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Beyond the Manuscript: Unraveling Author-Publisher Dynamics

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Abstract
In recent years, customer experience and satisfaction have become more critical than ever before. Companies focus on these two elements to retain and acquire customers in a highly competitive environment. The relationship between authors and publishers has always been complex, with dynamics deeply rooted in the social and cultural environment. At the same time, the success of their collaboration significantly impacts the local creative and sociocultural landscape. It is essential to understand the factors that determine author satisfaction and ease of collaboration, both generally and industry-specific, to support the growth and development of the book sector. This paper analyzes the collaborative dynamics between authors and publishers using the Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) and Customer Effort Score (CES) metrics based on a survey of 133 authors from various literary fields and geographic areas in Romania. The research findings provide insight into the key drivers behind authors' satisfaction and ease of collaboration with publishers. Moreover, we suggest practical recommendations from authors to publishers that can improve their collaborative processes, enhancing positive experiences for authors and potentially improving the overall quality of published works. This study's insights shall benefit authors, publishing houses, various organizations operating in the publishing field, policymakers, and regulatory bodies.

Keywords
Children's literature; education; children's literature studies; book market; international good practices

Introduction

The dynamic between authors and publishing houses can be complex in nature. Authors are considered not only clients but also business partners and content providers, being at the foundation of the publishing business. Collaboration between authors and publishers occurs at various stages, starting with manuscript development and editing, where the manuscript is carefully reviewed and improved through a close partnership between both parties. Throughout the book development and sales process, authors work closely with publishers. They provide valuable input on the graphics, including the cover art, page design, and any images or graphics to be included (Clark & Phillips, 2019). Authors also play a crucial role in promoting the book, connecting with potential readers through various online and offline channels. Social media is often used to align posts between authors and publishers, particularly during book launches or events related to the book, such as book signings or discussions. At the same time, publishers help authors create and maintain a personal brand identity as a part of the literary world, shaping how they present themselves to the public (O'Bryan, 2019). They work closely with authors on many other aspects of the publishing process, including book translations, foreign publishing rights, and converting books into digital or audio formats. This collaboration requires a lot of teamwork and effort.

We also note that finances are a sensitive and essential aspect of the relationship between an author and publisher. Negotiating and adhering to contracts is necessary for

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a lasting partnership where both parties are satisfied and their interests are protected. Currently, contracts between publishers and authors tend to favor the publisher globally. This occurs in a competitive economy with multiple entertainment industries, where bookselling is not the most prosperous. As a result, authors have one of the lowest incomes among creative professionals in their writing activities (Burgess & De Rosa, 2017; Throsby, Zwar, & Longden, 2015). This and other aspects can impact the author's overall satisfaction as a client. Publishing houses must ensure that their customers are happy with both the process and the outcome to create a lasting relationship that would ultimately benefit both parties (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014).

In Romania, the publishing sector has faced complex challenges due to the country's troubled history (Hrib, 2018a). Political changes and economic instability have hindered its growth, compounded by two global economic crises and the War in Ukraine (Ilie, Pârvu, & Niţă, 2022). Despite these obstacles, the industry has continued to develop in line with international trends. Building closer relationships with authors could contribute to its growth. Further research could provide valuable insights for fostering better collaboration. The practice shows that having fruitful relationships with authors is paramount for publishers' success. Such long-term partnerships are built on mutual trust and customer satisfaction. When authors are satisfied customers, they feel confident that their publishing company consistently delivers value, meets their needs, and provides a high level of service. As a result, they are more likely to continue working with the same publisher (Clark & Phillips, 2019).

This research aims to examine the author-publisher relationship from the authors' perspective. The study evaluates the authors' overall satisfaction with current practices, working conditions, experiences with publishers, and their needs, wants, and requirements regarding publishing houses. In addition, the study aims to identify areas for improvement that would enhance collaboration with publishers from the authors' point of view. A survey was conducted among Romanian authors of different genres to understand better how authors experience cooperation with publishing houses and how they assess their situation in the context of writing as a creative endeavor and the publishing industry as a business sector.

The paper is structured in several sections, starting with an introduction, followed by a literature review where concepts such as customer satisfaction, publishing business processes, author involvement, practices, and Romanian market circumstances are discussed. The methodology section offers a broader view of the survey design, respondents, tools, and data analysis methods. The "findings and discussion" section presents the data analysis with its results and interpretations, possible open areas for discussion, and insights into different facets of the author-publisher relationship. Finally, the study's conclusions and ideas for future research areas are presented.

This paper adopts a holistic approach to the topic, considering the socio-economic circumstances, business practices in the publishing sector, contract negotiations, the unique aspects of publisher-author relationships, and potential developments in this area. Authors' experiences and perceptions of the "inside" of the publishing sector should add to the current understanding of the book industry from a business perspective and complete the existing knowledge on related topics.

Literature review

Businesses around the world have recognized the importance of creating a service culture. This involves making service excellence a part of the company's core values, even for businesses that sell physical goods. Nowadays, businesses offer various services or product-service bundles to keep their customers satisfied and loyal. While the quality and success of the end product are crucial, customer satisfaction and retention rates are often influenced by the quality of the entire service the company provides. This applies

to all industries, including publishing. Adopting a service mindset that focuses on understanding, meeting, and sometimes exceeding customers' needs can lead to long-lasting partnerships and business success (Dam & Dam, 2021).

The relationship between authors and publishing houses is crucial to the publishing industry. It marks the beginning of the publishing process and sets the foundation for a successful collaboration. The process involves several stages, starting with submitting and accepting manuscripts or excerpts. However, the journey is not always straightforward, as authors may face multiple rejections and revisions requested by publishers. Sometimes, publishers may approach established authors to collaborate on upcoming books. However, this is less common and typically occurs when an existing relationship is already set up. Most of the time, when authors are satisfied with the service provided by a publisher, they establish long-term relationships, resulting in the publication of multiple books together (Clark & Phillips, 2019).

