isn't great. I'm talking to another publisher about an existing series and a new one, but I'm ambivalent because of the loss of control and royalties.*
- *I'm not ready to give up my traditional books completely, but am going to write more indie books next year than I did this year. I like the faster turnaround and the flexibility of indie publishing.*

In relation to disruption in the industry, this emphasis on the importance of speed of production and level of control, shared by hybrid authors who have first-hand experience of both indie and traditional models, can be seen to add further weight to the argument that traditional publishers may feel increased pressure to either change their ways of working, or to accept a growing author group will select other routes to publication that better suit their own preferences.

Indie authors and selective rights licensing

Although not a focus of the survey, one comment by a hybrid author responding to the project flagged a further business model that is growing among the independent author community: 'While I currently only self-publish eBooks, I do work with a publisher on some of my audiobooks and would consider a publisher for print books only if that was an option'. This is known as 'selective rights licensing' and could be viewed as a specific hybrid author approach, whereby the author remains the main publisher of the book and rights owner, but sells rights only in specific, selected formats to benefit from the expertise of certain specialist publishers or suppliers. This can relate to a range of publishing options, from illustrated or audio versions of the book to a specific translated version and related foreign rights agreements. Again, this model may see growth, as the independent author community develops the most time and financially efficient way to produce and sell their work across all formats and wider territories without the traditional agent and publisher intervention, where specialist departments and individuals would historically lead on rights management, utilising their partners and networks. The Alliance of Independent Authors now offers a membership benefit of advising on contracts for selective rights licensing activities. It is worth noting that the founder of the body is a former literary agent and can therefore bring their experience from the traditional publishing world to the indie author community.

Of further consideration for a traditional publisher taking on a hybrid author for some elements of their work should be to question the expectation and knowledge of that author in comparison to one who has not experienced the full process first hand. Those who already have experience of activities such as managing suppliers, timelines, and launches, may have increasingly high expectations as to what should be offered by a publishing house, perhaps even viewing them as a delivery partner or supplier, rather than a potential employer or advisor as may be the case for those publishing purely through the traditional model. This was also touched upon in the final recommendations from the Baverstock and Steinitz paper reporting their author survey findings, where they stated a prediction that:

> (T)he experience of self-publishing is likely to impact their (the author) behaviour in any future relationship: they will be more aware of their options; more desirous of involvement; keener to negotiate; less likely to 'leave it to the experts' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a, p.11).

This concept also harks back to the survey finding that independent authors' expectations of levels of control and speed of publishing appear to be higher than those who are traditionally published. Consideration by traditional publishers should be taken of these expectations when bringing a hybrid author on board, or one who is moving from self- to traditional publishing. What is the publisher offering to offset the royalties they require to pay for their expertise and services, and how might their approach to the publishing process need to change to reflect the increased understanding and potential interest in participation of the author?

8.6 Author Representation and Publishing

When synthesising the diversity and representation data from this study, at its simplest level, a typical independent author is more likely to be a straight, cisgender woman with children. They sit across all ages, but are more likely, in comparison to the older average of traditionally published authors, to be aged 44 or under.

In terms of ethnic background, religion, disability and sexual orientation, this study has not found any evidence that there is any significant difference between those independently publishing and those traditionally publishing, noting the smaller sample for the traditionally published group in the survey data. Counterintuitive to the concept of democratising storytelling, the indie author group does not appear to demonstrate a higher representative sample across any of the groups that have been traditionally viewed as marginalised in publishing. Similarly, survey data also suggests that those whose household income is below the national average are not highly represented in the indie author respondents. This further suggests that the independent model has not attracted those from lower socio-economic groups any more than the traditional publishing route has to date. Further, where women have been over-represented in publishing via traditional routes (both behind the scenes and in terms of authors themselves), this same group is also overrepresented in the indie author community.

These findings in themselves provide evidence that the hypothesis H4b is not proven in this study. However, people from the LGBTQ+ community, disabled people, and female writers were all represented in higher than population averages across both publishing routes, with the outlier here being ethnic background.

Why does traditional publishing appear to have wider representation of ethnic backgrounds than independent publishing?

Inclusivity projects taking place across all areas of the arts have aimed to diversify the stories told and may explain the higher levels of diversity found among the traditionally published groups. In this instance, a gatekeeper, which does not exist in the independent model, may have a significant role to play in seeking out diverse voices. Within the indie author community, groups and bodies speak up individually on the need to see indie publishing as for everyone, such as the 'Self-Publishing For All' campaign from the Alliance of Independent Authors, which currently focuses on providing information and support to diverse writers already active in the sector. However, no recognised facilitator exists to organise and coordinate a widening participation effort across the sector from under-represented groups who are not yet considering authorship as an option.

Moving models, important work is occurring within indie publishing houses in terms of actively calling for more work from authors of diverse backgrounds, notably the independent award-winning publisher Jacaranda Books[55] which describe their ethos thus: 'We are committed to publishing ground-breaking writing with a dedication to creating space on the bookshelf for diverse ideas and

---

[55] To find out more about the work of Jacaranda Books, visit: https://jacarandabooks.co.uk/pages/about-us

writers.' They also describe themselves as a 'diverse-owned independent publisher and bookseller', and this diversity behind the scenes may go some way to explaining their success at publishing award-winning stories from diverse voices. Individuals have also taken an active role in raising the profile of Black authors, from Heinemann's 1962 'African Writers Series' focused on the publication of original African writing, to Margaret Busby, the driving force behind the 1992 anthology bringing together female literature from Africa, *Daughters of Africa,* with the follow up *New Daughters of Africa* launching nearly 25 years later. Further examples of work in this area from the Big Five include the already mentioned Dialogue Books spearheaded by Sharmaine Lovegrove at Hachette, and Merky Books[56], the award-winning imprint launched in 2018 by Penguin Random House UK with support from Croydon-based Grime artist Stormzy. Merky Books describes itself as holding a 'clear ambition to publish books that will own – and change – the mainstream'. To its credit, Merky Books published best-selling author Malorie Blackman's 'Just Sayin', which surfaced the frustrations of the traditional publishing industry for a Black woman, potentially demonstrating it is open to self-reflection. However, again, it should be noted that this work most often takes place within the confines of the managed and facilitated traditional publishing process, not within indie publishing, where there is a notable gap in terms of a leading voice facilitating practical change in diversifying the indie author community across a range of groups, including ethnic background. As mentioned, this lack is visible specifically in appealing to those not yet publishing, rather than welcoming those who are. In general, diversification programmes in the sector also appear to take place in silos, within individual projects or organisations, rather than across the sector.

Tonic, a leading charity working towards greater diversity within the arts and cultural sector, makes the following statement on their website which hints at a frustration with some projects proposed as part of the diversity in the arts agenda but are 'tokenistic' in approach or value:

> Integrity is the value by which we seek to govern all our decisions and actions. We will politely decline involvement in work that is tokenistic, and are always committed to dedicating our resources to making change that is deep and long lasting, not fleeting or surface-level (Tonic website, 2023).[57]

For change to stick, this long-lasting and deeper effort, potentially beginning at an earlier stage in an author's career, or even before authorship is identified as an option, must take place across the sector. Tonic has an integrated approach to diversification which encompasses training for those behind the scenes and publishing creative work that facilitates more diversity on the stage, including at school and college level (particularly for their theatre work). Studies exploring diversity in the arts also emphasise the importance of reaching into schools, where young people are making early decisions on their career paths. For example, one Australian study investigated student representation in the arts across four years through 2,000 students aged 8-18 (Gore et al., 2019). Here, they found a similar

---

[56] For more information on the founding of Merky Books, visit:
https://www.penguin.co.uk/company/publishers/cornerstone/merky-books
[57] For more information on the DE&I work of Tonic, visit: https://www.tonictheatre.co.uk/about/our-approach/

pattern in relation to demographics, as observed in this study, in terms of the majority participating in the arts being female and from advantaged backgrounds. Although they did not report on ethnic background, they found being English speaking was a key factor in selecting the arts, which may indicate a connected obstacle of being positioned outside the majority language-speaking group in a nation as a barrier to participation. The study concluded that initiatives within schools, and therefore before people are at the point of selecting a career, are essential for disrupting the historic patterns they had found within the arts and building a more diverse representation of young people aspiring to take on careers in the arts.

Independent authors and hidden author characteristics

One phenomenon found in the data is reported here as a potential confounder to the figures collated regarding ethnic background: the hiding of personal author characteristics. Based on an initial observation, a review was undertaken across the sample bestseller data for examples of authors utilising avatars or illustrations as their profile image instead of a photo of themselves, with the findings outlined in figure 8.6.
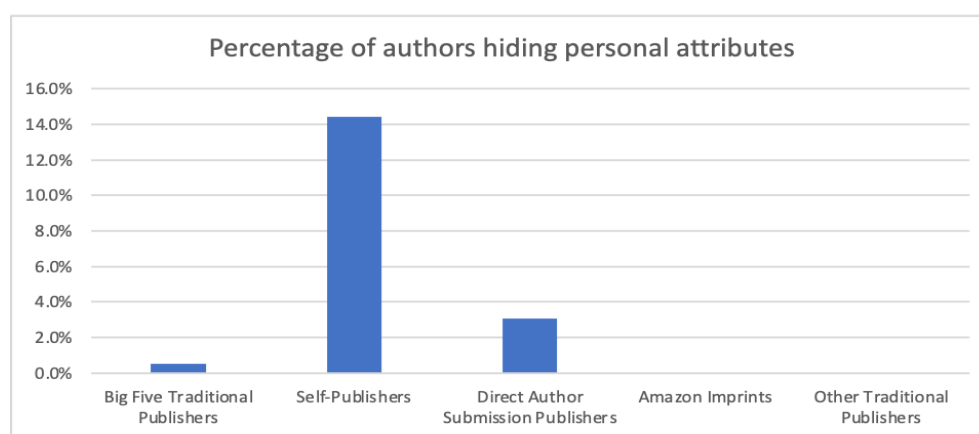
Figure 8.6: Kindle bestseller authors hiding personal characteristics by publishing type

The data showed that 14% of the independent books in the bestseller lists used avatars that did not confirm the personal characteristics of the author. On initial examination, the diversity data from the Amazon Ebook Bestseller analysis suggested that the independent author community is lacking diversity more acutely than the traditional sector, specifically in relation to gender and ethnic background. However, the high quantity of independent authors who appear to hide personal characteristics on their sales pages and reader-facing profiles in comparison to those who are traditionally published may skew these figures. In terms of data collection, this could sometimes be overcome through further research on social media or author websites, but it was impossible during the research period to establish the gender and/or ethnic background of all authors. The distribution of authors taking this approach when compared across publishing route indicates that this is a deliberate tactic taken by those who are specifically indie authors.

There are no current studies identified that specifically explore the visuals used by authors to represent themselves, but there are several potential reasons an author may deliberately hide their

personal characteristics. If an author avatar image is viewed as an extension of the established author pen name concept, then a list of reasons to do so is available as a comparable set of options. For example, this selection from an article on the Alliance of Independent Authors website offers sector insight (note all options referring purely to written names have been removed for relevance):

- If you have a job that requires a customer facing role or is in an industry that wouldn't gel well with your chosen genre
- If you're working in the legal system, a teaching profession, or a role where you need separation from your day job
- If you want to keep your identity secret
- You're changing genre and want some level of separation between you and your original audience
- You want to protect your family from your writing work or the public
- You want a name that will stand out more or fit into the genre better
- You write in a [insert relevant gender] dominated genre and want your gender to match that of the genre's expectations (Alliance of Independent Authors, 2023c).

One further option is that a writer may feel their physical characteristics are a hindrance to success or to engaging readers. This may reflect the authors' ethnic background, disability, and/or other characteristics such as age. This is an extension of the reason shared by the Alliance of Independent Authors above in relation to gender expectations for specific genres. Further, given the under representation of certain groups across publishing, it may be that these independent authors have received or perceived receiving 'knock backs' in the past due to one or more characteristics, for example through feedback from traditional publishing routes. They may have decided when moving into the independent publishing model to remove this barrier completely and approach readers with a 'clean slate'.

It can be seen from the data that two authors in the Big Five group have also taken this route: *The Rebel Accountant* and *The Secret Barrister*. In these instances, the secretive nature of their personae is both a cover for the authors themselves, ensuring they can share 'behind the scenes' information at no risk from their respective sectors, and is a marketing technique. The mysterious nature of the two personae has been used by their publishers (Hachette and Macmillan) to build their profiles and to create a buzz around the potentially dry or harder to market subjects of finance and law to reach a wider audience. For those hiding characteristics in the indie author group, this is not the case. Their work sits across genres, most often Romance, but also Thriller and Fantasy. Might it be that those underrepresented groups, men, and authors not presenting as white, are using these visual pen names to produce their work, utilising an option only open to them through independent publishing?

Three typical examples of independent authors with hidden characteristic imagery identified in the Kindle Ebook Bestseller records are included below for context:

Kate Oliver: Presenting as female in terms of author name, pronouns, and brand colours in reference to gendered stereotypes.

Genre: Fetish Romance.

Bestseller in data sample: Colt (Daddies of the Shadows Book 7)

Roxy Ray: Male and Female gender represented in author image, name presenting as female first name and male second name, female pronouns in author information.

Genre: Fantasy (Romance)

Bestseller in data sample: The Alpha's Fated Encounter

Nicole Fox: No gender indicators in author image, female name, and female pronouns used in author information.

