

Thesis for sale

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Andy: Hi, Andy.

Christoph Bartneck: Hi, Christoph.

How are you today?

Andy: I'm good, thanks. How are you?

Christoph Bartneck: Quite all right. I think I should congratulate you to your latest publication.

Andy: Yeah, thanks. It's been an interesting experience publishing this thing.

Christoph Bartneck: Yeah, so I found this book on Amazon called Cognitive Frugality Preserves Self Regulatory Resources and are just the author.

Andy: The title sounds very familiar. It sounds almost exactly like the title of my dissertation. I think maybe one or two words are changed. But the funny thing is, I didn't publish this book.

Christoph Bartneck: You didn't publish the book?

Andy: No. So I just discovered this randomly googling myself, and this book is for sale at places like the Harvard Bookstore, and that sounds awesome, except that I didn't publish this book.

Christoph Bartneck: [00:01:00] This is the Human Robot Interaction Podcast. I'm Your host, Christoph Bartneck.

Introduction

Christoph Bartneck: When did you do your PhD?

Andy: I finished my PhD in 2016.

Christoph Bartneck: And when was this book published?

Andy: Just recently, I think.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, wow, okay, that's interesting. And you had nothing to do with publishing?

Andy: I had nothing to do with this publishing.

Christoph Bartneck: Wow that's definitely weird. Whoever did this, how did they get their hands on your thesis?

Andy: Well, that was probably pretty easy because it's publicly available. I did my Ph. D. at Florida State, and so Florida State University posts all of their dissertations online so anybody can access them. If anyone listening to this podcast wants to read my thesis, you're more than welcome to.[00:02:00]

Christoph Bartneck: All right, but that also means that if there's a book sale, you don't get any royalties, do you?

Andy: That's correct.

Christoph Bartneck: Wow, that's definitely a new type of publishing. So, what is in the book?

Andy: I actually don't know. All I know is the title is very similar to the title of my dissertation, but I haven't seen a copy of the book, so I don't know.

Christoph Bartneck: I looked at the cover and it seems legitimate. I mean, there's an illustration, everything. It seems quite fitting.

Andy: The funny thing is if I had taken this to a publisher and that's the cover that they provided for me, I would have been pretty happy. It's actually a very nice cover for my book and very topical.

Christoph Bartneck: So somebody must have invested a certain amount of work into this. And when you look at the publisher on Amazon. [00:03:00] It says Irfan, which in Arabic, I looked it up, means wisdom, which kind of seems fitting. But the more interesting part, of course, is like, who is the actual publisher? And we asked Anton Angelo, our famous librarian, to help us with this. And he was able to confirm that the ISBN number of this book tracks back to Ingram. Ingram is a Publisher, and they also have a self publishing arm called IngramSpark. So possibly somebody used them to publish the book or not. don't know.

Andy: Yeah. I have no idea.

Christoph Bartneck: It's also conceivable that maybe somebody just used chatGPT and recreated your thesis.

Andy: It's totally possible. Maybe it's one of those hallucinations where it just sort of grabbed something similar to my dissertation.

Christoph Bartneck: . So, my question is, [00:04:00] what's the business model here?

Andy: I have no idea. I don't know why anyone I mean, this is going to sound bad, but I don't know why anyone would want to read my dissertation.

Christoph Bartneck: Well, it's not so much about reading it, it's more about making money for publishing it, or after publishing it, because you don't get the royalties, right?

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: And I could imagine that the self improvement markets, and particularly anything what's on psychology, would be potentially popular, right? We've got a whole shelf in airports around this literature. What would you think if you had found your book on the airport?

Andy: I would've been very surprised. I don't know. But yeah, I could totally see, with less technical language I could totally see someone being interested in the contents of my thesis, if written for a popular audience.

Christoph Bartneck: So the question is, is this a form of flattery? In a sense that they put, they didn't copy my thesis. Maybe my thesis is even worse than yours.

Andy: I don't know. Probably.[00:05:00]

Christoph Bartneck: But it might be more appealing to a general public.

Andy: Maybe. Yeah. I don't know. I don't know why they chose me or if they chose me. Maybe they've done this to a million people, and I was just one of many that they happened to choose.

Christoph Bartneck: Now, that's a really interesting question, because A one off seems a lot of effort with not much return. If you would do this at scale, it's a whole different story.

