

Theory and Evidence..

Harry Potterization:  
The Global Phenomenon Explained

by

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An honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science

Undergraduate College

Leonard N. Stern School of Business

New York University

May 2006

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## Harry Potterization: The Global Phenomenon Explained

### Abstract:

It is undeniable that the Harry Potter series has taken its own journey on the Hogwarts Express and catapulted into an international sensation. Lying beyond the enchanting storyline of a boy-wonder submerged in a world of wizardry, is a global cult following of individuals that hang on to J.K. Rowling's every last word, flock to theaters on opening night to catch a glimpse of the on screen magic, and scour toy stores to satisfy insatiable appetites for Potter paraphernalia. Of course the million dollar question is how such a phenomenon has occurred.

Beyond the traditional answers of marketing, literature, and psychological preferences of fans, I feel that a pivotal moment in time must have occurred for the Harry Potter brand to proliferate. This paper looks at "Harry Potterization" through the lens of Malcolm Gladwell's *Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference*, who describes tipping points as moments in time where "an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire."<sup>1</sup> Harry Potter illustrates this theory through its two stage transformation into the brand that it is today. The first stage, which took place from 1997-2000, displayed all the elements needed for a "tip" to occur through the use of word of mouth and buzz marketing tactics. Once J.K. Rowling's creation tipped in 2000, mass marketing took over creating a global hype anchored by the releases of new Potter book and movie installments, as well as tie-in merchandise. It is this second, consumer oriented stage that has enabled the phenomenon to sustain itself for the past six years.

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<sup>1</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. Book Cover

## **Introduction: From Privet Drive to International Best-Seller**

In 1997, the vast majority of the world was still unfamiliar with Harry Potter. If you asked children in the U.S. or the U.K. who Harry Potter was, the likely response would have been “Harry who?” Yet within just a few years, the world was taken aback by the popularity of this young wizard.

Harry Potter, the creation of author Joanne Kathleen (J.K.) Rowling, was a work in progress for nearly six years before Bloomsbury, Rowling’s U.K. publishing house, picked it up. The series is planned to span seven books, six of which have already been published; the first four of these novels have been recreated for the screen, with the fifth set for a July 2007 release date.

Harry, orphaned at birth, is forced to live with his dreadful “muggle” (non-wizard) aunt and uncle in their typical suburban London neighborhood, on a typical street in a boxy house at number 4 Privet Drive. Despite the pseudo-normalcy of his life to this point, on his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday Harry finds out that he is a wizard, and his world, and ours, have never been the same. Each book chronicles one year of Harry’s life at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As Harry learns more about his true identity, he realizes that he is an integral part of a larger saga, an “(...) almost legendary confrontation between good and evil, between him and the greatest Dark wizard of the age, Lord Voldemort.”<sup>2</sup> Harry quickly learns that he was the reason for Lord Voldemort’s demise, and Death Eaters, Voldemort’s followers, far and wide are anticipating their master’s return. With each successive novel, Harry finds himself becoming enmeshed in battles and conflicts. The books are Harry’s coming of age story, and with each

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<sup>2</sup> [www.hp-lexicon.com](http://www.hp-lexicon.com) (The Harry Potter Books)

installment the decisions he and his confidants face become more difficult as the lines between good and evil are slowly blurred.

After the release of the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's (Sorcerer's) Stone*<sup>3</sup>, each subsequent book has triumphed over the last, topping best seller lists around the globe, and thus giving birth to the Harry Potter phenomenon. Harry Potterization, as I call it, can best be defined as the ability of one woman to create a literary series that has transformed her central character into a household brand name with worldwide appeal. The magnitude of Rowling's reach can be seen in the 300 million books sold in over 200 countries in 60 languages. Furthermore, the sixth book sold over 4 million copies in the first day of sales, totaling 7.2 million in the US alone in 2005, making it the number one selling book in the United States. Based on the volume of books sold, the text translates into a value of \$1900 per word.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond book sales, the movies alone have grossed over \$3.2 billion dollars in box office receipts, with a breakdown of each film detailed in Exhibit 1. The Harry Potter brand itself, including the books, movies, and associated paraphernalia has been valued at over \$4 billion dollars, with author J.K. Rowling's personal fortune totaling \$1 billion dollars, making her wealthier than the Queen of England. Furthermore, the popularity of Harry Potter has even instigated corporate moguls such as Coca-Cola, Warner Brothers, Apple, Mattel, Time Warner, and other international giants to invest millions dollars to promote Harry Potter in some form. This sudden boom in sales leads to one

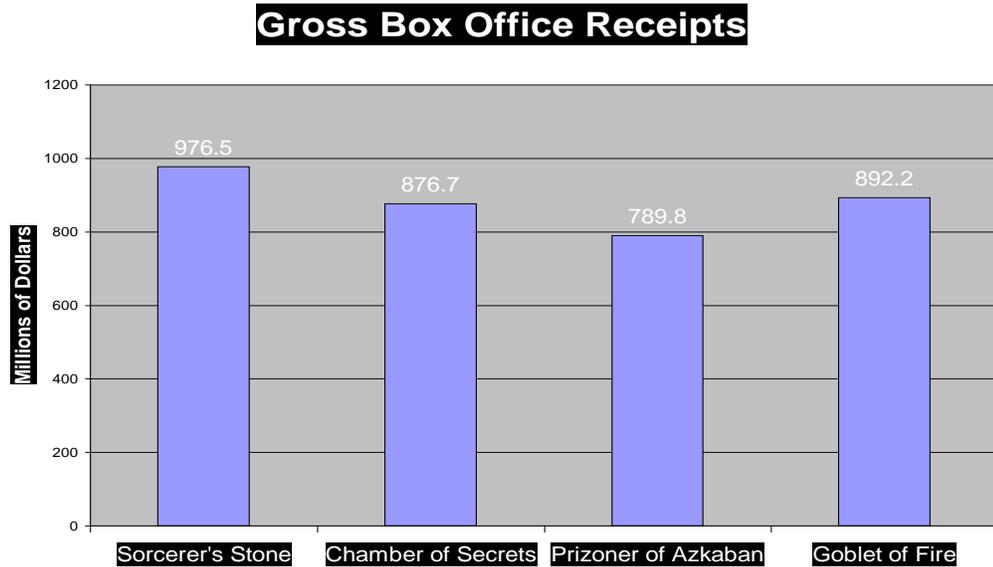
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<sup>3</sup> The first book was called *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in the UK release but renamed *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the U.S.

