



Visitors at the World Book Fair 2016 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi

PHOTOS: PRAVEEN KHANNA

BOOK TO THE FUTURE

FROM E-BOOKS A FEW YEARS AGO TO MOBILE-FIRST PLATFORMS AND NOW PAY-BY-CHAPTER DOWNLOADS, THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY IS TRYING TO MOVE AHEAD WITH THE TIMES AND EXPLORE NEW FORMATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Kunal Doley

IN APRIL last year, when Chiki Sarkar, former publisher at Penguin Random House India, announced her departure from the company to "pursue new opportunities", all we knew was that she was likely to start her own publishing firm. In September, she surprised everyone when she launched Juggernaut, a new venture that attempts to put the mobile ahead of print to target India's mobile boom.

More recently, publisher Westland tied up with Dailyhunt, a mobile publishing platform, to sell author Amish Tripathi's *Shiva* trilogy, one chapter at a time, which readers can download and pay for on their cellphones (at a cost of around ₹15 per chapter). Popular abroad, especially in Japan, the format of book chapter downloads is a 'first-of-its-kind' in the country, claim industry observers.

Of the 16 Indian and international languages that the *Shiva* trilogy is available in, Dailyhunt will offer chapter downloads for the books in nine languages—Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali and English—to begin with and will provide all 16 over a period of time, as per reports.

Readers can make payments using their mobile bills (the amount will be added to the bill) or prepaid balance instead of having to use the credit or debit cards. Dailyhunt, which focuses on local language mobile users, is all set to introduce this feature to more books in the coming weeks, as it targets the next wave of smartphone users. The company has also solved the problem of digital payment by allowing users to purchase using their mobile phone bills with flexible price points ranging from ₹1 to ₹50.

As we can see, the publishing industry is going through a sea change, or rather an 'e-change', as it tries to move ahead with the times and explore new formats and opportunities.

The flavour of the season, of course, is mobile publishing, which could change the landscape of publishing and reading in definitive ways if it comes up trumps. By stepping away a little from traditional publishing, Sarkar of Juggernaut sees her new venture as a way of giving the author a third life. "There's the paper book, the e-book, but along with that, there's life on the phone," she was quoted as saying in a media report. Initially publishing in English and Hindi, the mobile publishing company hopes to branch out into new Indian languages every year. For 2016, it plans to produce over 200 titles for its mobile app and 50 books for its select physical imprint.

Sarkar, it seems, has worked on the arithmetic. A recent study by marketing research firm AC Nielsen states that there are over 150 million smartphones in India, with nearly two-third users being under 25 years of age. The study goes on to say that users spend an average of 180 minutes on their cell-phones every day and nearly a quarter of the 150 million download 18.5 apps and games on an average every month. Juggernaut, in such a scenario, definitely makes sense.

Co-founded by Sarkar and Durga Raghunath, former vice-president (growth) at restaurant search service Zomato, Juggernaut counts Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, Facebook promoter William Bissell and Boston Consulting Group's India managing director Neeraj Aggarwal among its investors. It has already raised ₹15 crore, as per some reports.

THE FINE PRINT

The Indian book market in a nutshell...

₹306.6 bn
The current value of the Indian book market; this makes India the world's sixth-biggest publishing market

₹739.7 bn
The projected value of the Indian book market by 2020; it will grow at an estimated compound annual growth rate of 19.3% in the next five years

₹221.7 bn
The value of school education (K-12) in the overall Indian book market in 2014-15

₹66.1 bn
The value of higher education in the overall Indian book market in 2014-15

9,037
The number of publishers in India; this makes India the world's second-largest English language print-book-publishing country

21,800
The number of organised and unorganised book retailers in India

70%
Publishers in India who have digitised their content to produce e-book versions

15%
Share of books in the e-commerce trade in country; books just trail behind electronics (34%), and apparel and accessories (30%)

56%
Respondents who bought at least one e-book a year; nearly half of these bought at least three-four e-books a year

* The survey was conducted among 2,000 consumers (representative of the urban population aged 18-plus years)

Source: India Book Market Report 2015, conducted by Nielsen Book India with the Association of Publishers in India and the Federation of Indian Publishers

Hachette India, whose international list is very strong in many genres, including children's books, has also thought about mobile publishing, but "will pursue it only as a secondary strategy at least for the next two years". "It's a medium and platform that hasn't happened for many years. The second phase—introducing rich interactive media—is also well under way. We are now in the third phase—the deep use of data to provide new and more personalised experiences, and more powerful solutions and tools, all of which offer the potential to improve outcomes," explains Jha.