Andy: Yeah, it might make sense if you could scrape, say, everyone's name at Florida State University who published a thesis and then publish all of them. Odds are, someone's going to buy one of those books.

Christoph Bartneck: Well, since this is all done by print on demand, there are no upfront costs. So whoever is producing these copies doesn't have to invest any money into it. So the book only gets printed once it's ordered. So there are no upfront costs. So if you do this at scale, let's say with [00:06:00] hundreds, thousands of hundreds of thousands of books in this could be a business model.

Andy: Yeah, maybe. I think what's puzzling about it is how did they get the cover to be so nice? If they weren't spending any time or effort on it, I don't know.

Christoph Bartneck: Maybe we should try to put the title of your book into one of those AI image generators and see comes up I mean that could be sufficient.

Andy: Yeah, maybe. Maybe it is.

Christoph Bartneck: I think this is a really interesting question, and I think we should investigate it. What do you think?

Andy: Yeah, let's check it out.

Christoph Bartneck: So I've already went ahead, and I actually ordered a copy of your book and it will be delivered to your address in a couple of weeks.

Andy: Wow, that's very exciting.

Christoph Bartneck: So once it arrives, please call me and tell me what's in the book.

Andy: Okay.

[00:07:00] Oh

Christoph Bartneck: I ordered the book from Amazon. While waiting, I started to search for similar cases. Rarely anything was ever new. After some googling, I found a newspaper article about Richard Elliott from 2023. His thesis was also published as a book. I decided to call him.

Interview with Richard

Richard: So my name is Richard Elliott. I am a lecturer in European Philosophy at Birkbeck College in the University of London.

Christoph Bartneck: When did you complete your PhD

Richard: So I completed the PhD in March of 2022.

Christoph Bartneck: What is the title of your thesis

Richard: My thesis had the very catchy title of Productive Omissions in Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology.

Christoph Bartneck: What happened to your thesis?

Richard: My thesis was recommended to me on an Amazon listing, under a slightly different name. One word was changed in the name. Upon [00:08:00] investigating, I discovered that the thesis was being listed as well as on Amazon, on Barnes Noble, Waterstones, and Blackwell's websites among others.

Christoph Bartneck: Did you publish your thesis as a book?

Richard: I did not, apart from the online repository that the university where I undertook my PhD, had it online. I had made no efforts to publish it outside of articles featured as parts of chapters from the thesis. The earlier listings of the book, listed the publishers, usually as one called Remod, R E M O D. There remains a Google listing for the the so called book. And the publisher seems to have changed on that listing to a publishing house called For Our Son.

Christoph Bartneck: No, that's very interesting. And did you ever buy that [00:09:00] book?

Richard: Some of my friends and colleagues attempted to buy colleagues. In the end, their money was returned to them. Likely because of the efforts I had already taken to have the listings taken down, for example, on Amazon and Waterstones and Blackwells. I never saw a physical copy of the book. Unfortunately, in some ways, I would have quite liked to have it as a memento.

Christoph Bartneck: It would have been interesting to see if they had changed anything to the book on the interior because the book let's call it the book had a cover. Did you create the cover?

Richard: No, I didn't create the cover. The cover, as featured, On listings that I was made aware of featured a sort of very AI looking image of Nietzsche, who was the philosopher of focus in my dissertation, in my PhD thesis. And in the image of Nietzsche, he was looking [00:10:00] considerably hunkier, let's say, than he does normally in photographs.

My name was included on the cover. The thesis title was repeated with one minor word change. The thing that was a little worrying, however, is that the original title of my thesis was relegated to the subtitle. The main title added to the listing was quote, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology", end quote, which is worrying because another respected Nietzsche scholar had published recently a monograph with this exact same name with Oxford University Press, I believe, in 2021.

Christoph Bartneck: That's very confusing. So whoever did this put a little bit of effort into it because the cover had to be created, slight changes had to be made. So it's probably not completely automated. Could you imagine any kind of motive [00:11:00] for why somebody would like to do that?

Richard: No I have wondered about this, whether it was something automated, whether there's some kind of harvesting, let's say, software that was collecting online thesis work from various, scholars or PhD students in the process of trying to market them. I had published an article with a respected philosophy website called the Daily News about this issue when I discovered the listings online.