<sup>4</sup> Craven, Peter. "Hooray for Harry-What's the Difference Between J.K. Rowling, Shakespeare and Dickens?" The Australian 15 July 2005. Lexis Nexis. NYU, New York. 11 Apr. 2006.

quintessential question that many critics have tired to answer: what has caused this overnight success to occur?

**Exhibit 1:**



Source: IMDB.com

**Literature Review: The Critics Take on Harry Potterization**

While academics and critics are far from agreement on the cause of the Harry Potter phenomenon, a plethora of essays, articles, and books have been published that try to decipher the source of Potter's global success. The most recurring theories include the use of clever marketing tactics, the author's literary expertise in writing children's literature, the psychological appeal of the storyline and characters, or the combination of these theories.

The most pervasive explanation is marketing as the driving force behind Harry Potterization. Stephen Brown's *Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic* puts forth the

argument that the phenomenon “(...) epitomizes the contemporary marketing condition.”<sup>5</sup> Brown asserts that the success of Harry Potter can be attributed to its focus on the books, movies, merchandising, critics, and consumers. In particular the movies, merchandise, memorabilia, media coverage, and maledictions of critics all add to the sheer marketing magic surrounding the Harry Potter brand.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in Philip Nel’s “Is there a Text in this Advertising Campaign?: Literature, Marketing, and Harry Potter” argues that the phenomenon is driven by commodity consumption that simultaneously sets the parameters of reading and aesthetic taste. More specifically, the experience of reading for the young is mediated through mass media and marketing. Nel feels that it is “(...) difficult to talk about Potter and ignore marketing because you can see the movies, buy the movies, buy LEGOS, action figures, stickers, notebooks, clothing, Bertie Bots Every Flavored Beans, etc.”<sup>7</sup> Essentially, the characters from the children’s book have been transformed into corporate pitchmen selling all types of tie in products. For Nel, Harry Potter is a prime example of current business practices in children’s literature and culture. Consequently, those that believe that Harry Potter is a direct reflection of marketing genius point to the mass consumer appeal that the Harry Potter books have elicited. While the books themselves are entertaining and draw a fan base, it is the ability of marketers to turn the characters and plot into a brand which sells movies and tie-in merchandise that has made Harry Potter into a worldwide phenomenon.

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, Stephen. Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic. Great Britain: Cyan Books, 2005. Book Jacket

<sup>6</sup> Brown, Stephen. Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic. Great Britain: Cyan Books, 2005. 9

<sup>7</sup> Nel, Philip. "Is There a Text in This Advertising Campaign? Literature, Marketing and Harry Potter." The Lion and the Unicorn 29 (2005): 236-268. ProQuest.

Although Nel and others attribute Harry Potter’s global success to the marketing acumen of Rowling’s publishers and corporate sponsors, others contend that it is her captivating prose that instigated Harry Potterization. In, “Hooray for Harry: What’s the difference between J.K. Rowling, Shakespeare, and Dickens?,” Peter Craven expresses that Rowling is a “(...) superlative entertainer – the novels are great page turners that derive their deep and enduring charm from the way they combine their magical high jinks with the sturdiest of traditionalism.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, the boarding school story narrative is “suave and accurate” and astutely combines magic and school. Craven illustrates that Rowling’s writing “(...) confirms our sense of a traditional Britain, yet swerves away from stereotype in the direction of romance and fantasy.”<sup>9</sup> Her writing is able to evoke a sense of realism which reinforces the magic in the stories. Even Philip Nel, who concentrates on the marketing as the driver in the Harry Potter phenomenon, admits that J.K. Rowling’s literary merits cannot be overlooked. He asserts that four elements of Rowling’s writing contribute to the Potter success story including:

1. Rowling’s ability to speak to issues of contemporary social conscience
2. The realism of the boarding school novel
3. Rowling’s mix of fantasy with mystery
4. The mystery plot make the novels page turners, endowing them with a strong narrative drive

Overall, it is Rowling’s ability to write with fluidity and realness that make her books a runaway hits; thus proponents of this school of thought believe that even if there were no

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<sup>8</sup> Craven, Peter. "Hooray for Harry-What's the Difference Between J.K. Rowling, Shakespeare and Dickens?" The Australian 15 July 2005. Lexis Nexis. NYU, New York. 11 Apr. 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Craven, Peter. "Hooray for Harry-What's the Difference Between J.K. Rowling, Shakespeare and Dickens?" The Australian 15 July 2005. Lexis Nexis. NYU, New York. 11 Apr. 2006.

marketing “imaginarium” connecting the mass public to Harry Potter, the books would sell themselves out of sheer literary merit.