Genre: Romance

Bestseller in data sample: Whiskey Poison

If those hiding their characteristics are representing male writers, or writers who are not white presenting, then it may be that indie publishing is creating a space for diverse writers to produce their work. However, reader expectation, or another external factor or perception, appears to be leading to the proactive choice of the writer to hide their characteristics. Further exploration of this would be needed to determine this possibility in depth, hence this observation has been identified as a potential future research direction in Chapter Nine.

8.7   The Current Perception of the Self-Publishing Model

One of the final questions in the author survey asked authors to complete the sentence 'My perception of self-publishing today is…' by selecting an option from a Likert scale rating from Extremely Negative to Extremely Positive. The results here (see table 8.1) offer a snapshot of the views of authors from the author community in 2022 when the survey was held and demonstrates a strong sense of positivity for the model.

Just 1% of those authors who answered had an extremely negative view of the model, rising to 5% if 'somewhat negative' is also included. 7% had a neutral response to the question, with the remaining 87% either somewhat or extremely positive, noting that over half were 'extremely positive'.

Table 8.1: Perception of independent publishing model scoring by publishing route

	Independently Published	Traditionally Published	Hybrid	All respondents	Percentage of all respondents
Extremely positive	356	13	23	392	57%
Somewhat positive	175	25	7	207	30%
Neither	28	18	2	48	7%
Somewhat negative	13	14	3	30	4%
Extremely negative	2	6	0	8	1%
TOTAL	574	76	35	685	100%

When taking just those figures from the independent author group only (see figure 8.7), the overwhelmingly positive perception from within the community can be seen, with 93% of the sample feeling positive to some degree.
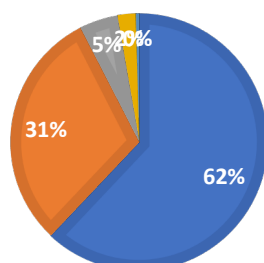
Figure 8.7: Perceptions of 'self-publishing' by the indie author respondents only

This positive perception of self-publishing and the potential pride it will elicit from those taking this route, may further indicate the breakdown of the historical stigma associated with indie authorship as introduced at the outset of this study. This perception change further indicates the potential for the sector to continue to grow and, therefore, the disruptive possibilities for this model in the wider industry, whether that be the move of more traditionally published authors to the independent model, competition rising for service provider availability or a more inclusive representation of author voice and stories in the future.

8.8 Summary

This chapter directly explored hypotheses 4a and 4b. In relation to Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Publishers need to make further changes to their model to continue to attract a wide range of authors, including involvement of authors in the process of publication, such as decision-making.

The evidence suggests that concerns for authors regarding the traditional process are focused on five areas which could be reviewed by the sector, particularly for smaller presses:

- The opportunity for some authors to be involved in the decision-making process.
- The lengthy time it takes to produce a book through the traditional process.
- The royalties available when producing through the traditional process.
- The support for marketing and print book distribution offered to authors when taking a traditional contract.
- The need for reviewing or potentially providing additional training to enhance the communication skills of publishing professionals working directly with authors.

It should be noted specifically that hybrid authors flagged concerns that in recent years marketing has become a role taken on by an author even with a traditional publisher, and this in particular could be a barrier to retaining talented authors.

The chapter also explored evidence from the data in relation to Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Those publishing through the self-publishing route will demonstrate a more diverse representation of authors than those publishing through traditional routes with reference to protected characteristics.

The evidence here suggests that, despite the lack of gatekeepers and the low cost of independent publishing, there remains a barrier to publication for those under-represented in the traditional publishing model. Specifically, there remains an overrepresentation of authors that are from a white ethnic background in comparison to population averages. However, an author choice that makes data complex to analyse here is the high level of indie authors choosing to represent themselves through avatar and illustrations, thus hiding their personal characteristics, which would merit further exploration as to why the choice has been made and whether this conceals wider diversity in the community.

Final thoughts: independent publishing and the power of perception

A range of findings have been presented in this study regarding how the industry can better understand, discuss, segment, and support independent authors. Perhaps one key finding should be reflected on across the industry: the increased positive perception of the model found within and outside of the indie author community that indicates a release from stigma and a growing confidence across the sector.

Those who are yet to accept this shifting perception should take note and consider how their work can continue with or alongside the indie author community, joining those who have been early adopters and supporters. Not doing so may risk being left behind the wave of change as independent authors continue to find their voices, grow their businesses, and reach more readers with an ever-expanding diversity of stories and content.

Chapter 9: Implications, Reflections & Recommendations

9.1   Introduction

This chapter reflects upon the study itself, both in terms of methodology and design, as well as scope and limitations. It will also briefly summarise the changes that have taken place in the publishing industry during the study period (2021-2024). Findings from across the study that have implications for either the author or the industry are summarised, including providing initial recommendations where appropriate.

Identified research questions or themes for potential future study will also be outlined, both in relation to questions reflecting on specific areas directly explored in this study and those suitable for wider investigation. This chapter will also make the final case for the key findings that demonstrate the original contributions to knowledge offered by the results.

9.2   Learnings: Methodology and Study Design

Survey questionnaire design

The following adaptions would be recommended for the author survey should this be held again:

- **Updating genre listings:** Genre listings could be developed further. The Amazon.co.uk genre breakdown used as a basis at the time of design did not offer the wide variety of options that some authors needed, and this was demonstrated by the fairly high use of the 'other' option (i.e. Children's and YA not specifically included). Crime, Mystery, Thriller could also be separated in future studies for deeper understanding of these related genres. Genre prioritisation could also be used as part of the genre set of questions in the survey to identify the key genre for each author and then further sub genres. This would build on the methodology used by the Alliance of Independent Authors for their Income Survey which was produced after the author survey for this study was finalised and distributed.

- **Developing the question relating to number of books produced:** Expanding the choices available when selecting how many books have been completed would also be recommended, given that the current survey stopped at '50 and over', with a small but significant group selecting this choice. More detail here may bring to light further data on the most prolific writers.

- **Developing questions relating to author investments:** In relation to investments made during the publishing process, the survey did not allow for respondents to record free-of-charge services that may have been utilised, for example through family, friends, or other contacts. This may be prudent to include in future studies.

- **Considering including questions relating to business models:** An additional theme could be included in a future author survey to explore the business models used by indie authors, for example, to determine who is distributing 'wide', using rapid release, selling only digital, selling through sales platforms or their own platforms and so on. This was excluded from the survey due to length and to focus on internal drivers. However, the later 2023 survey run by the Alliance of Independent Authors demonstrated interesting findings in this area, and this could be included in future academic studies.

- **Expanding questions relating to the reasons for writing:** Additional questions could explore when and how an author decided to write. This could be considered specifically in terms of where possible barriers continue to exist for some underrepresented groups who are not taking up authorship by either self or traditional publishing models. For example, it might be found that of most significance is reading or writing at home as a child, the motivation given by teachers through schooling, or seeing positive role models through the media or similar.

- **Exploring author branding:** Additional questions related to personal branding may also bring to light the relevance of those hiding characteristics through the use of avatars or similar as outlined in Chapter Eight.

Survey distribution methods

- **Increasing representation from traditionally published authors:** It was found during the study that analysing the results of the indie author group was most enlightening when they could be compared with traditionally published authors. However, respondent numbers for the traditionally published group were significantly lower than other groups. Exploring partnerships or distribution methods to bring more traditionally published authors into any future studies would be valuable.

9.3   Project Scope and Limitations

Five elements of the scope of this project may have impacted the data reported and should be considered as context for this study:

1. **Point in time:** the data collection took place in 2022, and it may be that closely following COVID-19 had an impact on survey take up and those experimenting with publishing due to changes in circumstances such as working from home. This should be considered as data context if used as a benchmark for future related studies.

2. **Pace of change:** both datasets used in the study provide a snapshot in time, and within a fast-moving industry this should be considered for future citations. Revisiting these findings at a future point would be prudent. Note that this study comes ten years after the most closely comparable study, 'Who are the self-publishers' (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013a), and therefore revisiting the data in a further ten years may be advisable.

3. **Access:** Amazon sales records were only accessible by manually collating figures from the publicly facing bestseller lists. This limited the data available. Future researchers may want to consider partnering with groups accessing this data through more sophisticated automated systems, such as k.lytics[58], or attempting again to negotiate directly with Amazon. There is evidence that they are opening up some sales data more readily as of 2023, for example, monthly sales figures for some products are available to those visiting the site (Waters, 2023).

4. **Demographic impact:** due to the low response from authors representing traditionally marginalised demographics, specifically in terms of ethnic background, the data were not suitable for exploring why some specific groups were identified as low in representation despite barrier removal of gatekeepers. This is a priority area for further research (see section 9.5).

5. **Early completion:** an increased interest in understanding the indie author community has grown since the commencement of the study in 2021. One clear example is the Alliance of Independent Authors Income Survey which took place for the first time in 2023. This speed of change and interest, outlined in more detail in section 9.4, along with the large and complex amount of data received through the survey and Amazon sales data, led to a decision at the halfway point of the study to remove a final phase of industry interviews as had originally been proposed and to complete the study early, recommending interviews for a second phase. Interviews would stimulate further conversation within the publishing sphere and explore sector response to the findings. Interviews would also offer the possibility of gathering lived-experience accounts from a range of authors or industry members.

---

[58] For more information about the k.lytics services, visit: https://k-lytics.com

9.4   Developments in Self-Publishing During Study Period

The nature of publishing independently, as a model still emerging into the mainstream but gathering pace, has been evidenced repeatedly in this study. As such, during the study period alone, developments in the industry have been observed and should be noted for future research. This is summarised here.

Alongside the 2023 Alliance of Independent Authors Author Income Survey, a range of other developments have taken place at the indie author membership organisation which should be noted. First, in relation to supporting academic study of the sector, the Alliance announced in 2024 that it will be actively approaching universities as 'Partner' organisations to information share and build research opportunities among academics both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, with an initial focus on Creative Writing and Publishing MA courses[59]. In relation to diversification of authorship, the Alliance of Independent Authors has also provided 80 organisations who specifically support 'authors of colour' with a pack of resources to support take up of authorship via this publishing route, and is actively seeking new 'ambassadors' in nations not yet represented in their network, most recently welcoming a representative based in the Caribbean.

The Society of Authors also continues its support for independent authors through their inclusion in the Society's membership which continues to grow, and more broadly in relation to diversity and inclusion for authors. For example, at the 2024 London Book Fair, taking place just prior to submission of this thesis, incoming CEO Anna Ganley presented a united front alongside representatives from the wider publishing community to support the roll out of the updated 'Inclusivity Action Plan'[60], developed by The Publishers Association working with others, including Creative Access, a social enterprise providing opportunities, support and training to the creative industries for people from under-represented groups. The action plan includes ten commitments for publishing businesses to undertake during the period 2023 – 2026, from data collection to training and mentoring. Although it is not yet clear how this can be applied to individual authors, this conversation has been initiated. Placing of authors at the table during these discussions, through bodies such as The Society of Authors, represents a further step in the right direction.

In terms of the academic field, while just two theses directly referenced 'self-publishing' at the outset of the study, at least another two are currently in development by the end of the process; a 100% uptick in academic research in this area. This includes C. Ruth Taylor, based in Jamaica, who is just beginning her studies in relation to the role of the independent author. Note that due to a cyber security incident, the British Library Thesis database, EThOS, has been unavailable since November 2023, so a wider search cannot be undertaken for final figures in relation to theses completed in 2023 or 2024.

---

[59] It should be noted that Kingston University introduced modules on self-publishing to its Publishing MA programme in 2013, offering access to the module to creative writing students.
[60] The Inclusivity Action Plan can be viewed online here: https://www.publishers.org.uk/our-work/diversity-and-inclusion/ and more about Creative Access can be found here: https://creativeaccess.org.uk/

There has also been one notable setback for indie publishing following the beginning of this study regarding accusations made by a range of readers that Mark Dawson, the original face of the high-profile indie author community 'The Self Publishing Formula' had utilised content from existing books in the production of his own bestsellers. At the time of writing, this was beginning to gain some coverage in more main-stream press (Gaskell, 2023). This is an emerging story as this thesis is completed, with the accusations yet to be wholly proven and the impact on the perception of independent publishing in terms of questions of quality control remaining unknown.

Finally, in terms of the raised profile of the concepts explored in this study, the researcher herself has experienced a positive interest in the data, and has in the final year of the study been requested to share initial data from the survey, along with supporting information regarding marketing and publishing of books, through a range of networks. This has included working with the Alliance of Independent Authors by supplying data to reports collating information across the sector, as well as through content writing on the Alliance of Independent Authors blog and participating in podcasts to begin to engage authors with the findings and wider topics they raise. The increased profile and activity in indie publishing both within the community and more widely in terms of media and public recognition will perhaps produce a cycle of growth and with it the opportunity to fulfil the potential for accessibility and inclusivity in publishing that was imagined at the outset of Web 2.0 over twenty years ago.

9.5   Key Findings and Implications for Authors and the Industry

The key findings from the study have been collated here and divided by the two impacted groups for ease of reference and application: authors and the wider industry.

Key implications for authors:

The study can be used as a general learning and evidence tool for indie authors to release themselves from the stigma arising from using the route they have chosen. Data in this study confirms that commercial success is viable through this route, and some traditional authors are now moving to the 'other side'. Many pros have been identified of the indie route, such as the opportunity to take personal control, the faster speed of publication and the higher royalty rate available, along with the indication of a positive personal experience from the process. Armed with this knowledge, an independently published author need not feel embarrassed or defensive about their choice, as has been the case for many in the past, evidenced in section 1.4 of this thesis. In addition, to embed this change in perception, it may now be time to refocus terminology fully on 'indie' or 'independent' authors, rather than 'self-published'.

