



BNC RESEARCH

How **Canadians** Buy Books 2015



9.2016

PREPARED BY BOOKNET CANADA STAFF



**BOOKNET
CANADA**

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Introduction

For several years, BookNet Canada has been producing consumer studies by asking book-buying Canadians about the attitudes and behaviours surrounding their purchases. In this study, we want to dive a little deeper and focus just on the path to purchase in three parts: how people become aware of the books they buy; what factors influence their decisions; and how they complete their purchases—from awareness to decision to action.

Our 784 respondents reported a total of 2,170 purchases—an average of 2.8 purchases per book buyer, per month—giving us a wide pool of consumer data with which to investigate the following questions:

In Awareness, we look at how buyers find out about the books they purchase: is it online, through a physical store, or from a friend?

In Decision, we look at how people decide to make a purchase: what made them decide to buy the book, and was the purchase planned or an impulse buy?

After that we come to Action: where was the book purchased, and why did they choose to purchase from that outlet?

Methodology

All respondents were aged eighteen or older and had purchased a minimum of one book, regardless of format, in the prior month. The panel was representative and included women and men along with adequate representation from all regions across Canada.

Surveys were circulated in March and July 2015, representing book purchases that took place in February and June, respectively. Respondents were asked to report on all books they purchased in the prior month.

Focus was placed on having a statistically valid panel. The panel included the recruitment of approximately 800 book buyers who completed surveys about their book-purchasing behaviour.

Select representatives from a larger panel qualified to receive a fielding of the survey because they indicated they had purchased or downloaded a book in the prior month. Those who met the criteria were asked to complete the online survey. Respondents were given an incentive for completing the survey.

BookNet Canada partnered with Nielsen Book for data collection and processing.

SAMPLING DETAILS

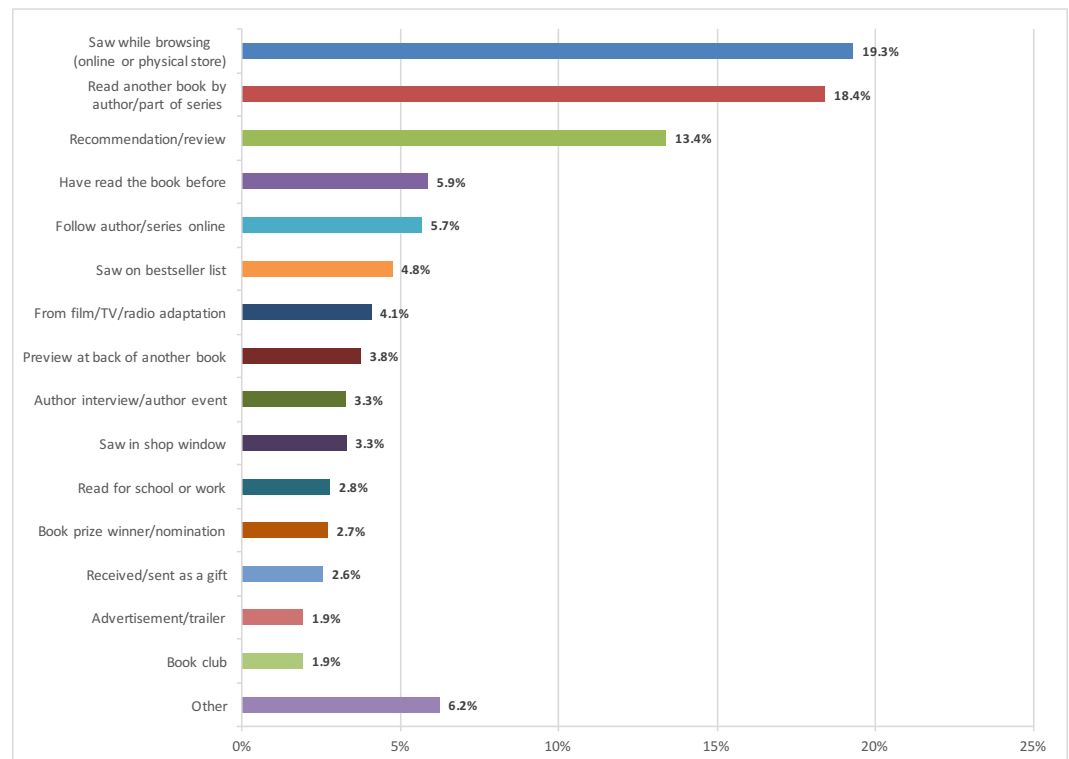
For each fielding of the survey, the margin of error is 5% at a 95% confidence interval. For these questions, we received a minimum of 400 responses per month for a total of approximately 800 responses encompassing ~2,200 purchases.

Awareness

By a wide margin, the top three ways readers became aware of the book they purchased was by browsing online or in a physical store (19.3%), through other books they read by the same author or as part of a series (18.4%), or through a recommendation or review (13.4%).

This question was framed as a multi-answer so each respondent was able to choose more than one option if they saw the book in more than one place. It is interesting to consider this when thinking about the rule of three, which is the marketing concept that suggests a consumer must see an item three times before they will seek it out for research or purchase. Recently it has been suggested that with the overflow of marketing channels on the internet and particularly social media, the rule of three has become the [rule of seven](#).

HOW BUYERS BECAME AWARE OF THEIR BOOK PURCHASES



How did you become aware of this book?
(N=2,690)

25%
of Fiction buyers
previously read the
author or series

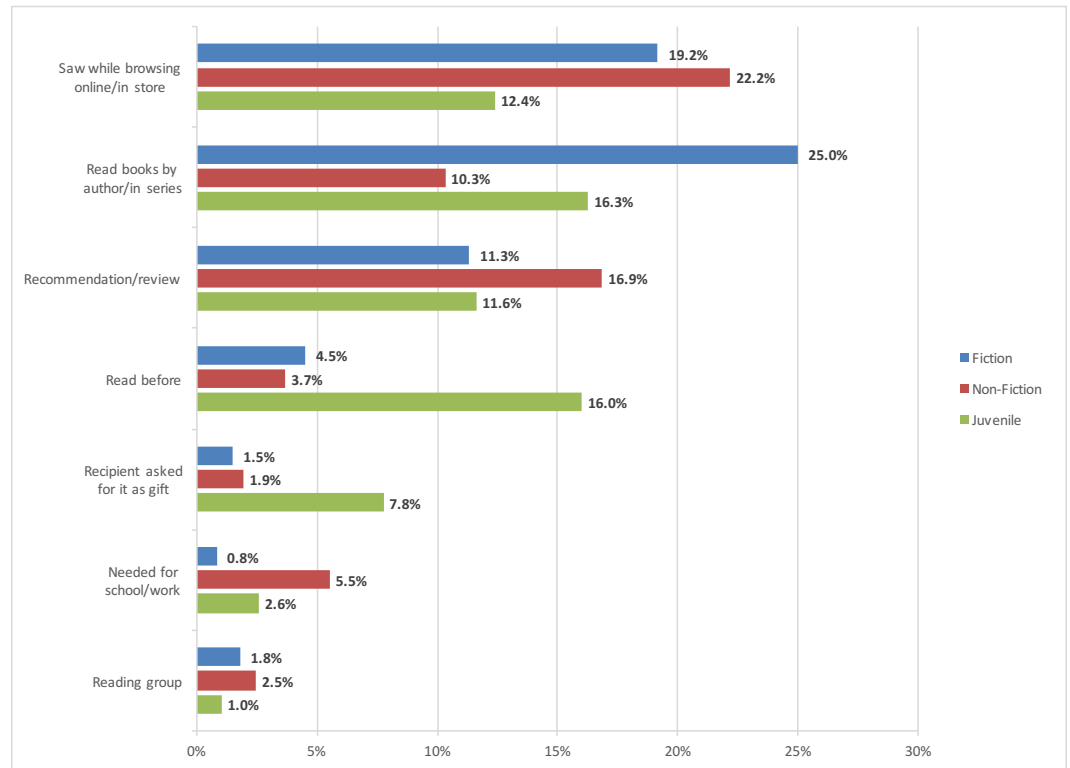
The methods of discovery that directly pertain to a book's metadata are particularly interesting. For example, 25% of people who bought a fiction book did so because they had read other books by the same author or because it was part of a series, making data points like series information vital to searchability. However, this is less important for non-fiction, where only 10.3% of book buyers did so. For juvenile books, 16% of buyers purchased books by authors they were already familiar with.

It's important for publishers to provide full, complete, and up-to-date metadata to aid in discoverability. In particular, paying attention to data such as series information, previews, book prizes, and reviews can be useful to discovery.

Two of the most popular ways readers become aware of new books—i.e., browsing (19.3%) and word of mouth (13.4%)—rely on the readers themselves. This makes it difficult to develop targeted marketing strategies, but there are things publishers can do to boost discoverability, starting with making sure that books are visible and easy to find.

Paying attention to how different subjects are discovered can also benefit publishers as they try to help readers find their books. With juvenile books, for example, most purchases are found because the buyer was already familiar with the author (16.3%) or because they had read the title before (16.0%). This seems to indicate that focusing marketing efforts on familiar books and authors, through comparative titles or author-focused marketing, will be beneficial.

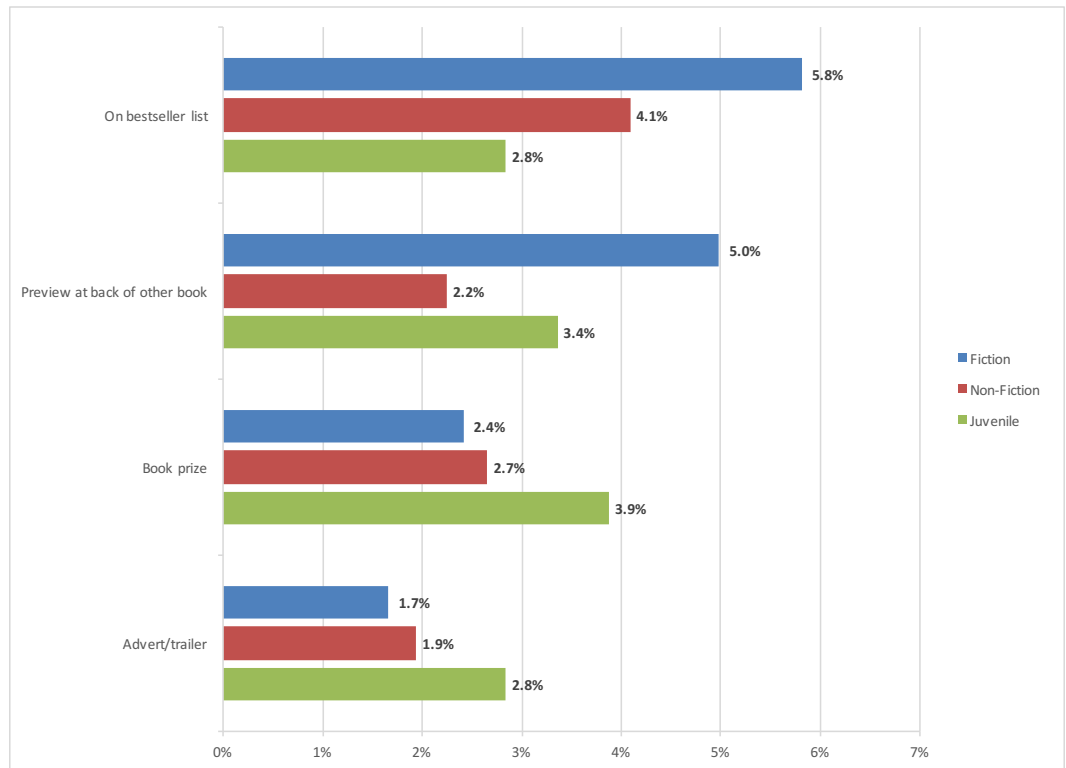
HOW READERS BECOME AWARE OF BOOKS – READER-DRIVEN



How did you become aware of this book?
(N=2,690)

As for modes of discovery where the publisher can exert more control, the graph on page 8 indicates that fiction books are often discovered on bestseller lists (5.8%) or in a preview at the back of another book (5.0%). A book prize nomination or win, however, is more effective for a juvenile book than it is for a fiction title (3.9% compared to 2.4%, respectively). While reviews/recommendations are most commonly found through in-person interactions, a significant percentage of them come from online sources, such as bookseller websites (15.6%), book review websites (4.4%), blogs (4.2%), and other online community websites (3.3%), suggesting that publishers should continue to push their books out to reviewers, whether professional or amateur. On the list of things that publishers can do to help with discoverability, securing book reviews remains the most effective way with an average of 13.3% over all subjects.

