

**SOCIAL PUBLISHING:  
Ending book hunger through mission-driven innovation**

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**OVERVIEW**

This project examines the emerging sector of “social publishing” as a model of creative production built on alternative incentive systems. Social publishers seek to fill a need that is unmet by for-profit publishers, and finally bring books to billions of new readers. Mainstream publishing is driven by the need to provide a return on capital investment and is committed to maximizing revenue by charging readers for access to content. As a result, mainstream publishing is ill suited to cater to the needs of certain “neglected audiences,” including the poor, readers of minority languages, and readers with print disabilities. Social publishing emerges from the normative commitment of its supporters that all people should enjoy opportunities to read. Operating on a mission-centric rather than profit-centric model, social publishers seek to produce books that are appropriate and attractive to nontraditional audiences and to distribute those books at the lowest possible cost. As a result of these commitments, social publishers are forced to develop innovative strategies in the areas of content acquisition, production, and marketing.

Social publishers operate in a variety of forms and on multiple continents. In South Asia, Pratham Books pursues the goal of “A book in every child’s hand,” reaching 50 million readers with books in more than 10 Indian languages, priced at around fifty US cents apiece. The African Storybook Project works in Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa to produce simple and affordable books to help young children develop a love of reading in their native languages as well as in English. In the United States, First Book provides steeply discounted new books to 160,000+ schools and community programs, and leverages its buying power to books featuring more diverse authors and characters. Meanwhile, Benetech offers more than 200,000 titles in braille and other adaptive formats to readers with print disabilities, and HathiTrust makes millions of library books accessible to disabled readers in digital formats. These efforts have so far been the subject of almost no academic study, and have yet to be systematically described and theorized.

The phenomenon of nonprofit publishing for neglected audiences is aptly described as “social” in at least four senses. First, social publishers are defined by the centrality of a *social mission*, rather than optimization of profit, as the central guide for their business decisions. As a consequence of this first point, social publishers typically rely heavily on *social subsidies* in the form of government funding, corporate sponsorship, and/or private philanthropic support. An additional consequence of the focus on publishing as a social mission is that social publishers perceive and treat their products as *social goods* to be directed to wherever they are most needed, rather than based on ability to pay. Social publishers typically distribute their books for free or at a marginal cost. Often, but not always, social

publishers also engage in *social production* of creative content, as theorized by Yochai Benkler. These alternative production models depart from traditional models of firm-based and sole-author production, leveraging intrinsic motivations, social networks, and peer production enabled by digital platforms. As a result of these core differences, social publishers cannot simply imitate the established business models of for-profit publishers. Instead, they must engage in radical innovation at the levels of content acquisition, production, and marketing.

This book offers an engaging, descriptively rich account of the social publishing sector, based upon extensive interviews with the organizational leaders driving its evolution. Its objectives are to document the emerging practices of social publishers, to generate insight about what makes these efforts successful or unsuccessful, and to derive broader lessons from this example of creative production that relies on alternative incentive structures. The author does not simply celebrate the accomplishments of these social entrepreneurs, but also adopts a critical perspective to pose and answer difficult questions. For example, can social publishing be funded in ways that do not compromise the independence of authors and publishers to write and distribute material that challenges authoritarian governments, traditional gender norms, or other power structures? Does social publishing's pressure to produce and distribute books at the lowest possible cost threaten the ability of professional authors and illustrators to earn a livelihood from their work?

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

### **1. Introduction (10-15 pages)**

The introduction sketches an engaging overview of the emerging field of social publishing and its potential impact on the problem of book hunger. It also situates social publishing in the context of related themes of social entrepreneurship, open business models, mission-driven innovation, and open access publishing, previewing key findings of the research as developed through the various chapters. This chapter will appeal to the general reader, emphasize the major takeaways of the book, and help readers identify the chapters of greatest interest to them.

### **2. The Right to Read (10-15 pages)**

This chapter draws upon and synthesizes my previous research on book hunger, situating the problem that social publishing seeks to address. Mainstream publishing serves a tiny portion of the market, while billions of readers are underserved. Economic and linguistic dimensions of this problem are highlighted, as well as the impact of disability upon access to reading material. Alternative framings of the value of access to reading material are explored, including human capital and human rights framings.

### **3. Books for the Blind (15-20 pages)**

This chapter looks at the evolution of social publishing for blind and print-disabled readers in the United States. Through interviews with leaders from "then" and "now," it traces the lost history of this alternative publishing movement. The present

and future of publishing for the blind are also considered, in light of contemporary digital possibilities and the recent Marrakesh Treaty on publishing for visually impaired persons. This chapter also critically considers the relevance of legal reform for meeting the needs of neglected readers, in light of the importance of collaboration with rights holders.