And in response to that article, about, I would say around a dozen people contacted me having searched for their own work in similar circumstances. And in comparing what my case looked like with theirs, there were similar kinds of AI generated imagery that were similar changes to small changes to [00:12:00] titles, for example. So in terms of an individual motive I can't say. I'm surprised and saddened if there were, but That's where my speculation has to end, I'm afraid.

Christoph Bartneck: Now that it was clear that there were other cases of thesis theft, I started to dig deeper. I tried the reverse image search on Google to find Andy's book cover image, but could not find it. I then started to search for the Irfan publisher, but I could not find any traces either. I turned to my chief librarian, Anton Angelo. He and his friends were able to find out that the ISBN number was associated with the self publishing platform IngramSpark. I contacted them and asked them if they could get me in touch with Irfan, to no avail. They replied that they cannot give other details about their clients due to privacy and security. This doesn't make sense.

[00:13:00] um, uh, um, uh, um, uh,

Update for Andy

Christoph Bartneck: Hi Andy.

Andy: Hi Christoph.

Christoph Bartneck: Did you get the book?

Andy: I got the book and it has words in it, so it's not like completely blank. It, uh, it has the cover that it's supposed to have according to the website. And it has my dissertation in it.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, that's peculiar. Does it have all of your thesis?

Andy: It has most of my thesis, but they cut out the acknowledgements bit and the table of contents, so it just goes straight into the thesis. It doesn't have any of the preamble stuff that presumably would give away that this is a dissertation rather than a book that's meant to be a book.

Christoph Bartneck: And the references, are the references in?

Andy: References are also not in. And but they do include the appendices, like all of [00:14:00] the questionnaires that I used and the ethics approval that I had for the thesis.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. So what has changed on the front cover?

Andy: Ah the biggest thing is one of the words in my title is different. So the title of my thesis is Cognitive Miserliness Preserves Self Regulatory Resources in this book it's called Cognitive Frugality Preserves Regulatory resources.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, so whoever did this put a little bit of effort into the cover design, change the title and cut out a couple of pages.

Andy: Yeah, so it's not like they just copied the whole thing. They changed some things, and seems like it must be in deliberate ways because otherwise why would they cut out the acknowledgement section [00:15:00] specifically? And why would they change one word in the title? That seems suspicious to me.

Christoph Bartneck: Is the name of the title repeated inside Cognitive Frugality? So they also changed this page. So the first inside pages change as well.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay.

Andy: yeah,

Christoph Bartneck: is there any information about the publisher of this book in it?

Andy: Well, yes yes and no, there's like an ISBN number on the back and there's something that says printed in the USA and there's a QR code and then there's even a barcode but it doesn't really say anything. who published it, or what the copyright is, or anything like that, that you would expect from a normal kind of book.

Christoph Bartneck: On the website on Amazon it says the publisher is Irfan. Is there any information about Irfan in this book?

Andy: Not that I can see.[00:16:00]

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. So there's no way of contacting the publisher now at all because there's no information.

Andy: There's no information. Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. This is going to be an interesting detective work now to figure out how we can get a hold of these people.

Andy: I think so.

Christoph Bartneck: We had a couple of ideas now. We've been thinking about why. Why would you do this?

Andy: Yeah, I don't know.

Christoph Bartneck: So one of the hypotheses I had until today was. Maybe it's the references. If you make more publications, even with slightly different names, but as soon as a new publication will be picked up by Google Scholar, and it will double the amount of citations that you give. And whoever is on the other side, and maybe wants to have one, would benefit from it.

Andy: That's right.

Christoph Bartneck: But, as we can see in this book, there are no references. This can't be it.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: Do you think this book is gonna sell a lot?

Andy: Gee, [00:17:00] I, part of me hopes so. But but no, I think that's very unlikely I not very many people are going to want to read my dissertation. Because it, reports on three studies, and most of it focuses on the methodological details and statistical analyses of these three studies. I just, I can't imagine that being a popular seller.

Christoph Bartneck: Unless you only look at the cover and only the title, and that might be all the people look at. And on Amazon, that's the only thing they see. Because there's no look inside. So people just buy the cover and the title. That's all they do.

Andy: Yeah. you might see it and it is a nice cover. And I think the topic's interesting, but I might be a little bit biased.