One particularly important element for client satisfaction is adopting a personalized approach. From this perspective, small businesses sometimes hold a competitive advantage, especially in publishing. When tailoring the service around the unique needs, demands, and preferences of the customer, the service is perceived as more meaningful and relevant (Kaufman, 2012). As publishing is a creative industry, this is significant, as the author actively participates in the end-product creation process. Hence, the publisher needs to work with them all along. Therefore, collaboration becomes another critical element in the quest to ensure a good experience for the author-client. As stated earlier, involving the author in various aspects of the publishing process is crucial. Their input should be considered when making business decisions and, at times, prioritized. Establishing a sense of partnership and mutual respect is of utmost importance as it can lead to long-term collaborations, resulting in numerous benefits. These benefits range from the safety and comfort of working with a trusted client to potential financial gains from creating a long-term marketing strategy (Khan, Salamzadeha, Iqbal, & Yang, 2022). Recognition and appreciation for the customer are crucial elements of customer satisfaction (Kaufman, 2012). In the case of authors, this factor is also exacerbated by the author creating the product hand in hand with the publisher. Moreover, the authors are the initial creators of the content. Therefore, they play a significant role in the success of the publication. Showing appreciation for their creative efforts and successful collaboration and their integral role in the publishing process shall induce a sense of meaning and a feeling of reward in the author-client.

Another essential aspect in ensuring author-customer satisfaction is contract negotiation, where advance payments, royalty rates, and other financial elements of the collaboration are discussed. The rates for royalties are quite varied and can range from 5% to 15% for hardcover books and up to 25% for e-books and audiobooks, on average in the US market but also as a global trend when speaking about big publishers. Sometimes, the fee grows progressively with the book sales levels (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014). These rates depend on the publisher's usual practices, the author's reputation, and the potential for their book sales. Discussions also include the book's rights and formats, such as whether it can be sold in print, e-book, or audiobook formats. The author's rights to republish their work and collaborate with other publishing houses and the timeframe for doing so are also discussed. An aspect to consider that shapes the overall collaboration may be choosing a big or a small publisher. Large publishers usually have more resources, a recognized brand, and a more extensive negotiation power. On the other hand, small publishers can provide more personalized attention and work more closely with the author, but they may not offer the same level of sales security (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014).

Publishing practices are influenced by culture, history, literary tradition, and socio-economic context (Towse, 2022), with education and literacy levels playing a significant role (Galor, 2022). The Romanian book industry has faced challenges such as censorship and economic crises, hindering sustained growth. Building strong stakeholder

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relationships and ensuring efficient workflows are essential for growth. Publishing in Romania involves multiple stages, resulting in a lengthy return-on-investment period and a cycle of debt that causes financial struggles for everyone involved (Grigore, 2014). It is not uncommon for authors to receive meager compensation compared to their overall sales and effort. In the long run, this may motivate authors to pursue more independent practices, such as self-publishing, by using the services from companies like, for example, Amazon, which offers a 40%-60% royalty rate to authors, from which delivery and printing costs are automatically deducted according to Kindle Direct Publishing (Amazon, 2023). However, in Romania, it is not common for authors to practice self-publishing, as the publishing practices are generally more traditional. Instead, they rely on their relationships with publishing houses. Many authors prefer to write in Romanian, which is not widely spoken internationally. Authors can benefit from their relationships with distributors, libraries, bookstores, and retail chains by collaborating with publishing houses. These benefits often compensate for the lack of financial stability. However, few authors can be full-time writers due to the small return on book sales, which are generally low in Romania. Most Romanian writers have jobs in the book industry or other fields to support themselves. Only a handful of authors can afford to be full-time writers, and they are usually best-sellers or well-known authors (Hrib, 2018a).

Even in countries with more robust publishing industries and higher author payment rates, many writers still have other jobs for more secure financial support (Burgess & De Rosa, 2017; Throsby, Zwar, & Longden, 2015). Low fees for authors seem to be common at the international level. It might be related to the fact that publishers bear a more significant part of the costs and risks associated with producing and selling a book, especially when the author is not a notorious one. Therefore, it is common in the industry that the publisher gets a higher reward for the books sold (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014). At the same time, the author is at the very core of the publishing business: content creation. Without an author, there would not be a publishing business. Synergetic teamwork between the author and the publishing house crew is critical for creating successful books.

Studies at an international level found that writers are one of the most underpaid professions in the creative industry. Specifically, poetry and fiction writers are particularly disadvantaged (Burgess & De Rosa, 2017; Throsby, Zwar, & Longden, 2015). Even in countries like Australia, where book sales are strong, and the industry is well-studied, poetry writers only make an average of $4,000 annually from their writing, which may be enough for a secondary job but is insufficient to support their daily needs. In fact, authors of all genres report that low income is the main reason they cannot dedicate more time to writing and often have to work other jobs. Among fiction authors, children's book writers tend to be more prolific and financially stable, producing more books and therefore earning more from publishing fees. Those who write children's books that are part of the school curriculum are even better off, as they often work in educational settings and can dedicate more time to writing. Non-fiction and academic authors tend to earn more from book sales, but their primary income still comes from the institutions they are affiliated with (Throsby, Zwar, & Longden, 2015).

Authors worldwide rely on publishing houses for security reasons. Digital publishing opportunities, especially self-publishing, still present security threats even if they might be cheaper and pay off more. Many authors face piracy even more frequently when their work is exposed online. The material is typically purchased once and then shared through messaging, email, or reposting on websites that display pirated content to the public. This may be due to financial reasons or the belief that knowledge should be freely accessible (Hati, Fitriasih, & Safira, 2020). Even though publishing under the umbrella of a publishing house does not guarantee the security of one's work, it is still a safety net as classic publishing houses rely more on physical book sales. Even though hardcover books can be borrowed and scanned, they cannot be replicated precisely. On the other hand, publishers, especially the big players, are already using advanced technology, such

as blockchain, that protects their intellectual goods and assets, including the writings of authors with whom they work. Nevertheless, piracy remains an ongoing issue, and publishers still lack adequate tools and systems to prevent it (Li, Liao, & Xie, 2021).

