

5-2015

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Recommended Citation

Hearn, Kyra, "Social Media Blogs-to-Books: Changes in Content and the Editorial Process" (2015). *Book Publishing Final Research Paper*. 4.
https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/eng_bookpubpaper/4

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Social Media Blogs-to-Books: Changes in Content and the Editorial Process

by

Kyra Hearn

Publishers have recently released a number of books that derive their content from Tumblr or Twitter accounts. Previously, it was more common to see publishers release books that derived their content from blogs. Since all of these social media platforms produce content in different ways, how does this influence—if at all—the publisher's editorial process? Also, how does the content change—if at all—from the original social media platform to its presentation in a book?

Introduction

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, we have seen publishers change the ways in which they acquire books. This change began with the rise in popularity of blogs, a medium that transformed the methods that authors used to create and distribute content and altered the ways in which readers consume content. It became a common phenomenon for publishers to release books that derived their content from what we now consider “traditional” blogs. Examples of such blogs that were turned into books, or “blooks,” are *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* by Julie Powell and *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* by Colby Buzzell.

Recently, we have seen publishers release a number of books that derive their content from Tumblr or Twitter accounts. Since all of these social media platforms produce content in different ways, how does this influence—if at all—the publisher's editorial process? Also, how does the content change—if at all—from the original social media platform to its presentation in a book? To determine the answers to these questions, the books *Alice in Tumblr-land: and Other Fairy Tales for a New Generation*, *Texts From Dog*, *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, *F*ck! I'm in my Twenties*, and *Dads are the Original Hipsters* were compared to the social media accounts from which the content originated from.

New Content

As one would expect, there's a significant amount of new material included in the books that was not originally featured on Tumblr or Twitter. Depicted below is a table that represents the number

of pages with new and original content within the books. The center row indicates the number of pages where new material was featured within the book and was not introduced to Tumblr and/or Twitter. The last row of the table indicates the number of pages where original content was featured on Tumblr and/or Twitter before acquisition and was also included within the printed book.

Name of Book	New Material	Original Material
Alice in Tumblr-land	83	61
Dads are the Original Hipsters	98	32
Feminist Ryan Gosling	91	26
F*ck! I'm in my Twenties	46	48
Sh*t Rough Drafts	104	32
Texts From Dog	142	52

The amount of new material included within all of the books suggests that there's a balance between new and old content when publishing a book that derives content from an existing blog. The inclusion of new material presents obvious evidence of change between the content from a social media platform and its printed counterpart, but is this also indicative of an editorial change? In an email, Paul Laudiero, author of *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, said that his publisher, Chronicle, gave him a number of pages and a number of new drafts that were needed for his book. This resulted in Paul creating more than 100 new drafts of material—that previously did not exist—as his publisher and editor requested. Tim Manley, author of *Alice in Tumblr-land*, also mentioned in an email that “it seemed that a blog-to-book was required to have

at least 50% and sometimes 70% new content.”¹ This trend is apparent in all six of the books examined, as evident by the numbers reflected in the table.

Developmental Changes

The new material included in the books demonstrates a transformation of content from its original social media platform and also reveals editorial intervention. However, the original content, previously published on Tumblr and Twitter, also changed—in some cases drastically—when presented in the printed book and exhibits strong evidence of a traditional editorial process. For example, in *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, there were noticeable changes in the narrative of some of the drafts. “Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde” was originally presented on Tumblr as just one line, but within the book it was expanded into a paragraph with more humor and context. A few lists, such as alternative titles for *The Great Gatsby*, were lengthened while others had lines removed. Some drafts changed entirely. *Eat, Pray, Love*, for example, was presented on Tumblr as one long title: “Eat, Pray, Love, Sleep, Wake Up, Realize You’re Still Alone, Drink, Sleep, Wake Up, Drink, Drink, Drink, Try to Call Him, Drink, Drink, Sleep, Realize Love Doesn’t Exist, Eat, Eat, Eat, Sleep.”² Within the book, *Eat, Pray, Love*’s draft was presented as five short, alternative titles, altering the connotation of the draft altogether. In an email, when asked about the expansion of the narrative and added content in some of the drafts, Paul said that the changes made were the results of suggestions from his editor at Chronicle.

