



**Interview with
Dr. Rachel Noorda & Dr. Kathi Inman Berens**

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KENNEALLY: For generations, editors and publishers have relied on gut intuition when making book acquisitions and sales projections. Those guts tell them who reads what. Well, maybe it's time for a gut check.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

Sure, it does take guts to write a book and still more guts, too, to publish a title without assurance of any success. The book business, though, is conceding ground increasingly to data, and not just sales data focusing on units sold. More data than ever is available on reader demographics and reading habits. A standout source for book business data is Immersive Media and Books 2020, the first study to capture data expressly about how people engage with books, video games, film, and television. Co-authors Dr. Rachel Noorda and Dr. Kathi Inman Berens offer data-informed guidance on book buyers and cross-media consumption, and they probe incisively for why book readers may choose to become book pirates.

Dr. Kathi Inman Berens is associate professor of book publishing and digital humanities at Portland State University. She's co-editor of the forthcoming *Electronic Literature Collection, Volume 4*. Welcome back to the program, Dr. Inman Berens.

INMAN BERENS: Thank you so much, Chris.

KENNEALLY: And Dr. Rachel Noorda is director of book publishing and an assistant professor in English, also at Portland State University. Her book, *Entrepreneurship in US Book Publishing in the 21st Century*, was published by Cambridge University Press in September. Welcome back to the program, Dr. Noorda.

NOORDA: Glad to be here. Thank you, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Well, we welcome you both back, because we spoke in May on this podcast about the Immersive Media report and how your collaboration with the Panorama Project worked out. We've invited you back for a second interview, because now you've had another look at the data collected from more than 4,000 survey respondents whose composition by gender, race, age, and region do ensure some national representation. This



new take is planted in a data study practice called cross-tabbing. So for someone who isn't familiar, Dr. Noorda, what does that involve?

NOORDA: Yeah, thanks for asking, Chris. The Immersive Media Project is really rich with data, as the report shows. It's over 70 pages. Cross-tabbing allows us to see the relationships between the variables so we can take deeper dives into the data. We illustrated some of this cross-tabbing in the report already, and we've talked about it in this podcast, too, previously because of book piracy. We've seen where book piracy intersects with other variables.

In the time since our last discussion on this podcast, Kathi and I have continued to cross-tab data about piracy with other variables, including book pirate behavior and discovery in other media, which we are also really excited to share and talk about with you today.

KENNEALLY: So what you were looking for, obviously, is to better understand how media consumption happens here in the United States and what it means for the book business, but also what it means for the readers – for each of us. So tell us about this notion of cross-media discovery, which I take to mean that books lead people to movies, movies lead people to books, that sort of relationship.

NOORDA: We've already talked about in the report that cross-media discovery is something that we were investigating as part of the mission and the objectives of Immersive Media. We wanted to know not just about books, but also about consumption of games and TV/movies. And what's interesting is just recently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released an American Time labor survey, and *PW* covered this to talk about a rise in reading time. There was a 21% rise for the second half of 2020 in reading. That's great. But one of the things that really illustrates – because if you dive deeper into that, you can see that not only was reading on the rise during the latter half of 2020, but so was TV watching, which was up 11%, and playing games and computer use, which was up 37%.

This all ties into what we touched on in the report and what we really want to drive home with piracy today, which is that this isn't an either/or thing. You're not a pirate or a book buyer. You can be both. And you're not either a book buyer, consumer, reader, or a consumer of other media. What we saw in our data was that those that were avid in books were avid across other media. So we're seeing patterns of behavior for book pirates across different media.

KENNEALLY: Dr. Inman Berens, there's an additional medium involved here, which are audiobooks, something that have been on the rise dramatically in recent years – wouldn't have been under consideration so much not so long ago, but really are an important factor



in media consumption, and certainly an important business factor for the publishing environment. So tell us about audiobooks and what you've learned about them.

INMAN BERENS: Audiobook engagers are significantly more context-agnostic than the general population. That means that they love stories, and they follow those stories in any format. This suggests a full integration of books into their lifestyles. Books are everywhere they are, whether they're borrowing from a library, buying online, buying in a bookstore, listening, reading an ebook, reading a print book, engaging in a graphic novel, and so forth. This also suggests that word-of-mouth marketing will work especially well with audiobook engagers, because no matter where you catch them, they will find a way to borrow or buy a book that they're interested in.

INMAN BERENS: People who engage with audiobooks are also buying more books during COVID and buying across formats. People who engage with audiobooks are doing this because it comes as no surprise that audiobook engagers would be buying more during COVID than the general survey population, but it is a really significant jump – 36% compared to just 17% of the general population.