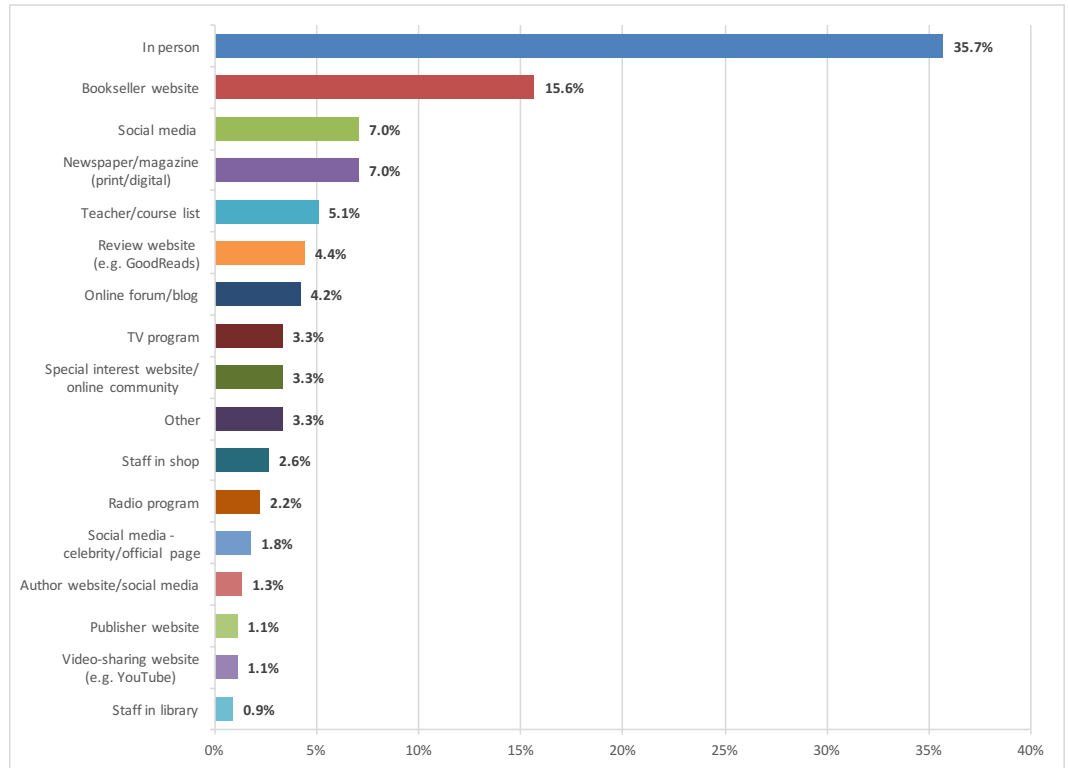
HOW READERS BECOME AWARE OF BOOKS – PUBLISHER-DRIVEN



How did you become aware of this book?
(N=2,690)

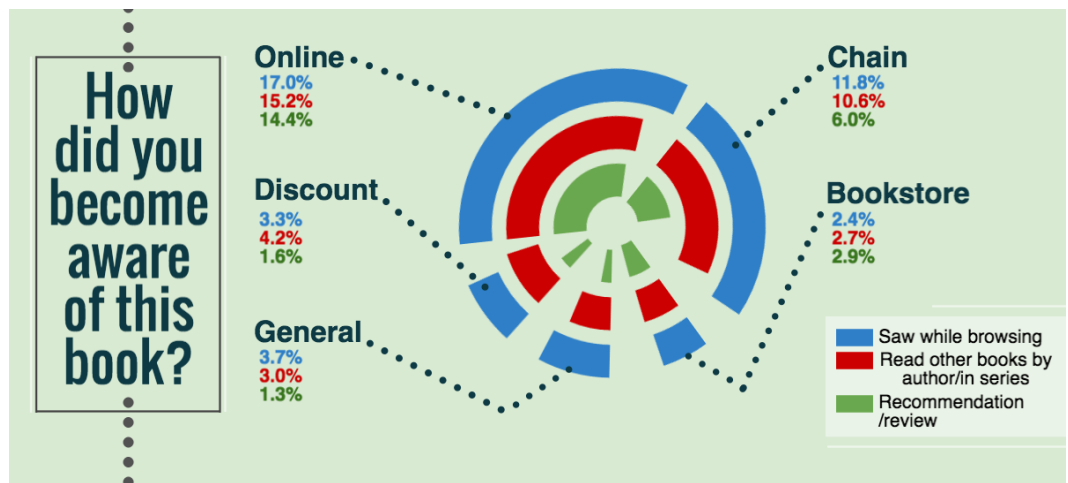
The chart on page 9 outlines where recommendations and reviews generally come from. The majority of recommendations are in-person (35.7%) but there are quite a few places online where people go to find book reviews and recommendations, such as social media, review sites, blogs, and online magazines/newspapers.

WHERE READERS FIND RECOMMENDATIONS AND REVIEWS

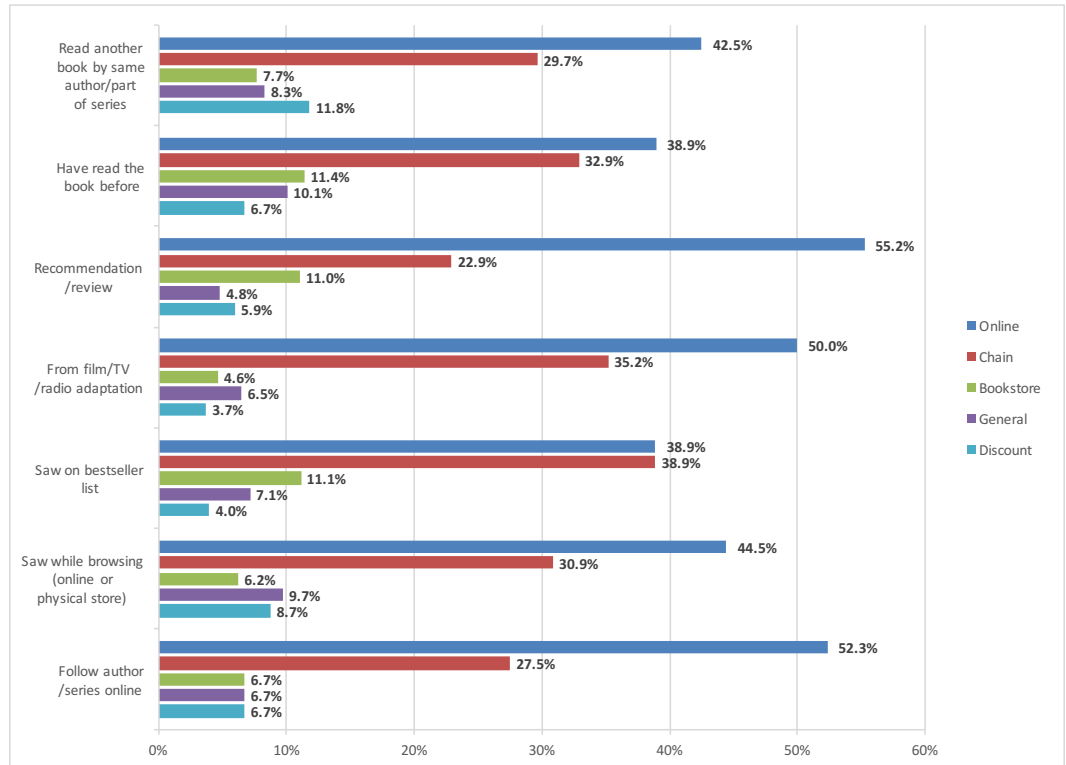


Where did the recommendation/review come from?
(N=454)

MODES OF DISCOVERY – BY CHANNEL



How did you become aware of this book?
(N=1,228)



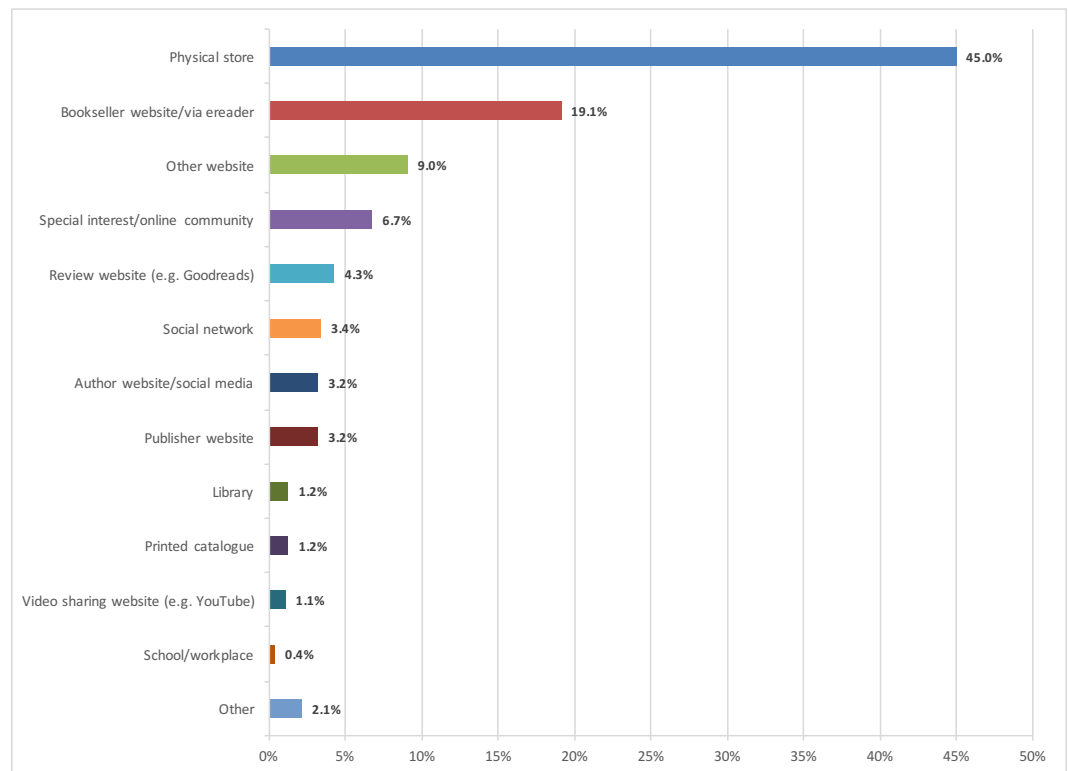
How did you become aware of this book?
(N=2,384)

When book buyers reported that they found the book while browsing “in a shop/online/elsewhere,” we asked for details on where they were browsing. The number of people who browse for books online compared to in-person is almost equal: 47.9% of respondents found books in person and 50% were browsing online.

The majority of the in-person browsing occurs in a physical store (45%), with the other in-person options (library, school, and workplace) amounting to only 2.9% combined.