Christoph Bartneck: Have you checked the Amazon sales rank?

Andy: have I have not.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. Let's do that. Let's go to Amazon and see. Phonage.

Andy: Cognitive.

Christoph Bartneck: Let's see what we got. Okay, I got your book here. [00:18:00] Published in November 26, 23. You are the author. Publishers Irfan. Okay, bestseller rank. You are in place 6, 550, 000. Something something in all of the books.

Andy: Top 10 million, that's pretty good.

Christoph Bartneck: In cognitive behavioral therapy, you are at 1096.

Andy: Wow, that's pretty good, especially because it has nothing to do with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Christoph Bartneck: In Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuropsychology, you're at 2603, and in Medical Cognitive Psychology, you're at 9178.

Andy: Okay. Well, it's not really about any of those topics either.

Christoph Bartneck: Well, these are broad categories.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: That probably either the person who published this would have selected these or they're automatically assigned by Amazon. We don't know that. Can we have a comparison? What would be [00:19:00] like a book in the field that's similar to this, that you know exists for real and it sells?

Andy: Oh, like a real book. Thinking fast and slow.

Christoph Bartneck: Oh, that's the big one.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: that would be very popular. Yeah, it will be extremely popular. Here we go. Daniel Kahneman, he recently passed away.

Andy: Yeah, it was a real loss for the field. Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: So, here we go. He is bestseller rank 531 of all books on Amazon.

Andy: That's pretty good. That's

Christoph Bartneck: pretty good. Number three in cognitive psychology. Number four in medical cognitive psychology.

Andy: There's, there are books more popular than that in Cognitive Psychology. Okay.

Christoph Bartneck: good. So, bestsellers in medical cognitive psychology.

Number one. Chaser. Unlocking the genius of dog. What? Okay. Number two. The awakening brain. The new signs of, I can't read the full title. Then thinking fast, thinking slow. So, okay. So, but the [00:20:00] first one is called Chaser.

Andy: Huh.

Christoph Bartneck: The genius of dog who knows a thousand words.

Andy: Oh, about a dog that they've taught words? Okay, I can see why people would read about that.

Christoph Bartneck: Oh, you know about this.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, I think they like trained a dog to respond to different English words and they're basically seeing how many words a dog can learn. That sounds pretty interesting. Well,

Christoph Bartneck: anyway, so that's just Okay, that's not a fair comparison.

Andy: No. No. I can't imagine this has sold too many books.

Christoph Bartneck: guess

Andy: My guess is that it's sold exactly one.

Which

Christoph Bartneck: the one that we have

Andy: That would be my guess.

Christoph Bartneck: let's entertain this idea. I would say if

Andy: But you never know. Let's entertain this idea. You never know.

Christoph Bartneck: PDF, create a cover, do it like this, It would take you a half an hour to an hour of work. And you maybe gain [00:21:00] five dollars, six dollars in sales from this.

Andy: Hmm.

Christoph Bartneck: So

Andy: is that how much you would get for one book?

Christoph Bartneck: Well, I could try to look up what the production costs are, but typically speaking, Revenues are between 5 and 10 percent of the sales price. So what is your sales price?

Andy: I think you spent 36 on it.

Christoph Bartneck: Oh, did I?

Andy: I think so.

Christoph Bartneck: Oh dear. It wasn't

Andy: cheap.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, here we are. It is currently at 35, yeah, 35 US dollars. So, yeah, I mean, this is a thing you have to put into a relationship. So this book is not particularly thick. I mean, the price will change depending on how many pages you have. So this is a relatively thin book. And I could maybe try to look it up later how much it would cost, let's say, at Ingram and Sparck to the printing costs alone.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: Was your thesis in color or was it in black and white?

Andy: Oh, [00:22:00] I believe it was in color and so they've printed it in black and white to maybe save money.

Christoph Bartneck: Yeah, yeah, it's definitely much cheaper.

Andy: Yeah. Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, so If it's not money, if it's not citations, what is it?

Andy: I don't know. Well, it can't be prestige, because I'm the only one who will get the prestige. I mean, my name's on the cover of the book.

Christoph Bartneck: Unless somebody would try to do the opposite and damage your reputation.

Andy: Could be. But, I mean, it's just my dissertation. There's nothing embarrassing about it. It's already publicly available at my university's website. Okay.