The emergence of digital technology could potentially add to authors' overall satisfaction with their activity and their relationship with the publishers. It greatly impacts book promotion (O'Bryan 2019) and feedback mechanisms, switching the control of marketing activity toward the author ((Burgess, Williams, & Curran, 2023; Salgaro, 2022). In turn, publishers can use sophisticated technologies to improve the authors' experience. One effective strategy is to use algorithms and data analytics to understand readers' preferences and opinions on books and marketing practices. Publishers can discuss these insights with authors and develop effective strategies together. They can also utilize online collaboration platforms and project management tools to streamline their workflow and reduce the need for frequent face-to-face meetings (Sharma & Baoku, 2013). Another way publishers can use technological advancements to improve authors' satisfaction might be by creating more digital books, such as e-books and audiobooks. This could lead to lower production costs as they are produced only once but can be sold multiple times. This could increase authors' satisfaction, as their royalty payments could be higher than traditional print books (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014).

In today's ever-changing environment, creating an appealing deal for readers while supporting and promoting their valuable authors, editors, translators, and other professionals presents a challenge for most publishers. Providing adequate compensation, good working conditions, and acknowledgment is crucial for long-term partnerships. As pricing is a significant factor in the buying decision in general, publishers are almost always subject to contradictory pressures, especially in the Romanian market. The consumers demand lower prices while internal pressures go in the opposite direction. To increase books' quality and to be able to offer proper pay to the involved professionals, as well as to support the increased printing costs while maintaining a certain level of profits, publishing houses are in a position where either prices need to be raised or costs to be lowered. This can directly affect their relationship with other clients and partners, including authors (Zbuchea & Hrib, 2019).

Publishing houses face another challenge when it comes to distribution. Although having their physical bookstores might be beneficial, it is difficult for most publishers to reach a broad audience this way. They must collaborate with bigger book chains and bookstores in densely populated areas such as malls and other similar places. Such collaborations allow for less control by the publishers on elements such as the audience, location, and even the end-price. A general recommendation for publishers would be to use a combination of selling channels. This way, any disadvantages of a particular channel can be mitigated while a broader population segment can be reached. At the same time, this might lower their control over the respective channels even more and the ability to involve the authors in direct onsite events in the bookstores (Lu, Shi, & Huang, 2018).

The particular relationship between a publishing house and an author usually has as a basis a contract signed when the manuscript is accepted, and the parties start working on the project of creating the book. Although publishers usually have contracts that tend to favor them over authors, there has been a recent shift in power toward readers and writers. With more access to each other, authors now take on a significant part of the marketing activities. Additionally, there are multiple platforms for self-publishing that authors can also use, even though they are still less popular and prestigious. In light of this, publishing houses need to expand their array of services and provide complete professional support to their authors (Clark & Phillips, 2019). In the same path of thought, the importance of marketing operations and the possibilities provided by social networks has dramatically increased recently, with new types of partnerships, advertising, and content creation opportunities arising. Publishers need to work hand in hand with authors to gain visibility, build reputation, and increase sales. Additionally, the end consumers place more emphasis on book form, design, and quality, even though

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their tastes may vary significantly. Collaboration increases the chance to bring an enhanced product to the consumer (Zbuchea & Hrib, 2019).

It should be noted that book markets vary greatly based on geographical and sociocultural characteristics. The Romanian market combines the free market with the state's unsystematical financial interventions, many rapid changes, and no holistic or strategic policies to support cultural organizations (Hrib, 2020). Entrepreneurs in this field need to adapt throughout the years to a market undergoing continuous crises and transformations. At the same time, the speed of life, as well as the speed of production, increased significantly, deepening the state of turbulence (Hrib, 2018b). A powerful effect on the development of the publishing sector in Romania affecting the collaboration relationships with the authors was the COVID-19 pandemic, with the lockdown and economic situation hitting various industries. Significant decreases in demand, interruptions in the supply chain, and lack of funds made education and culture among the most affected sectors. Players who lacked a brand strategy and failed to adapt to the speed of information flow and rapid distribution found themselves isolated (Hrib, 2020)—this period also highlighted the systemic issues in the publishing field, such as lower digitalization among smaller publishers, limited possibilities to access funds, and a lack of habitual book buying among Romanian consumers. Overall, the changes in consumption habits were insignificant, but people started to read more of what they had at home and engage more in online activities such as book clubs, author meetings, etc. At the same time, publishers were "forced" to move both their selling and communication activities online, as well as operational collaborations with authors and other partners. This period revealed that systematic communication is essential in all business activities and might sometimes be definitory for staying in business (Zbuchea, Săniuţă, & Hrib, 2020).

The transformation in the publishing field has been even more highlighted by the mentioned COVID-19 pandemic and socio-economic and political struggles in the area. A pattern that has become more and more visible is digitalization. This increases the importance of authors' presence on social media and their readers' virtual (and real) lives. Now more than ever, they play an important role in marketing and promotion, shifting from content creators to brand ambassadors (Mehrotra, 2020). Publishers may find an opportunity in this apparent power shift in the authors' favor by broadening their range of services provided. Following the general trend companies from various industries are adopting, publishers can build up on the idea of customer care and service excellence (Kaufman, 2012).

An example would be adopting a dedicated team model (Bohatyrchuk, 2018) for authors' support that could assist authors in various activities, such as working closely in proofreading, beta reading and editing the manuscripts, working together on cover design, discussing and synchronizing their online presence and marketing actions taken by the author and the publisher, etc. These teams can be formed of regular employees or contracted freelancers, which is more specific for the industry, especially small and medium publishing houses. Some companies even offer such specialized services (for example, Porchlight).

Collaboration and communication are essential for establishing successful partnerships (Altabbaa, Kaba, & Beran, 2019), especially in a business such as publishing, which relies, to a greater extent, on the power of words and perceptions. One general recommendation in this context would be a high degree of transparency in the relationship with the authors. In the long run, it would benefit publishers to be open about the whole publishing process, from editing to marketing, distribution, and even post-sales activities. Clear expectations are important for authors to have a positive experience with publishers. Authors can be better informed and prepared by understanding the publishing process and expected outcomes. Authors are a valuable part of the publishing process, as they help create value in their unique way. Therefore, they should be involved in decision-making processes, from selecting the book title to

marketing strategies. Publishers should keep authors informed of their project's progress, including sales figures, reader feedback, and promotional efforts. In turn, authors should provide constant feedback and insights on updates from their readers to achieve better results. At the same time, both parties need to cooperate, be transparent, and stick to set deadlines to have a lucrative collaboration (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014).