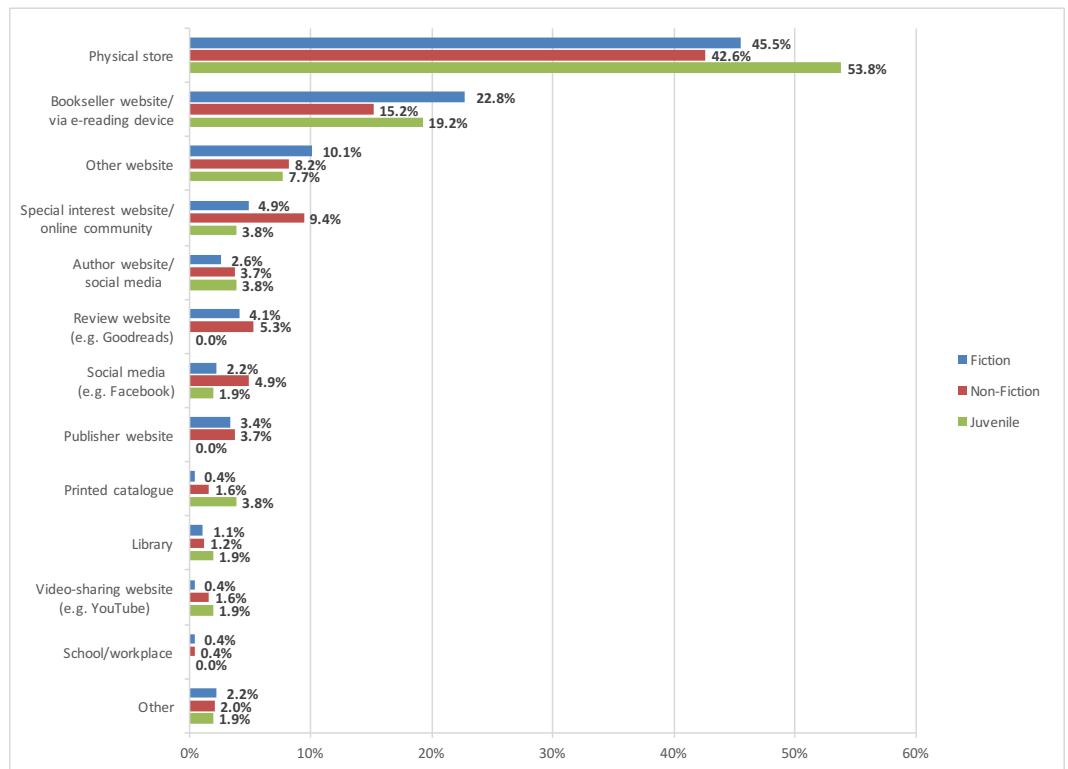
When it comes to online browsing, responses are spread over a number of categories with bookseller websites at 19.1%, review websites such as Goodreads at 4.3%, and author websites/social media at 3.2%.

WHERE READERS BROWSE/SEARCH FOR BOOKS



Where were you browsing/searching when you became aware of this book?
(N=564)

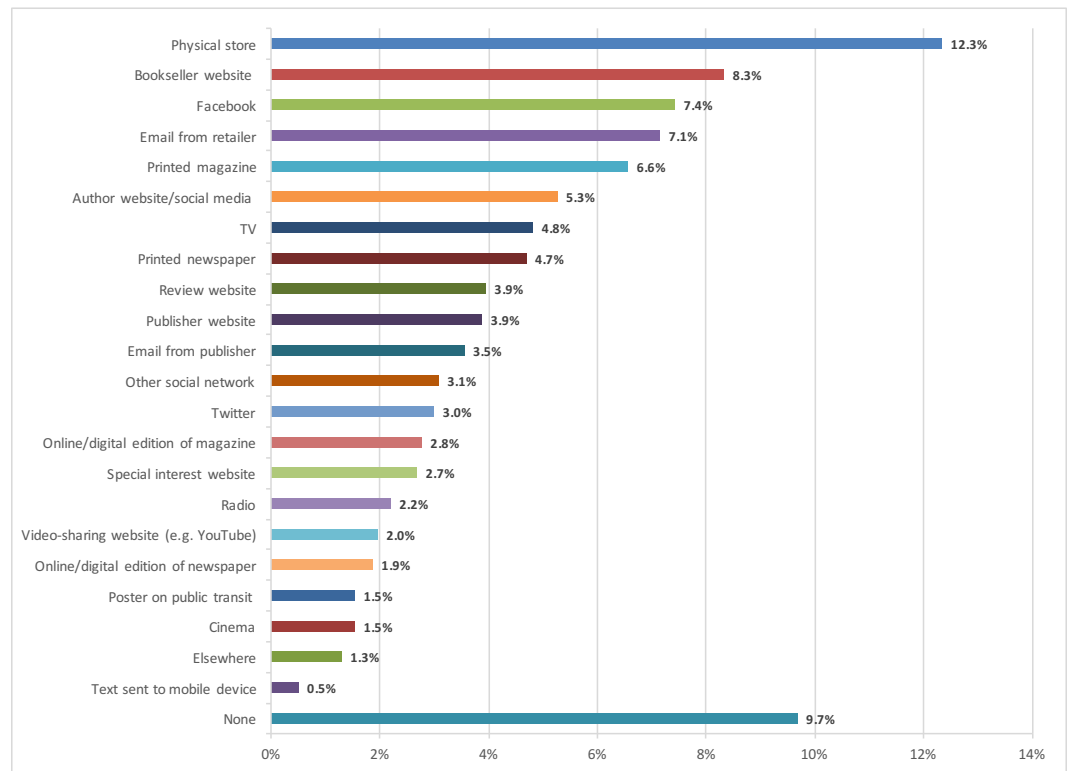
WHERE BUYERS BROWSE/SEARCH FOR BOOKS – BY SUBJECT



Where were you browsing/searching when you became aware of this book?
(N=564)

We asked book buyers where they have seen or heard books advertised in the prior month. Seeing books in a physical store was highest (12.3%) and online views via retailers ranked very high, either on a retailer website (8.3%) or from a retailer’s email (7.1%).

EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVERTISING

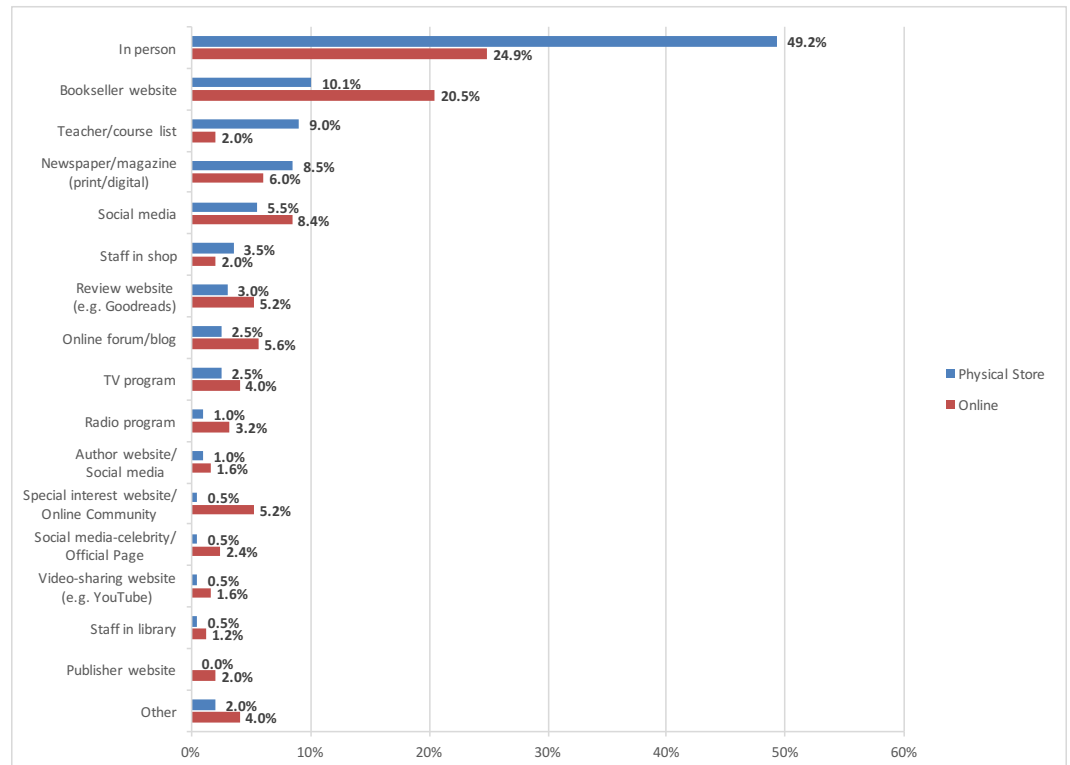


Where, if at all, have you seen or heard books advertised in the last 4 weeks?
(N=5,779)

In-person
recommendations tend
to result in purchases
from a physical store

If we take a look at where a recommendation came from and compare that to where the actual sale occurred, we can see some distinct differences between in-person and online purchases. In-person recommendations predominantly result in purchases made in a physical store (47% compared to 25% made online). Whereas online sources of recommendations, such as social media, websites, and blogs, tend to result in online purchases.

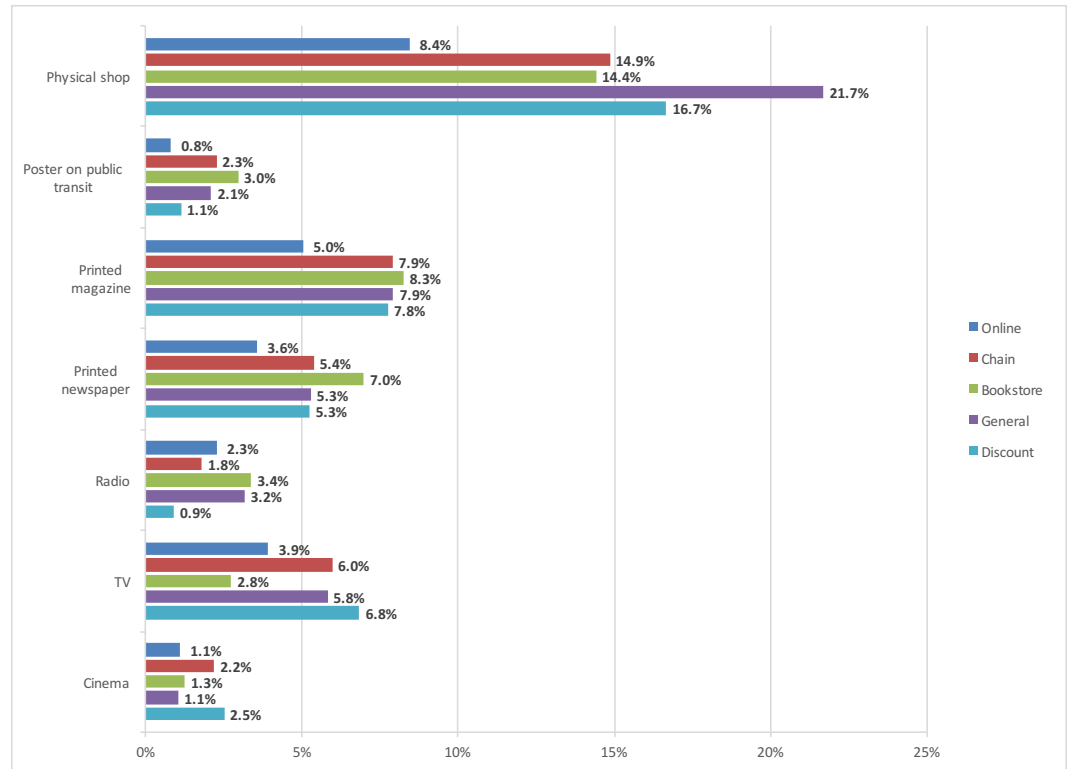
SOURCE OF BOOK RECOMMENDATION



Where did the recommendation/review come from?
(N=448)

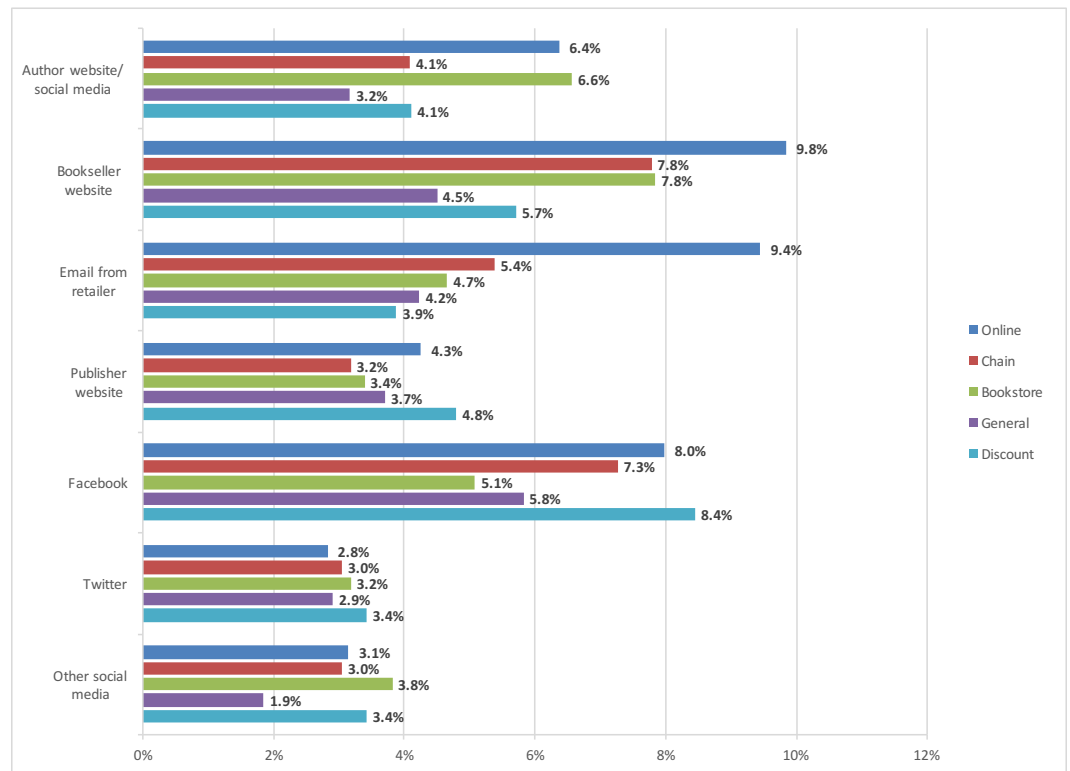
The next two graphs look at things in a bit more detail, breaking out purchasers' sources of recommendations/reviews by in-person (first graph) or online (second graph) against the channels where those purchases were made.