Christoph Bartneck: If it's not money, If it's not something good, if it's not something bad, is it just nuisance? Is it just a person having fun?

Andy: Just trolling. But they didn't even contact me to let me know. I just found this out randomly because I was scrolling my own Google pages.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. But how about if somebody, whoever it might be, might have some beef with you? And [00:23:00] did this just to annoy you?

Andy: Maybe. I don't know. It's not that annoying to me. So if that's what it is.

Christoph Bartneck: It's failing?

Andy: They've failed.

Christoph Bartneck: Well, you are a universal, very pleasant person, so it's very hard for me to imagine that somebody would have beef with you.

Andy: Yeah, me too.

Christoph Bartneck: That'd be interesting. Yeah, it seems so random.

Andy: Yeah, I agree. I have no idea why anyone would have done this. It's really weird.

Christoph Bartneck: Oh, well, we'll find out more next time Thank you, Andy.

Andy: Thanks.

Christoph Bartneck: Irfaun did not provide any contact details in the book. This was starting to become a dead end.

The breakthrough came when I noticed that on the book reseller Books Direct website, I could click on the Irfaun Publisher link and it directed me to a page that listed all its books. And there it was. A second occurrence. Alia [00:24:00] Warner's book Mindfulness as a protective factor for the relationship between self injury. It seemed similar to Andy's case. A quick search revealed that this was indeed her PhD thesis from 2015. I contacted her and she confirmed that she had not published the thesis as a book.

Where there's smoke, there's fire. Now that I knew that there were others I started to search Amazon's catalog more systematically. I looked for health books published around November 23 at the 40 US dollar price point of a sole author. Bingo! I found an avalanche of theses. Within a few hours I contacted more than 30 authors and they all confirmed that these were fraudulent publications.

A few were aware of them and even less tried to take actions already. They all faced the same problem [00:25:00] with not being able to determine who the publisher is. It also became obvious that the purpose of these books is money. Trying to sell one thesis is hardly worth the effort. But if you sell hundreds, if not thousands, then this can earn a substantial income.

IngramSpark does have an online form that authors can use to make a copyright claim. But that would probably not result in more information about the thieves. I decided to seek legal advice.

Interview with Ursula

Christoph Bartneck: Ursula, could you please introduce yourself?

Ursula: Kia Ora. ora I'm a professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of canterbury I've been there for nearly 30 years now, specializing in media law.

Christoph Bartneck: Wonderful. It's good to have an expert in the [00:26:00] room because I have some legal questions.

Ursula: Okay, have a go. can't claim to be expert in all the law, but happy to toss some ideas around.

Christoph Bartneck: Does a traditional book publisher have the responsibility to check copyright infringements of its authors?

Ursula: A traditional book publisher doesn't have any actual legal liability to check contents of what they publish. What they have is an onus, and it's only sensible they try limit any potential liability that they've got. So if they're sensible, they'll either be checking things themselves or, and, or. They'll have legal advice maybe to help them as well to deal with things such as breach of copyright or defamation, that sort of thing.

Christoph Bartneck: Are they responsible afterwards for the content they publish?

Ursula: Yes, and again, it varies depending on the area of the law, but in terms of breach of copyright, they [00:27:00] would, I think, in terms of our law, be seen as a publisher because they're copying. And um, as long as they fall within the definition of a copier and a publisher in the Act, then they could be liable.

Christoph Bartneck: Is a print on demand self publishing company a traditional publisher?

Ursula: There's no legal magic around this idea of a traditional legal publisher. So the question at issue here is simply would a print on demand self publishing company fall within the required definitions in the Copyright Act, if we're just talking about copyright. So the question would be, are they breaching copyright and are they a publisher? And again, I think that is possible.

Christoph Bartneck: Possible, well maybe we can try to home in on this. This company is called IngramSpark, which is a subdivision of Ingram. Ingram is, by all means, a traditional publisher, and they created a platform [00:28:00] where people can upload their own books and sell them through their channels.

Wouldn't that mean that they're a publisher? They duplicate the book, they print it they do the logistics, they do the payments, they earn a fee when they sell the book, so it seems very identical to a traditional book publisher.