Another significant aspect of the publisher-author relationship is ensuring proper payment and compensation. It is essential to remunerate the authors for their work and recognize their value and contribution to the publishing house. Offering competitive royalty rates that reflect their books' quality and commercial success can motivate authors to continue their collaboration with the publisher. Retaining the most valuable authors is an investment for future collaborations, not just an expense. To strengthen this business relationship and build trust, it is essential to have well-designed contracts with clear clauses that benefit both parties. Ideally, each party's rights and obligations should be clearly specified and not subject to interpretation (Clark & Phillips, 2019; Throsby, Zwar, & Longden, 2015).

Selling and distribution could greatly benefit from author involvement as well. For instance, publishers could help organize events where authors can directly sell their books. Nowadays, social media and the ease of creating websites and blogs allow authors to market and advertise their books online. Additionally, such events can be held in bookstores, during author talks, or book club discussions at libraries, which can help build relationships with these important community hubs. Especially if books are written in an international language, authors can also assist in listing their books on online retailers such as Amazon or local big retailers if written in the national language. Both physical and virtual book tours can also increase sales, enhance author recognition, and reach wider audiences when done in collaboration between the author and publisher. Publishers can provide authors with sales data and analytics summaries to help inform future marketing and selling strategies and insights about their most avid readers and target niche (Steiner, 2015; Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014).

Customer satisfaction relies heavily on the direct experience of interacting with the company, regardless of the business type. While tools and technologies can be of great assistance, the true essence of customer success stems from a mindset of service excellence and a growth-oriented approach, emphasizing learning and implementing innovations that aim to make the customer's experience as smooth as possible while maintaining a good cost-benefit ratio. It is important to note that customer satisfaction is closely related to their expectations. It is essential to manage these expectations and remain aware of what the company can consistently offer. Going the extra mile without the appropriate infrastructure can potentially harm the relationship with the client, as their expectations would be too high. If the company cannot maintain that level of service, then the client's satisfaction could decrease. A professional approach, supported by a well-designed work infrastructure, can enhance customer satisfaction regardless of the business type (Kaufman, 2012).

The complex and symbiotic relationship between publishers and authors is a centerpiece of the literary world. It builds on the creation and dissemination of books and other written materials. This partnership requires high collaboration, negotiation, and a shared love for storytelling. Authors work with publishing houses to transform their creative ideas into profitwise viable products (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014). However, disagreements often arise on how to make the literary work more commercially appealing without sacrificing creativity or originality (Martin, 2017). This relationship evolves and builds on mutual trust and shared challenges and successes. Authors often choose to work on their upcoming books with the same publishers, creating a long-term partnership with the publishers. This relationship between publishers and authors is the engine that brings stories closer to the audience. Both parties are involved in the entire publishing process, which includes negotiating, artistic

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growth, and commercial pursuits (Clark & Phillips, 2019). This process is filled with joys and challenges, ultimately shaping the literary world we know today.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between authors and publishers. It aims to examine different stages of this relationship, from the initial collaboration to post-publication activities. The study assesses authors' perceived ease and satisfaction from various perspectives. Table 1 presents a summary of the objectives this research aims to achieve. The table displays the aspects that have been analyzed and briefly describes the respective objectives.

Table 1. Research objectives

Initiation and Collaboration	Evaluate the ease of manuscript submission and initiation of the publishing process.
	Assess satisfaction with negotiation, contract signing, and collaboration on design aspects.
Communication and Responsiveness	Evaluate the satisfaction with communication and responsiveness during the editing and revision phase.
	Assess the ease of accessing information and updates about the publishing project.
Process Management	Investigate the difficulty of adhering to the established publication schedule.
	Analyze how well the publishing house managed challenges or unexpected changes.
Distribution and Marketing	Evaluate the smoothness of the book distribution process.
	Assess satisfaction with engagement in marketing activities.
Financial Aspects	Investigate satisfaction with financial aspects, including contract adherence and author rights payments.
Quality, Support, and Post-Publication	Appraise the support and guidance received from the publishing house.
	Assess satisfaction with the quality of the final printed product.
	Assess satisfaction with post-publication activities.
Types of relationships	Evaluate if authors perceive publishing houses as service providers or partners.

To achieve the objectives, a questionnaire has been designed that utilizes the metrics of Customer Effort Score (CES) and Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT). Aspects of CSAT provide direct insights into the relational aspects, while CES offers information on the perceived smoothness of interactions, which may be a predictor for longer-term relationships as well. Both CES and CSAT are metrics that reflect customer feedback. However, CES measures a specific aspect: the customers' ease of interaction and process navigation/product use. It aims to minimize difficulties for customers. On the other hand, CSAT looks at a larger spectrum and aims to maximize satisfaction (Bleuel, 2019). Unlike the general use of these metrics, usually used for assessing customer satisfaction and predicting company loyalty, this research analyzes authors' collaboration with various publishing companies to gain industry perspective and insights on macro-level trends.

The Customer Effort Score (CES) measures the effort a customer puts in to achieve their desired outcome. It also indirectly evaluates the amount of effort a company puts into making things easier for the customer. CES is closely linked to customer service and the efficiency of processes and products (RevOS.ai, 2023). The general question of CES is,

"How much effort did you have to put in to receive the respective service/perform the respective action?". This metric is considered a predictor of customer loyalty, future spending, and repurchase intentions (Agag & Eid, 2020). This study aimed to evaluate the perceived difficulty of various tasks involved in the publishing process, which require collaboration between authors and publishers. The intent was to identify areas functioning well without significant challenges and areas needing improvement, either through actions taken by publishers or at the system level by policymakers and other institutions involved. CES is generally calculated as the average score of all responses.

The Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) is a key performance indicator measuring customer satisfaction with a particular product or service. It is a straightforward and effective method for gaining feedback that helps companies understand which products or services perform well in terms of customer satisfaction and which ones need improvement. The standard question for CSAT is, "How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the goods/service you received?". The results are calculated as a percentage, either as an average composite customer satisfaction score or by considering only the highest two points on the Likert scale, which is believed to be more accurate in predicting customer retention (Raileanu, 2023). Although CSAT is limited to measuring a specific interaction and not an ongoing relationship, it can still indirectly indicate repurchase intention and predisposition to become loyal. Increased satisfaction generally leads to increased loyalty and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Zaato et al., 2023). However, CSAT is also influenced by previous interactions with the same company or other similar companies and customer expectations. The level of satisfaction generated by a feature depends on its performance or functionality relative to customer expectations. It is also influenced by customers' personality traits, particularly in the case of services where interactions are subjective. According to research, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness tend to have a positive influence on CSAT, while neuroticism tends to have a negative impact (Wenninger, Rau, & Röglinger, 2022). Therefore, a larger sample size is required to draw sound conclusions, particularly regarding services.

Through CSAT, the research aims to understand which aspects of the publishing process are perceived positively by customers, resulting in higher satisfaction scores, and which aspects negatively impact customer satisfaction. It is to be noted whether certain respondents tend to answer all questions similarly, either positively or negatively, which may indicate a bias related to their last interaction or personality traits. Additionally, the aspects considered satisfactory or unsatisfactory by most respondents are identified, showing the industry trends. These patterns can provide valuable insights into areas that require structural transformation at the publishing sector level. These factors may be responsible for hindering growth in the publishing industry. Likewise, it is essential to evaluate the aspects that are functioning well so that companies in the field can capitalize on them to enhance customer satisfaction.

The CSAT and CES scales mirror the perceived efforts and satisfaction of customers. Table 2 presents the main dimensions measured by the two scales and the associated questions.

Table 2. Dimensions associated with the investigation and the related questions

Dimension	CES	CSAT
Submission	CES1. How easy was it to submit your manuscript and initiate the publishing process with the publishing house?	CSAT1. How satisfied are you with the information received before starting the collaboration with the publishing house?
Contracting	CES2. How easy was negotiating and signing the contract and related documents with the editor?	CSAT2. How satisfied were you with the initiation of the publishing process and the negotiation of the contract?
Cooperation	CES3. How smooth was the communication and responsiveness	CSAT3. How satisfied were you with the editorial support and guidance

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	from the publishing team during the editing and revision phase?	received from the publishing house?
Timeline	CES4. How difficult was it for you to adhere to the established publication schedule?	CSAT4. How clearly did the publishing house provide the information regarding the stages and updates of the editorial project?
Design	CES5. How easy was it for you to collaborate with the publishing house on the book's design and cover appearance?	CSAT5. How satisfied are you with the quality of the final printed product received from the publishing house?
Information & updates	CES6. How easy was it to access information and updates about your publishing project through the platform or the publishing house's representatives?	CSAT6. How satisfied were you with communicating with the editor during the editorial process?
Challenges	CES7. How easily did the publishing house manage challenges or unexpected changes during the publishing process?	CSAT7. How efficiently did the publishing house address your specific needs and preferences during the publishing process?
Distribution	CES8. How smooth was the book distribution process for your book?	CSAT8. How satisfied were you with the book's sales and distribution activity?
Marketing	CES9. How easy was it for you to engage in marketing activities related to your books?	CSAT9. How satisfied were you with the promotional and marketing support offered by the publishing house? CSAT10. How satisfied are you with the publishing house's involvement in post-publication activities?
Financial aspects	CES10. How simple was the process of receiving author rights payments?	CSAT11. How satisfied are you with how the editor adhered to the financial aspects of your contract?

All questions in the survey questionnaire have been standardized to a 7-point Likert scale to ensure consistency and comparability of the results. In the case of the CES scale, 1 represented very difficult and 7 – very easy. In the case of the CSAT scale, 1 represented highly unsatisfied, while 7 was highly satisfied. Therefore, the higher the scales, the better for authors and publishing houses.

For the last research objective, two questions have been inserted, enquiring if the authors consider themselves clients or rather partners in the publishing process. The survey's questionnaire includes two questions that directly investigate this aspect.

1) The author is a client of the publishing house, benefiting from editorial, distribution, and marketing services.
2) The author is a partner of the publishing house, deciding together with the publishing house and actively contributing to the success of the publishing project.

The results shall offer a clearer picture of the publishing common practices in Romania and the overall maturity of this industry. Stronger partnerships often indicate closer business relationships and co-creation of value, which in turn signals potential sector-level growth.

The questionnaire was distributed between September and October 2023 through various channels, such as email, social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn), and messaging platforms (WhatsApp, Viber), to authors who have published books with Romanian publishers. Most of the authors were from larger cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Iasi. This may limit the study results, as authors from smaller towns and rural areas are underrepresented. However, publishing houses are primarily located in larger urban areas, which could explain why more authors are active in these regions.

The results of the study have been processed using SPSS, which is a suite of software programs that are used for statistical analysis in social sciences. It provides various functionalities such as predictive modeling, quantitative data analysis, visualization design, and text analysis. One of the significant advantages of this program is its user-friendliness, as it only requires basic knowledge of statistics and software understanding. It is widely used in education and research institutions because it can handle large amounts of data. However, some challenges are associated with it, such as limitations in multi-level analysis and pre-programming or extended customization possibilities (Rippey, 2021).