#### **4. Closing the Reading Gap (15-20 pages)**

This chapter specifically focuses on the efforts of social publishers to bring books to low-income readers who would have trouble affording them at prevailing prices. The U.S. cases of First Book and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are highlighted. More generally, the chapter situates the case for thinking of book production and supply as a “social sector” similar to health care or education, in which a mixture of for-profit, charitable, and government activity is required.

#### **5. Enhancing Cultural Diversity (10-15 pages)**

This chapter specifically focuses on the ways in which social publishers are changing what gets published, bringing books to print that otherwise would not have been considered marketable, because they reflect and appeal to subcultures that have less buying power because of their small size or economic inequality. First Book’s “diverse books” initiative and PJ Library’s impact on Jewish children’s literature are considered, as well as international examples.

#### **6. Breaking Language Barriers (15-20 pages)**

This chapter specifically considers the efforts of social publishers to address the linguistic gap in book publishing beyond English. It highlights the special challenges involved in publishing for less lucrative language markets, including translation quality and addressing cultural sensitivities, utilizing the cases of Pratham Books, African Storybook Project, and PJ Library. It also critically considers what it would take to extend multilingual social publishing beyond children’s literature.

#### **7. Sustaining Social Publishing (10-15 pages)**

This chapter focuses on the various strategies social publishers have devised to fund their operations, including cost recovery through sales of hard copy books, government and corporate partnerships, and private philanthropy. Consideration is given to the constraints imposed by social funding models. For example, if state funding is essential to the organization’s work, do certain topics become taboo? What limits to scale exist when an organization relies heavily on donor funding?

#### **8. The Digital Publishing Revolution (15-20 pages)**

This chapter looks at the ways that digital production and Internet technologies open up new possibilities for social publishers. In many ways, social publishers have been quicker to adopt digital technologies than traditional publishers, and digital publishing holds unique opportunities to reach widely distributed niche audiences. This chapter explores why digital publishing is such a good fit for social publishers and where their innovations are headed.

### **9. The Changing Face of Authorship (10-15 pages)**

Many social publishers are experimenting with alternative models of content production, including book dashes, web-based peer production, and open translation and versioning. These newer approaches challenge our traditional conceptions of authorship. What are the consequences, both good and bad, of this shift? Is there room within this model to support the development of professional authors earning a livelihood from their creativity?

### **10. Considerations of Quality (10-15 pages)**

If social publishing is not motivated by competition in the marketplace, what ensures that the works it creates will be of comparable quality to traditional books? This chapter critically considers the problem of judging quality in literature, and explores what social publishers are currently doing to assure quality.

### **11. Creativity and Copyright (15-20 pages)**

Conventional wisdom holds that copyright protection is the essential foundation of a vibrant publishing sector. Social publishing in some ways challenges this assumption, demonstrating that in some instances, non-profit and open strategies hold significant advantages. Like Open Access scholarly journals, social publishers often Creative Commons license to maximize readership and impact. This suggests that the potential of open access publishing is not unique to academic scholarship, but can work across many genres. What are the potential and limits of open access publishing? How can copyright law encourage both for-profit and not-for-profit publishing models to thrive?

### **12. Open Business Models (15-20 pages)**

A number of profitable business models may coexist with social publishing in a symbiotic way. These might include business models along the lines of free-content meets e-readers, small-scale distribution by street vendors, or social enterprise “B” corporations that combine features of social and mainstream publishing to achieve both financial profit and social impact. This chapter explores the potential for profit through open business models that leverage social publishing’s innovations to reach as yet untapped markets.

### **13. The Future of Publishing (15-20 pages)**

As books follow music through the digital transition, the path that social publishers are paving may represent the future of the industry. What lessons can for-profit publishers learn from the distribution and marketing innovations of social publishers? Is the future of publishing open-source? Can open and proprietary models of publishing peacefully coexist? Or will the demand for cheaper and freer books undermine the mainstream industry?

### **14. Mission Driven Innovation (15-20 pages)**

An emerging insight of this research is that social mission can be a powerful driver of innovation. To reach readers at “the bottom of the pyramid,” social publishers have had to develop radically different business models for content production,

marketing, and distribution. As a result, social publishers find themselves on the leading edge of digital production and distribution. This concluding chapter illustrates this point and enquires about the broader potential of social sector entrepreneurship as a source of business innovation.