Other academics like Peter Gotesman, argue that Rowling’s stories appeal to the human consciousness which drives Harry Potter sales. In *Early Childhood Education*, Gotesman states that five vital needs of a child’s psyche account for the book’s popularity amongst children: fantasy, relevance, subversion, good vs. evil, and heart. Fantasy attracts children because it allows for the most unbinding type of imagination a child can experience – children by nature love to expand this imagination, especially in a world of adult limitations. In terms of relevance, young readers relate to main characters in their youth, vulnerability, passions, joys, pressures, tribulations and worries.<sup>10</sup> Gotesman feels that the act of being a child wizard is the very essence of subversion: being able to do what an entire world of humans cannot. Furthermore, he contends that children have a burning desire for worldly justice, for good to prevail and for the mean and evil to be defeated (good vs. evil). Finally, Gotesman believes that children feel sympathy for Harry himself (heart). Thus the combination of these four psychological elements directly connects Harry Potter with its child fan base. Similarly, in “Harry Potter and the Mystery of Mature Muggles”, Vicky Allan maintains that the books are popular among adults because adult consumers want what they cannot have – their childhood. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore tells Harry, “Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels...but old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young.” Allan parallels this reasoning by attesting that Rowling’s books collapse the boundaries between adulthood and childhood, endowing adults with

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<sup>10</sup> Gotesman, Peter. "Early Childhood Education." *Teachers College Record* 106 (2004): 267. 30 Mar. 2006.

childlike traits and children with adult characteristics. Both critics believe that it is the nature of the Harry Potter stories that enable children and adults alike to look beyond the storyline and actually relate to the characters on a deeper psychological level. While no one doubts that the writing makes people read the books, it still does not answer the underlying question of the Harry Potter phenomenon.

### **Problem Statement:**

As discussed, previous research in this area has been inconclusive in determining one answer to the Harry Potter phenomenon. In many ways, Harry Potterization cannot be boiled down to one solution and is essentially a direct function of all the aforementioned theories and many other ancillary components. Instead of trying to put forth a new explanation as to what caused the Harry Potter phenomenon, this paper attempts to answer the following two central questions:

1. At what moment in time did Harry Potter go from merely another children's book to the international multi-dimensional bombshell?
2. What has sustained the phenomenon?

### **Hypothesis:**

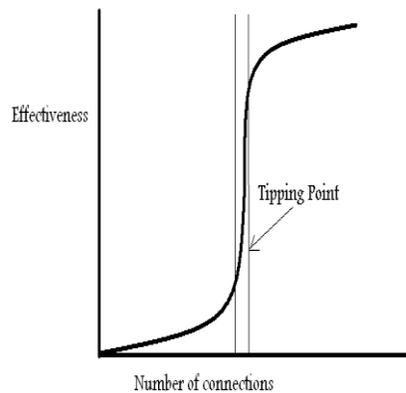
I believe that the Harry Potter phenomenon can be explained by Malcolm Gladwell's best-seller *The Tipping Point*, which is the "magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire"<sup>11</sup> (Exhibit 2). I contend that in 2000 Harry Potter reached its "tipping point" and skyrocketed into one of the world's most recognizable brands. From 1997-2000, the groundwork was laid for a global explosion with the release of the first three books and the movie agreement between JK Rowling and Warner Brothers. From 2000 onwards I argue that the

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<sup>11</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 9

international mass marketing efforts of Warner Brothers and Rowling’s publishers (Scholastic and Bloomsbury) coupled with the online revolution, have continued to appeal to consumers’ tastes without alienating the hardcore “Pottermaniacs” that joined the Potter cult as a result of its original grassroots charm.

**Exhibit 2:**



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**Tipping Point Defined:**

Before we can observe how the Harry Potter phenomenon correlates to the Gladwell’s notion of the tipping point, we must first define what the tipping point is. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, by Malcolm Gladwell examines how something unique becomes common. He asserts that there are three rules that must be followed for a tipping point to occur.

1. Law of the Few
2. Stickiness Factor
3. Power of Context

The first element of the tipping point is the Law of the Few. Here Gladwell argues that individuals are critical to social epidemics, and thus 3 types of people are necessary to bring about any type of trend: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen. Connectors are the people with a special gift of bringing the world together. They are the individuals that know lots of people and truly have an extraordinary knack for making friends. Gladwell contends that while these individuals are rare in society, they maintain many more times the number of relationships than the average person does. Furthermore, word of mouth epidemics are the work of Connectors. Mavens on the other hand, are gatherers of information or the accumulators of knowledge. They like to initiate discussion and are helpers in the marketplace. They evaluate the messages that come through the network and pass on their evaluations to others. Finally, Salesmen are exactly what the name implies. This group of individuals has the skills to persuade and sell, which helps them move messages which may be of importance to them. This ability to persuade strangers to accept a message is why salesmen are important in tipping epidemics.

The second portion of the tipping point is the Stickiness Factor. This relates to the actual content and packaging of a message. Gladwell believes that a particular message must have a certain characteristic that causes the stimulus to remain active in the recipients' minds. Moreover, the message must be deemed worthy enough of being passed on. Gladwell sums up the stickiness factor by saying that it is a “(...) simple way to package information, that under the right circumstances make it irresistible.”<sup>12</sup>

Stickiness can occur through positive associations or nostalgic value, and the elements that make an idea sticky are often small and trivial. The biggest challenge of the stickiness factor deals with the “clutter” that exists in the marketplace. Since consumers

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<sup>12</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. pg. 132

are constantly bombarded with new information, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a message stick. Therefore, paying attention to the structure and format of material can dramatically enhance stickiness.