In addition, this study has identified that hybrid authors, those publishing through both indie and traditional routes, appear to be more likely to find commercial success than those taking just one route. Authors who are considering broadening their approach to encompass both routes can take confidence from this finding.

Study findings also indicate that indie authors can be divided into two clusters with shared characteristics, Authorpreneurs and Author-artisans. Authors can utilise the two segments to identify where they fit in terms of their authorship goals to help build a plan for their author journey based on what they want to achieve. A feeling of solidarity with the identified cluster may also aid a positive start to an indie author career.

Activities, traits and behaviours have been tested in relation to increasing commercial success likelihood, with findings including a small but intriguing correlation between a rise in author commercial success scores and lower scores for agreeableness alongside higher scores for neuroticism, as well as a stronger positive correlation for publishing more books in a shorter period. These early findings can provide indicators to support prioritisation for those who have ambitions to achieve commercial success and long-term careers through independent publishing. However, it should be noted that each factor identified has a limited impact and should be viewed within the context of other factors that have not been tested in this study, such as the quality of the writing produced. Similarly, the identification of the role of luck and how to increase your chances of finding it through increasing your own activity and opportunities should be considered. This open and active behaviour reflects the resilience hinted at through the commercially successful author factors. Maintaining the drive and grit required to continue as an author, and ensuring you create opportunities for yourself at every turn, is perhaps of critical importance alongside more practical choices made.

Key implications for the publishing industry:

The study findings suggest that as many as 52% of independent authors are now choosing to publish independently without approaching an agent or traditional publisher first. Therefore, even those publishers who are yet to be personally aware of the impact of indie publishing, may be missing out on potential bestsellers. In addition, although the Big Five publishers continue to dominate major sales, the finding of 14% of ebooks on the Amazon Bestseller lists from indie authors, alongside verbatim feedback from authors disenchanted with the traditional model, and the growing trend of traditionally published authors proactively moving to indie publishing, there is an indication that further change is coming. The implication for the industry is that it would be wise to understand these author needs and review practices now, with author retention planning potentially increasing in importance.

Specifically, and most pressingly, given the rise in small press closures following COVID-19 (Page, 2020), the indications of a growth in the business model of the indie author as publishing imprint owner may have the most impact on the smaller traditional print houses initially. In these instances, evolving to use services historically aimed at indie authors (such as print-on-demand as opposed to the costly sale or return of large print runs), or identifying where an indie publisher can provide unique services or experience over an indie-author-led business, may be prudent. On the flip side, competition for suppliers may also increase, alongside editors and proof readers reporting positive relationships and faster payments when working with indie authors (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2013b), this study identifies that indie authors are utilising the expertise of suppliers, such as editors and proofreaders, in high numbers, and if this trend increases, the competition for the time of talented suppliers in these fields will increase, as will their costs.

A concerning finding for the sector is that the data indicates that there continues to be a lack of diverse representation in both independent and traditional publishing, specifically in relation to ethnic background, which should be further considered by those working in the industry and others who can provide wider context and recommendations for change (see section 9.5).

Finally, the data overall has demonstrated that there are some key barriers for some authors when taking the traditional route that harks back to an earlier age. The slow process, a lack of control in decision-making, and a lack of marketing support for smaller authors appears to have negatively impacted author perceptions of the traditional publishing model. In addition, there is some indication that it would be beneficial to the traditional model to ensure communications skills are developed for staff who interact with authors to improve working relationships. The model should be reviewed and refreshed in light of the above, if a wide cross-section of authors, particularly those from the younger age range who are predominantly digital natives, continues to be sought.

9.6   In Summary: Contribution to Knowledge

The data from this study, alongside the lack of current academic literature in the field, has provided the opportunity to fill gaps in academic and industry knowledge regarding the independent author. It has also provided the opportunity to build upon and create a dialogue with the minimal related papers that are available, namely the work of Baverstock and Steinitz.

Key contributions to the field

The study data has offered a range of new benchmarks for future studies which had not been explored academically before. However, three key findings comprise the main contributions to the field:

1.   **Segmenting the independent author for the first time**

Through survey responses from 819 authors, this study has, for the first time, used quantitative and qualitative data to identify and name two distinct segments of the indie author community: the Authorpreneur and the Author-artisan. This output can be utilised by the publishing industry to understand and discuss the independent author experience and needs. In addition, it recommends the community proactively moves from the 'self-published' author naming convention to adopt more widely the 'independent' or 'indie' author label. It should also be noted that this study, for the first time, collated and analysed independent author demographic data across all nine UK protected characteristics, providing benchmark data for future research.

2.   **Identifying factors shared by commercially successful independent authors**

The related author survey data has also formed the first academic exploration of the actions and behaviours shared by commercially successful independent authors. This has both built on the existing understanding of the group and identified new findings of significance, including the – albeit small - negative impact of Agreeableness and positive impact of Neuroticism on the likelihood of success of the independent author, in combination with a high scoring of Openness. The findings here can be utilised to identify how both authors themselves and the industry can better understand this community and by future researchers, where testing these new indications further would be prudent.

3.   **Spotlighting the limited nature of 'democratisation' through independent publishing**

Through both survey and Amazon Ebook Bestseller data analysis, the study has identified that indie publishing has not offered the broad interpretation of 'democratisation' of authorship that had been hoped for at the outset of Web 2.0, particularly in relation to ethnic background and socio-economic groups. Although pockets of success have been found and some areas, such as age and disability, show developments compared to the traditional model, there is still much work to do and understanding to be developed before the opportunity indie publishing offers for democratised storytelling has been fully realised.

9.7   Recommendations for Future Study

Alongside recommending further research to better understand the new findings in this study, six specific areas for further exploration have been identified.

1.   Expanding overarching study findings via sector and author interviews

To supplement this research, in-depth interviews could be conducted to explore the findings with the sector (both authors and publishers) and to build further conclusions on the outcomes and next steps to be taken on a practical level. This could also serve as a rallying of the sector to respond to the challenges and opportunities identified in this study.

This could be achieved within an academic setting but may be more successfully explored within an existing author or publishing group with links to a range of authors and industry experts, such as The Society of Authors and/or the Alliance of Independent Authors.

2.   Independent authors hiding personal characteristics

Further exploration could take place to explore the trend for independent authors not disclosing personal characteristics – who are the authors behind the personae and why are they choosing to publish in this way? For example, it may be possible to discover if this is related to hiding diverse characteristics, wider marketing choices, or for other reasons.

3.   The growth and potential of indie author imprints

Further research with indie authors could develop the understanding of the potential growth of indie author imprints – exploring how prevalent the model is today and/or how quickly it is growing, as well as what impact this could have on the traditional model, specifically the most closely comparable independent traditional publisher sector.

4.   The representation of disabled people in authorship

The higher than population average representation of disabled people identified across publishing types could be further explored, in particular in the context of being counter to the current academic literature regarding the disenfranchisement of this group across the arts. The indie author success that has been hinted at throughout this study could be explored further to verify the findings and establish any learnings for other art forms.

5.   Democratising publishing

A key area of future study based on the outcomes from this research has been identified as investigating the invisible barriers to independent publishing for those who have historically been marginalised in relation to publishing, storytelling, and authorship as a career option in the UK.

The data in this study indicates that authors from some ethnic backgrounds remain under-represented in both the traditional and independent models, despite the lack of gatekeepers. This remains an understudied area and one with potential benefits for both authors and the audience in terms of ensuring access to a wider range of storytellers and stories. Specifically in the context of diversity and inclusion making headway in other creative industries, potentially publishing is being left behind.

Considerations of further research in this area could include:

- Re-approaching Amazon for wider sales data, particularly on author demographics, to analyse across a longer time period and with more detail. A larger data set would also allow for a more nuanced exploration of different communities and groups.
- Working in partnership with universities and/or colleges running English and Creative Writing courses to survey or run workshops with young people from a range of backgrounds (with a particular focus on ethnic background and those with relevant lived experience) to discuss:
    - Perceived/actual barriers to publishing (both traditional and independent).
    - Personal views on authorship as a viable career.
    - Cultural or community histories and perceptions of authorship as a viable career.
    - Potential actions that could be taken to develop access routes for different groups.

  These sessions could form the basis of understanding what barriers remain in terms of authorship for specific groups or communities and what actions could be taken to remove them.
- Holding interviews with the selection of commercially successful authors from underrepresented groups to record and explore their lived experience of the sector and what helped them overcome and/or what led them to not perceive the barriers others appear to have faced.
- Interviews with charities and organisations already finding success in other creative industries in relation to widening participation or ED&I (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) to learn from their successes or challenges to build recommended next steps for the industry. Examples include Tonic, with proven impact on gender representation in theatre; or Jacaranda Books, an independent Black-owned publisher successfully publishing a range of diverse award-winning books and now partnering with Hachette. This list can be expanded greatly for a related project.
- Working with groups in the publishing sector who can activate any learnings, both to understand any practical challenges of putting changes in place and what has been attempted so far, for example, the Alliance of Independent Authors and The Society of Authors.

In a future project of this nature, it would be valuable to build a research team that brings lived experiences from a range of backgrounds to the project, including a male viewpoint, given the female-heavy nature of publishing and authorship. This could be particularly valuable for the methodology and planning stage, and the interpretation of results, where a more inclusive range of views would mitigate inadvertent skewed interpretations being made based on the researcher's own profile and experience.

This inclusive input could be achieved in three ways: Passing on the research to be led by a researcher with lived experience representing one or more of the marginalised groups identified; having the current researcher continue the project as part of a research group with advisors or research team members bringing viewpoints from an inclusive range of backgrounds and experiences to the project end-to-end; either of the above options, alongside working with a specialist group, charity, or research partner with experience in diversity and inclusion in the arts.

6. Indie publishing and well-being

In Chapter Five of this study, it was noted that independent authors were highly likely to feel positive about the future even when commercial success had not been achieved. This raises the question that was initially explored through the work of Baverstock and Steinitz, who identified the high level of satisfaction for independent authors a decade previously (2013b).

There is a potential opportunity to further explore the high levels of positivity among this group and the relationship to the publishing route they have selected. This could be in reference to similar work undertaken to investigate entrepreneurs and well-being, as explored in the meta-analysis by 'Happy Entrepreneurs? Everywhere? A Meta-Analysis of Entrepreneurship and Wellbeing' (Ute et al., 2022). Here the finding of relevance would be that data from a range of studies suggest entrepreneurs exhibit higher positive well-being – especially work and life satisfaction – than employees. Due to the crossover in skills and autonomy between publishing independently and entrepreneurship, along with the finding in this study that indie authors demonstrated high levels of satisfaction and positivity, findings from comparable studies could offer a useful framework for further study.

A wider opportunity may be to further explore independent publishing in the context of mental health support or other holistic care, potentially through close working with relevant institutions to A/B test comparable groups with and without publishing interventions. As part of this work, exploring which element of the publishing process has the most impact on well-being may also be of interest, for example, the act of creative writing, the decision-making and autonomous role, seeing the publication in print, or a combination of a range of activities. The data from this survey and others regarding the motivations to independently publish may prove a useful benchmark here.

Bibliography

Abrams, D. (2015). 'Survey Says Median Author Advance in UK under £6,600'. *Publishing Perspectives*: https://publishingperspectives.com/2015/03/survey-says-median-author-advance-in-uk-under-6600/ (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Abraha, M. (2020). 'Publishing has ignored and pigeonholed black authors for too long'. *Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2020/jun/09/publishing-has-ignored-and-pigeonholed-black-authors-for-too-long (Last accessed 10 October 2023).

ALCS (2022). 'Why are Writers at a Loss for Words?' *Authors Licensing and Collecting Society*: https://www.alcs.co.uk/news/why-writers-are-at-a-loss-for-words/ (Last accessed 9 January 2024).

Alliance of Independent Authors: ALLi (2020). 'What is Vanity Publishing?' *Self-Publishing Advice Centre Blog*: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/what-is-vanity-publishing/ (Last accessed 5 January 2024).

Alliance of Independent Authors: ALLi (2023a). *Creative Self-Publishing: ALLi's Guide to Independent Publishing for Authors & Poets*. 3rd Edition. Published by Alliance of Independent Authors.

Alliance of Independent Authors: ALLi (2023b). 'Rapid Release Strategies for Indie Authors'. *Self-Publishing Advice Centre Blog*: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/successful-rapid-release-strategies-for-indie-authors/ (Last accessed 10 November 2023).

Alliance of Independent Authors: ALLi (2023c). 'The Ultimate Guide to Author Pen Names'. *Self-Publishing Advice Centre Blog*: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/the-ultimate-guide-to-author-pen-names/ (Last accessed 10 November 2023).

American Printing Association (website last updated 2024). *American Printing Association Website*: https://printinghistory.org (Last accessed 1 October 2023).

Alter, A. (2014). 'Fast-Paced Best Seller: Author Thrives on Volumes --- With 25 Books in 30 Months, Self-Published Writer Plots Success'. *The Wall Street Journal*. Eastern edition, 2014-01-08.

Ampere Analytics (2021). 'Streaming Subscriptions in US Overtake Number of People. *Ampere Analytics News*: https://www.ampereanalysis.com/insight/streaming-subscriptions-in-us-overtake-number-of-people (Last accessed 26 September 2024).

Anderson, C. (2010). *The Longer Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand*. London: Random House.

Andrade, C. (2020). 'The Limitation of Online Surveys'. *Indian J Psychol Med. Journal*, October 2020 Vol. 6, pp. 575-576.

Armistead, C. (2013). 'How Beatrix Potter self-published Peter Rabbit'. *Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/dec/17/beatrix-potter-peter-rabbit-self-publishing (Last accessed 1 November 2024).