The original content included in the printed version of *Alice in Tumblr-land* sees remarkable changes. In comparison to the original posts on Tumblr, we see an evolution of

¹ Tim Manley, email message to Kyra Hearn, May 11, 2015.

² Paul Laudiero. *Shit Rough Drafts* (Tumblr). www.shitroughdrafts.com

language and narrative. While only one page at a time is dedicated to a character's story, there's a full story within each page that allows for the reader to either read the book front to back or simply flip to one page and enjoy it. The reader who reads the entire book is given more context behind many of the characters—the Beast isn't just a Beast, as he is on Tumblr, he's a Beast who likes to play Xbox in his underwear and follow the statistics of his fantasy football team. The Hare and the Tortoise aren't just rivals, one chugs energy drinks like it's part of his day job and the other creates works of literary merit that are reviewed by the *New York Times*.³ Alice's story is divided over a series of pages, as is the story of Hansel and Gretel, lengthening these stories considerably, adding to a story arc that was shortened on Tumblr, and like many other characters in the book, have endings to their specific tales. Some stories are cut right to the point, like the Three Billy Goats Gruff. Little Red Riding Hood is given an introduction to her story and more inner dialogue than originally posted on Tumblr. Robin Hood's story, like a few others, changes in terms of setting and context—he steals from the rich and gives to the poor on Tumblr, but in the book he promotes equity through his legitimate business and line of work. In his email, Tim Manley said, "In the jump from the fairy tales Tumblr to *Alice*, I'd say the biggest change is—as you note—a more detailed storyline. With the Tumblr, I could never be sure if someone reading a fairy tale had read every other fairy tale I posted. It was *required* to stand on its own...A whole arc develops for each main character and, to some extent, for the whole book." These changes are patterns and tactics that we often see in fiction novels, where characters have a backstory and dialogue, and the reader is further invested in the development of the story and characters.

³ Tim Manley. *Alice in Tumblr-land: and other Fairy Tales for a New Generation*. Penguin Books, 2013.

In some respects, the original content remained the same but the structure and/or organization changed. In *Dads are the Original Hipsters* and *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, the books are divided into three sections. These sections were established before or during the writing process, but not necessarily changed during the editorial process. In their emails, Paul Laudiero said that the sections within *Sh*t Rough Drafts* were established after the book was acquired and were created because they “made the most sense,”⁴ while Brad Getty said that he divided *Dads are the Original Hipsters* into sections to “give it some direction and make sure [he] didn’t touch on one thing too much.”⁵ Tim Manley established a pattern based on the characters in *Alice in Tumblr-land* and the frequency of their stories. Emma Koenig’s book *F*ck! I’m in my Twenties* is divided into sections as well, though upon comparison to the Tumblr site that the content originated from, it’s apparent that though the content is rearranged in print, the sections were established before acquisition. Emma Koenig managed to establish these sections by declaring in a post that she was attempting to explain her twenties (attempt number one, attempt number two, etc.). The creation of sections within these books indicates both a change in the original content and the influence of a publisher’s traditional editorial process. On Tumblr and Twitter, it’s incredibly difficult to divide posts into categories, as the content is presented on the platform typically by date of post. The structure created for these books is an example of an editorial process that we often see with fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and academic books but in the form of chapters.

Other changes in the original content that are seen in *Alice in Tumblr-land*, *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, and *Dads are the Original Hipsters*, but are not as evident in *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, *Texts*

⁴ Paul Laudiero, email message to Kyra Hearn, May 8, 2015.

⁵ Brad Getty, email message to Kyra Hearn, May 12, 2015.