Finally, the Power of Context is a rule about the environment in which a message spreads. Gladwell believes that small changes in the context of a message can determine whether or not it tips. Under this rule, the architect of this theory also stresses the importance of small groups for the distribution of messages. He argues that the maximum number of members that can reasonably exist in a human group is one hundred and fifty, given that anything larger detracts from a group's efficiency. Gladwell describes consumers as "contextual chameleons" that will adapt to anything if it fits the context, situation or occasion in which they find themselves.<sup>13</sup>

### **Gladwell Meets Rowling: How Harry 'Tipped'**

#### **Law of the Few:**

##### *The Connectors and Mavens*

At the onset of the Harry Potter phenomenon, there was no mainstream marketing. Rather, a buzz was created and sustained purely on personal recommendation, playground conversations, and customer satisfaction in a very grassroots fashion.<sup>14</sup> Gladwell contends that the Law of the Few depends greatly on the "nature of the messenger."<sup>15</sup> Thus, using the theorist's framework, the Connectors can be seen as the children and adults that initially read the books and spread their opinions to their social networks. The Mavens, on the other hand, are the reviewers, columnists, and

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<sup>13</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 139

<sup>14</sup> Brown, Stephen. "Who Moved My Muggle? Harry Potter and the Marketing Imaginarium." Emerald Insight (2002): 134-146. 22 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0263-4503.htm>>.

<sup>15</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 91

interviewers that began to write/speak about Harry Potter in far reaching publications or television/radio networks. The release of the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, relied first on the Connectors and subsequently the Mavens because these groups planted the seeds of the Potter epidemic.

The first print of *Philosopher's Stone* was only 500 copies. Yet within the first year, the book sold 30,000 copies. Originally, the novel caught on due to the strong reviews by children. The adolescents that first got their hands on the novel told their friends it was a good book and word spread quickly.<sup>16</sup> What better way to start a phenomenon than through children? With the various activities kids participate in from after school sports to summer camp, children have large networks, and are ideal connectors. The way that children began to create a hype around Harry Potter can be paralleled to the Furby craze in 1998, where word of mouth recommendations led to 27 million furbies being sold in a 12 month period. David Siegel, Chairman of Wondergroup, a children's marketing consulting agency, found that "(...) kids in particular are really responsive to what's new...they'll really jump on the bandwagon."<sup>17</sup>

As Gladwell explicates, connectors are an essential aspect of beginning word of mouth epidemics, but the role of Mavens cannot be overlooked. If one conducts a Factiva<sup>18</sup> news run from July 1997 until 1998, fewer than 100 articles appear on the Harry Potter series. Most of these articles are from British publications concentrating on the literary merit of the novels, as well as J.K. Rowling's personal story. From 1998-2000, articles on Rowling and Potter nearly sextupled as the books gained more

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<sup>16</sup> Nel, Philip. "Is There a Text in This Advertising Campaign? Literature, Marketing and Harry Potter." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29 (2005): 236-268. ProQuest.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, Morag. "Can't Get No Satisfaction." *Brand Strategy*. Apr. 2006. 11 Apr. 2006 <[http://www.brandstrategy.co.uk/issues/2006/April/Can\\_t\\_get\\_no\\_satisfaction/Browse.view](http://www.brandstrategy.co.uk/issues/2006/April/Can_t_get_no_satisfaction/Browse.view)>.

<sup>18</sup> Factiva is a database that compiles news stories from various publications

momentum. It is these types of articles as well as TV/radio interviews that put J.K. Rowling and her work in the spotlight and began to create an underground buzz over Harry Potter. These individuals, the mavens, read and reviewed the books, learned about the author, and disseminated the information to a great audience. For example, by 1998 the Harry Potter books began to top best seller lists, including the New York Times, bringing new credibility to author J.K. Rowling. Thus the abundance of media attention from newspapers to television enabled these mavens to attract a new type of connector – adults.

As more adults began to jump on the Harry Potter train, Bloomsbury recognized the potential in this unexploited market and created a retro version of the first book with an adult cover in 1998 enabling more adults to read the book without being embarrassed that it was children's literature. Consequently, adults began to spread the word to their networks and begin a similar word of mouth trend, amongst an older audience. As a result, the literary worlds of the children and adults was officially blurred, and from 1998 onwards, there began an escalating trend for grown-ups to read children's fiction and flirt brazenly with childhood again.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Salesmen*

While the connectors and mavens are the bedrock behind word of mouth phenomena, it is truly the salesmen that tip the scales. J.K. Rowling, Warner Brothers, Scholastic, and Bloomsbury are all salespeople in the Potter success story, each being able to persuade different constituencies into embracing the brand. Once the connectors

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<sup>19</sup> Allan, Vicky. "Harry Potter and the Mystery of the Mature Muggles." The Sunday Herald 10 July 2005. Lexis Nexis. NYU, New York. 11 Apr. 2006.

and mavens created enough of a grassroots appeal between the release of the first and second books, J.K. Rowling herself began to play a more active role in the promotion of her series. For example, in 1998 Rowling began to make trips to the US and conduct various interviews to help promote the story. Her book signing at Books of Wonder drew less than 100 fans, but one year later at the same location there was a cheering crowd of over 800 individuals. Likewise, Rowling created Harry Potter hysteria when she went to Naperville, IL for book signing in Dec 1999. More than 2,000 fans lined the up to meet with the best-selling writer. The author's overnight success can be partly attributed to Rowling's personal marketing plan. Within one year, Rowling put herself in the spotlight, gracing the cover of Time Magazine, making numerous television appearances from interviewing with Katie Couric on the Today Show to being a guest on the Rosie O'Donnell Show, thereby placing herself in the homes of over 10 million American viewers.<sup>20</sup> Her strategic move came right before *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* was to be released in the United States, and was a perfect sales pitch to households around the U.S.