Atwell, M. (2019). 'Publishing 2025: A Vision'. *The Bookseller Blog*: https://www.thebookseller.com/blogs/publishing-2025-vision (Last accessed 30 July 2022).

Author not stated. (2011). 'Traditional Publishing: Pros & Cons': https://www.selfpublishingreview.com/2011/09/traditional-publishing-pros-cons/ (Last accessed 2 December 2023)

Author not stated. (2012*).* 'Amazeballs! Mummy Porn has Made it onto a Dictionary'. *Evening Standard Online*: https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/amazeballs-mummy-porn-has-made-it-onto-a-dictionary-an-online-one-8124670.html (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Author not stated (2020). 'Personality traits and entrepreneurs: Does gender make a difference'. *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 34(3), pp. 43-45.

Aronovitch, A. and Gibaldi, C. (2023). 'The importance of grit and its influence on female entrepreneurs'. *Entre-preneurial Business and Economics Review*, 11(1), pp. 165-179. https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2023.1101009

Bacon, F. and Giacobetti, F. (2003). 'Francis Giacobetti interviews Francis Bacon: "I painted to be loved". *The Art Newspaper*: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2003/06/01/francis-giacobetti-interviews-francis-bacon-i-painted-to-be-loved (Last accessed 1 July 2023).

Badley, G. F. (2019) 'Post-Academic Writing: Human Writing for Human Readers'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(2), pp. 180-191.

Bandera, C. and Passerini, K. (2020). 'Personality traits and the digital entrepreneur: Much of the same thing or a new breed?', *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 1:2, pp. 81-105.

Baron, D. (2009). *A better pencil: Readers, writers, and the digital revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Barrick, M. R. and Mount, M. K. (1991). 'The Big Five Personality Dimensions and Job performance: A Meta-Analysis'. *Personnel Psychology*: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1991.tb00688

Barrick, M. R. and Mount, M. K. (1993). 'Autonomy as a Moderator of the Relationships Between the Big Five Personality Dimensions and Job Performance'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 78 (No. 1), pp. 111-118.

Baverstock, A. (2001). *Marketing your book: an author's guide : how to target agents, publishers and readers*. 1st ed. London, A. & C. Black.

Baverstock, A. (2007). *Marketing your book: an author's guide : how to target agents, publishers and readers*. 2nd ed. London, A. & C. Black.

Baverstock, A. (2008*).* 'Author Empowerment'. *The Bookseller Blog*: http://www.thebookseller.com/blogs/author-empowerment (Last accessed 30 July 2022).

Baverstock, A. (2010). 'You're not so vain after all'. *The Times Higher blog*: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/kingston-university-youre-not-so-vain-after-all/413711.article (Last accessed 20 November 2023).

Baverstock, A. (2011). 'In Depth – Self-Publishing'. *The Bookseller Website*: http://www.thebookseller.com/feature/depth-self-publishing (Last Accessed 20 November 2023).

Baverstock, A. (2011). *The Naked Author*. London: Bloomsbury.

Baverstock, A. (2012). *How Books Became Less Different*, Oxford Brookes University Press.

Baverstock, A. and Steinitz, J. (2013a). 'Who are the self-publishers?' *Learned Publishing*, Vol. 26, Issue 3, pp.211-223.

Baverstock, A. and Steinitz, J. (2013b). 'What satisfactions do self-publishing authors gain from the process?' *Learned Publishing*, Vol. 26, Issue 4, pp. 272-282.

Baverstock, A. (2013a). 'Ten ways self-publishing has changed the world'. *Guardian Book Blog*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/apr/08/self-publishing-changed-books-world (Last Accessed 30 November 2023).

Baverstock, A. (2013b). *Why self-publishing needs to be taken seriously*. Logos, Journal of the World Publishing Community.

Baverstock, A. Blackburn, R. and Iskandarova, M. (2015a). 'How the role of the independent editor is changing in relation to traditional and self-publishing'. *Learned Publishing*, 28(2), pp. 123-131.

Baverstock, A. Blackburn, R. and Iskandarova, M. (2015b). 'Who are the independent editors, how did they reach their role and what are their associated job satisfactions?' *Learned Publishing*, 28(1), pp. 43-53.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Berg, N. and Knights, M. (2019). *Amazon: How the World's Most Relentless Retailer Will Continue to Revolutionize Commerce*. Kogan Page.

Beuscart, J. and Couronne, T. (2009). 'The Distribution of Online Reputation: Audience and Influence of Musicians on MySpace'. *Third International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media:* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2009): https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/13989 (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Bhaskar, M. (2013). *The Content Machine: towards a theory of publishing from the printing press to the digital network*. London, England; Anthem Press.

Black, A. (1990). 'Deadlier than the Male: Women as Readers and Writers of Crime Fiction'. *8 Law Context: A Socio-Legal Journal,* 54.

Blake, C. (1999). *From pitch to publication*. London: Macmillan.

Black, R. W. (2008). *Adolescents and online fan fiction*. New York: Peter Lang.

Brownell, K. M. et al. (2023). 'Choice or chance: How successful entrepreneurs talk about luck'. *Journal of Small Business Management*. [Online] ahead-of-print, pp. 1–34: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00472778.2023.2169703 (Last accessed 02 February 2024).

Bookouture (Date Unknown). 'Our Commitment'. *Bookouture Website*: https://bookouture.com/what-were-looking-for/ (Last accessed December 28 2023).

Bounie, D. et al. (2013). 'Superstars and outsiders in online markets: An empirical analysis of electronic books'. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications Journal*. Vol. 12 Issue 1. Jan-Feb 2013, pp. 52-59.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. Polity Press with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Brandt, M. J. (2017). 'Why authors shouldn't give away free books'. *Alliance of Independent Authors, Self-Publishing Advice Centre*: http://selfpublishingadvice.org/opinion-why-indie-authors-shouldnt-give-away-free-books/ (Last Accessed 10 July 2023).

Brewer, R. L. (2009). 'How Long Does it Take to Get a Book Published?' *Writer's Digest*: https://www.writersdigest.com/getting-published/how-long-does-it-take-to-get-a-book-published (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Budak, V. (2016). *Creative Freedom in the Digital Age*. Loughborough University.

Bureau of Labor Statistics US (2023). 'The Employment Situation December 2023.' *Bureau of Labor Statistics US Online*: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf?_ga=2.118094857.1677138233.1619138675-2139860585.1619023537_ (Last accessed December 28 2023).

Cambridge Dictionary (Date Unknown). 'Definition of Atheist'. *Cambridge Dictionary Online:* https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/atheist (Last Accessed 20 November 2023).

Campbell, L. (2016). 'Self-published titles '22% of UK e-book market'. *The Bookseller Online*: https://www.thebookseller.com/news/self-published-titles-22-e-book-market-325152 (Last accessed 2 November 2023).

Cantner, U et al. (2011). 'Which Big-Five personality traits drive entrepreneurial failure in highly innovative firms?' Paper presented at the DIME-DRUID ACADEMY Winter Conference 2011.

Carlick, S. (2022). 'Beyond Booktok', Penguin Articles: https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2022/08/beyond-booktok (Last Accessed 10 January 2024).

Carolan, S. and Evain, C. (2013). 'Self-Publishing: Opportunities and Threats in a New Age of Mass Culture'. *Publishing Research Quarterly Online*, 29 (4), pp. 285–300.

Carvajal, D. (2000). 'Long Line Online for Stephen King E-Novella'. *The New York Times Online*: https://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/16/books/long-line-online-for-stephen-king-e-novella.html (Last accessed 27 December 2023).

Cavannagh, M. (2019). 'Marketing a Book Series: The Power of Read-Through'. *IngramSpark Blog*: https://www.ingramspark.com/blog/marketing-a-book-series-the-power-of-readthrough (Last accessed 10 April 2024).

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Date Unknown). 'Disability Impacts All of Us', *CDC Online*: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html (Last accessed 1 May 2023).

Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (2022). *The American Family Survey 2022*. Brigham Young University.

Charyton, C. (2007). 'What Is the Relationship Between Sexual Orientation, Bisexuality and Creativity?' *Journal of Bisexuality*, 6:4, pp. 49-69, DOI: 10.1300/J159v06n04_05

Christensen, C. (1997) *The Innovator's Dilemma When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Clayton (2013). *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, Harvard Business Review Press.

Clark, G. and Phillips, A. (2019). *Inside Book Publishing*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Coker, M (2015). 'Dan Poynter, The Father of Self-Publishing Passes Away'*, Smashwords Blog:* https://blog.smashwords.com/2015/11/dan-poynter-father-of-self-publishing.html (Last accessed 6 March 2024).

Coker, M (2020). 'Are Self-Published Authors Still Indie Authors?' *Publishers Weekly Online*: https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/83009-are-self-published-authors-still-indie-authors.html (Last accessed 10 January 2024).

Coker, M. (Updated 2023). 'About Smashwords', *Smashwords Online*: https://www.smashwords.com/about (Last Accessed 1 December 2023).

Cope, B. and Phillips, A. (2006). *The Future of the Book in the Digital Age*. Oxford, UK: Chandos.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*. SAGE Publications Limited, Thousand Oaks, California.

Daneman, M. and Stainton, M. (1993). 'The generation effect in reading and proofreading'. *Reading and Writing,* Vol. 5, pp. 297–313.

Pierre, D. (2014). 'The Future of Book Publishing: Seven Technology Trends and Three Industry Goals'. *Publishing Research Quarterly*. Published: 07 August 2014, Vol. 30, pp. 275–281.

Dányi, E. (2016). 'Samizdat Lessons: Three Dimensions of the Politics of Self-Publishing'. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/3336451.0019.211?view=text;rgn=main (Last accessed 20 January 204).

Dawson, M. (2019). *Episode 091:* 'Why I turned down seven-figures to self-publish'. *Self Publishing Formula Podcast*, available at: https://selfpublishingformula.com/podcast.

Dilevko, J. and Dali, K. (2006). 'The self-publishing phenomenon and libraries'. *Library & Information Science Research*, 28.

Dolcos F, Hohl K, Hu Y and Dolcos S. (2021). 'Religiosity and Resilience: Cognitive Reappraisal and Coping Self-Efficacy Mediate the Link between Religious Coping and Well-Being'. *J Relig Health*. Aug; 60(4): pp. 2892-2905. doi: 10.1007/s10943-020-01160-y.

Duchek, S. (2018). 'Entrepreneurial resilience: a biographical analysis of successful entrepreneurs'. *International entrepreneurship and management journal*. 14 (2), pp. 429–455.

Dillon-Lee, F. (2018). *No Longer on the Shelf: The Case for Self-Publication*. Brunel University.

Daniszewski, J. (2020). '*Why We Lowercase White*'. The Associated Press Blog: https://blog.ap.org/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white (Last accessed 30 May 2024)

Eccleshare, J. (2020). 'Jill Paton Walsh Obituary'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/26/jill-paton-walsh-obituary (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Edelman, A. (Updated 2016). 'Why Traditionally Published Authors Go Indie'. *HuffPost Online*: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-traditionally-publish_b_8294250 (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Etemad et al. (2013). 'Conclusion: international entrepreneurship – learning points and implications'. *Current Issues in International Entrepreneurship*, Chapter 12: https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781953426.00020

Evain, C. and Carolan, S. (2013). 'Self-Publishing: Opportunities and Threats in a New Age of Mass Culture'. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 29.4 (2013): pp. 285–300.

Everitt, B., Landau, S. and Leese, M. (2010). *Cluster Analysis*. 5th edition. Chichester, Wiley.

Ezard, J. (2000). 'E-book sales a nightmare for author Stephen King'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/27/stephenking (Last accessed 27 December 2023).

Feather, J. (2005). *A History of British Publishing*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Feist, G. (1998). 'A Meta-Analysis of Personality in Scientific and Artistic Creativity'. *Society for Personality and Psychology*. Volume 2, Issue 4.

Findsen, B. and Formosa, M., eds., 2016. 'Introduction: International perspectives on older adult education. Research, policies and practice'. *Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 22. New York: Springer, 1–10.

Flood, A. (2014). 'Creative writing professor Hanif Kureishi says such courses are 'a waste of time''. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/04/creative-writing-courses-waste-of-time-hanif-kureishi (Last accessed 1 January 2024).

Flood, A. (2016). 'Digital Reading Driven by Older Women Study Claims'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/digital-reading-driven-by-older-women-study-claims (Last accessed 10 July 2023).

Flood, A. (2015). 'Self-publishing lets women break book industry glass ceiling survey finds'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/06/self-publishing-lets-women-break-book-industrys-glass-ceiling-survey-finds (Last accessed 20 November 22).

Forrester Advisory Services (2021). 'Post-Pandemic Media Consumption: Online Streaming Accelerates A New Content Experience'. *Forbes Online*: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forrester/2021/06/28/post-pandemic-media-consumption-online-streaming-accelerates-a-new-content-experience/?sh=55db057b18cf (Last Accessed 25 February 2023).

Fry, M. (2009). 'Me and My… Literary Agent'. *Scottish Herald Online*: https://www.heraldscotland.com/default_content/12761239.literary-agent/ (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Furst, H. (2019). 'Subordination and Legitimation of Self-Publishing: Shifting the Basis for Evaluation of Cultural Goods'. *Cultural Sociology*, 2019-12, Vol. 13, pp. 483-502.

Gaskell, D. (2023). 'Mark Dawson, The Million Dollar King of Self Publishing, Accused Of Plagiarism'. *Medium Online*: https://medium.com/illumination/mark-dawson-the-million-dollar-king-of-self-publishing-accused-of-plagiarism-793a0997798f (Last accessed 1 March 2024).