SOURCES OF IN-PERSON RECOMMENDATIONS/REVIEWS – BY CHANNEL



Where did the recommendation/review come from?
(N=454)

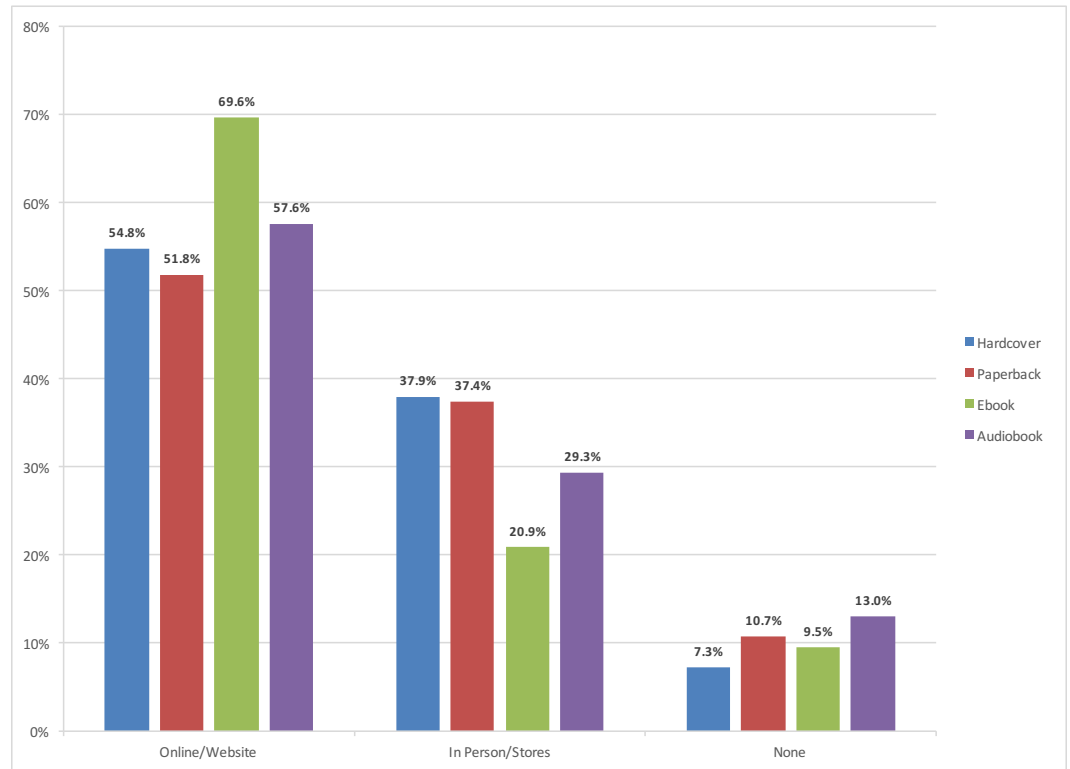
SOURCES OF ONLINE RECOMMENDATIONS/REVIEWS – BY CHANNEL



Where did the recommendation/review come from?
(N=454)

The majority of advertisements for books are found online—the internet, it seems, is inundated with ads—while stores, offline venues, and ‘in person’ dominate when it comes to trusted recommendations. That being said, there is still a significant group of people who find advertisements for books offline (34.2%).

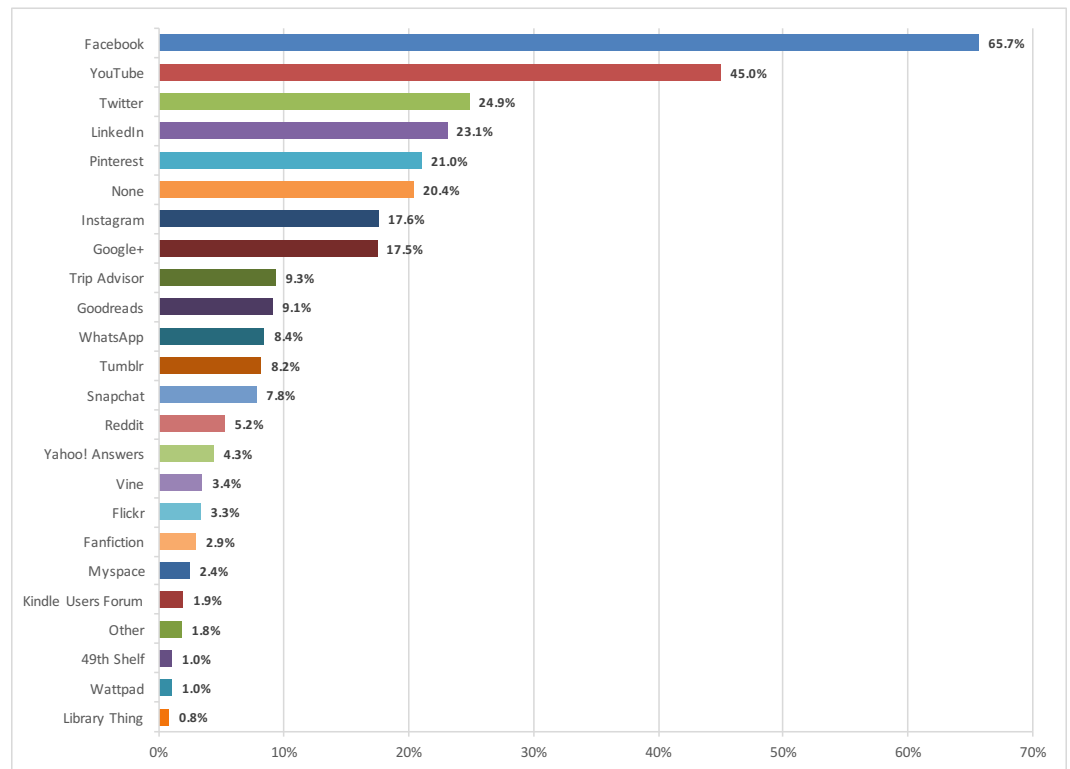
WHERE BOOK ADVERTISEMENTS ARE FOUND



Where, if at all, have you seen or heard books advertised in the last 4 weeks?
(N=5,558)

As more and more book discovery moves online, it is important to note how, and where, book buyers are spending their time online. When asked what social networks they use, respondents were able to select multiple answers, resulting in a very strong showing of the top seven social networks, with small numbers for the rest of the options.

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS



Which, if any, of the following online social networks, communities, or sharing sites do you currently participate in?
(N=784)

Decision

Once a buyer has decided to make a purchase, the time comes to evaluate the various alternatives available in the market and the many factors that can influence a final decision. A buyer will try to make the best choice based on their needs, tastes, and budget, while taking into consideration factors like the value of a recommendation or review—for example, a bestseller list, award, or recommendation from a respected friend may be all that is needed to make a decision—or additional considerations like price, perceived quality, and interest in the subject matter.

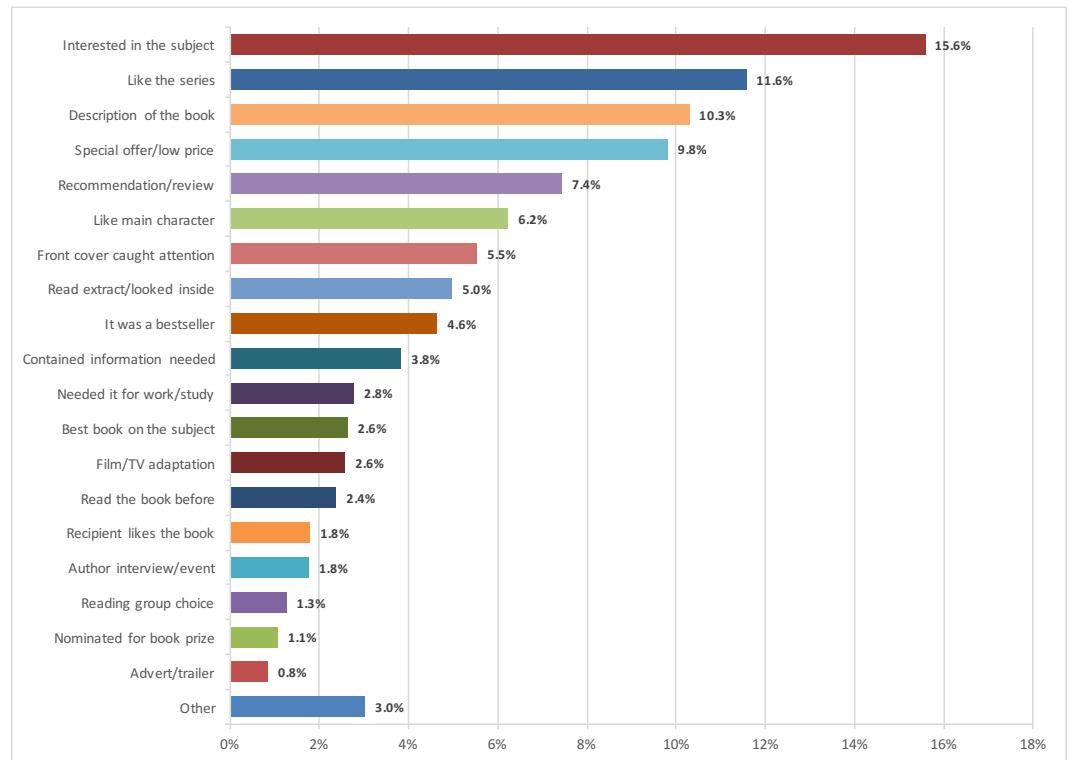
The type and quality of metadata, such as cover image and description, may also play an important role in the buyer's decision. The availability of the data points listed below, including series information, description, reviews, and excerpts, are all important bits of information that can factor into a buyer's decision, if, of course, they appeal to the buyer.

A few notable shifts from 2013 to 2015:

- The number of book buyers indicating they made their purchase because they were interested in a series rose from 7% to 12%.
- Buyers who noted the book description as a reason for making their purchase rose from 3% to 10%.
- The influence of the front cover on a purchase increased from 2.6% to 5.5%.
- Bestseller lists played a more important role in 2015, increasing from 1.8% to 4.6%.