*From Dog, or F*ck! I'm in my Twenties*, are the changes in the illustrations. In *Alice in Tumblr-land*, many of the illustrations that paired with the fairy tales are new illustrations that were not seen on Tumblr, though some are revised versions. In regards to his illustrations, Tim mentioned in his email, "I wanted to do more than just re-paste stuff from the Tumblr into a book. For one thing, I wanted the illustrations to be better. Nearly every illustration in the book is new." This is also applicable to *Dads are the Original Hipsters* and *Feminist Ryan Gosling*. In both of the aforementioned books, the photos originally featured on their respective Tumblr sites were often not the photos that were included in the books, but were new, "better" ones that had not been seen before. When asked about the photos included in his book, *Dads are the Original Hipsters*, author Brad Getty said, "It takes a lot of photos to create a book. I had over 5,000 images that I was constantly sorting through, searching and contacting people about. It takes a lot to get the best. Look at it this way, if you get 100 images, only one will be good." In the case of photos and illustrations, changes made to the original content translates into a shift in the overall story. Tim Manley made adjustments to his illustrations upon the suggestions made by his editor and agent, saying that they suggested "each illustration should feature the character prominently. Their idea was that people [would] connect more with the character, and that it would be more engaging to flip through." Added details to illustrations, such as those found in *Alice in Tumblr-land*, give the reader more connotation, and the same can be said for the photos in *Dads are the Original Hipsters* and *Feminist Ryan Gosling*. Thus, the selection of photos and the revised illustrations after the acquisition of these books indicates a change in the original content and tells us that there was a revision process for the visual elements in addition to the textual.

Editorial Process

Aside from the addition of entirely new material, three books manifested little to no changes from the original content included in the printed books. While the photos in *Feminist Ryan Gosling* changed in many instances to other pictures of Ryan Gosling, the majority of the text associated with the photos did not. Meanwhile, the photos in *Texts From Dog* and the illustrations in *F*ck! I'm in my Twenties* did not change at all. These three books provide examples of where the original content did not change and also had seemingly very little editorial influence after the acquisition of the books. This is not to say that there was no editorial process or assistance. *Texts From Dog*, *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, and *F*ck! I'm in my Twenties* doubtlessly underwent, at the very least, a copyedit, as evident from the changes in punctuation and grammar. In *Texts From Dog*, the most noticeable adjustments were the removal of all periods at the end of every text message and the change from British quotation marks to American. This indicates a copyedit, but based upon the Tumblr and Twitter accounts of Texts From Dog from which the book content derived from, the lack of changes suggests that there were very few revisions, if any. In *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, the adjustments to punctuation (semi-colons, em-dashes, serial commas, etc.) and changes in syntax were the only noticeable changes. In *F*ck! I'm in my Twenties*, place-specific mentions, such as New York City, were eliminated in addition to minor mechanical changes. Therefore, it can be assumed that the content of these books influenced the publisher's editorial process very little, similar to the other social media-derived books.

The editorial process is more apparent in *Alice in Tumblr-land*, *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, and *Dads are the Original Hipsters*. Like the other books, these assuredly underwent a copyedit, as

discernible from the changes in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Much of the material in *Dads are the Original Hipsters* was slimmed down, and a portion of the words were eliminated or replaced. Brad Getty mentioned in an email that during the revision process, he and his editor had to “tone down some of the language so that retailers would pick it up” and therefore much of the profanity had been eliminated. Unlike *Alice in Tumblr-land* and *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, the narrative in *Dads are the Original Hipsters* was condensed, and many of the captions below the photos of fathers on Tumblr were cut in half for their presentation in the book. Further, the sentences within the book were not as lengthy, and the diction more descriptive.