Genzlinger, N. (2020). 'Jill Paton Walsh, Multigenerational Writer, Dies at 83'. *The New York Times:* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/18/books/jill-paton-walsh-dead.html (Last accessed 1 March 2024).

Gore, J., Gibson, S., Fray, L., Smith, M. and Holmes, K. (2019), Fostering Diversity in the Creative Arts by Addressing Students' Capacity to Aspire. *Journal of Creative Behav*ior. 53, pp. 519-530.

Grady, C. (2020). 'Why the term "BIPOC" is so complicated, explained by linguists'. Vox Magazine: https://www.vox.com/2020/6/30/21300294/bipoc-what-does-it-mean-critical-race-linguistics-jonathan-rosa-deandra-miles-hercules (Last accessed 17 June 2024).

Griffin, G. (2022). 'Who's really behind your favorite celebrity memoir?' *WBUR Online*: https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/09/21/celebrity-memoir-ghostwriters (Last accessed December 28 2023).

Grohman, M. G. et al. (2017). 'The Role of Passion and Persistence in Creativity. Psychology of aesthetics, creativity, and the arts'. *Psychology of Aesthetics Creativity and the Arts*. 11 (4), pp. 376–385.

Gudinavičius, A. and Šuminas, A. (2018). 'Choosing a book by its cover: analysis of a reader's choice'. *Journal of Documentation*. 74 (2), pp. 430–446.

Hachana, R. et al. (2018). 'Identifying personality traits associated with entrepreneurial success: Does gender matter?*' Journal of Innovation Economics & Management*. 3 (27): pp. 169-193.

Hadro, J. (2013). 'What's the Problem with Self-Publishing?' *Library Journal*. 138 (7), pp. 34–3.

Hane, P. J. (2012). 'Spotlight on the self-publishing market'. *Information Today*. 29 (8), 7–7.

Heinström, J. (2013). *Theory in Information Behaviour Research*, Edited by Wilson T. D. Chapter 4. Publisher: Sheffield, UK.

Henke, H. (2001). *The global impact of eBooks on ePublishing*. Springer-Verlag London.

Herman, Flores, O'Neill (2022). 'Trans Population Update June 2022'. *Williams Institute Online*: https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Pop-Update-Jun-2022.pdf (Last accessed 2 November 2023).

Hudson Ink (2023). 'About Us'. *Hudson Ink*: https://www.hudsonindieink.com (Last visited 10 December 2023).

Hutchison, B. (2022). 'Eastgate: An Interview with JD Kirk'. *Books From Scotland Online*: https://booksfromscotland.com/2022/11/eastgate-an-interview-with-jd-kirk/ (Last accessed 27 December 2023).

Hviid, M. et al. (2019). 'From Publishers to Self-Publishing: Disruptive Effects in the Book Industry'. International Journal of the Economics of Business. 26 (3), pp. 355–381.

Ibbetson, C. (2020). 'What are Common Reading Habits?' *YouGov Report*: https://yougov.co.uk/entertainment/articles/28243-world-book-day-britons-reading-habits? (Last accessed 2 November 2023).

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Johnson, M. (2017). 'The Rise of the Citizen Author: Writing Within Social Media'. *Publishing Research Quarterly*. 33(3): 10.1007/s12109-017-9505-8

Jirásek, M. and Sudzina, F. (2020). 'Big Five Personality Traits and Creativity'. *Kvalita inovácia prosperita*. 24 (3), pp. 90.

Kaspi-Baruch, O. (2019). 'Big Five Personality and Creativity: The Moderating Effect of Motivational Goal Orientation'. *The Journal of creative behavior*, 2019, Vol. 53 (3), pp. 325-338.

Kassir and Epsley. (2021). *Queer Between the Covers*. University of London Press.

Kaufman, S. (2018). 'The Role of Luck in Life Success Is Far Greater Than We Realized'. *Scientific American*: https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/the-role-of-luck-in-life-success-is-far-greater-than-we-realized/ (Last accessed 30 November 2023).

Kaya, M. and Steffens, P. and Hearn, G. and Graham, P. (2010). 'How can entrepreneurial musicians use electronic social networks to diffuse their music'. *Proceedings of the 7th AGSE International Entrepreneurship Research Exchange*. Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University, Langan-Fox, J (Ed.), CD Rom, pp. 679-691.

Keen, A. (2007). *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Kelly, J. (2022). 'The rise of the stay-at-home dad'. *Forbes Magazine*: https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/12/07/the-rise-of-the-stay-at-home-dad/ (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Kemmis, S. and Wilkinson, M. (1998). *Participatory Action Research and the Study of Practice*. Routledge.

Keymer, T. (2011). *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Kirch, C. (2011).0 'PW Select: Booksellers Reveal Secrets to Self-Published Success'. *Publishers Weekly*, 2011, Vol. 258 (13), p. 3.

Koerber, J. (2012). 'Express yourself'. *Library Journal.* 137(16), pp. 23-26.

Knowles, C. (1981). *Self-publishers and Their Books, Primary Communications Research Centre*, University of Leicester.

Lancendorfer, J. (2017). 'How Beatrix Potter Invented Character Merchandising'. *Smithsonian Museum Online*: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-beatrix-potter-invented-character-merchandising-180961979/ (Last accessed 5 January 2024).

Laquintano, T. (2013). 'The legacy of the vanity press and digital transitions'. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*. 16 (1), 42–17.

Laquintano, T. (2010). 'Sustained Authorship: Digital Writing, Self-Publishing, and the Ebook'. *Written Communication*, 2010-10, Vol. 27 (4), pp. 469-493.

Laquintano, T. (2016). *Mass authorship and the rise of self-publishing*. University of Iowa Press.

Leutner, Franziska et al. (2014). 'The Relationship Between the Entrepreneurial Personality and the Big Five Personality Traits'. *Personality and Individual Differences* 63, pp. 58–63.

Lewis, G.B. and Seaman, B.A. (2004). 'Sexual orientation and demand for the arts'. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85, pp. 523-538.

Lloyd, A. (2007). 'Education, Literacy and the Reading Public'. *British Library Newspapers*. Detroit: Gale.

Lodge, S. (2012). 'Self-styled successes: four self-published children's authors have received warm welcomes from mainstream houses'. *The Publishers Weekly*, 2012, Vol. 259 (40), p. 42.

Lovegrove, S. (2018). 'If you don't have a diverse workforce or product, sooner or later you won't exist'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/18/sharmaine-lovegrove-if-you-dont-have-diverse-workforce-wont-exist-dialogue-books-interview (Last Accessed 2 November 2023).

Lowrey, S. (2021). 'Putting the Self in Self-Publishing'. *Publishers Weekly*. 268 (28), pp. 19.

Luther, J. et al. (2017). 'Special Issue Editors' Introduction: The Past, Present, and Future of Self-Publishing: Voices, Genres, Publics'. *Community Literacy Journal*. 12 (1), pp. 1–4.

Lynch, C. (2001). 'The battle to define the future of the book in the digital world'. *First Monday*, 6(6-4): http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/printerFriendly/864/773 (Last Accessed 10 July 2023).

Maas, S. J. (2011). 'The Writing Community's Kryptonite…AKA Jealousy'. *Let the Words Flow*: https://letthewordsflow.wordpress.com/2010/07/27/the-writing-communitys-kryptonite-aka-jealousy/ (Last accessed 10 August 2023).

Martinez, G. and Daniels, K. (2023). 'Fertility of Men and Women Aged 15–49 in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth, 2015–2019'. *National Health Statistics Reports*, Number 179.

Mbiya, A. (2023). 'New research: 64% of personality traits bias survey responses'*, Mindlab Online*: https://themindlab.co.uk/academy/new-research-personality-traits-greatly-bias-survey-responses/ (Last accessed 2 January 2024).

McGahan, A. and Porter M. (2002). 'What do we know about variance in accounting profitability?' *Management Science* 48(7): pp. 834-851.

McCrae, R. R. et al. (2000). 'Nature over nurture: Temperament, personality, and life span development'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(1), pp. 173–186.

McCrae, R. R. and Costa, P. T. (1987*).* 'Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 52, pp. 81-90.

McCrae, R. R. and Costa, P. T. (1997). 'Personality Trait Structure as a Human Universal'. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 52, No. 5, pp. 509-516.

McCallum, Q. and Gleason, K. (2018). *Understanding patterns of disruption: lessons learned from the cloud, machine learning, and more.* O'Reilly Media, Inc.

McLoughlin, D. (2022). 'Amazon Kindle, E-book, and Kindle Unlimited Statistics'. *Words Rated: https://wordsrated.com/amazon-kindle-e-book-and-kindle-unlimited-statistics/* (Last accessed 14 January 2024).

Merton, C. (2008). 'Self-publishing: last resort or opportunity?' *Midwifery Digest*, 2008-06, Vol.18 (2), p.274-275

Milliot, J. (2023). 'Self-Publishing Is Thriving, According to Bowker Report'. *Publishers Weekly:* https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/91574-self-publishing-is-thriving-according-to-bowker-report.html (Last accessed 2 November 2023).

Moore, K. (2023). 'How Many Oscars Has Netflix Won In Its History?'. *What's on Netflix Online*: https://www.whats-on-netflix.com/news/how-many-oscars-has-netflix-won-in-its-history-2023/ (Last accessed 30 January 2024).

More, J. (2018). *Entrepreneur Mindsets and Habits.* Independently published.

Morgan and Rego. (2009). 'Brand Portfolio Strategy and Firm Performance'. *Journal of Marketing*, January 2009 73(1): pp. 59-74.

Morten, H, Izquierdo-Sanchez, S and Jacques, S. (2019*)*. 'From Publishers to Self-Publishing: Disruptive Effects in the Book Industry'. *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, 26:3, 355-381, DOI: 10.1080/13571516.2019.1611198

Murdoch M, Simon AB, Polusny MA, Bangerter AK, Grill JP, Noorbaloochi S, Partin MR. (2014). Impact of different privacy conditions and incentives on survey response rate, participant representativeness, and disclosure of sensitive information: a randomized controlled trial. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. Jul 16;14:90. doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-14-90.

Murdock, C. J. (2017). 'Making Fanfic: The (Academic) Tensions of Fan Fiction as Self-Publication'. *Community Literacy Journal*. [Online] 12 (1), pp. 48–61.

Murray, S. (2006*)*. 'Publishing studies: Critically mapping research in search of a discipline'. *Publishing Research Quarterly,* vol. 22, pp. 3–25.

Mustafa, S.E., Mohd Adnan, H. 'Crowdsourcing: A Platform for Crowd Engagement in the Publishing Industry'. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 33, 283–296 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-017-9525-4

Nardini, B. and Schnell, J. (2013). 'Self-Publishing: Breaking Down Barriers?' *Against the Grain*. Vol. 25, Issue 3, Article 13.

Nankervis, M. (2022). 'Diversity in Romance Novels: Race, Sexuality, Neurodivergence, Disability, and Fat Representation'. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 38, pp. 349–363. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-022-09881-6

National Center for Education Statistics (2022). 'Percentage of persons 25 to 29 years old with selected levels of educational attainment': https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_104.20.asp (Last accessed 3 January 2024).

Nielsen (2021). 'E-books and the Lockdown Effect'. *Nielsen Online*: https://nielsenbook.co.uk/e-books-and-the-lockdown-effect/ (Last accessed December 27 2023).

Noblit, C. (2021*)*. 'How to write a book to market', *Written Word Media Online*: https://www.writtenwordmedia.com/how-to-write-a-book-to-market (Last accessed 5 January 2024).

Nunberg, G. (1996). *The future of the book*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

O'Reilly, T. (2009) *What is Web 2.0?* O'Reilly Media Inc, Independently Published: What is Web 2.0 (Last accessed 1 December 2023).

Office for National Statistics (2017). 'Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2017'. *ONS Online: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesbymaritalstatusandlivingarrangements/2002to2017#* (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Office for National Statistics (2021b). 'Education, England and Wales: Census 2021'. *ONS Online:* https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/educatio nenglandandwales/census2021 (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Office for National Statistics (2021a). 'UK Births, Deaths and Marriages'. *ONS Online:* https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/

Office for National Statistics (Updated Jan 2023). 'First census estimates on gender identity and sexual orientation'. *ONS Online*: https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/news/firstcensusestimatesongenderidentityandsexualorientation (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Page, B. (2016). 'PRH sells Author Solutions'. *The Bookseller online*: https://www.thebookseller.com/news/prh-sells-author-solutions (Last accessed December 27 2023).

Palmer, K. (2021). 'Communication techniques for effective project management'. *The Association for Project Management*: https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/communication-techniques-for-effective-project-management/ (Last accessed 10 January 2024).

Pallat, J. (2020). *SPSS Survival Manual*. Open University Press; 7th edition.

Parker, S.K., Wu, C., and De Jong, J. (2011). 'Need for Cognition as an Antecedent of Individual Innovation Behavior'. *Journal of Management*, Volume 40, Issue 6.

Pearson, K. (Date Unknown). 'Writing Career'. *Keith A Pearson Online*: https://www.keithapearson.co.uk/about/ (Last accessed 5 May 2023).

Pecoskie, J. (J. L.) and Hill, H. (2015). 'Beyond traditional publishing models'. *Journal of Documentation*. 71 (3), pp. 609–626.

Pervin, Lawrence A. (2003). *The Science of Personality*. Rutgers University Press.

Pew Research Centre (2014*)*. 'Religious Landscape Study'. *PEW Research*: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/ (Last accessed 10 January 2024).

Pew Research Centre (2019). 'In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace'. *Pew Research:* https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/ (Last accessed 26 September 2024).