New media, new opportunities
The publishing industry is certainly witnessing change—a change in the way content is created and consumed, a change in the factors and variables affecting the industry and certainly a change in the way publishers are adopting strategies and methodologies to keep pace with consumer and

market needs. Ratnesk Kumar Jha, managing director, south Asia, Cambridge University Press (CUP), feels the possibilities of the digital revolution are endless and still evolving. "For CUP, the first phase—turning existing print content digital—has been happening for many years. The second phase—introducing rich interactive media—is also well under way. We are now in the third phase—the deep use of data to provide new and more personalised experiences, and more powerful solutions and tools, all of which offer the potential to improve outcomes," explains Jha.

Rupa Publications, one of the oldest surviving English-language publishers in the country, is also betting big on the digital platform. "We're going in for a lot of interesting initiatives across platforms, digital being one and audio being the other. We're

coming out with chapterisation (breaking down a document into sections headed by titles subsidiary to the main title of the work), mini books (simple and quick books mostly aimed at encouraging children to read) and e-singles (a story somewhere between 5,000 and 30,000 words—shorter than most books, longer than most magazine articles). Basically, we're looking at technology as a platform, which can be used to put out content for the end user. This end user might or might not be the traditional reader, but any reader—traditional or non-traditional—who might not want to walk into a book shop, but just read a book or two a year," says Kapish Mehra, managing director of the 80-year-old publishing house.

As per Anurima Roy of Bloomsbury Publishing India, digital publishing has been around for a while.

"It is growing slowly in India, but the thing is that publishing (through any medium) and selling have to grow because, apart from a few big ones, most books are only 3,000 odd in print run and difficult to sell. New platforms like e-books are actually a way to get these numbers to a higher level, but at a lower cost," she says. But are these new platforms and initiatives posing a challenge to traditional publishers? Yes and no, says Abraham of Hachette India. "The adaptation and customisation—the shift, so to speak—have not been overly difficult to engineer. The problem is in defining the market and its needs, and the delivery channels. This is not a song download model or random bite-sized quotations we're talking about, but actual re-thought content for a new audience. The first thing to determine is whether that



THE FLAVOUR OF THE SEASON IS MOBILE PUBLISHING, WHICH COULD CHANGE THE LANDSCAPE OF PUBLISHING AND READING IN DEFINITIVE WAYS IF IT COMES UP TRUMPS

audience, used to gaming, instant reference and "freemiums", wants more varied reading content and is willing to pay for it," he says.

Mehra of Rupa Publications says, "No, I don't think so. It is a very different set of readers. It's just that we need to reach out to both of them."

Forgotten chapter

The past couple of years have not been too kind to bookstores, as they kept shutting shop one after another. Delhiites have bid farewell to some well-known names, such as Fact & Fiction in Vasant Kunj, The Bookworm in Connaught Place and Yodakin in Hauz Khas Village. Once a warmly lit bookstore in Connaught Place, with stacks of fiction and academic titles, ED Galgotia & Sons, too, pulled down its shutters after over 30 years of existence.

Others have changed course. Quill and Canvas in Gurgaon, for instance, is now mostly an art gallery and Oxford Bookstore in Connaught Place has an upgraded *chai* bar as its main attraction.

"Bookstores are the backbone of the industry. There is absolutely no substitute for the well-curated store as far as building reading habits and discoverability are concerned," says Abraham, adding: "Given the sheer range and depth of publishing, there should be room for all. In fact, we need varied bookstores. Or we will just end up as a country that consumes either textbooks and/or bestsellers. This is certainly not the prescription for a country that wants its people to be well-rounded citizens capable of competing on the world stage."

Internet growth and penetration have accelerated a dynamic that

has affected brick-and-mortar showrooms irreversibly, feels Jha of CUP. "Rise of e-commerce, consumer affinity due to excellent service and ease of transaction, massive buying power of e-commerce giants, as well as high discounts offered to consumers through this model have had an impact on brick-and-mortar showrooms. However, there is an opportunity for both channels to co-exist within the competitive environment."

Jha adds: "It's important for the industry to take stock of the evolving situation and respond adequately. It's important to adopt an agile strategy to remain effective and successful in this time of change."

The epilogue

The coming times should be exciting. Will readers pay to read stories

The show must go on

Here's how 'print-on-demand' technology is enabling publishers to keep books alive, long after they have gone out of print



Kunal Doley

IN EARLY 2014, when Sreekumar Narayanan walked into a bookstore to buy a book, he was told that it was unavailable. The Chennai resident then went online to search for it on various e-commerce sites, but the book was 'out-of-print' there too. "I contacted the publisher, who explained that the book had been phased out, as it was not commercially viable to print copies of it in bulk. I was flabbergasted, as in this day and age, and despite having so many new technologies at our disposal, it makes no sense for titles to be 'out-of-stock,'" he says.