Book description as
a reason for making
a purchase rose from
3% to 10%

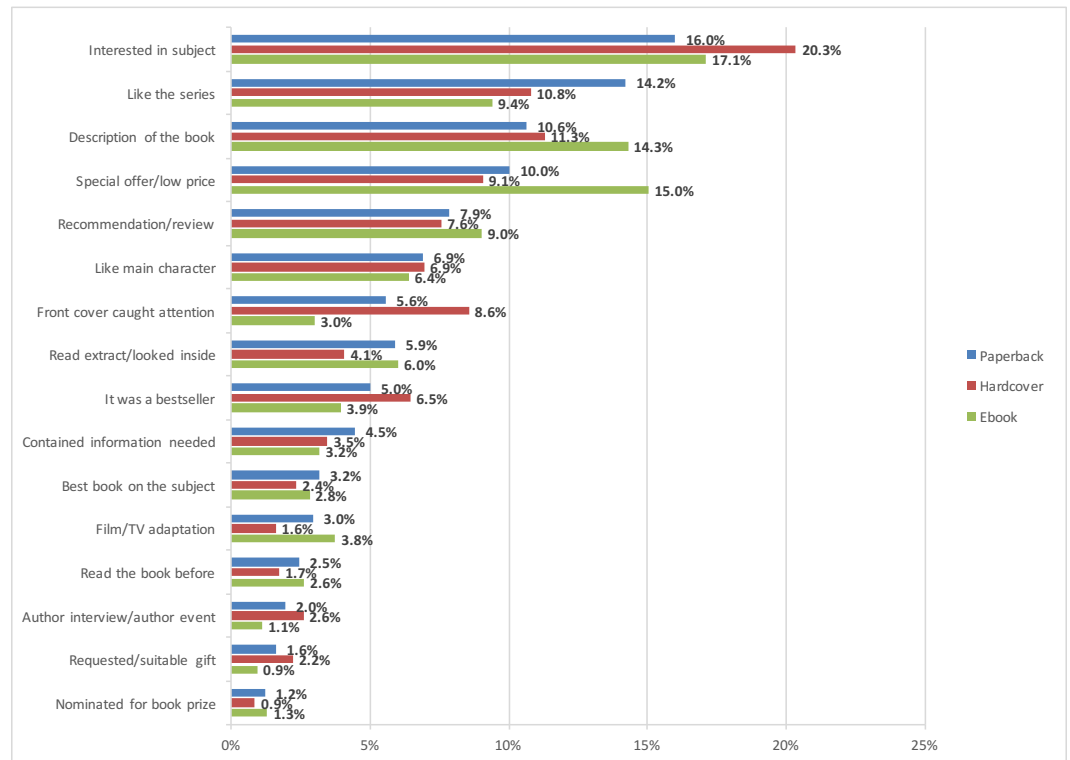
PRIMARY REASON FOR PURCHASE



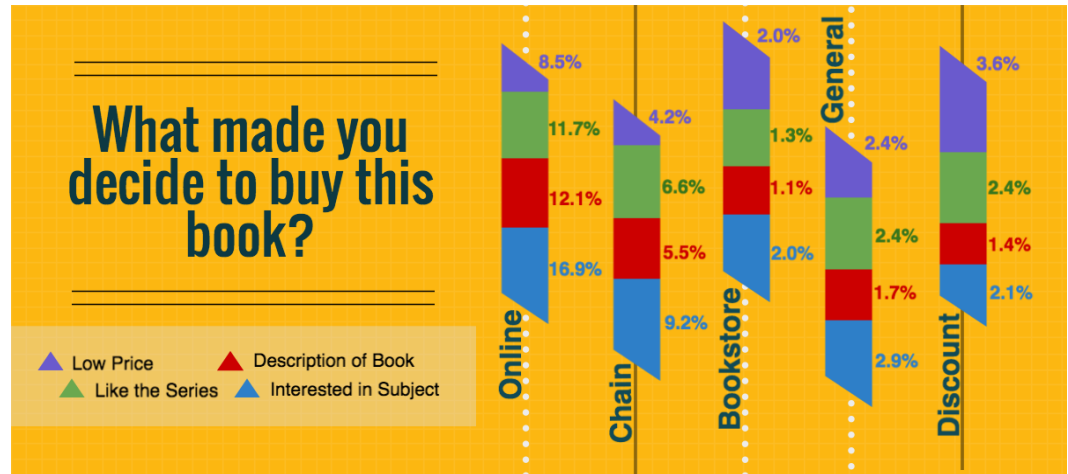
What made you decide to buy this book?
(N=3,579)

When we break out the factors that influence the decision to buy by format, we find some variances in importance. For example, buying a book because of the low price or special offer is much more common for ebooks. Buyers who are seeking out more books in the same series tend to purchase paperbacks more frequently.

PRIMARY REASON FOR PURCHASE – BY FORMAT



What made you decide to buy this book?
(N=3,132)



What made you decide to buy this book?
(N=1,511)

When it comes to the decision to buy, another important element is whether or not the purchase was planned: did the buyer plan to go to the store and buy that particular book? Did they plan on buying “a” book? Or was it a completely impulsive purchase?

31%
of purchases are
completely planned

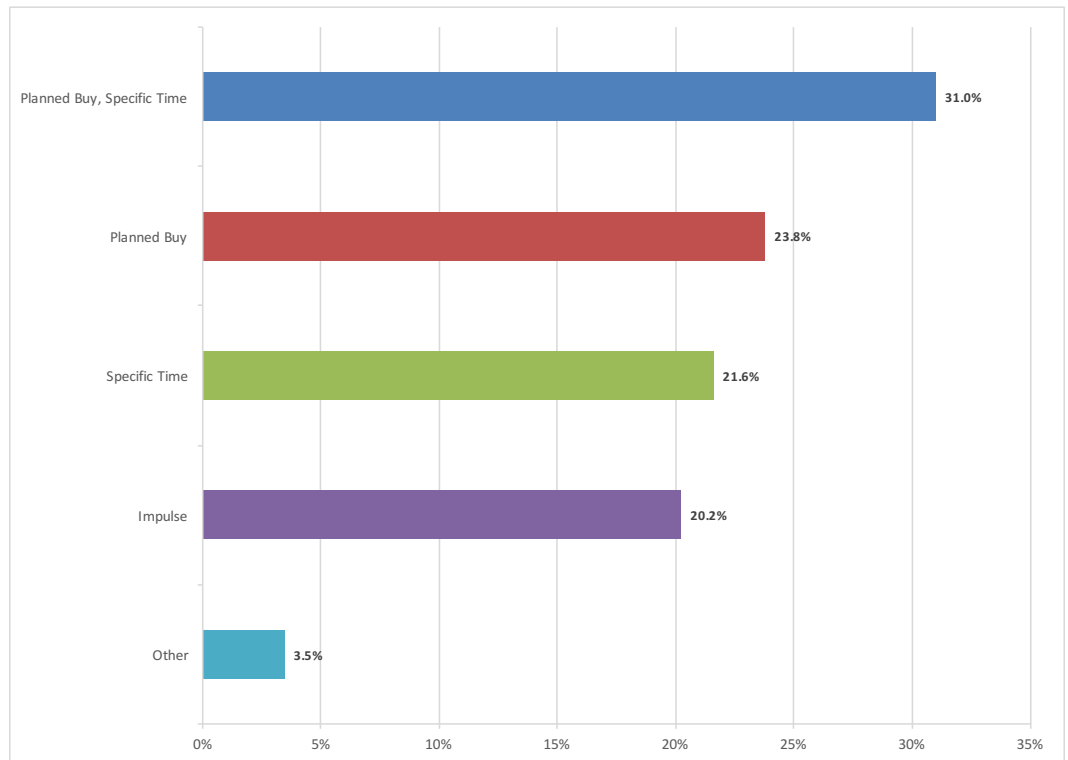
It’s widely believed that purchasing is becoming more intentional¹, especially with the increasing prevalence of online shopping. The graphs below support this and tell us that the majority of purchases (31%) are completely planned (i.e., the buyer planned on buying that book at that specific time).

Respondents were presented with the following options:

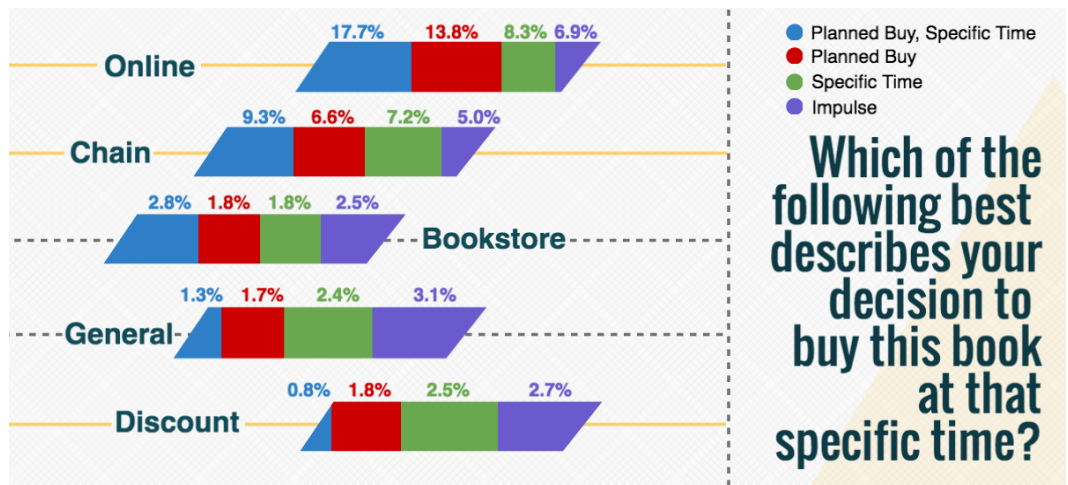
- “I had planned ahead to buy this specific book at that specific time.” (Planned Buy, Specific Time)
- “I had planned to buy this specific book, but not necessarily at that specific time.” (Planned Buy)
- “I was planning to buy a book at that specific time, but had not planned to buy this specific book.” (Specific Time)
- “I was not planning to buy a book at that specific time; it was an impulse purchase.” (Impulse)

¹ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-end-of-the-impulse-shopper-1416872108>

PLANNED VS. IMPULSE PURCHASE



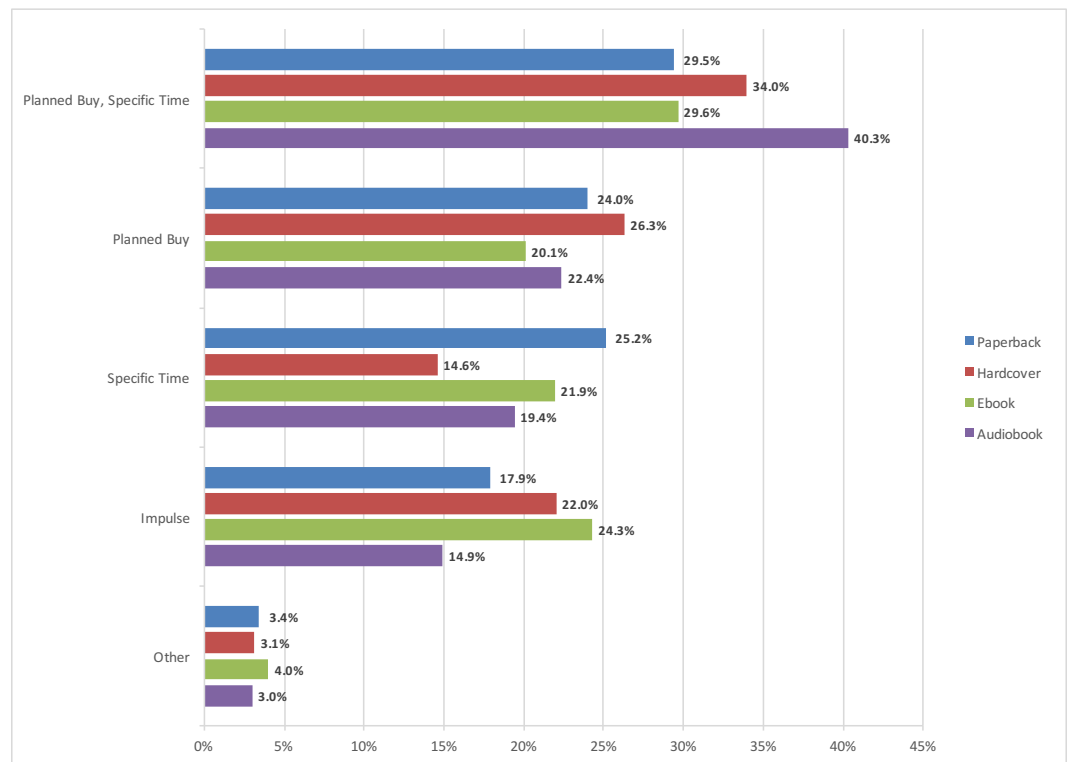
Which one of the following best describes your decision to buy this book at that specific time?
(N=3,345)



Which of the following best describes your decision to buy this book at that specific time?