Pihlainen, K., Ehlers, A., Rohner, R., Cerna, K., Kärnä, E., Hess, M., … Müller, C. (2022). 'Older adults' reasons to participate in digital skills learning: An interdisciplinary, multiple case study from Austria, Finland, and Germany.' *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol. 55(1), pp. 101–119.

Phillips, A. (2014). *Turning the page: the evolution of the book*. London: Routledge.

Phillips, D.C. (1983). 'After the Wake, Postpositivism and Educational Thought'. *Educational Researcher,* Vol. 12(5), pp. 4-12.

Playle, S. (2018). 'How Many Submissions Do Literary Agents Receive?' *Liminal Pages Website*: https://www.liminalpages.com/how-many-submissions-literary-agents-receive (Last accessed 1 December 2023).

Portes, R. (2017). 'Who Needs Experts?' *Guardian Online*: https://www.london.edu/think/who-needs-experts (Last accessed 1 December 2023).

Potter, A. (2003). *Should we abandon Type A in favour of the Big Five model?* Birkbeck College University of London.

Potter, J. and Hepburn, A. (2012). 'Eight challenges for interview researchers', in Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B., McKinney, K. D. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403

Poynter, D. (2007). *Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book*. Para Publishing.

Poynter, D. (2009). *Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book: Volume Two*. Para Publishing (Kindle Edition).

PublishDrive (Date Unknown) 'What are film rights?' https://publishdrive.com/glossary-what-are-film-rights.html (Last accessed 2 December 2023).

Price, L. (2022). 'Fanfiction, Self-Publishing, and the Materiality of the Book: A Fan Writer's Autoethnography'. *Humanities* (Basel), Vol. 11 (4), p. 100.

Puryear, J. S. et al. (2019). 'Relating Personality and Creativity: Considering What and How We Measure'. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*. 53 (2), pp. 232–245.

Ramdarshan Bold, M. (2018). 'The return of the social author: Negotiating authority and influence on Wattpad'. *Convergence* (London, England), 2018, Vol. 24 (2), pp. 117-136.

Roberts, B. W. and DelVecchio, W. F. (2000). 'The rank-order consistency of personality traits from childhood to old age: A quantitative review of longitudinal studies'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(1), pp. 3–25.

Ross, L. J. (2020). 'Self-publishing is a fantastic opportunity to be creative'. *'i' news online*: https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/lj-ross-interview-crime-fiction-dci-ryan-self-publishing (Last accessed 15 January 2024).

Ross, O. (2019). 'The 7 Processes of Book Publishing'. *Alliance of Independent Authors*: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/7-processes-of-publishing/ (Last accessed 10 November 2023).

Rose, R. C., Kumar, N., & Ibrahim, H. I. (2008). *'The effect of manufacturing strategy on organizational performance'*. *Performance Improvement*, 47(1), pp. 18–25: https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.175

Rosett, S. (for Alliance of Independent Authors) (2023). 'The Ultimate Guide to Being a Hybrid Author', *Self-Publishing Advice Centre*: https://selfpublishingadvice.org/the-ultimate-guide-to-being-a-hybrid-author/ (Last accessed 10 November 2023).

Runco, M. (2014). *Theories and Themes: Research, Development, and Practice*. Creativity 2nd Edition, Academic Press.

Salmony, F. and Kanbach, D. (2022). 'Personality trait differences across types of entrepreneurs: a systematic literature review'. *Review of Managerial Science*, Heidelberg Vol. 16, Iss. 3, pp. 713-749.

Sargent, B. K. (2014). 'Surprising Self-Publishing Statistics'. *Publishers Weekly Online*: https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/63455-surprising-self-publishing-statistics.html (Last accessed 27 December 2023).

Sarnecka, B. (2020). 'Why Would a Professor Self-Publish a Book?' *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 2020, Vol.51 (4), p.309-313.

Scope (date unknown). 'Social Model of Disability', *Scope*: https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/ (Last accessed 10 July 2023).

Selzer, B. (2015). 'Thriving Among Giants: Self-Publishing in the Digital Age'. *American Journal of Public Health (1971)*. 105 (10), pp. 1956–1956.

Smith, C. (2021). 'Home baking businesses rise as Great British Bake Off returns'. *Simply Business Online*: https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/articles/2022/09/great-british-bake-off-and-home-baking-businesses-on-the-rise/ (Last accessed: 01 February 2024).

Shatzkin, M. (2019). 'Seven ways book publishing will change over the next few years'. *The Idea Logical Company blog*: www.idealog.com/blog/7-ways-book-publishing-will-change-over-the-next-few-years/ (Last accessed: 10 November 2023).

Shumake, J. (2017). 'Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing'. *Community Literacy Journal*, Vol. 12 (1), pp. 100-103.

Silvia, P. J., Kaufman, J. C., Reiter-Palmon, R., and Wigert, B. (2011*).* 'Cantankerous creativity: Honesty–Humility, Agreeableness, and the HEXACO structure of creative achievement'. *Personality and Individual Differences,* Vol. 51, pp. 687–689.

Kutaula, S., Gillani, A., Leonidou, L. C., and Christodoulides, P. (2022). 'Integrating fair trade with circular economy: Personality traits, consumer engagement, and ethically-minded behavior'. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 144, pp. 1087-1102.

So, J. and Wezerek, G. (2020). 'How White is the Book Industry?' *The New York Times Online*: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/11/opinion/culture/diversity-publishing-industry.html (Last accessed 1 December 2023).

Solomons, M. (2023*).* 'The Unstoppable March of the Celebrity Author'. *The Spectator Online*: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-unstoppable-march-of-the-celebrity-author/ (Last accessed 10 November 2023).

Spatz, S. (2018). 'What can indie authors learn from E. L. James Self-Publishing Success?' *Writing Cooperative:* https://writingcooperative.com/what-indie-authors-can-learn-from-e-l-james-self-publishing-success-242236d8635d (Last Accessed 10 November 2023).

Stonewall (Date Unknown). 'LGBTQ+ terms'. *Stonewall*: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms (Last accessed 10 July 2023).

Su, R., Rounds, J., Armstrong, P. I. (2009). 'Men and Things, Women and People: A Meta-Analysis of Sex Differences in Interests'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 2009, Vol. 135 (6), pp. 859-884.

Taherkhani, Z. et al. (2023). 'The effect of positive thinking on resilience and life satisfaction of older adults: a randomized controlled trial'. *NCBI*: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9977771/ Sci Rep. 2023; 13: 3478. Published online 2023 Mar 1 (Last accessed 10 January 2024).

Taleb, N. (2010). *The Black Swan, Second Edition: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. Penguin.

Tang, Y., Huang, X., and Wang, Y. (2017). 'Good marriage at home, creativity at work: Family–work enrichment effect on workplace creativity'. *J. Organizational Behavior*, 38: pp.749–766. doi: 10.1002/job.2175.

Talbot, D. (2023). 'Odds of Getting Published Statistics'. *Words Rated*: https://wordsrated.com/odds-of-getting-published-statistics/ (Last accessed 7 February 2024).

The Authors Guild (Updated Sept. 2023). 'Key Takeaways from the Authors Guild's 2023 Author Income Survey'. *The Authors Guild*: https://authorsguild.org/news/key-takeaways-from-2023-author-income-survey/ (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

The Society of Authors (Date Unknown). 'How do authors get paid?' https://societyofauthors.org/Where-We-Stand/buying-choices/How-do-authors-get-paid (Last accessed July 30 2023).

Thomas, A., Battisti, M., Kretschmer, M. (2022). 'UK Authors' Earnings and Contracts 2022: A Survey of 60,000 Writers'. *Create*: https://www.create.ac.uk/blog/2022/12/07/uk-authors-earnings-and-contracts-2022-a-survey-of-60000-writers/ (Last Accessed 10 January 2024).

Thomas-Corr, J. (2021). 'How Women Conquered the World of Fiction'. *The Observer*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/may/16/how-women-conquered-the-world-of-fiction (Last accessed 1st October 2023).

Thompson, John B. (2022). *Book Wars: the digital revolution in publishing*: Cambridge, Polity.

Thompson, John B. (2005). *Books in the Digital Age: The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States*. Polity Press.

Torday, P. (2022). 'Steer Clear of 'Mediocre Writing' by Celebrities for Christmas, Authors Plead'. *The Guardian Online*: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/dec/11/children-authors-kids-non-celebrity-book-christmas (Last Accessed 2 December 2023).

Towell, J. (2001). 'Using Celebrities to Motivate Students to Read'. *The Reading Teacher Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1 (Sep. 2001), pp. 22-26.

Tualla, K. (2011). *Becoming an Authorpreneur*. Independently Published.

Tyson, S. (2023). 'What challenges do first-generation students face?' *The 93% Club Website*: https://www.93percent.club/blog/first-generation-student (Last accessed 3 January 2024).

UK Government (Updated 2021). 'Ethnicity Style Guides'. *Gov.uk*: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/ (Last accessed 10 July 2023).

Vadde, A. (2017). 'Amateur Creativity: Contemporary Literature and the Digital Publishing Scene'. *New Literary History*, Baltimore Vol. 48, Iss. 1, (Winter 2017): 27-51,194.

Vallée-Tourangeau, F. & Vallée-Tourangeau, G. (2020) 'Mapping systemic resources in problem solving'. *New Ideas in Psychology. 59, 100812-. doi:10.1016/j.newideapsych.2020.100812*.

von Rimscha, M.B., Putzig, S. (2013). 'From Book Culture to Amazon Consumerism: Does the Digitization of the Book Industry Lead to Commercialization?'. Publishing Research Quarterly 29, pp. 318–335: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-013-9327-2

Visentin, D. and Cleary, M. and Minutillo, S. (2020). 'Small Business Ownership and Mental Health'. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 41:5, pp. 460-463.

Wach, Stephan, Gorgievsk. (2016). 'More than money: Developing an integrative multi-factorial measure of entrepreneurial success'. *International Small Business Journal*, Vol 34.

Waldfogel, J. and Reimers, I. (2015). 'Storming the gatekeepers: Digital disintermediation in the market for books'. *Information Economics and Policy*, Vol. 31, June 2015, pp. 47-58.

Walumbwa, F. O. and Schaubroeck, J. (2009). 'Leader personality traits and employee voice behavior: Mediating roles of ethical leadership and work group psychological safety'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(5), pp. 1275–1286.

Waters, M. (2023). 'Amazon Displaying Sales Figures'. *Intentwise.com*: https://www.intentwise.com/blog/amazon-ui-feature/amazon-is-displaying-sales-data-in-search-heres-what-to-know/ (Last accessed 20 July 2023).

Wilde, K. (2021). 'No you shouldn't self-publish your book. There are already enough bad books out there.' The Writing Cooperative.

Winkler, P. (2014). 'Famous Authors Who Self-Published: Busting a Self-Publishing Myth'. *Huff Post Online*: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/famous-writers-who-selfpu_b_4303994 (Last accessed 1 November 2023).

Wiseman, R. (2011). *The Luck Factor*. Cornerstone Digital; New Ed edition.

Wirt, J. et al. (2001). 'The Condition of Education Report 2011'. *NCES 2001072*, Ed Pubs.

World Population Review (2024). 'PHD by country metanalysis': https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/phd-percentage-by-country (Last accessed 5 January 2024).

Young, S. (2014). 'Me myself I: Revaluing self-publishing in the electronic age'. Book Chapter, *The Future of Writing,* Potts, J, pp. 33 – 454.

Zhao, H. and Seibert, S. E. (2006). 'The Big Five Personality Dimensions and Entrepreneurial Status: A Meta-Analytical Review'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 91 (2), pp. 259–271.

Zaid, G. (2003). *So Many Books: Reading and Publishing in an Age of Abundance*. Trans. Natasha Wimmer. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books.

APPENDIX ONE: Author Survey Text

2022 Author Survey Copy: Distributed via Qualtrics Digital Platform

Welcome to the 2022 Author Survey – please note this survey will close at midnight (UK time) on the 16th of October.

This anonymous survey for authors has five sections and should take around fifteen minutes to complete. You can pause and come back to your survey session should you need to.

The results will be central to a new piece of research being undertaken by Holly Greenland as part of a PhD with Kingston University. The project is exploring the different paths authors take to publish their work and whether personality traits or other characteristics impact authors' choices.

We are looking for views from self-published authors and traditionally published authors, including those publishing through hybrid, digital-only and specialist publishers.

Before you answer questions about your publishing experience, you will be asked about your outlook on life and your demographic characteristics, such as your age and gender.

The survey is anonymous and does not require you to share your contact details. However, at the end of the survey you can choose to share your email address to be in with a chance of being randomly selected to receive one of three book tokens as recognition of your participation.

Please share the survey link with other authors or networks you feel could contribute to this research. The survey will close at midnight on the 16th of October 2022.

Sharing survey link: {SHORT URL LINK SHARED HERE DURING LIVE DISTRIBUTION}

Thank you for supporting this study.

{REQUIRED FOR SELECTION BEFORE PROCEEDING}

Please select the box below to consent to sharing your views anonymously with the project:
• I consent to share my views anonymously with the Author Survey 2022 Project

If you would like more details about this project, you can view the Informed Consent Form, Participant Information Sheet, or the Privacy Notice.

If you have any further questions, you can email Holly Greenland, the lead researcher for the project:

{EMAIL SHARED HERE DURING LIVE DISTRIBUTION}

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS
Before we get started, these three quick questions will identify if your experience matches the requirements of the study.