Likewise, Scholastic, Bloomsbury, and Warner Brothers are also astute salesmen in promoting Harry Potterization. From the release of the first book, both publishing houses have attempted to shelve the walls of all major retailers, including Barnes and Nobles, Borders, Tesco, Waterstones, Wal-Mart, etc. to promote the Harry Potter books. In addition, the publishers have been able to create hypes surrounding the release of the books, attracting new fans with each publication. Furthermore, Rowling's 1998, seven-figure, two film deal, with Warner Brothers was essential in the proliferation of the Harry

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<sup>20</sup> McGinty, Stephen. "Pottermania - Focus - Profile - J.K. Rowling ," *The Sunday Times* (UK), October 17, 1999.

Potter brand. It enabled the media giant to grant nearly 75 licenses to corporate supplicants to create H.P. merchandise, which would be used to create a sales machine after the “tip.”<sup>21</sup> Beyond conforming to the Law of the Few, all three categories of salesmen also played a crucial role in both the Stickiness and Context Factors.

### **The Stickiness Factor:**

While the Law of the Few explains the underlying drivers that initiate word of mouth epidemics, Gladwell’s Stickiness Factor is what helps bring budding phenomena to fruition by presenting ideas in a specific way to make it stick in the mind of consumers. The fundamental message that Harry Potter is a remarkable story stuck as a result of favorable circumstances. Traditionally, the maxim in the advertising business is that an advertisement needs to be seen at least six times before anyone will remember it.<sup>22</sup> However, in today’s world where consumers are inundated with various ad campaigns, it is increasingly difficult to get any one message to stick using conventional marketing methods. Consequently, much of the Harry Potter propaganda has come from newer buzz tactics – the result of shrewd marketing, in which companies seed a vanguard group, ration supplies, leverage the power of lists, and initiate grassroots movements.<sup>23</sup> In particular the “sticky” factors that helped tip the Potter series was the creation of a hype/tease surrounding book releases, the ability for individuals to connect to both the characters and author J.K. Rowling, and the homogenous brand “image” that has been repeated in all mediums of Harry Potter merchandise.

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, Stephen. "Who Moved My Muggle? Harry Potter and the Marketing Imaginarium." *Emerald Insight* (2002): 134-146. 22 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0263-4503.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 92

<sup>23</sup> R., Dye. "The Buzz on Buzz." *Harvard Business Review* 78 (2000): 139-146. 15 Apr. 2006 <<http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>>.

Gladwell necessitates that an ideal circumstance must exist for something to stick.<sup>24</sup> J.K. Rowling and her team of publishers picked an opportune time to release the Harry Potter books. While the late 1990s saw the creation of numerous trends, from the boy band craze to Pokemon, there was a window of opportunity in children's literature. The overall children's book market saw depressed sales throughout the early 1990s, creating a golden ticket for Rowling's fantasy series.<sup>25</sup> However, capitalizing on the right circumstance was only half the battle of the Stickiness Factor.

One of the most effective marketing techniques the Potter camp has employed, is their ability to build an aura of mystery around the release of each book, beginning with the fourth installment, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The entire campaign leading up to the novel's release was a tease. Initially book stores and retailers began to hang posters claiming "Harry's Back!" with a day by day countdown to the sales date. However everything from the title of the book to the pagination and price was kept a secret until two weeks before the novel's release.<sup>26</sup>

A total of 3.8 million first copies were printed in US and a million more in Britain. As part of the publicized secret campaign, newspapers buzzed with stories of book warehouses overflowing with security and booksellers being put on an embargo that forbid them to sell any *Goblet* books before 12:01 a.m. on July 8, 2000; if a store was caught selling the novels at any point before they would face the consequence of losing their license to sell any subsequent Potter releases. Additionally, even Amazon.com's

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<sup>24</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 132

<sup>25</sup> Paterson, Paul A. "Children's Book Market Recovery Continues." Toy Directory Monthly. 1 Dec. 2002. 20 Apr. 2006 <[http://www.toydirectory.com/monthly/december2002/book\\_Market.asp](http://www.toydirectory.com/monthly/december2002/book_Market.asp)>.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, Stephen. Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic. Great Britain: Cyan Books, 2005. 87

business contract with Fed Ex. Corp. became a part of the advertising campaign, with the shipping company announcing that the Harry Potter release was the largest single day distribution event in the history of business to consumer e-commerce.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond the media hype surrounding the logistics of the book's release, Rowling tantalized readers by revealing subtle information about the plot – including the death of a “significant” character and hints pertaining to Harry's “love” interest.<sup>28</sup> The clever mystery inducing tactics appealed to the sheer curiosity of human nature, compelling individuals to purchase the newest installment. Moreover, the technique put Harry Potter in the front of consumers' minds, which is exactly what the Stickiness Factor aims to do.