Which of the following best describes your decision to buy this book at that specific time?
(N=1,844)

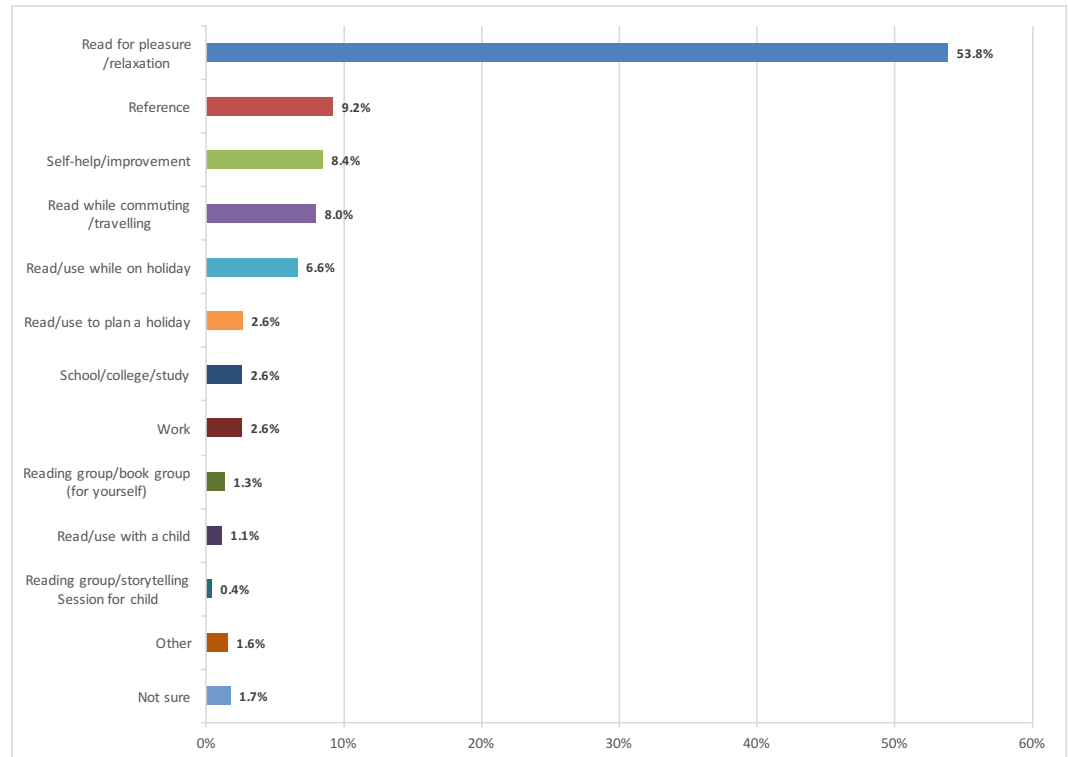
PLANNED VS. IMPULSE PURCHASE – BY FORMAT



Which one of the following best describes your decision to buy this book at that specific time?
(N=2,170)

More than half of the books purchased were done so for pleasure (54%), with purchases for work or study accounting for only 2.6% each.

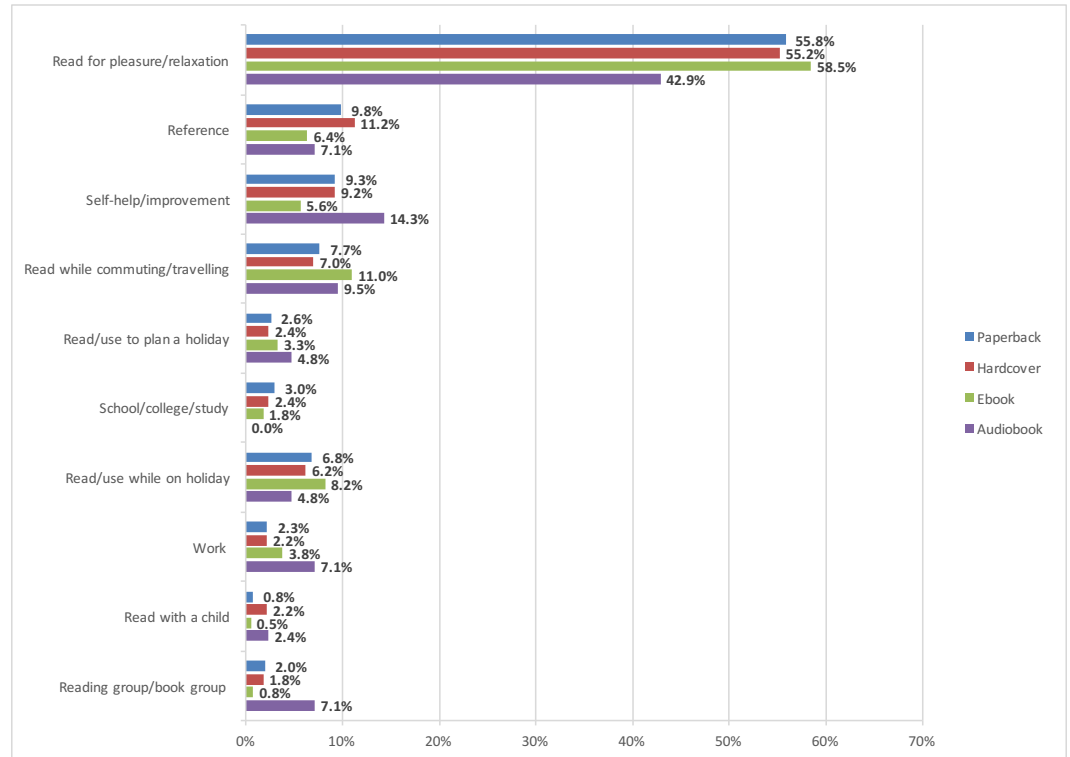
REASON FOR BOOK PURCHASE



What do you plan to use this book for?
(N=2,238)

While format doesn't often play a big part in how a buyer plans to use their book, audiobooks are the one exception. While the majority are still bought for pleasure, 14% of audiobook purchases were for self-improvement, compared to 9% for hardcover. Audiobooks also ranked relatively high when it comes to purchases made for work at 7%, compared to the next highest format, ebooks, at 3.7%.

REASON FOR BOOK PURCHASE – BY FORMAT



What do you plan to use this book for?
(N=2,238)

Action

So your buyer has found your book and made the decision to buy—now comes the time to act. The biggest questions when it comes to action are:

- Did they purchase the book online or in a physical outlet?
- Where, specifically, did they complete the purchase? This includes where they found the book in a physical store.
- Why did they decide to buy the book there?

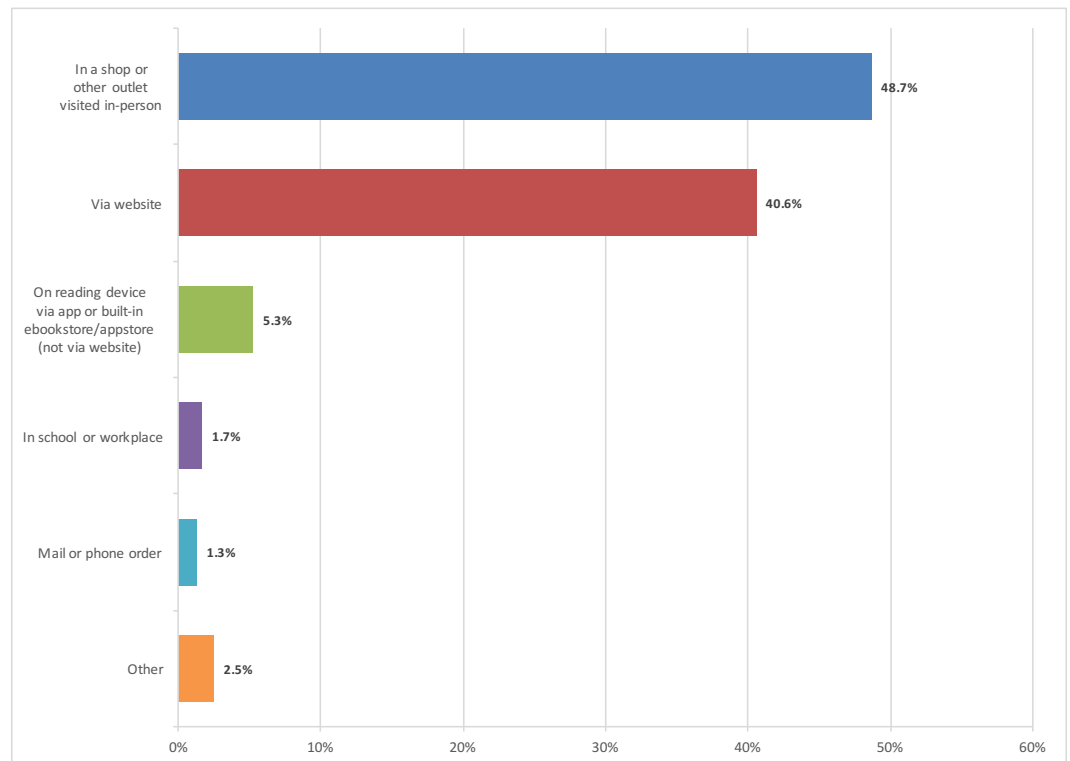


Where did you buy this book?
(N=951)

When it comes time to actually buy a book, there is a surprisingly small divide between online and in-person shopping: 40.6% compared to 48.7%, respectively.

Shopping directly from an e-reader or a built-in ebookstore (not on a website) is small compared to online and in-store, but it's still present at 5.3%. Interestingly, when online and e-reader/ebookstore purchases are combined (45.9%), they are almost equal to those made in physical outlets.

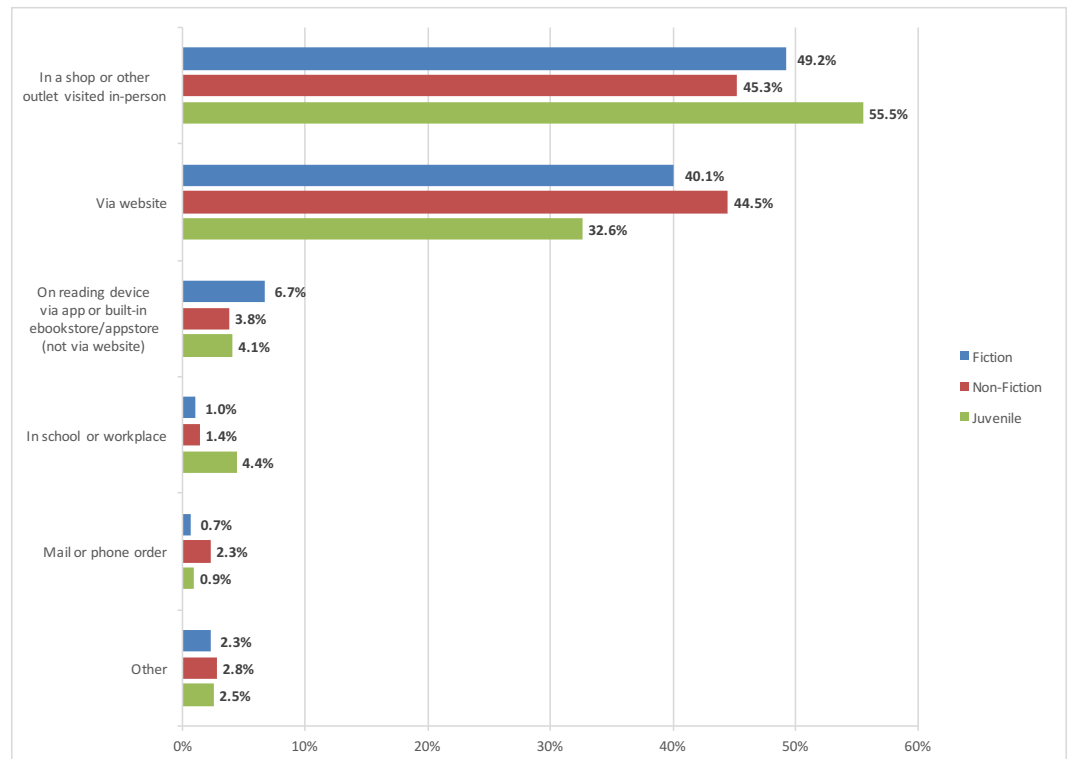
HOW THE BOOK WAS PURCHASED



How did you buy this book?
(N=2,169)

In terms of subject, the difference between online and in-person shopping is not significant. Fiction and non-fiction books are mostly bought in a physical store, with fiction at 49.2% and non-fiction at 45.3%. The breakdown for online shopping is almost the same: 40.1% for fiction and 44.5% for non-fiction. There is a bit more of a difference with juvenile, with 55.5% buying in person and 32.6% online.