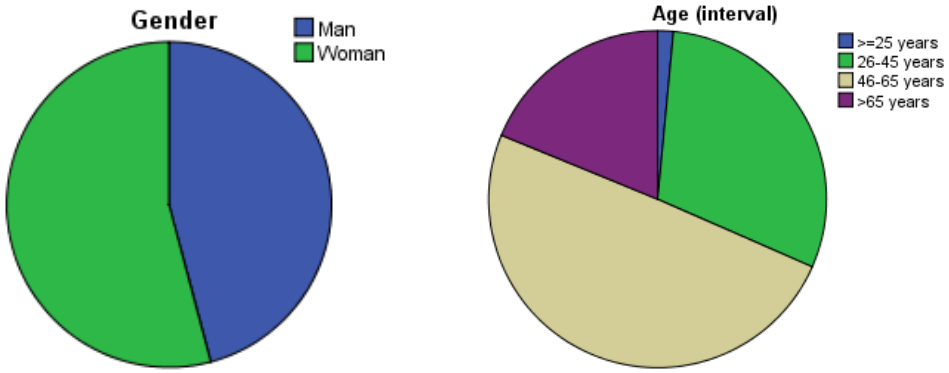
Analysis of results

Respondents profile

Almost all of the respondents, as expected, do not have primary income from writing and selling books. Only three respondents are mainly living on their authorship rights. Two of them are women writing fiction books for children/teens. The third one, a man, publishes non-fiction and popularization books. One woman wrote 20 books cooperating with five publishing houses, while the others wrote ten volumes working with 2-3 publishing companies. Their age is between 40-55 years. They all live in Bucharest.

A total of 133 authors responded to the survey. Of these, 46% were academic authors, while the remaining 54% were authors of children's or adult fiction, poetry, and non-fiction popularization books. Although this division does not clearly show the differences between academic and non-academic literary fields, it does represent a good balance between academic and non-academic publishing. Because the feedback metrics (CES and CSAT) used in this study are subjective in nature, the number of responses (133) may not provide a precise and accurate picture of the Romanian publishing landscape. Despite this limitation, the results can still provide valuable insights into processes requiring further research and business improvement.

Figure 1 presents the structure of the entire sample, considering various indicators.



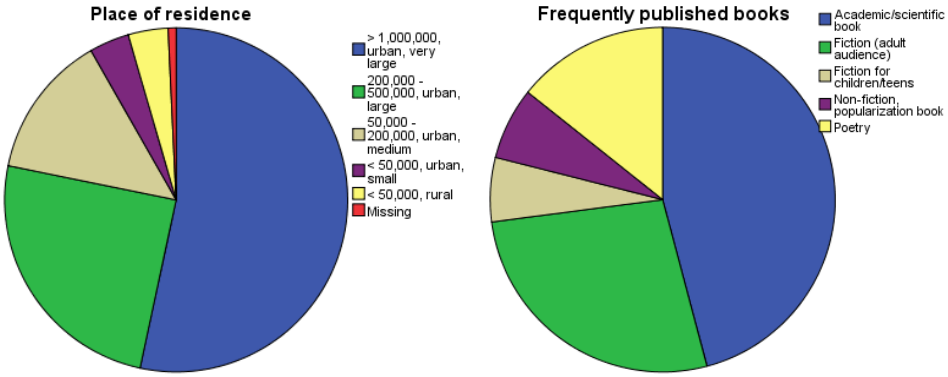


Figure 1. The profile of respondents considering gender, age, place of residence, and types of books published

We observe that women are slightly better represented in the sample. Very young authors and those from small towns or rural areas are not consistently represented. More than half of the respondents live in Bucharest, and half wrote academic and non-fiction books.

We also investigated their experience in terms of writing and publishing (Figure 2). The sample is balanced in terms of number of books published. Also, the experiences with publishing houses are not highly diverse.

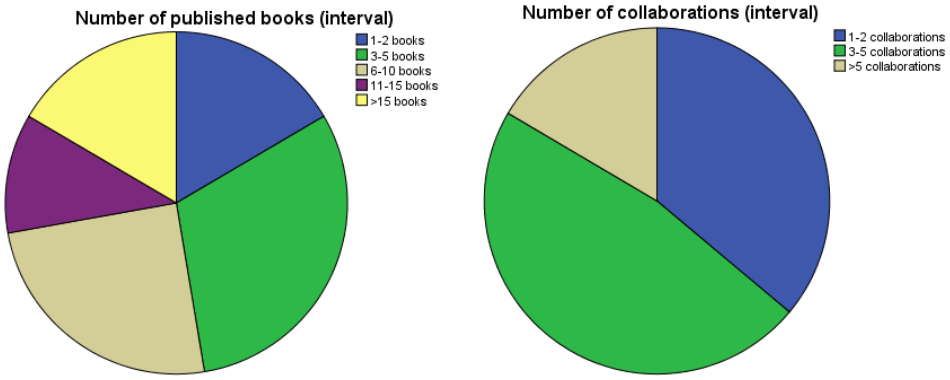


Figure 2. The respondents' experience in publishing

Findings and discussions

To ensure the reliability of the scales, we used Cronbach's Alpha, which measures internal consistency. All dimensions measured are worded in the same way, positively. We calculated it for both scales investigated, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha statistics for CES and CSAT

Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
CES	.852	.858	10
CSAT	.936	.939	11

In both cases, the indicators are above 0.7, indicating that the measurements are adequate and have internal consistency. We observed consistent inter-item correlations

for both scales; still, in the case of the CES scale, it is lower than the CSAT scale (.376 compared to .581). Tables 4 and 5 present the correlation matrix for the measured scales.

Table 4. Pearson correlations for CES

	CES1	CES2	CES3	CES4	CES5	CES6	CES7	CES8	CES9	CES10
CES1	1									
CES2	.593**	1								
CES3	.554**	.561**	1							
CES4	.331**	.431**	.342**	1						
CES5	.487**	.489**	.596**	.509**	1					
CES6	.392**	.373**	.604**	.282**	.604**	1				
CES7	.428**	.475**	.676**	.349**	.579**	.625**	1			
CES8	.206*	.264**	.340**	.111	.192*	.372**	.307**	1		
CES9	.299**	.266**	.276**	.148	.265**	.276**	.279**	.495**	1	
CES10	.262**	.292**	.372**	-.008	.183*	.308**	.232**	.533**	.371**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In the case of the CES scale, the strongest correlations are between the Cooperation dimension with Challenges, followed by the correlation between Challenges and Information & updates, and Information & updates with Cooperation and Design. All these items are related to the publishing process – designing and bringing the book onto the market.