While the brouhaha surrounding the book release was crucial in the Stickiness Factor, particular aspects of the Harry Potter books subconsciously help the brand “stick” in people's minds. More specifically, it is the ability for individuals to connect to the characters and author. For example, Harry is the obvious underdog, the “everychild” as Roni Natov calls it. He is the embodiment of a child that for a long time felt unacknowledged, unappreciated, and unseen in an unfair world.<sup>29</sup> Yet his perseverance and ability to overcome the obstacles that stand before him is at the very core of the human spirit, and embodies what many individuals strive to accomplish. Furthermore, even the antagonists in the stories, are characters we can relate to. At one point or another we have each come in contact with our own “Snape,” a person that both scares and condescends us to no end. Even though Harry resides in a magical world, he still

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<sup>27</sup> Kapur, Jyotsna. "Free Market, Branded Imagination-Harry Potter and Teh Commercialization of Children's Culture." *Jump Cut: a Review of Contemporary Media* (2003). 6 Mar. 2006 <[www.ejumpcut.org](http://www.ejumpcut.org)>.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, Stephen. *Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic*. Great Britain: Cyan Books, 2005. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Natov, Roni. "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of Ordinary." *The Lion and the Unicorn* (2001): 311. 30 Mar. 2006.

goes through growing pains that adults and children alike have experienced at one point in their lives. The natural connection to the characters makes Harry Potter very sticky.

Moreover, J.K. Rowling's rag to riches story, for many adults is a source of inspiration. Especially in the United States, Rowling is a foil for the American Dream. One of the first things many newspapers and tabloids reported was Rowling's personal struggle. For example, upon the release of Rowling's first book, one columnist wrote, "When children's author Joanne Rowling recalls her darkest days, there is a shiver in her voice...the poverty, the depression and the clammy chill of her one-bedroom Edinburgh flat where the single mother who had fallen on hard times sought to keep her baby daughter warm (...)"<sup>30</sup> The story of her struggle is real, and an indispensable aspect in the author's grassroots appeal. The fact that "Joanne did not have a proper job, and couldn't afford child care and for six months"<sup>31</sup> is a reality that many women face and can personally connect to. Consequently, in a world where consumers are immersed in a culture of superficial beauty and Hollywood glitz, J.K. Rowling has a natural charm that draws people to her background, and makes the author as loveable as her beloved protagonist – yet another very important sticking point.

The last element of the Stickiness Factor that I contend was imperative in reaching Harry Potterization, is the homogenous boy-wizard image that has been advertised around the globe; particularly, the clever symbols are a constant reminder of the Potter brand. For example, Harry's lightning bolt shaped scar has become synonymous with Pottermania. Likewise, the identical display cases in bookstores,

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<sup>30</sup> Woods, Judith. "Coffee in One Hand, Baby in Another...Recipe for Success." The Scotsman. Lexis Nexis. NYU, New York. 15 Feb. 2006.

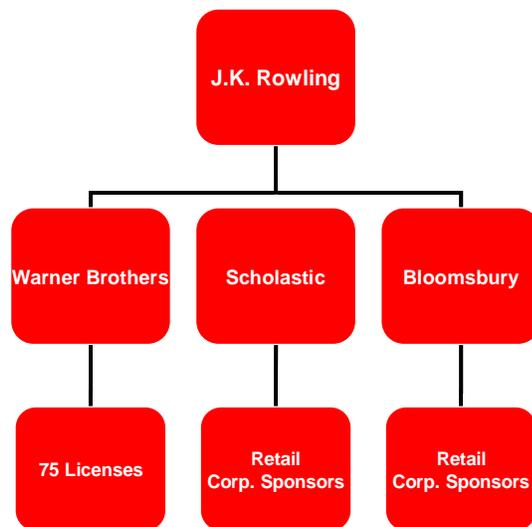
<sup>31</sup> Treneman, Anne. "Joanne Rowling's Secret is Out." The Independent Aug. 1997. Lexis Nexis. 30 Mar. 2006.

release posters, and font utilized on the book covers and chapter titles, are each subtle nuances that consumers are constantly exposed to, which again cause the Potter concept to stick. Of course the ability to create such a uniform brand image lies in the Power of Context.

**Power of Context:**

Malcolm Gladwell boils the Power of Context down to the “the conditions and circumstances of the times and places” in which epidemics occur.<sup>32</sup> In order to maintain influence over all of these factors, the Power of Context for Harry Potter comes down to control. In particular, Rowling’s control over her publishers and Warner Brothers, and each of these individuals' control over merchandise and book distribution. Exhibit 3, illustrates the chain of command in spreading the context of the Potter message. The message embodies a coming of age story that interlaces magic, adventure, and friendship that provides a little something for everyone.

**Exhibit 3:**



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<sup>32</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 139

At the top of the control hierarchy is J.K. Rowling. While she has been able to build strategic alliances with those below her, she has managed to retain a substantial amount of control in the type of wholesome “image” marketers’ display. For example, Rowling ensured from the get-go that the Harry Potter films would be made in Britain with a British cast and crew.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Warner Brothers has adhered to Gladwell’s magic number of 150, which he asserts is the biological limitation in our brain and that any group larger than this will automatically segment into factions and decrease efficiency.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, while most film makers grant hundreds of licenses to corporate partners, Warner Brothers limited its assignment of product licenses to 75. The most well known contractual agreements were with Mattel (board games and toys), Hasbro (trading cards and candy), Electronic Arts (video games and computer based ancillaries), Lego, Character Group (plastic and porcelain figurines), and a \$150 million sponsorship with Coca-Cola.<sup>35</sup> By limiting the number of merchandise producers, Warner Brothers has been able to mitigate any potential difficulty in sustaining a brand image that may occur. The most visible illustration of this was Warner Brother’s actions against operators of Harry Potter fan sites in December 2000. The company claimed that these sites violated Warner’s intellectual property rights since the web domains included the names of Potter characters and contained pictures of “licensed” figures.<sup>36</sup> Since the Internet is an important medium for which Harry Potter marketing takes place, W.B.