But audiobook engagers – their enthusiasm is not just limited to that particular format. They were also buying more than the general population ebooks and print books, as well, during COVID.

KENNEALLY: Rachel Noorda, that raises the question of multitasking – people doing more than just one type of media consumption at the same time.

NOORDA: We know that audiobook users and book pirates are both these kind of superusers. And what's interesting is that those who listen to audiobooks – they do multitask more with print, but actually less with ebook and audio than the general survey population. Those are audiobook listeners who listened to more than zero audiobooks per month. That means that the rest of the population listened to zero audiobooks per month.

So to explain this data a little bit further, why would someone who didn't listen to any audiobooks per month say that they were multitasking with audiobooks? This is something that's kind of interesting. There are a few possible explanations. One is that some respondents said that they engaged with zero audiobooks per month, but maybe they're still engaging with audiobooks, just maybe or two a year. And if that's true, then there's the possibility that incredibly infrequent audiobook listeners are more likely to multitask than regular listeners.

Another possibility is that respondents who engaged with zero audiobooks a month aren't engaging with audiobooks, but they still have a perception that audiobooks are made for



multitasking. So when they were asked the question about when you're listening to audiobooks, are you multitasking, are you doing anything else, they were responding hypothetically.

That all leads to more questions, really, to ask in our next round of the survey, and we're excited to delve more. But it's interesting that audiobook listeners actually multitask less with audiobooks and ebooks.

KENNEALLY: I think the audiobook experience is one that just encourages multitasking. Whether you're driving a car or cooking dinner, it's really a great way to keep active, but to be engaged in a story. It's a great experience for me, anyway.

NOORDA: Well, in the general population, when we're talking about the three formats, about 70% of the population of the survey said that they multitasked with audiobooks, so that's really high. It's more than ebooks, which was 60%, and print books, which was in the 30s. But yeah, when we hone in on those audiobook listeners, it tells a slightly different story.

KENNEALLY: Perhaps for the media consumer in 2020 and 2021, they don't so much make these distinctions. Have you found any information to support that idea?

NOORDA: Yeah, this was one of the things that we have certainly been thinking about, because we know that pirates buy books in multiple formats. Part of this certainly might be connected to access and flexibility – maybe owning a print book, but then wanting to be able to read a book easily on a plane and have the ebook format or the audiobook format for when you're going for a run. So being able to bundle – and there haven't really been many successful examples of ebook and print or audiobook and print bundling in publishing. Yet it could really help with greater access and perhaps be – because we know that access – limits to access can be a catalyst for piracy. And perhaps this time, when we know there's supply chain challenges, and we're just coming out of COVID, and there's been a lot of disruption to the industry, it may be as great a time as any to start experimenting with some things, including bundling.

KENNEALLY: Kathi, I want to turn to you now to focus more on the issue of piracy and how the book pirates out there behave. We've already said that book buyers and book pirates – they're not necessarily two very distinct categories. The book pirates we're talking about are probably also book buyers.

INMAN BERENS: A headline is that book pirates are also very good customers. Rachel mentioned that pirates buy books in multiple formats – 41% of the time, significantly higher than the general population. So when the value proposition makes sense to people



who illegally download, then they're more than willing to buy not just one form of that story they love, but multiple forms.

Book pirates rely more on algorithms to find media than the general population. They are also much more likely to find entertainment via social media recommendations. Just 3% of the general population uses the Amazon recommendation algorithms to discover books – a number, by the way, that Rachel and I wonder whether people are actually aware of how constantly book recommendation algorithms are agents in their touch points with books. But we'll leave that aside. People's perception is that only 3% of the general population is using Amazon recommendation algorithms to discover books. For pirates, that's 4.3%.

Pirates use the Netflix recommendation engine 10.5%, compared to 8.6% of the general population. When pirates – or maybe we should just say people illegally downloading – are using recommendation algorithms to find TV, it's 5.7% of the time, compared to 3.9%. Their susceptibility to social media recommendations is almost double that of the general population – 17.5% compared to 9.4%. So I think we can certainly deduce that pirates, or people who illegally download and also buy books, are very active on computers, and they are engaging with human and nonhuman systems, like recommendation algorithms, to find what they want.

Friends and family are still high for recommendations among pirates, but significantly lower than the general population. So that's to say the average person is reporting that friends and family are tipping them to the books that they want to buy, but for pirates, only 14.9%, compared to 22% of the general population say that friends make those recommendations. For pirates, family is just 10.9%, compared to 14.4%. So really, thinking pirates are possibly people who are just much more aware of how algorithms shape their behavior.

