

# Selling and lending e-books

## Changes in the Swedish literary field

Birgitta Wallin

Academic dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås to be publicly defended on Friday, February 22, 2019 at 13:00 in lecture room C203, University of Borås, Allégatan 1, Borås.

Faculty examiner: Professor Frank Huysmans,  
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The Swedish School of Library and Information Science  
Faculty of Librarianship, Information, Education and IT  
University of Borås



THE SWEDISH SCHOOL OF LIBRARY  
AND INFORMATION SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF BORÅS

**Title:** Selling and lending e-books: Changes in the Swedish literary field  
**Language:** English  
**Available:** <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hb:diva-15273>  
ISBN 978-91-983398-2-6 (Print)  
ISBN 978-91-983398-3-3 (Digital)  
ISSN 1103-6990

### **Abstract**

This study explores the actors distributing e-books in the Swedish book market. The focus was on public libraries and booksellers, which included aggregators, subscription services, online booksellers and physical bookshops. Field theory (Bourdieu, 1996) was used in order to investigate the positions, dispositions and capitals (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) of the actors in the literary field. Innovation theory (Winston, 1998) was used to identify the suppression of radical potential and supervening social necessity of the e-book on the Swedish book market. Different strategies utilised by the actors in the changing digital market were explored using the concepts of planned and emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 2003). A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used for the data collection. Surveys were used in order to reach a large portion of the respondents and semi-structured interviews were added to reach additional respondents and get further in-depth responses.

Key findings revealed that the e-book distributors in the Swedish book market maintain their positions by adapting to the changing digital market. There are two main strategies found in regard to e-book use: the first in which the use of e-books is encouraged in order to maintain relevance for customers and library users; the second in which physical bookshops and some public libraries are passive and do not encourage the use of e-books when it comes to their customers and library users. The risk of disintermediation was considered to be low and was really only the concern of one aggregator who was the mediator of e-books between publishers and public libraries and booksellers.

The tensions found mainly concerned the availability of e-book titles and conditions of selling, licensing, lending and use of e-book titles as dictated by the most powerful actors in the field. There were ideological tensions which emerged with e-book lending which were not present with print book lending (at least not from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Booksellers considered that e-book lending was unfair competition as the principle of one book and one loan was no longer valid given that e-books can be lent out to several library users simultaneously. Public libraries were worried about the better usability and technological advantages offered by commercial e-book providers as they offered more attractive options to their users. The findings illustrate that there were social necessities enabling and radical potential suppressing e-books on the Swedish book market, which were sometimes created by the same actors.

The study contributes to research that explores how actors in small language markets, like the Swedish book market, can deal with the changes brought on by the digital production and distribution of books.

**Keywords:** E-books, Swedish book market, e-book lending, Public libraries, e-book selling, booksellers, subscription services, aggregators, bookshops, online booksellers