1. Do you live in the UK?
- Yes – I live wholly or mostly in the UK
- No

2. {Skip to end of survey if 'No - I have not published a book' is selected}
Have you published a minimum of one book ("published" means you have completed a book and distributed it to, or shared with, readers in any format. This could include as an ebook, in print or as an audio book)?
- Yes - fiction only
- Yes - non-fiction only
- Yes - a combination of fiction and non-fiction
- No - I have not published a book

3. Which category best describes how you are currently being published? (Select one option only)
- Self-published
- Published through a publisher
- A combination of the two

Please also share where you heard about this survey...
- Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi)
- The Society of Authors
- Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB)
- Word of mouth
- Self Publishing Formula (Mark Dawson)
- Writers' HQ
- Online Writer's Group/Forum (please specify) _____
- Other (please specify) _____

Section One: About You

Before you answer questions on publishing, this section asks about **your outlook on life in general**. This will help to build up a picture of the sorts of people writing today and publishing in different ways.

Look at each statement presented as if it was being used to describe you. Then select from the options in terms of accuracy.

Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you might like to be now or in the future. Try to answer as honestly as possible. It may help not to think too much about your answers to each question and select your choices using your instincts.

Please rate the following in terms of how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

{Questions randomly ordered by survey mechanism}

	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate
Am the life of the party.	o	o	o	o	o
Feel little concern for others.	o	o	o	o	o
Am always prepared.	o	o	o	o	o
Get stressed out easily.	o	o	o	o	o
Have a rich vocabulary.	o	o	o	o	o
Don't talk a lot.	o	o	o	o	o
Am interested in people.	o	o	o	o	o
Leave my belongings around.	o	o	o	o	o
Am relaxed most of the time.	o	o	o	o	o
Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.	o	o	o	o	o
Feel comfortable around people.	o	o	o	o	o
Insult people.	o	o	o	o	o
Pay attention to details.	o	o	o	o	o
Worry about things.	o	o	o	o	o
Have a vivid imagination.	o	o	o	o	o
Keep in the background.	o	o	o	o	o
Sympathize with others' feelings.	o	o	o	o	o
Make a mess of things.	o	o	o	o	o
Seldom feel blue.	o	o	o	o	o
Am not interested in abstract ideas.	o	o	o	o	o
Start conversations.	o	o	o	o	o
Am not interested in other people's problems.	o	o	o	o	o
Get chores done right away.	o	o	o	o	o
Am easily disturbed.	o	o	o	o	o
Have excellent ideas.	o	o	o	o	o
Have little to say.	o	o	o	o	o
Have a soft heart.	o	o	o	o	o
Often forget to put things back in their proper place.	o	o	o	o	o
Get upset easily.	o	o	o	o	o
Do not have a good imagination.	o	o	o	o	o
Talk to a lot of different people at parties.	o	o	o	o	o

Am not really interested in others.	o	o	o	o	o
Like order.	o	o	o	o	o
Change my mood a lot.	o	o	o	o	o
Am quick to understand things.	o	o	o	o	o
Don't like to draw attention to myself.	o	o	o	o	o
Take time out for others.	o	o	o	o	o
Shirk my duties.	o	o	o	o	o
Have frequent mood swings.	o	o	o	o	o
Use difficult words.	o	o	o	o	o
Don't mind being the centre of attention.	o	o	o	o	o
Feel others' emotions.	o	o	o	o	o
Follow a schedule.	o	o	o	o	o
Get irritated easily.	o	o	o	o	o
Spend time reflecting on things.	o	o	o	o	o
Am quiet around strangers.	o	o	o	o	o
Make people feel at ease.	o	o	o	o	o
Am exacting in my work.	o	o	o	o	o
Often feel blue.	o	o	o	o	o
Am full of ideas.	o	o	o	o	o

Section Two: Your Protected Characteristics

We are asking all respondents these standard questions which have been adapted from the UK Census 2021. These include some questions covering the nine characteristics which are by UK law protected from discrimination.

Please be assured that this section, along with the full survey, is anonymous. By sharing your information you will be helping build a better understanding of writers today and our understanding of the opportunities for diversity and inclusion in the future.

1. How old are you? {Drop down menu}
● Under 18
● 18 – 24
● 25 – 34
● 35 – 44
● 45 – 54
● 55 – 64
● 65 +

2. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months (include any problems related to old age)?

● Yes, limited a little
● Yes, limited a lot
● No

3. If you answered 'yes' to question 2, please indicate your disability:
● Vision (e.g. due to blindness or partial sight)
● Hearing (e.g. due to deafness or partial hearing)
● Mobility, such as difficulty walking short distances, climbing stairs, lifting, and carrying objects
● Learning or concentrating or remembering
● Mental Health
● Stamina or breathing difficulty
● Social or behavioural issues (e.g. due to neuro diverse conditions such as Autism, Attention Deficit Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome)
● Other / Prefer to self-describe _____

4. What is your sex as registered at birth?
Please note: questions about gender identity and reassignment will follow
● Female
● Male

5. Is the gender you identify as the same as your sex registered at birth?
● Yes
● No

{Additional question displayed if 'no' is selected above} What gender do you identify as?
● Male
● Female
● Trans-gender
● Non-binary
● Other / Prefer to self-describe _____

6. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
- Heterosexual/straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other / Prefer to self-describe _____

7. What is your current legal marital or civil partnership status?
- Single
- In a relationship
- Married / in a civil partnership
- Separated, but legally married / separated but legally in a civil partnership
- Divorced / previously in a civil partnership but now legally dissolved
- Widowed / Surviving partner from a civil partnership

8. Do you have children?
- Yes
- No

9. Are you currently pregnant or on parental leave?
- Currently pregnant
- Currently on parental leave
- No

10. What is your religion?
- No religion
- Atheist
- Buddhist
- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Hindu
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Sikh
- Other (please specify) _____

11. What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.
White
- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, please describe
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe
Asian / Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, please describe
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe _____

Any Other ethnic group

- Any other ethnic group, please describe _____

12. What is your approximate household disposable income in relation to the current UK average of £31,400 a year? ("household disposable income" means the total income of all those living in your house, after tax, but including benefits/allowances - i.e. the income available to spend or save each year). For writers outside the UK, please estimate or select 'Unsure'.
- Above the average household income of £31,400
- Below the average household income of £31,400
- Just about the same as the average household income of £31,400
- Unsure
- Prefer not to say

13. What is the highest level of education that either of your parents have attained?
- Doctorate degree or higher
- Master's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Secondary school/college graduate, diploma or equivalent
- Some secondary school completed
- Other _____

14. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?
- Doctorate degree or higher
- Master's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Secondary school/college graduate, diploma or equivalent
- Some secondary school completed
- Other _____

15. Education type: Please select the type of school(s) you mainly attended between the ages of 11 and 18 years old:
- State-run or state-funded school in the UK, which was non-selective
- State-run or state-funded school in the UK, which was selective on academic, faith or other grounds
- Independent or fee-paying school in the UK
- Independent or fee-paying school in the UK (assisted or funded place)
- Home schooled
- School outside of the UK (please describe type - i.e. fee paying or state)
- Other _____

16. Where do you currently live {Drop down options}
- Northern Ireland
- England: South West
- England: South East
- England: Greater London
- England: East of England
- England: West Midlands
- England: East Midlands
- England: Yorkshire and Humber
- England: North West
- England: North East
- Scotland
- Wales
- US (any state)
- Another country (not UK or US), please include below _____

Section Three: Your Writing Experience

This section explores **your writing experience to date**. This will help us understand the publishing experience and goals of a wide range of authors.

1. In which year did you publish your first book
{Drop down options from 1950 – 2022}

2. How many books have you published to date?
{Drop down options from 1 to 50 or more}

3. What genre/s best describe your writing (select all that apply)
- Adventure Stories & Action
- Biographical Fiction
- Contemporary Fiction
- Crime, Thrillers & Mystery
- Disability Fiction
- Erotica
- Family Sagas
- Fantasy
- LGBTQ+
- Historical
- Horror
- Lad Lit
- Literary Fiction
- Medical
- Metaphysical & Visionary
- Myths & Fairy Tales
- Poetry & Drama
- Political
- Psychological
- Religious & Inspirational
- Romance
- Science Fiction
- Short Stories
- Sport
- War
- Westerns
- Women's Fiction
- Non-fiction: books related to writing or publishing
- Non-fiction: all other topics
- Other _____

4. How is your writing currently distributed? (Select all that apply)
- Distributed through digital platforms/websites in e-book form
- Distributed through digital platforms/websites in print
- Distributed through independent book shops in print
- Distributed through chain book shops in print
- Distributed at festivals/conferences/events
- Available on my own website
- Distributed as an audiobook
- Unsure
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

5. Which of the following best describes your current writing status?
- Full-time career writer
- Part-time career writer while in additional permanent employment
- Part-time career writer while in additional part time employment
- Part-time career writer while studying
- Writing a one-off book for a specific reason (i.e. family history)
- Writing as a leisure activity / for personal enjoyment
- Other (please specify) _____

6. Do you undertake paid work or voluntary activities as a result of, or related to, your writing experience? (e.g. teaching writing courses, running self-publishing workshops, speaking at events)
- Yes, I undertake paid work in relation to my writing
- Yes, I undertake voluntary activities in relation to my writing
- Yes, I undertake both paid work and voluntary activities in relation to my writing
- No

7. In what way have you invested in your writing so far? (Select all that apply)
- My own writing time unpaid (i.e. without an advance), during which paid employment couldn't be undertaken
- Paid for cover design
- Paid for editorial advice
- Paid for proofreading
- Paid for blog tours
- Paid for social media marketing
- Paid for launch event
- Paid for other marketing activity
- Paid for legal support
- Paid for audio version
- No financial investment made in writing so far
- Paid for other activity (please specify) _____

8. How would you rate your knowledge of the publishing process today? (The publishing process means all the steps needed to take a written text through to a finished product in the hands of your readers.)

	Not knowledgeable at all	Slightly knowledgeable	Moderately knowledgeable	Very knowledgeable	Extremely knowledgeable
I would rate my knowledge of the publishing process as...	○	○	○	○	○

9. Would you be interested in learning more about the publishing process?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

10. Approximately how many book sales or equivalent (i.e. page reads or audio downloads) have you had in the past year? (This could be either the past 12 months from now, or the last full year you have a report for)
- Over 50,000
- 10,000 – 50,000
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 1,000 – 4,999
- 100 – 999
- Under 100
- Unsure

11. Approximately how many free books have you distributed in the past year – this could be the past 12 months from now, or the last full year you have a report for? (i.e. as an online deal, giveaway or similar)
- Over 50,000
- 10,000 – 50,000
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 1,000 – 4,999
- 100 – 999
- Under 100
- Unsure

12. In terms of investment in publishing and distributing your writing, have you… (please select one option only):
- Earned more so far than you have invested
- Broken even (i.e. invested about as much as you earned)
- Invested more so far than you have earned, but foresee making profit in the future
- Invested more so far than you have earned and do not foresee making profit in the future
- Unsure
- Other (please specify) _____

13. Do your current approximate earnings from writing match your financial needs?
- Yes – I am earning more than I need to earn from writing
- Yes – I am earning what I need to earn from writing
- No – I need to increase my earnings from writing to meet my financial needs
- Unsure
- Other (please specify) _____

14. OPTIONAL: What are your approximate annual earnings from writing and related activity? Please be reassured this is an anonymous survey and the answers shared here will help us compare for the first time the earnings of different types of authors:

_____

15. OPTIONAL: Please use the space below to add any further details you would like to share based on the questions in this section (i.e. how you came to be a writer, further details on distribution figures etc.).

_____

Section Four: What Does Publishing Success Mean to You?

Please share with us **what success means to you** in relation to publishing your book/s.

1. Read the following statements and rate them by importance to you and what you view as success for your writing:

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
Increasing the sales of my books	○	○	○	○	○
Building a stable living as an author	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining a positive sales position in relation to competitor authors in my genre	○	○	○	○	○
Building a long-term career as an author	○	○	○	○	○
Building harmonious relationships with the people I work with to publish my book/s	○	○	○	○	○
Providing a stable income for those who work with me to publish my books	○	○	○	○	○
Building a satisfied and loyal readership	○	○	○	○	○
Having the freedom and autonomy to set my own writing goals and challenges	○	○	○	○	○
Being challenged by others to achieve goals set externally	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining enjoyment from the process of writing the book	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining enjoyment from the wider publishing process to produce my book	○	○	○	○	○
Being able to successfully put my own ideas in place to help make my book a success	○	○	○	○	○
Getting a good balance of my working time and my free time	○	○	○	○	○
Public, positive feedback from my readers	○	○	○	○	○
Public, positive feedback from the industry (i.e. reviews, publishers, awards)	○	○	○	○	○
Leaving a legacy through my writing for the future	○	○	○	○	○
Seeing my work finalised	○	○	○	○	○
Earning a comfortable income from my writing	○	○	○	○	○
Earning a high income from my writing	○	○	○	○	○
Having my work read by others	○	○	○	○	○

2. Based on what you see as success from publishing your book/s, please rate how successful you feel your own experience of publishing has been so far:

	Not at all successful	Slightly successful	Moderately successful	Very successful	Extremely successful
I would rate the success of my book/s as...	○	○	○	○	○

3. OPTIONAL: Please share any further thoughts you have on what success as a writer means to you...

_____

Section Five: Your Experience by Publishing Route
This is the final section of the survey. The questions in this section will be related to how you are currently being published.

Firstly, to ensure you receive the correct questions, please confirm which category best describes how you are currently being published: (Select one option only)
- Self-published
- Published through a publisher
- A combination of the two (i.e. different publishing routes for different books – 'hybrid' authors)

Section Five Option One: questions received by hybrid authors only

Your experience of publishing in different ways

This final section looks at your own experience in relation to the two different routes you have taken.