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, Stephen. Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic. Great Britain: Cyan Books, 2005. 75

<sup>34</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 179

<sup>35</sup> Brown, Stephen. "Who Moved My Muggle? Harry Potter and the Marketing Imaginarium." Emerald Insight (2002): 134-146. 22 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0263-4503.htm>>.

<sup>36</sup> Coombe, Rosemary J., and Andrew Herman. "Culture Wars on the Net: Intellectual Property and Corporate Propriety in Digital Environments." The South Atlantic Quarterly (2001): 919-947. 10 Apr. 2006.

claimed that fan-sites caused confusion among Internet users and soiled the brand image the company was trying to portray.

Likewise, Scholastic and Bloomsbury have played a crucial role in the shaping of the Harry Potter message. The publishers control the number of books to be printed. This directly affects the nature and extent of the hype that is created, as well as determines which bookstores and retailers will be granted the rights to sell the newest Potter installments. Furthermore, the publishing houses also decide which corporate sponsors it will work with on future Potter promotions.

Thus from top to bottom, a great level of control was exercised to ensure that the Harry Potter brand would not take on various images, but instead radiate one fortifying representation of a amiable young wizard that people around the world can relate to, from his appearance, hobbies, and favorite succulent sweets, all the way down to his deepest insecurities.

### **T...T...Tipped:**

The sections of the tipping point detailed above, each illustrate the overlapping aspects that led to Harry Potter's own "tip." While many argue that Rowling's work was an overnight success, it was actually three years in the making. From the word of mouth reviews from children and newspaper to the ingenious marketing techniques that caused individuals to recognize and embrace Harry Potter, each stage of the tipping point was executed with absolute precision. It is no surprise that all the groundwork that was laid culminated with the release of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and resulted in the globalization of the Harry Potter brand. The mass marketing and merchandise we have come to associate with the Harry Potter phenomenon came to fruition after the release of

book four in July 2000, and marked the inception of the second stage of Harry Potterization.

### **Stage Two: What's Keeping Harry on the Phenomenon Express**

Even though Harry Potter's tipping point occurred in 2000, the brand has been able to sustain itself for over six years with no end in sight. The reasons for this short-run sustainability can be attributed to the consumer purchasing cycle, the digital internet age that transmits information at a faster pace than ever before, and the interdependence of the various constituencies in the Potter phenomenon.

Once a consumer buys specific merchandise, it is important for that individual to connect a particular product, with the brand name, and corporate source, in order to create a closed circuit in which a particular image resonates. Thus the success of a branding strategy is reliant on repetition and visibility.<sup>37</sup> Warner Brothers, Scholastic, and Bloomsbury's prowess in this matter have proved to be an indispensable aspect of the Potter success story. Prior to the release of a Potter books or movie, retailers worldwide begin to sell tie-in merchandise to help build anticipation.

For example, while the first movie initially brought in \$250 million at the box office, Warner Brothers made over \$500 million selling Potter paraphernalia.<sup>38</sup> The producers of this merchandise recognized the buying potential in the children's market. The U.S. "tween" demographic, ages 8-12, are 29 million strong with a purchasing power of \$38 billion per year.<sup>39</sup> Thus producers are constantly trying to develop products that

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<sup>37</sup> Kapur, Jyotsna. "Free Market, Branded Imagination-Harry Potter and Teh Commercialization of Children's Culture." Jump Cut: a Review of Contemporary Media (2003). 6 Mar. 2006 <[www.ejumpcut.org](http://www.ejumpcut.org)>.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, Stephen. "Who Moved My Muggle? Harry Potter and the Marketing Imaginarium." Emerald Insight (2002): 134-146. 22 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0263-4503.htm>>.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, Robert, and Ruth Washton. The U.S. Tween Market. Marketresearch.Com. 85.

will whet the appetite of their mercurial child consumer. For example, 16 months before the release of the first movie, ad campaigns around the sale of the first Harry Potter video game began. Furthermore, after 2000, Mattel, Lego, EA, etc. continually manufactured new merchandise to keep their target demographic enticed.

In addition, the timing of theatrical and novel distribution is impeccable. The fact that Rowling has spanned out the release of the book installments with the movies, propels the Potter cycle forward. After the fourth book in 2000, the first movie came out in 2001, followed by the second movie (2002), fifth book (2003), third movies (2004), sixth book (2005), and fourth movie (2005). This pattern has helps keep fans enthralled.

Moreover, it is the ability to captivate supporters' interests in between these releases that shows the true marketing genius of the corporate sponsors. For example, if you walk into a Borders Book Store during a "off Harry" season, one of the first items you'll see at the check-out lines are Bertie Bots Every Flavor Beans. Similarly, Scholastic has tried to captivate Potter enthusiasts' attention by teaming up with Apple Corp. in 2006 to create a Harry Potter sweepstakes in preparation for the release of the paperback version of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. For six weeks, fans get a chance to win the grand prize of a HP iPod package (a 30 GB iPod etched with crest of Hogwarts and all six downloadable audio books from iTunes Music Store, plus copy of Deluxe Edition of *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* with bookplate signed by author). Scholastic believes that they "know how passionate Harry Potter fans are and we wanted to give them something new and exciting to expand their reading experience...while old fans will love the online activities and interactive features, readers

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new to the series can be introduced into the magical world of Harry Potter.”<sup>40</sup> These types of interim promotions help to perpetuate the phenomenon and keep individuals actively involved in the world of Harry Potter.