Table 5. Pearson correlations for CSAT

	CSAT1	CSAT2	CSAT3	CSAT4	CSAT5	CSAT6	CSAT7	CSAT8	CSAT9	CSAT10	CSAT11
CSAT1	1										
CSAT2	.675**	1									
CSAT3	.724**	.646**	1								
CSAT4	.718**	.668**	.811**	1							
CSAT5	.484**	.450**	.587**	.563**	1						
CSAT6	.642**	.574**	.756**	.789**	.683**	1					
CSAT7	.654**	.552**	.753**	.736**	.724**	.798**	1				
CSAT8	.496**	.470**	.447**	.457**	.319**	.456**	.507**	1			
CSAT9	.521**	.520**	.490**	.516**	.367**	.463**	.520**	.864**	1		
CSAT10	.526**	.613**	.485**	.528**	.454**	.599**	.501**	.574**	.528**	1	
CSAT11	.535**	.549**	.539**	.573**	.360**	.514**	.501**	.765**	.851**	.584**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As mentioned above, the correlations between the items included in the CSAT scale are stronger than in the case of the previous scale. Besides the strong correlations between most of the publishing processes also observed in the case of the previous scale, we observe some strong relations between satisfaction related to the financial aspects and satisfaction related to marketing.

We present the descriptive statistics for both scales in Table 6 to observe the overall evaluation.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations for CES and CSAT scales

Dimension	**CES**			**CSAT**		
	Item	Mean	Std. dev.	Item	Mean	Std. dev.
Submission	CES1	5.55	1.777	CSAT1	5.17	1.610
Contracting	CES2	5.53	1.672	CSAT2	5.03	1.647
Cooperation	CES3	5.44	1.743	CSAT3	5.04	1.743
Timeline	CES4	5.89	1.407	CSAT4	5.11	1.713
Design	CES5	5.71	1.574	CSAT5	5.83	1.184
Information & updates	CES6	5.09	1.819	CSAT6	5.59	1.552
Challenges	CES7	5.21	1.670	CSAT7	5.35	1.548
Distribution	CES8	3.88	1.895	CSAT8	3.71	1.949

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Marketing	CES9	4.16	1.977	CSAT9 CSAT10	3.65 4.69	1.896 2.057
Financial aspects	CES10	3.77	2.242	CSAT11	3.68	2.020
GENERAL EVALUATION		**5.02**			**4.80**	

Overall, the CES scale is a little higher than the CSAT scale. This means that the authors tend to consider that their efforts and costs are not so difficult to cope with, while the level of satisfaction tends to be average. The perceived hierarchies are a little different, too. In the case of the CES scale, the top three dimensions are Timeline, Design, and Submission. In contrast, in the case of the CSAT scale, the highest evaluation is given to the following dimensions: Design, Information & updates, and Challenges. In the case of both scales, the least appreciated dimensions are Marketing, Distribution, and Financial aspects. Therefore, the production processes are generally appreciated, while the commercialization and financial elements tend to be criticized more by authors.

In all cases except the implication of the publishing house in post-publication activities (CSAT10), men tend to give somewhat higher evaluations than women. Still, in all cases, the T-test shows that $p>0.05$; therefore, the differences are not statistically significant. We also performed a T-test to observe if there are significant differences considering the type of books published. Considering the small number of respondents to specific categories, we divided the group into two – the authors of non-fiction books and the authors of fiction books (including poetry). In most cases, the non-fiction writers are slightly more critical than the fiction authors, but the differences are not statistically significant.

We also considered Oneway ANOVA tests to see the influence of age and place of residence. Considering the age of the respondents, ANOVA shows that in the case of CES2, CES3, CES8 CSAT4, CSAT5, CSAT6, CSAT7, and CSAT8, there are differences between the very young authors (aged less than 25) and the other respondents. Nevertheless, considering that only two very young authors responded, we cannot view these results as reliable. Additionally, the analysis shows that the place of residency is not significant when evaluating the two scales.

Lastly, we checked if the experience with publishing houses significantly influences how the authors evaluate costs and satisfaction related to their relationships. We run Oneway ANOVA considering the number of books published. No significant values have been obtained except for CES7 (Challenges), as presented in Figure 3. ANOVA shows the following data: $F(4,128) = 3.353$, $p = 0.012$. Scheffe's post-hoc analysis revealed that authors with 1-2 books published ($n = 22$, $M = 4.23$, $SD = 2.092$) have a lower evaluation of the ease of dealing with challenges of the publishing houses compared to those with more than 15 books published ($n = 22$, $M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.283$). Differences are not significant between those who published at least three books.

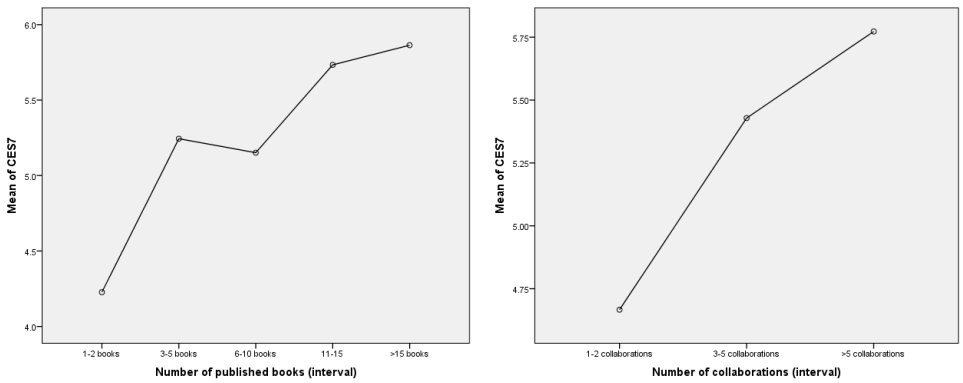


Figure 3. Means Plots considering the amount of experience with publishing houses

Interestingly, in the case of many of the investigated items, including CES7, the standard deviation tends to be lower for the authors with more books published. This proves that the more experienced authors are in publishing, the more uniform their evaluation is related to that experience. Similarly, aspects have been documented when checking the impact of the number of publishing houses with which the authors cooperated. The only statistically significant difference has been uncovered for the same item – CES7. ANOVA revealed that $F(2,130) = 4.6563$, $p = 0.012$. Authors who worked with 1-2 publishers ($n = 48$, $M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.928$) evaluate lower the ease of dealing with the challenges of the publishing houses compared to those with at least six publishers ($n = 22$, $M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.343$).