1. Which publishing route did you take first?
- Self-published a book first
- Published through a publisher first
- Other (please give details) _____

2. Before publishing your book/s, had you completed any of the following? (Select all that apply)
- Approached an agent for representation
- Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher through an agent
- Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher directly
- Undertaken a course related to publishing skills (i.e. proofing, marketing, editing)
- Undertaken a creative writing course
- Had a job in publishing
- Had a job involving writing
- Had a job involving marketing
- Had connections in the publishing industry
- Other (please specify) _____
- None of the above

The following set of questions are related to your self-published book/s.

3. In relation to your self-published book/s, why did you choose to self-publish? (Select all that apply):
- Had heard positive things about self-publishing
- Had heard negative things about traditional publishing
- Wanted to learn more about the publishing process by being hands-on
- Wanted to retain power over decisions for my book
- Wanted to retain higher percentage of royalties for my book
- Had approached an agent but with no luck
- Had approached traditional publishers but with no luck
- As a route to gaining a traditional publisher in the future
- As a flexible activity that works around caring responsibilities
- As a flexible activity that works around other working responsibilities
- Felt it was more appropriate for a one-off/niche writing project
- Unsure
- Other (please specify) _____

4. When publishing your <u>self-published books</u> what was/is your role in the decision-making process?

	I was the only decision maker	I was the main decision maker	I was involved partly in decision-making	I was not involved in decision-making	Not applicable
Creative choices, such as narrative and characters	○	○	○	○	○
Book cover selection	○	○	○	○	○
Marketing or PR planning/activity	○	○	○	○	○
Where the book is sold	○	○	○	○	○
What price the book is sold for	○	○	○	○	○
When the book was launched	○	○	○	○	○

5. Were you satisfied with the decisions made about your <u>self-published book/s</u>?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

6. Have you felt pressured at any time to make creative or other decisions about your <u>self-published book/s</u> that you did not agree with?
- Yes - regularly
- Yes - occasionally
- No

7. Were you satisfied with the final <u>self-published book/s</u> produced?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

8. Approximately how long did your last <u>self-published book</u> take to produce, from identifying the concept for your book to your first sale?
{Drop down choices}
- Under three months
- Between three and six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and eighteen months
- Between eighteen months and two years
- Between two and three years
- Between three and four years
- Between four and five years
- Between five and ten years
- Over ten years

9. Were you satisfied with the how long it took to produce your <u>self-published book/s</u>?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

10. To what extent do you believe any of your characteristics have negatively or positively impacted your experience when <u>self-publishing</u> your book?

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
Your protected characteristics (age, gender, ethnic background, sexuality etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Your personality characteristics (i.e. your outlook on life or work)	○	○	○	○	○
Your skills or experience (i.e. previous work, volunteering or training)	○	○	○	○	○

The following questions are in relation to your books <u>published through a publisher</u>.

11. In relation to your books <u>published through a publisher</u>, who publishes your book/s?
- One of the 'Big Five' (Penguin/Random House, Hachette Book Group, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan, or any of their associated prints)
- Another publisher with a traditional publishing contract for BOTH print and digital books (i.e. with the publisher covering all costs of the publishing process for books in different formats)
- Another publisher with a traditional publishing contract for ONLY digital books (i.e. with the publisher covering all costs of the publishing process for digital books only)
- Another publisher with a hybrid publishing contract (i.e. with a contribution paid by you the author to cover some or all initial costs up front)
- Other (please specify) _____

12. In relation to your books <u>published through a publisher</u>, why did you choose this route rather than self-publish? (Select all that apply):
- Had not heard of self-publishing
- Assumed this was the only route to publishing
- Was advised by my agent to use this publishing route
- Had heard positive things about publishing through a publisher
- Had heard negative things about self-publishing
- Wanted support from a publisher to make creative decisions for my book (i.e. editorial advice etc.)
- Wanted support from a publisher to undertake practical publishing activities (i.e. distribution, cover design, marketing etc.)
- Wanted qualified recognition for my book (i.e. by being selected by a publisher)
- As a flexible activity that works around caring responsibilities
- As a flexible activity that works around other working responsibilities
- Felt it was more appropriate for a one-off/niche writing project
- Wasn't satisfied with previous experience of self-publishing
- Was approached following self-publishing activity
- Unsure
- Other (please specify) _____

13. Have you felt pressured at any time to make creative or other decisions about your book/s <u>published through a publisher</u> that you did not agree with?
- Yes - regularly
- Yes - occasionally
- No

14. Approximately how long did your last book <u>published through a publisher</u> take to produce, from identifying the concept for your book to your first sale?
{Drop down choices}
- Under three months
- Between three and six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and eighteen months
- Between eighteen months and two years
- Between two and three years
- Between three and four years
- Between four and five years
- Between five and ten years
- Over ten years

15. To what extent do you believe any of your characteristics have negatively or positively impacted your experience when <u>publishing your book through a publisher?</u>

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
Your protected characteristics (age, gender, ethnic background, sexuality etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Your personality characteristics (i.e. your outlook on life or work)	○	○	○	○	○
Your skills or experience (i.e. previous work, volunteering or training)	○	○	○	○	○

16. Based on your experience, have you preferred the self-publishing or traditionally published process for publishing your book/s?
- Preferred self-publishing
- Preferred traditional publishing
- No preference
- Unsure

17. OPTIONAL: Please share any views you have on the differences or similarities between publishing in different ways...

_____

Section Five Option Two: questions received by traditionally-published authors only

This final section looks at your own experience of publishing in relation to the publishing route you have taken - through a publisher.

1. Why did you choose to publish via a publisher rather than self-publish? (Select all that apply
- Had not heard of self-publishing
- Assumed this was the only route to publishing
- Was advised by my agent to use this publishing route
- Had heard positive things about publishing through a publisher
- Had heard negative things about self-publishing
- Wanted support from a publisher to make creative decisions for my book (i.e. editorial advice etc.)
- Wanted support from a publisher to undertake practical publishing activities (i.e. distribution, cover design, marketing etc.)
- Wanted qualified recognition for my book (i.e. by being selected by a publisher)
- As a flexible activity that works around caring responsibilities
- As a flexible activity that works around other working responsibilities
- Felt it was more appropriate for a one-off/niche writing project
- Unsure
- Other (please specify) _____

2. Before taking your publishing contract, had you completed any of the following? (Select all that apply):
- Approached an agent for representation
- Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher through an agent
- Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher directly
- Undertaken a course related to publishing skills (i.e. proofing, marketing, editing)
- Undertaken a creative writing course
- Had a job in publishing
- Had a job involving writing
- Had a job involving marketing
- Had connections in the publishing industry
- Other (please specify) _____
- None of the above

3. Who publishes your book/s?
- One of the 'Big Five' (Penguin/Random House, Hachette Book Group., Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan, or any of their associated prints)
- Another publisher with a traditional publishing contract for BOTH print and digital books (i.e. with the publisher covering all costs of the publishing process for books in a range of formats)
- Another publisher with a traditional publishing contract for ONLY digital books (i.e. with the publisher covering all costs of the publishing process for digital books only)
- Another publisher with a hybrid publishing contract (i.e. with a contribution paid by you the author to cover some or all initial costs up front)
- Other (please specify) _____

4. When publishing your book/s what was/is your role in the decision-making process? In the case where this is different each time, please rate the statements in relation to the last book you published.

	I was the only decision maker	I was the main decision maker	I was involved partly in decision-making	I was not involved in decision-making	Not applicable
Creative choices, such as narrative and characters	○	○	○	○	○
Book cover selection	○	○	○	○	○
Marketing or PR planning/activity	○	○	○	○	○
Where the book is sold	○	○	○	○	○
What price the book is sold for	○	○	○	○	○
When the book was launched	○	○	○	○	○

5. Were you satisfied with the level of involvement you had with the decision-making process for your book/s?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

6. Were you satisfied with the final book/s produced?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

7. Have you felt pressured at any time to make creative or other decisions about your book/s that you did not agree with?
- Yes
- No

8. Approximately how long did your last book take to produce, from identifying the concept for your book to your first sale?
{Drop down choices}
- Under three months
- Between three and six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and eighteen months
- Between eighteen months and two years
- Between two and three years
- Between three and four years
- Between four and five years
- Between five and ten years
- Over ten years

9. Where you satisfied with the time it took to produce your last book?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

10. To what extent do you believe any of your characteristics have negatively or positively impacted your experience when publishing your book?

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
Your protected characteristics (age, gender, ethnic background, sexuality etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Your personality characteristics (i.e. your outlook on life or work)	○	○	○	○	○
Your skills or experience (i.e. previous work, volunteering or training)	○	○	○	○	○

11. OPTIONAL Tell me more about how you feel your characteristics positively or negatively impacted your publishing experience...

_____

12. Would you recommend traditional publishing to other writers?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

13. Would you choose to self-publish in the future?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

14. OPTIONAL: Please briefly explain the reason for your answer above:

_____

15. How positively or negatively would you rate your perception of <u>self-publishing</u> today?

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
My perception of self-publishing today is...	○	○	○	○	○

16. OPTIONAL: This is your final question. Please use this space to share anything else you would like to about your publishing experience (i.e. pros and cons of your experience or to expand on an answer given at any point in the survey):

_____

Section Five Option Three: questions received by self-published authors only

This final section looks at your own experience of publishing in relation to the publishing route you have taken – self-publishing.

1. Why did you choose to self-publish your book/s? (Select all that apply):
• Had heard positive things about self-publishing
• Had heard negative things about traditional publishing
• Wanted to learn more about the publishing process by being hands-on
• Wanted to retain power over decisions for my book
• Wanted to retain higher percentage of royalties for my book
• Had approached an agent but with no luck
• Had approached traditional publishers but with no luck
• As a route to gaining a traditional publisher in the future
• As a flexible activity that works around caring responsibilities
• As a flexible activity that works around other working responsibilities
• Felt it was more appropriate for a one-off/niche writing project
• Unsure
• Other (please specify) _____

2. Before self-publishing, had you completed any of the following? (Select all that apply)
• Approached an agent for representation
• Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher through an agent
• Submitted a manuscript or sample to a publisher directly
• Published through a publisher but contract ended/was discontinued
• Undertaken a course related to publishing skills (i.e. proofing, marketing, editing)
• Undertaken a creative writing course
• Had a job in publishing
• Had a job involving writing
• Had a job involving marketing
• Had connections in the publishing industry
• Other (please specify) _____
• None of the above

3. When publishing your book/s what was/is your role in the decision-making process? In the case where this is different each time, please rate the statements in relation to the last book you published.

	I was the only decision maker	I was the main decision maker	I was involved partly in decision-making	I was not involved in decision-making	Not applicable
Creative choices, such as narrative and characters	○	○	○	○	○
Book cover selection	○	○	○	○	○
Marketing or PR planning/activity	○	○	○	○	○
Where the book is sold	○	○	○	○	○
What price the book is sold for	○	○	○	○	○
When the book was launched	○	○	○	○	○

4. Were you satisfied with the level of involvement you had with the decision-making process for your book/s?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

5. Were you satisfied with the final book/s produced?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

6. Have you felt pressured at any time to make creative or other decisions about your book/s that you did not agree with?
- Yes
- No

7. Approximately how long did your last book take to produce, from identifying the concept for your book to your first sale?
{Drop down choices}
- Under three months
- Between three and six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and eighteen months
- Between eighteen months and two years
- Between two and three years
- Between three and four years
- Between four and five years
- Between five and ten years
- Over ten years

8. Where you satisfied with the time it took to produce your last book?
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

9. To what extent do you believe any of your characteristics have negatively or positively impacted your experience when publishing your book?

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
Your protected characteristics (age, gender, ethnic background, sexuality etc.)	○	○	○	○	○
Your personality characteristics (i.e. your outlook on life or work)	○	○	○	○	○
Your skills or experience (i.e. previous work, volunteering or training)	○	○	○	○	○

10. OPTIONAL Tell me more about how you feel your characteristics positively or negatively impacted your publishing experience...

_____

11. Would you recommend self-publishing to other writers?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

12. Would you like to publish through a traditional publisher in the future?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

13. How positively or negatively would you rate your own perception of self-publishing today?

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
My perception of self-publishing today is...	○	○	○	○	○

Final section for all authors

OPTIONAL: This is your final question. Please use this space to share anything else you would like to about your publishing experience (i.e. pros and cons of your experience or to expand on an answer given at any point in the survey):

_____

Thank you for participating in this research. Please share your email address if you would like to be entered into the randomly selected draw to receive one of three £20 book tokens (or equivalent). Any email addresses provided for this draw will be saved securely and separately from survey answers to ensure anonymity, not used for any contact other than for the purposes of the draw and deleted after the draw has been completed.

Your email address for book token draw:

_____

If you would like to contact Holly directly about this research, or to be kept up to date as the project progresses, you can email {EMAIL SHARED HERE DURING LIVE DISTRIBUTION}

Your responses to this survey will be stored anonymously. Please record in a safe place the randomly generated number in bold below. You will need to quote this number should you want to get in touch about your responses in the future.[61]

Please also copy and paste the number into the answer box below to ensure your data can be identified by the research team: ${rand://int/100000:999999}

Your randomly generated reference number: {QUALTRICS PROVIDED AUTOMATICALLY RANDOMLY GENERATED NUMBER AS REQUIRED BELOW DURING LIVE DISTRIBUTION}

_____

---

[61] Note that a respondent could use this number to ask questions about the project, or request the withdrawal of their data from the project. No participant got in touch for either reason.