Ursula: Yes, I agree with that. In terms of the law one of the ways you breach the Copyright Act is by copying. And you can also breach it, in fact, by instructing someone else to copy something that you don't I think the person who uploads something into a print on demand site is copying if the work is not their own. And then I think the site itself in providing and making this available to the public in a nice easy way is copying as well.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay. By definition of that, we're currently focused a bit on New Zealand law, [00:29:00] but it's probably relatively internationally,

Ursula: well, I'm not an international copyright expert, but copyright law does tend towards being similar in jurisdictions because there's lots of benefits of that. So that's all I can really comment there.

Christoph Bartneck: Now, what follows then is the question is, does IngramSpark have the responsibility to check copyright infringements of their customers and be responsible for the content that's being published?

Ursula: I think that's arguable because they are are copying And that may fall under the act.

Christoph Bartneck: So that's a clear yes as you can from a lawyer?

Ursula: Yes.

Christoph Bartneck: Okay, thank you. If a self publishing company is not a publisher, but just a platform, what obligations do platforms have?

Ursula: When you [00:30:00] say just a platform, interesting that you use that language because of course in relation to some and other areas of law around the world mere platforms do have some special defences by virtue of the fact that they can say, well, we haven't actually been involved this process, we're merely providing, we're a conduit, we're merely passing information on.

And so in places like America for have the Communications has a special, called a safe harbour in relation to offensive material, for so called mere platforms. We don't have anything like that in New Zealand. And there's nothing like that, in fact, in the Copyright Act.

I don't think these print on demand self publishing companies are mere platforms. I don't think that's what they are. They are actually providing a way for people to [00:31:00] upload something that they want to

publish and then they're providing a way for that to be published by other customers who see the title of the book and decide they want it or So they're actively involved in it. They're not merely passing something on.

Christoph Bartneck: That's actually a very interesting point. So the fact that they are the ones who physically print the book. And send it out is what disqualifies them for this defense of being just a platform.

Ursula: In terms of our copyright legislation, I think the act printing sending it out when triggered by a customer means they are copying. They simply fit the definition of copying there or another way it can come under the act is as a breach is by issuing copies to the public. And can be seen in that way as well.

[00:32:00]

Update for Andy

Christoph Bartneck: Andy, I have some news for you.

Andy: Okay. What's that?

Christoph Bartneck: I looked up how much it costs to print your thesis.

Andy: How much does it cost?

Christoph Bartneck: 2.40.

Andy: 2. 40. How much did I pay?

Christoph Bartneck: 36 at a discount. So the original price was 40. So I think we wasted a good 37 on this.

Andy: Okay. All right.

Christoph Bartneck: The profit margin is immense for this particular thesis. also partly because your thesis is relatively short.

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: So, yeah, maybe that's worthwhile. I'm not sure.

Andy: I guess so. I mean, even if they sell one or two of these things, they've made 70 bucks.

Christoph Bartneck: Yeah. The other news is that I found a large number of similar cases to yours.

Andy: Really?

Christoph Bartneck: Yes, so within an hour or so I was able [00:33:00] to find around 30, 40, even 50 theses that all follow the same pattern.

Andy: Interesting.

Christoph Bartneck: And I contacted these authors and they all confirmed that this is their thesis and they didn't agree to have it to be published so we're all in the same boat here.

Andy: Mmm.

Christoph Bartneck: And that solves one mystery that we had, which was what's going on and why would anybody do this?

Andy: Yeah.

Christoph Bartneck: The answer is they're doing it at scale and for profit. Because only your thesis doesn't make sense. But if you do that, hundreds of thousands of these theses will be worthwhile.

Andy: Because few people will want someone's thesis and that's enough to make some money.

Christoph Bartneck: And the other important aspect here is that you cannot look into the book prior to buying it. So there's no information about what you actually get other than, let's say, the abstract and summary that you'll get and the [00:34:00] cover image. That's all you'll ever see.

Andy: Okay,

Christoph Bartneck: So they don't know how technical the thesis might be and that this is not a book for popular consumption, let's say.

Andy: Right. Yeah, well, we couldn't read my thesis until we bought it. Yeah, we weren't sure if it was like the full version or if they had made it easier to read or anything.

Christoph Bartneck: The next step would be to contact IngramSpark and confront them with these results. Would you be okay if I include you in this endeavor?

Andy: Yeah, let's do it.