Narayanan, who is also the founder of Bhavish Print Solutions, a digital printing company, then worked with many publishers to identify how many such titles they had. "We found that, over time, most publishers had amassed a huge backlog of out-of-print titles—sometimes running into tens of thousands—that weren't monetised. At the same time, these were books that readers like you and me were looking for. That's when it struck me that there was a viable business model in enabling publishers to keep such books alive," the 41-year-old says. This was born SansRack, an on-demand book distribution platform that enables publishers of all sizes to bring their entire catalogue to life.

Working with both domestic and international publishers, SansRack aims to eliminate the phrase 'out-of-print' from the publishing world. It also aims to make it possible for

international books, which are usually imported into India, to be produced locally and sold at affordable prices to Indian readers. Additionally, it will give Indian authors an opportunity to explore the international market. "Right now, our focus is on acquiring more titles and helping publishers create a revenue stream from their out-of-print titles. We are also working with many foreign publishers to bring their titles to India at a price that is relative to the market here. This would save a lot of time and money that goes into importing these books into India," he explains.

SansRack's business model involves acquiring the printing and distribution rights of titles from publishers and distributing them via various sales channels like e-commerce and offline stores. "The only difference is that these books will be listed first and printed only upon order, thereby reducing the risk of printing in bulk and the cost of warehousing."

With the lofty goal of making every book ever published available to Indian readers at an affordable cost, SansRack intends to expand its catalogue to five million titles by the end of this year. "We have signed up with over 70 publishers and have amassed over one million titles so far. We plan to reach five million titles by the end of the year. We want to serve two sections of the publishing ecosystem: content creators or publishers, and readers. Our job is to make books available to readers at all times," Narayanan says.

lisher, their voice and the kind of books they publish should complement each other, and the total number of books published should be manageable for marketing to be able to do justice to each book and author, so that the sell-out is great," says Roy of Bloomsbury Publishing, which launched its India operations in 2012.

"It's an exciting, if mixed, future. The demographics and market trends foretell growth, while industry conditions in the short term indicate a churn that will arrest that growth. In between, what will matter will be the ability to run one's business well, tuning into a volatile market and not blindly running with the herd," explains Abraham of Hachette India. Mehra puts in the last word: "It's a matter of change, and change has to happen."

OUR FOCUS IS ON ACQUIRING MORE TITLES AND HELPING PUBLISHERS CREATE A REVENUE STREAM FROM THEIR OUT-OF-PRINT TITLES. WE ARE WORKING WITH MANY FOREIGN PUBLISHERS TO BRING THEIR TITLES TO INDIA AT A PRICE THAT IS RELATIVE HERE. THIS WOULD SAVE A LOT OF TIME AND MONEY THAT GOES INTO IMPORTING BOOKS INTO INDIA. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THESE BOOKS WILL BE LISTED FIRST AND PRINTED ONLY UPON ORDER, THEREBY REDUCING THE RISK OF PRINTING IN BULK AND THE COST OF WAREHOUSING



RATNESK KUMAR JHA, managing director, south Asia, Cambridge University Press

FOR US, THE FIRST PHASE—TURNING EXISTING PRINT CONTENT DIGITAL—HAS BEEN HAPPENING FOR MANY YEARS. THE SECOND PHASE—INTRODUCING RICH INTERACTIVE MEDIA—IS ALSO WELL UNDER WAY. WE ARE NOW IN THE THIRD PHASE—THE DEEP USE OF DATA TO PROVIDE NEW AND MORE PERSONALISED EXPERIENCES, AND MORE POWERFUL SOLUTIONS AND TOOLS, ALL OF WHICH OFFER THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES



KAPISH MEHRA, managing director, Rupa Publications

WE'RE GOING IN FOR A LOT OF INTERESTING INITIATIVES ACROSS PLATFORMS, DIGITAL BEING ONE AND AUDIO BEING THE OTHER. WE'RE LOOKING AT TECHNOLOGY AS A PLATFORM, WHICH CAN BE USED TO PUT OUT CONTENT FOR THE END USER. THIS END USER MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE THE TRADITIONAL READER, BUT ANY READER—TRADITIONAL OR NON-TRADITIONAL—WHO MIGHT NOT WANT TO WALK INTO A BOOK SHOP, BUT JUST READ AN E-BOOK OR TWO A YEAR



THOMAS ABRAHAM, managing director, Hachette India

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