

“Thinking Global” in the Cultural Industry: How far is the business model of the US Film Industry applicable in the French Book Industry?

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Abstract

This research focuses on globalization strategies in the cultural industry, i.e. cultural production based on replicable goods: books, films, music. Traditionally, this process has been criticized due to loss of uniqueness (Benjamin, 1935) and the risk of standardization, particularly within the Hollywood film industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). Our study explores the appropriateness of adopting the US film industry’s business model within the French book industry. French publishers have been inspired by this business model, particularly regarding production, development and promotion. However, limited academic research has been conducted to date. Therefore, this research aims to identify the links between the business model of the French book industry and that of the US film industry, and also how the business model implemented in the French book industry is perceived by consumers using qualitative interviews with French book experts and consumers. A number of implications for the French book industry is presented.

Keywords: business model, film industry, publishing industry, books, cultural goods.

Introduction

This research focuses on globalization strategies in the cultural industry, i.e. cultural production using techniques such as replicable goods: books, films, music. Traditionally, this process has been criticized due to loss of uniqueness (Benjamin, 1935) and the risk of standardization, particularly within the Hollywood film industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). Our study explores the appropriateness of adopting the US film industry’s business model within the French book industry. In France, publishers have been inspired by this business model, particularly regarding production, development and promotion. This can be explained through the following factors:

- Historically, the film industry is the first cultural industry;
- Common features of books and films as cultural goods:
 1. Unique goods as they represent an artistic creation (Benhamou, 2011);
 2. Symbolic goods perceived by consumers (Eco, 1985; Colbert, 2006);
 3. Replicable goods allowing for larger scale sales of prototypes (Creton, 2001; Karpik, 2007);
 4. Experiential goods (Nelson, 1970) where there remains uncertainty on quality pre-purchase for consumers (Evrard, 1987; Anthorsson, Berry and Urbany, 1991);
- Hyperchoice in these markets (Evrard, 1987): for example, nearly 600 films per year in movie theaters and more than 600 novels published each September in France. This phenomenon has been increased with the development of Internet and e-commerce: a huge number of films and books is now available for free or for sale on websites as well as via mobile and digital tablet applications.

However, limited academic research has been conducted to date on the comparison between the different business models of cultural industries in a global context. Therefore, the main research question in this study is the following: How far is the business model of the US film industry applicable to the French book industry? The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, we present the theoretical framework of the business models related to the US film industry and the French book industry from a review of the literature including a number of theoretical domains (i.e. Economics of Culture, Economics of Leisure, Arts and Cultural Management, Marketing in Arts and Culture, Sociology, Sociology of Culture). We follow with a presentation of our methodological approach used in