Christoph Bartneck: Of course, I also had legal advice from Ursula, and she motivated me to proceed with this and she thinks this is a clear cut case pretty much.

Andy: Okay.

Christoph Bartneck: This is gonna get interesting.

Andy: Interesting. Okay.

Next steps

Christoph Bartneck: Thanks to Ursula's help, I drafted a letter on behalf of the 15 authors who decided to participate. I sent a list of fraudulent books together [00:35:00] with our demands to IngramSpark. They responded after 10 days. They confirmed that they took down all the theses, but refused to take responsibility for the offence.

They argued that each content provider certified to us That they had the full right and title to the titles they upload to our service. As such, they are fully responsible for that content and any infringement claims should be directed to them.

This is just not true. IngramSpark prints and distributes the manuscripts. They are therefore the publisher. Ursula already pointed out that this safe harbor defense does not hold. At least not in New Zealand.

They sent us a list of the offender's email addresses. They all had the same pattern, such as dennyflakes at dennyflakes. cloud. The domain names were registered around the time of the book publications. There are no web [00:36:00] pages on these domain names. You just get an error message. Clearly these email addresses are just a disposable front to their operations. I reminded them that we want to have full contact details, including address and bank details. How else could anybody ever charge them with anything, in particular if the perpetrators live in another country?

IngramSpark responded that this was all they would provide. This is rather disappointing, since they protected the thieves by withholding the essential contact and bank details. Nobody has any chance to get a hold of these thieves, since they can be anywhere on the planet. The next step would be to get the lawyers involved, and I believe that Ingram knows that barely anybody has the financial background to afford this.

Discussion

Christoph Bartneck: So what can you do when your thesis got stolen? First of [00:37:00] all, don't buy your own thesis. It might be the only copy ever sold and you make it worth their while.

Ursula: I think you should, whoever is wanting to make a complaint on this basis should take advantage of those processes. And obviously firms like this, they offer them now because they've been pushed to offer some sort of remedy because this, probably when they first set up their business, they had nothing like that at all and they just hoped to, you know, publish away get away with it. as much as they, their business model, and make as much as Then probably started receiving complaints and realized that they had to, if they were not to to be pursued themselves, set up some sort of process. So I think that's probably the best that any person who's been wronged in this way can give.

Christoph Bartneck: There are several solutions available. The first is to add a visual watermark to your thesis.

Ursula: I think the best way to do that is do what they do with photos online now as well. You put a [00:38:00] watermark on the document so everyone knows that, you know, it's a copy that's, Not the final copy, and it belongs to somebody else. Maybe the university needs to think about doing that in relation to the repository and documents in the repository. Or you could put your own watermark on the copy that you submit to the repository. And have a talk to them about it, if that's what you're doing. That would, I think, stop companies like this trying to make money out of these copies that come from library repositories and so on.

Christoph Bartneck: While it could deter thieves from using your PDF file, This is not an absolute protection, since the thieves do not allow customers to view the interior pages of the book prior to purchase. But when the thieves select the thesis to upload, they are less likely to use yours. If your thesis is already in a repository, contact their manager to add a watermark to the existing file. The library might even do [00:39:00] it for you.

Another solution would be for you to self publish your thesis through IngramSpark. If you set a low price, then you will push the illegal copies of your thesis out of the market. But there are also some disadvantages to this solution.

Ursula: that's a practical solution if you can be bothered doing it, but kind of. It's not very good for your reputation as an academic, is it? That you're prepared to put your book out there at a very low price. That's

the other issue about that relates to the harm that happens by a self publishing company doing this sort of thing, which is that know, within academia, there's kind of a low opinion of self publishing in a way, isn't there? And so one thing I was thinking of mentioning was that you have rights under the Copyright Act that are called moral rights. And they might be engaged in their circumstances. You could argue that this happening is a form of derogatory treatment of your work and that might come under that part of the Copyright Act.

Christoph Bartneck: [00:40:00] So, this is where the story ends. We successfully took down the stolen theses, but failed to identify or prosecute the thieves. I am certain that this scam will continue. The only thing left is to raise awareness of this problem and expose Ingram's shameful behavior. I will put the link to Ingram's copyright infringement claim form into the show notes. I will also add the email at Ingram you can contact to express your concern. Maybe if enough of us speak up, they will reconsider their policy.