The descriptive statistics in Table 7 present a mixed evaluation. Authors consider themselves both clients and partners of the publishing companies, but they would rather perceive that the partnership dimension should prevail. We would consider this an opportunity for publishers to involve authors more and maybe even to collaborate with them on editorial products.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on the perceived type of relationship

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Client	133	1	7	4.33	2.055
Partner	133	1	7	4.72	2.130
Valid N (listwise)	133				

Interestingly, there are some differences between men and women. Men tend to consider themselves more than women as clients, while women consider themselves partners more than men. Nevertheless, T-tests show that these differences are not statistically significant. Also, non-fiction writers tend to view themselves as partners to a wider degree than fiction authors, but this is also not statistically significant, according to the T-tests performed. The ANOVA tests showed no significant differences between respondents considering their residency and their experience with publishing houses (considered both in terms of the number of books previously published and the number of publishing houses with which they cooperated in the past).

Conclusions

The various aspects analyzed in this research are closely linked, meaning that growth in satisfaction in one or several areas of the process can increase overall satisfaction. However, it should be noted that while authors and clients generally appreciate the production process, the post-production aspects, such as finance, marketing, and distribution, are areas of weakness regarding customer satisfaction and ease of operations. A reason for poorer performance in the commercialization aspects of the publishing process might be that publishing companies often provide little to no support to authors in areas such as distribution, marketing, and post-sales activities. Romanian publishers should consider expanding and improving their services in these areas to raise their authors' satisfaction and sales levels. Although the initial costs for such expansion may seem high, it can be considered a worthwhile investment for retaining author-customers and improving visibility and sales to end-consumers. Publishers already involved in the marketing and distribution activities may consider exploring more innovative marketing approaches in close collaboration with the authors, which might lead to increased satisfaction and financial performance.

The difference in satisfaction levels with publishers' activity, between the production and commercialization segments, implies that there might be a fundamental problem in the relationship between publishers and commercial booksellers. Difficult cooperation in this field could hinder publishers from actively participating in commercialization. This

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could be an interesting area for future research. Additionally, further insights can be obtained from qualitative investigations through interviews with authors and publishing representatives.

A further confirmation that there may be an issue at the industry level that needs to be addressed is the observation that experienced authors and those who have worked with multiple publishing houses tend to have more consistent evaluations compared to newcomers. As authors become more familiar with the common practices in the sector, they tend to place less blame on the publishers and instead focus on finding ways to overcome the challenges. This highlights the need for a systemic approach to improve the book industry as a whole, including both the production and selling segments. Policymakers might also consider implementing strategies and policies that promote collaboration between these two segments and enable publishers to access resources that help them become more involved in the post-production and post-publication stages.

Authors consider themselves both clients and publishing houses' partners in the book publishing process. Non-fiction writers see themselves more as partners and are slightly more critical. This may be because many of these authors are academic writers who are more rigorous in their approach and have affiliations with academic institutions. As a result, they tend to have long-term publishing relationships that reveal both strengths and weaknesses over time. Moreover, they tend to write more books and collaborate more than the average fiction writer, who often has a job outside of writing. Publishers who primarily collaborate with fiction authors might consider encouraging long-term collaborations and pay closer attention to their authors. They should offer incentives and consultation for future projects to be worked on together. The benefits are worth considering despite possible conflicts regarding vision and practices that may arise throughout a more extended collaboration. Trust, better communication, and more elaborate and long-term marketing campaigns that have the potential to result in improved financial performance are just several benefits to consider in this sense. Solid partnerships create shared ownership in the publication process and foster value co-creation.

Based on the results of this study, publishers should consider enhancing their communication channels and keeping authors informed of any challenges that may arise throughout the publishing process. Assisting authors, especially those less experienced, is critical to their decision to remain in the industry and collaborate with the respective publisher in the future. As these authors face more challenges that they find very difficult to navigate, lack of support may discourage them and damage the author-publisher relationship at the same time. Publishers should prioritize transparent practices and inclusion among authors. While investing in well-known authors may be economically beneficial, debutants and newer authors should not be overlooked. Nurturing these relationships can result in a long-term investment in talent development. Additionally, collecting constant feedback from authors on various aspects of the publishing process would be beneficial for identifying areas for improvement and implementing necessary changes.

Financial satisfaction is crucial, but unfortunately, it is not currently performing well. Transparency in payments and adherence to contractual terms are essential for authors' satisfaction and the publishing sector's growth. Proper royalty fees that are at least aligned with Western countries' standards and paid on time would significantly boost authors' satisfaction and provide publishers with more credibility. This might be the most challenging aspect of the publishing process elements. This is a persistent issue in Romania, a relatively young book market, and countries with a long publishing tradition. To address this, innovative business models with multiple revenue streams are needed to help stabilize the finances of publishers and ensure they can meet their commitments to authors in terms of payments.

Since most authors involved in this research were from urban centers in Romania, particularly Bucharest, it would be beneficial to investigate the experiences of underrepresented authors from smaller cities and rural areas. Additionally, exploring the publishing experience of authors from different genres of non-academic writing would be worthwhile. It might be interesting to see whether the commercial success of a specific genre translates into increased satisfaction with the publishing process and more attention from publishers. Furthermore, it would be valuable to examine whether any actions have been taken to promote and revive less popular genres, for example, hosting thematic events or supporting niche communities.

In conclusion, the research shows that authors do not find their interactions with publishers problematic; still, their satisfaction levels are average and hold much room for improvement. More efficient production processes and significantly improved post-production processes are required for more satisfied clients and a better-performing book sector overall. Publishers should prioritize clear communication on marketing strategies and financial arrangements, tailoring assistance to their authors' unique needs. This would help transition to partnerships and long-term arrangements that would be mutually beneficial and help address some of the challenges the publishing industry faces.

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