## **AUDIENCE**

A major reason for developing this topic as a book project, rather than as a journal article, is its strong interdisciplinary appeal. I have found colleagues in business schools, information science, and political science to be very interested in the phenomenon of social publishing. Apart from academics, I expect the book to also be of particular interest to people from professions such as teaching, librarianship, and publishing. A book will best travel to these diverse disciplinary audiences. I have selected both American and international case studies to ensure the relevance and appeal of the work for both audiences. The tone of the book will be accessible to general intelligent audiences, including undergraduate readers.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE**

This book will be the first work on the phenomenon of social publishing, apart from a few very short journalistic accounts, typically focusing on the activities of only a single organization. As such, it is the first to approach this sector in a systematic way, offering a framework for understanding the potential and challenges of this approach to addressing book hunger. The book will be of interest to readers of the literatures on social entrepreneurship, literacy development, and publishing.

The book also makes a particular contribution to the academic literatures on “knowledge commons” and “intellectual production without intellectual property.”

In particular, my study of Pratham Books’ collaborative StoryWeaver platform utilizes the methodological framework for the ethnographic study of “knowledge commons” first pioneered by Elinor Ostrom and adapted by Michael Madison and Brett Frischmann. It thus meets a current need within the commons literature for case studies applying and refining this methodological framework to generate broader insights about knowledge commons governance.

More broadly, this work fits into the literature on “intellectual production without intellectual property,” or “IP without IP.” A recent innovation in intellectual property scholarship is to highlight attention to places where creative production of the sort typically motivated by intellectual property rights is occurring due to alternative motivations. Here, authorship and publishing are conceived as core functions of copyright, yet this research highlights gaps in the copyright incentive system where alternative motivations come to the fore. The concluding focus on business model innovation also touches on an area of particular interest to patent scholars. Counter-intuitively, the case study of social publishing suggests that in some contexts, the lack of a profit motive may actually drive greater innovation.

## **PRODUCTION**

I expect the final book to run between 150 and 250 pages. Apart from the book cover, no artwork is planned. I plan to complete the manuscript by October 2016.

I am quite wedded to the term “social publishing” and believe I would like that to be the title of the book. I am very open to suggestions for a better subtitle.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Lea Shaver is an Associate Professor of Law at the Indiana University McKinney School of Law. Her scholarly work focuses on the intersection of intellectual property law and human rights, especially cultural rights. Her work ties together both normative and empirical perspectives, concerned both to understand how things are really working on the ground, as well as to build a vision of a more just alternative. A frequent hallmark of her scholarship is the use of an ethnographic case-study approach, informed by her study of social sciences at the University of Chicago, before attending and graduating from Yale Law School. Professor Shaver spent three additional years at Yale Law School as a postdoctoral fellow, and continues to be an affiliated faculty member of the Yale Information Society Project.

Professor Shaver has published more than ten articles and essays, as well as editing three books in the Yale Information Society Project Access to Knowledge Series. As of June 2015, she ranks in the top 3% worldwide of all authors posting to the Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN) by downloads. Her articles have been published in top-ranked journals, including the *Wisconsin Law Journal*, the *Washington University Law Review*, and the *Washington and Lee Law Review*. Professor Shaver also publishes in interdisciplinary journals such as the *European Human Rights Journal* and the *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*. Her work has influenced other scholarship both domestically and internationally, in disciplines as diverse as media studies and business management, as well as her core discipline of legal scholarship.

Professor Shaver is an internationally recognized expert on intellectual property and cultural rights. Her scholarship on “the right to science and culture” has been repeatedly relied upon in reports to the UN Human Rights Council. She has served as an expert consultant to the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and has appeared as an expert presenter multiple times at United Nations Headquarters in Geneva. In 2014-2015 alone, she was invited to give presentations at Yale, New York University, Berkeley, Oxford, the University of Strasbourg, and Hebrew University, among other venues.

This book is her third major project on the topic of book hunger.

Her first article in this vein, *Copyright and Inequality*, brought together normative and empirical accounts of copyright law with broader questions of distributive

justice. In it, she argues that copyright scholarship has paid insufficient attention to the question of how well copyright law is actually working, particularly for potential readers with less discretionary income and speakers of marginalized languages. By recognizing that copyright's incentive system creates both winners and losers, she argues, scholars can begin to think about ways to adapt copyright law to better serve all of society.

Her most recent article, *The Right to Read*, is forthcoming from the *Columbia International Law Review*. This article ties the concerns about equitable access to reading material that were identified in *Copyright and Inequality* to international human rights norms. The work provides a doctrinal framework for understanding reading as a universal human rights encompassing three aspects: liberty to read (freedom from censorship), capacity to read (education for literacy), and availability of reading material that is affordable, and in a language that the reader can understand.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Thank you for your time in reviewing this book proposal. I would appreciate any feedback and suggestions you may have, at [lbshaver@iu.edu](mailto:lbshaver@iu.edu) or 203-535-2560.