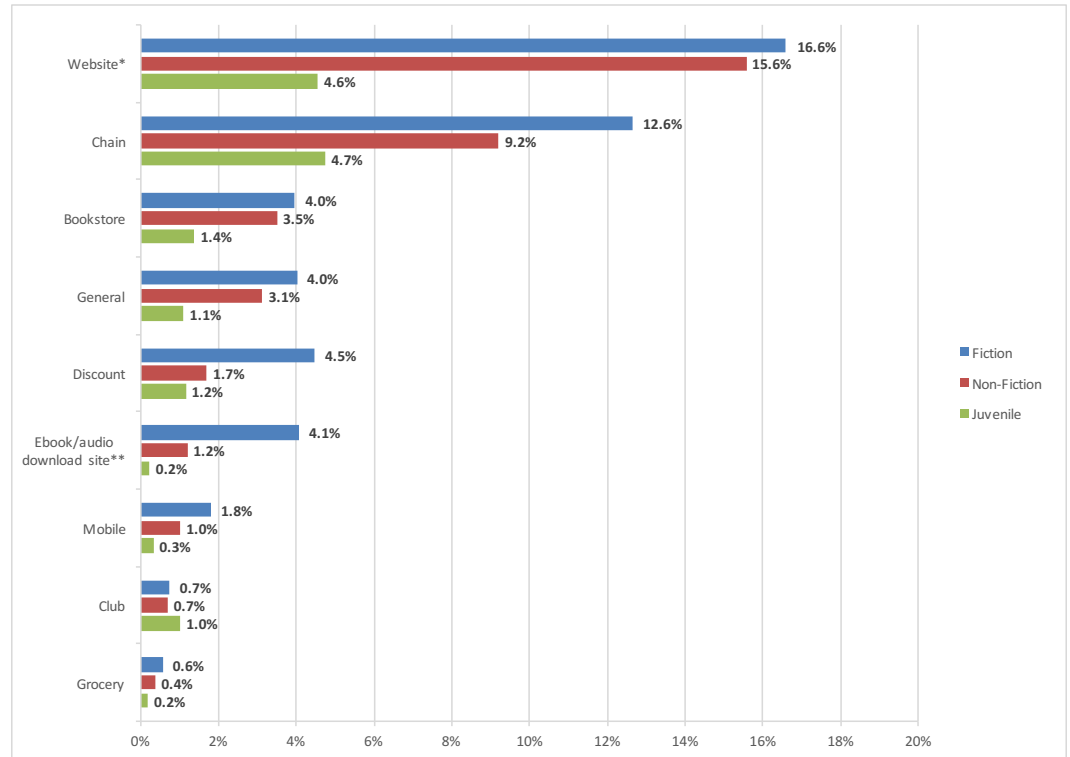
HOW THE BOOK WAS PURCHASED – BY SUBJECT



How did you buy this book?
(N=2,170)

When looking at where people shopped by top-level subject, it's important to consider the type of books that are predominantly available at each retail outlet. Anecdotally, it's more common for discount stores to carry fiction, which would result in a greater amount of fiction sales through that channel. That being said, it's interesting to see that fiction far outsells non-fiction in mobile sales.

WHERE BOOK WAS PURCHASED – BY SUBJECT



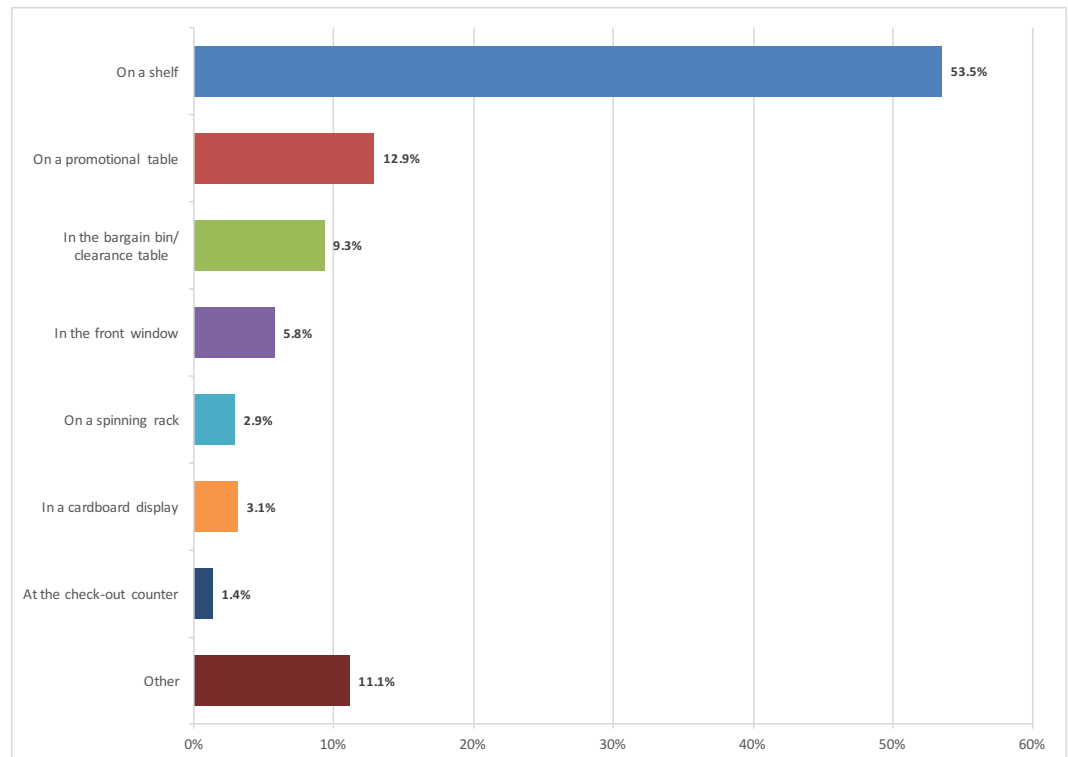
Where did you buy this book? (N=2,168)

*Website: e.g. Indigo or Amazon

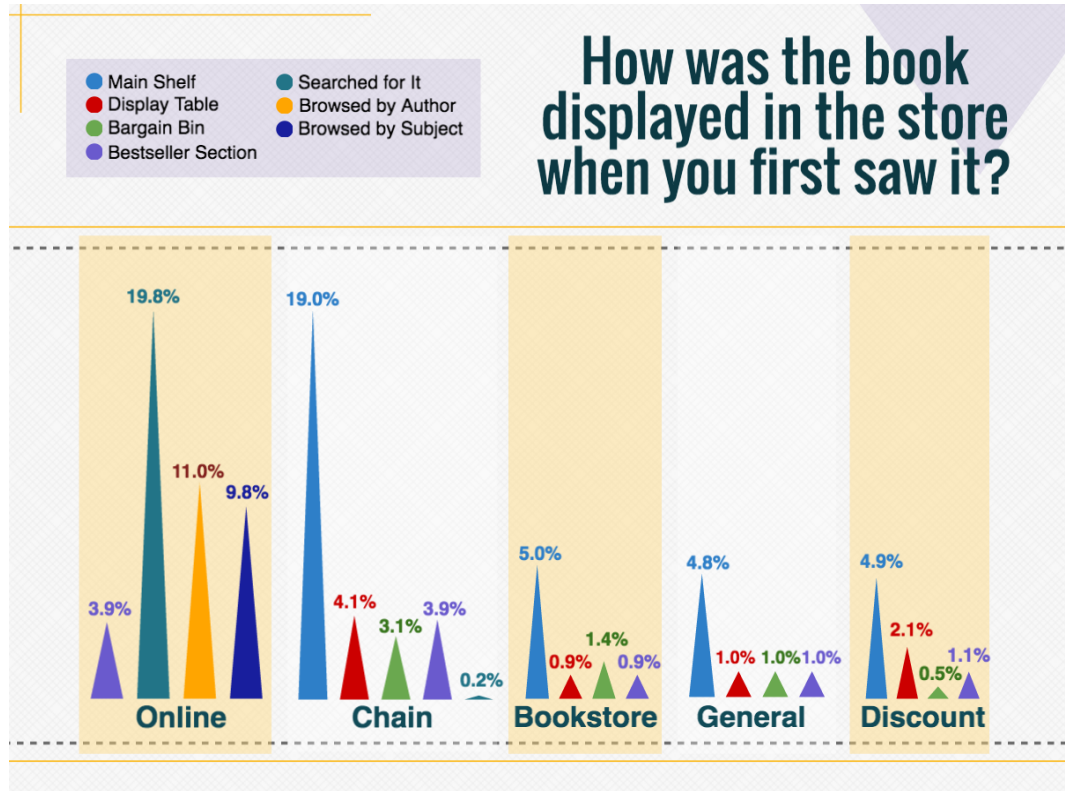
**Ebook/Audio Download Site: e.g. Kobo or iTunes

Though planned purchases are on the rise, there is still a fairly high number of purchases reported as impulse buys (20%), many of which are influenced by how a book buyer finds a book. Display, whether in a physical store or online, plays a huge part in discoverability. In physical stores, finding a book on the shelf is still the most common occurrence. Rising in popularity, though, are “front-of-store” locations such as promotional tables, displays, front windows, and bargain bins.

HOW THE BOOK WAS DISPLAYED – PHYSICAL OUTLET



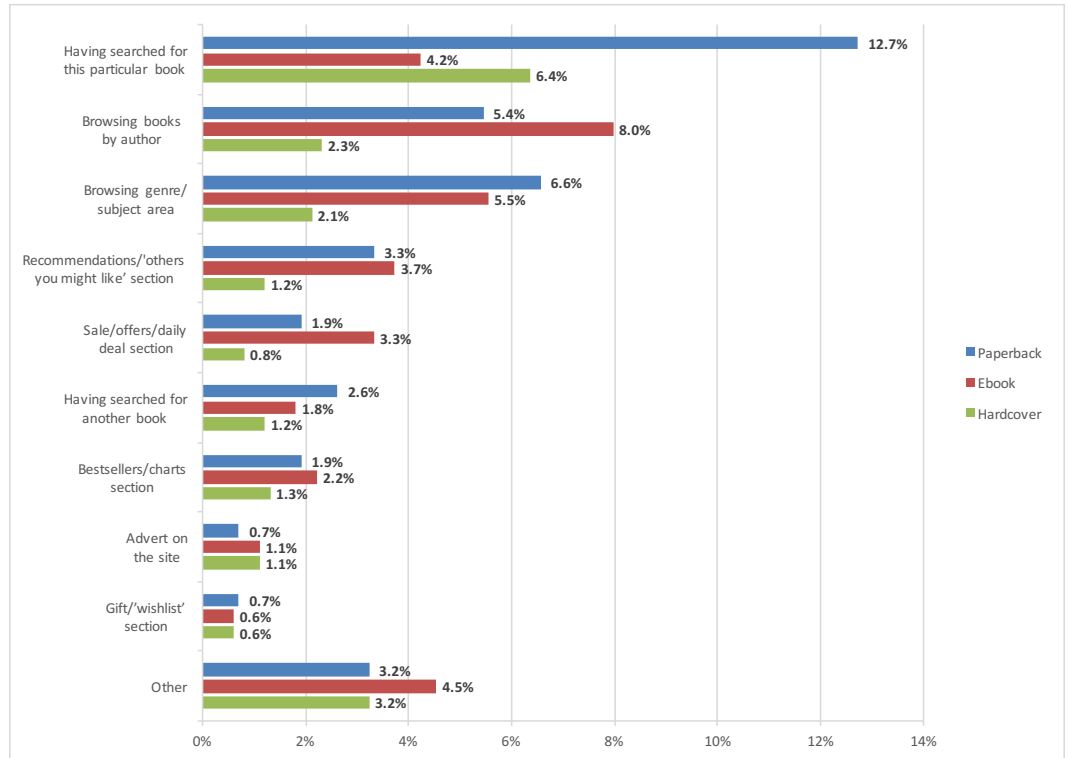
How was the book displayed in the store when you first saw it?
(2015 N=1,056)



How was the book displayed in the store when you first saw it?
(N=1,552)

When looking at physical books purchased online, the majority were found through searches. For ebooks, we see that serendipitous efforts, such as browsing by subject or author, were more common.