KENNEALLY: Once they've found what they're looking for, they know where to go for it to get it, whether they pay or don't.

INMAN BERENS: Yes. And I think that this gets back to what Rachel was suggesting about bundling. I mean, we do have this moment where our holiday season is approaching. I think 40% of book sales happen during the holiday season. And we know the supply chain is challenged. Would this be a good moment for publishers to think about running an experiment with a few titles with bundling specifically? Would this be a good moment, when access might be constricted, to open it up a little bit with ebook? Like you can get that ebook right now, and you'll have that paper copy delivered to you when it becomes available. That's kind of the connection between the analog world – these fabulous things



we love, these printed books with paper and glue and ink – and the content, which can be accessed in audio or ebook.

KENNEALLY: Data is so important. I mentioned at the top that it's been too much a business of gut, but data today is how we can drive publishing forward in a positive way. Rachel, I wonder if you can tell us just about how pirates behave when it comes to other media. Book publishers should not feel singled out.

NOORDA: No, and I think there's always more connection and opportunity for us to collaborate with other industries. We saw that reading is not isolated. It happens with other media. And that is true with piracy, too. So twice as common for piracy of TV and movies to happen with book pirates than with the general population, and same thing with pirating games. 39% of book pirates pirated TV/movies and 27% pirate games. So it's pretty significant. We also see that they're more likely to binge-watch and also to play multiplayer games. So that sense of community and collaboration might also be important to them. And that makes sense knowing what we know also about their engagement in fan worlds, like fanfiction on the book side. So this suggests maybe more of an approach that could be connected media-wise and looking to other industries, not just being siloed to books.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. Dr. Inman Berens, let's talk about something else that emerged during the pandemic last year. This survey was conducted at that time, in 2020, and in parallel course and sometimes in a related interaction with the pandemic was the rise in concern and attention to inequity in our society, in our American society, particularly racial inequity. Do you have any data around media consumption and book readership that reflects this and perhaps gives us some interesting insights on that topic?

INMAN BERENS: Yes. It's important to know that white people are the large majority of book pirates. However, non-white people pirate proportionally more than the general population across all racial demographic categories. Black, Latinx, Asian – AAPI – Native American, Middle Eastern/North African, and Hawaiian are all pirating a bit more than the general population.

Price and access might be a factor, including ebook access at public libraries, which is a point we really can't underscore enough. So greater proportions of book pirates borrowed more during COVID than the general survey population. While the general population borrowed more print books during COVID, people who illegally download books borrowed significantly less print books than ebooks – 30.1% – or audiobooks – 31.6%.

So we know that there's a call to action here. The industry has historically better served white audiences than nonwhite audiences. I know that the Codex Group – Jane Friedman



in The Hot Sheet mentioned the Codex Group – in partnership or commissioned by the Authors Guild and some publishers specifically were looking at Black and Latinx readers and their behaviors. And their data, which is proprietary, very much follows what our data found as well, which is that Black and Latinx millennials are avid across all media categories and all book formats. So better serving those populations might do a good job also of curtailing piracy. We know that income disparity is tied to race in the United States, and we really need more data about who is pirating and why they are pirating.

KENNEALLY: Well, I think that should be exciting news to book publishers – a real opportunity there to open up new markets and bring in new readers.

INMAN BERENS: I think it's a thrilling opportunity. And I think one thing you can surmise from Immersive Media 2020, which again is free and open access, and from the Codex Group's work, is that book publishers have been leaving money on the table, and we are now in a position to fortify with data the good wishes that people have to better serve customers.

KENNEALLY: I don't think we can really argue that the industry needs more data about all aspects of this business, not just about pirates.

INMAN BERENS: We are working with the Book Industry Study Group, and we're in the fundraising phase right now. We're aiming to work with a committee with broad representation across the industry. Last time, when we were partnered with Panorama, we had representatives from the ALA and from BISG and from the Independent Publishers Association and others, and we really would like to continue this broad representational reach as we peer review the survey questions. Rachel, do you want to jump in and say more?

NOORDA: There is a need for more data in the industry, rather than that gut feeling, and we're really excited and hoping for this second round of the project to go forward.

KENNEALLY: We wish you the best of luck with your fundraising, and we thank you for joining us today. Dr. Rachel Noorda, director of book publishing and assistant professor of English at Portland State University, thank you so much.

NOORDA: Thanks, Chris.

KENNEALLY: And Dr. Kathi Inman Berens, associate professor of book publishing and digital humanities at Portland State University, thanks to you as well.

INMAN BERENS: It's always a pleasure to chat with you, Chris.



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