Paul Laudiero and Tim Manley’s books underwent similar grammatical edits, as Tim said, “I wanted to keep the stories written the way people talk. But, in some cases, correct grammar must triumph.” Because the content originated from social media platforms, one wonders if there was a revision process. Traditionally, after a publisher and editor acquire a manuscript, the author’s manuscript may go through multiple revisions before both the publisher and the author agree upon the version that goes to press. Similar to traditional manuscripts, *Alice in Tumblr-land*, *Dads are the Original Hipsters*, and *Sh*t Rough Drafts* also underwent revisions. Brad Getty mentioned in his email that the manuscript for *Dads are the Original Hipsters* underwent two to three rounds of edits and revision. When asked if *Sh*t Rough Drafts* had a revision process, where a manuscript is returned with editorial comments and changes more than once, Paul Laudiero said, “My editor was fantastic, so there weren't too many edits. He really dug my humor and trusted me. But yeah, there were a few edits.”

It seems that Tim Manley saw more of a traditional editorial process for *Alice in Tumblr-land* than any of the other authors. Tim had the opportunity to choose the editor for his book, and

based his decision upon the vision the editor had for Tim’s book. In his email, Tim said, “I was lucky enough to have several choices, and to be able to speak to each editor before deciding who we would work with. The editor I chose to work with had a similar vision as me.” Just as Brad and Paul had more than one revision of their manuscript, Tim did as well. The editorial process he saw for *Alice in Tumblr-land* is most similar to that of a traditional manuscript, where an editor makes suggestions for changes and/or improvement, and the author chooses to accept or reject the feedback. He mentions in his email, “As the process of writing the book continued forward, there were several points where I passed my editor a manuscript and he passed me notes.” In fact, during the revision process of Tim’s manuscript, his editor made suggestions that Tim did not agree with:

My editor crossed out any story that was serious or sentimental. He thought they should only be funny. I had to take a moment to think about his feedback. Did I trust him, or did I trust my gut? I decided to push back. I argued that the serious stories were actually the most important ones in the book. The great majority of the book should be fun and entertaining, but it was the moments of realness that would make the book matter. He was hesitant at first, but eventually agreed.

The revisions that Brad, Paul, and Tim experienced indicate that the traditional editorial process may be shortened, but not significantly influenced by the material’s originating source.

Conclusions

Chronicle Books discovered *Sh*t Rough Drafts* through their contest The Great Tumblr Book Search—a unique method of discovering new writers and acquiring books. The popularity and frequency of which we are seeing these social media accounts turned into books clearly shows

that a trend in publishing is evolving: publishers are seeking new material outside of submitted manuscripts. Social media platforms come with an established readership and allow for aspiring authors to share their voice and produce content in different ways that sometimes cannot be translated into a printed book. However, based upon the comparison of the books *Alice in Tumblr-land: and Other Fairy Tales for a New Generation*, *Texts From Dog*, *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, *Sh*t Rough Drafts*, *F*ck! I'm in my Twenties*, and *Dads are the Original Hipsters* to the social media sites from which their content derived from, it is apparent that the publisher's editorial process is not influenced during the production of the books. This is made evident by the noticeable copyedits and developmental editorial changes in all of the books after their acquisition. Similar to a traditionally acquired manuscript, at least three of the manuscripts of the examined books underwent a revision process with an editor, where notes were exchanged and changes were either accepted or rejected by the author. Although the editorial process was not identifiably influenced by the source of the material, the content from the social media sites did change considerably when presented in a book. The extension of the content in both *Sh*t Rough Drafts* and *Alice in Tumblr-land* is one example of how the content changed from its original form on social media to its presentation in a book. New content not featured on any social media platform before acquisition and creation of an organized structure are just a few other trends that affected most, if not all, of the examined books. On sites such as Tumblr and Twitter, there's no need for story structure and the content can be short for audience consumption. There is no page count or limits of language. While the content of all of the books are non-linear, unlike traditional fiction and nonfiction books, the original content's changes in narrative, structure, and language when presented in print indicate an assimilation to the traditional styles of books of

which readers are accustomed. In sum, though the content is acquired in a non-traditional style from social media sites, the publisher's editorial process is not influenced, and as a result the original content derived from social media platforms does change when presented in a printed book.

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