Generation Y, those individuals born after 1980, are part of the digital revolution. Consequently, the Internet is a medium of exchange for majority of Potterites. While 66.4% of all US households have Internet access, 76.1% of all “tween” households subscribe to an online service.<sup>41</sup> It is no wonder that Potter fan sites such as mugglenet.com averages 20 million hits per month from a fan base in over 153 countries. The Internet is a huge factor in keeping the Harry Potter phenomenon alive. It is on the web that news concerning the newest Potter film or book will break even before a more traditional media source picks it up. Through various podcasts, blogs, chatrooms, and fan sites, individuals are able to communicate with other Pottermaniacs and discuss their favorite fantasy series. J.K. Rowling even updates her own website, [www.jkrowling.com](http://www.jkrowling.com), to reveal information and dispel rumors about her upcoming books, as well as to keep fans informed with what is going on in her own life. The Internet has enabled Potter enthusiasts to stay up to date with new occurrences as well as allow Potter virgins to experience the phenomenon without ever having to read a book or go to the movies.

The success of the Potter books has had a significant multiplier effect on the economy. Those companies with license agreements depend on the sustainability of the phenomenon in order to expand their profits. The printing industry works at full capacity

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<sup>40</sup> "Scholastic Kicks-Off Harry Potter Wednesdays." PR Newswire 23 Feb. 2006. Lexis Nexis. 11 Apr. 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, Robert, and Ruth Washton. The U.S. Tween Market. Marketresearch.Com. 31.

to meet demand before the release of a new Potter installment. Furthermore, overnight delivery services stretch their elastic limit during new release dates to ensure that all pre-ordered books get to consumers on time. In addition, the publishing industry saw a 24% sales increase in the children's books after the release of the first few novels. Even boarding schools saw an increase in applications, due to the popularity of the Potter brand. The Harry Potter explosion has even influenced Rowling to create spin off of books, including *Quidditch Throughout the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, in order to satisfy consumer demand for the time in between her novel releases.

Consequently, it is not just J.K. Rowling, Warner Brothers, Scholastic, or Bloomsbury that rely on the success of Harry Potter. Since so many other industries have benefited from Harry Potterization, they have a vested interest in making sure each subsequent film or book release outshines the last. For example, the brand's mass popularity enabled EA Games, the manufacturer of Potter video games, to build a new studio in January of 2003 as a result of doubled profits linked to the games of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings franchises.<sup>42</sup>

### **Phenomenon in the Long Run: Will Harry Get Derailed off the Hogwarts Express?**

From the beginning, customers have been at the forefront of the Harry Potter phenomenon. It is this mass consumer orientation that has gained the respect of fans around the globe. Whether it is the person that purchases the mainstream products or the individual that just enjoys the books for their entertainment value, J.K. Rowling, her publishers, Warner Brothers, retailers, and online websites have done their best to tailor their products to Harry Potter's diverse fan base. The fact that customers are constantly

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<sup>42</sup> Thompson, Kristin. "Fantasy, Franchises, and Frodo Baggins: the Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood." *The Velvet Light Trap* 52 (2003): 45-63. [Project Muse](#). New York. 20 Mar. 2006.

stimulated and want more Pottermania says a lot about the power of the brand image. However, it is undeniable that much of the phenomenon is dependent on commodity consumption. Once the last of the books and films are released, the same marketing strategies that have worked thus far can no longer be implemented, and the phenomenon as we know it today cannot be sustained. The various constituencies that rely on book releases and movie premieres will have nothing to look forward to. While manufacturers may still create collectors memorabilia, the large scale consumption of these items we have seen thus far will cease to exist.

While it is possible that Harry's infamous lightening bolt scar will one day be in the same logos-sphere as the McDonald golden arches or the Nike swoosh, the lasting impressions of Harry Potter will not be the merchandise or movies, but the literary merit of the novels long after the commercial appeal has died. It is Rowling's ability to create a series about the trials and tribulations of every day people with a fantastical twist that will put her in the league of her predecessors, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

In evaluating the big picture, I have learned that Harry Potterization is a unique phenomenon, but does have other modern day counterparts. While marketing acumen played a large roll in both the tipping point and subsequent success, Harry Potter has been able to achieve a cross generational appeal that no marketer could have formulated. Nonetheless, the tipping point was important to identify because it isolated the period in time at which Harry Potter transformed from a children's book to a worldwide icon. While many theories attempt to deconstruct the Harry Potter phenomenon and understand the worldwide craze, academics have not yet tried to understand what caused the books to "tip" and become a modern day marvel.

By looking at this phenomenon through Gladwell's framework, I was forced to determine what types of trends enable volcanoes like Harry Potter to erupt. I examined similar cases such as Hush Puppies, iPods, Sesame Street, etc. and could see the commonalities between what made these phenomena and Harry Potter tip. In particular, Gladwell's theory shed light on the importance of timing, the ability to know one's market, and the significance of absolute awareness at all times, because in the end it is the little things that do make a big difference. With the Harry Potter phenomenon, all it took was a few individuals to "look at the world around (them). It may seem like an immovable place. It is not. With the slightest push—in just the right place—it can be tipped"<sup>43</sup>

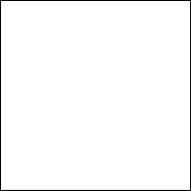
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<sup>43</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2002. 259

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