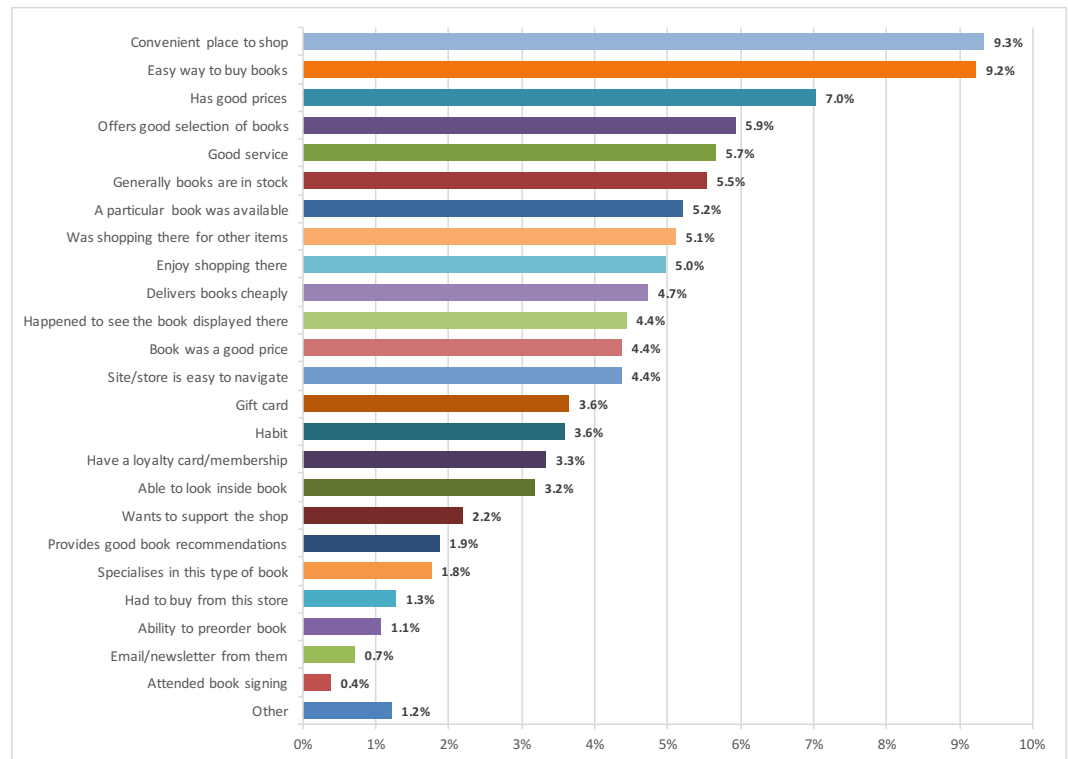
HOW THE BOOK WAS NOTICED – ONLINE OUTLET



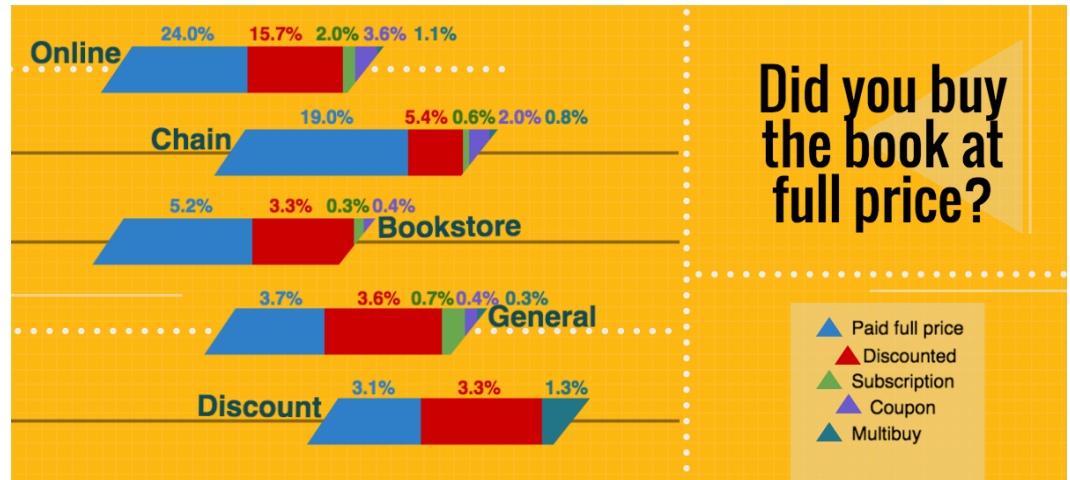
Where did you first see the book on the website/ebookstore/appstore?
(N=991)

The most popular reasons for choosing a particular place to buy a book are the convenience of the physical location (9.3%) and the ease of buying it there (9.2%). Price becomes a factor after those conveniences, with good prices or cheaper offers accounting for 7.0% of responses. After that the next four are close: liking the selection at 5.9%; good service at 5.7%, having books that are generally in-stock at 5.5%; and availability of this particular book at 5.2%.

WHY BOOK BUYERS MADE THEIR PURCHASE AT THAT STORE



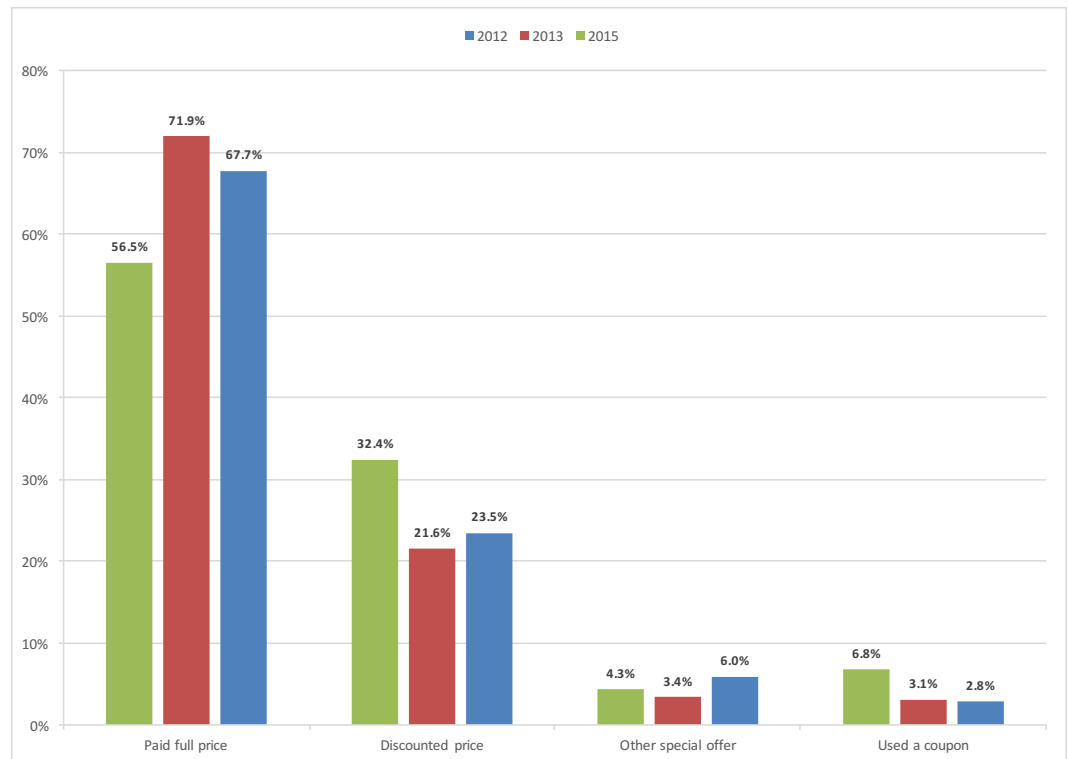
Why did you use this particular shop/website/organization to buy this book, rather than buying it somewhere else?
(N=6,367)



Did you buy the book at full price?
(N=1,880)

In 2015, people were less willing to pay full price for a book they wanted compared to 2012 and 2013, with the number of people who paid full price for their book dropping from 71.9% in 2013 to 56.5% in 2015. Sales or discount prices are becoming increasingly important to consumers—the number has jumped from 21.6% in 2013 to 32.4% in 2015, which surpasses the 2012 number as well.

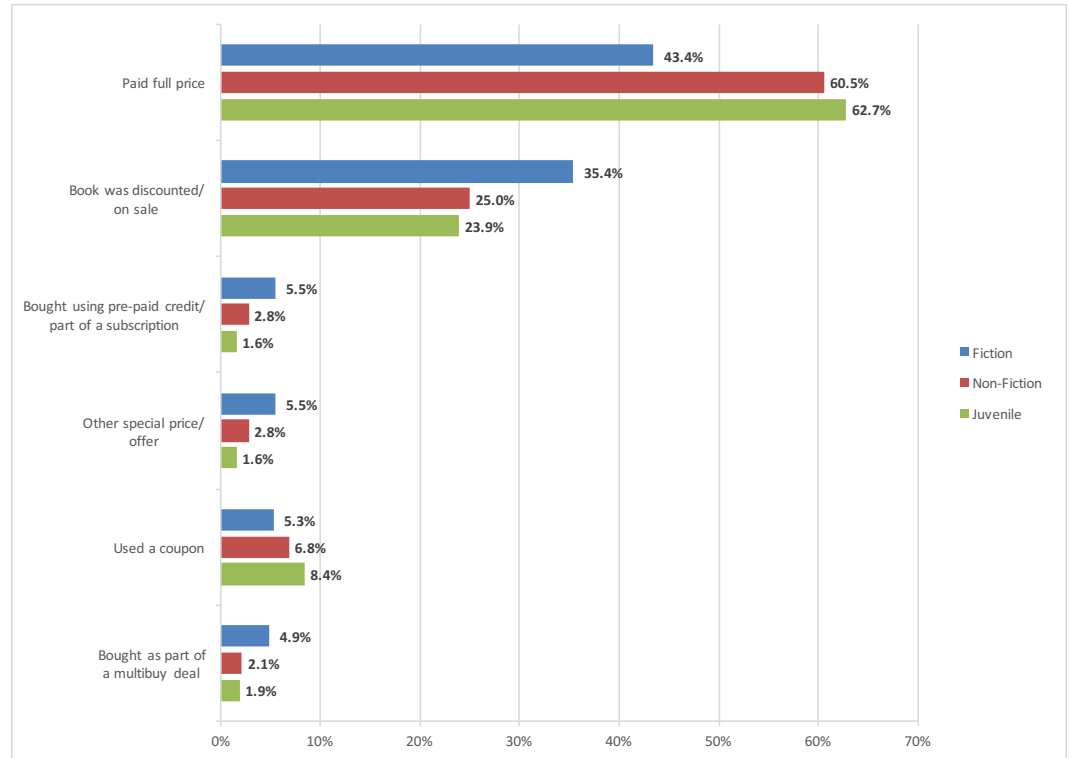
WHAT BUYERS PAID



Did you buy the book at full price or did you buy it at a special price or on offer?
(2015 N=2,221)

For fiction books, only 43.4% of purchases were full price while 35.4% were discounted or on sale. Non-fiction and juvenile purchases fared a bit better with a similar breakdown: approximately 60% full price and 23-25% discounted/on sale.

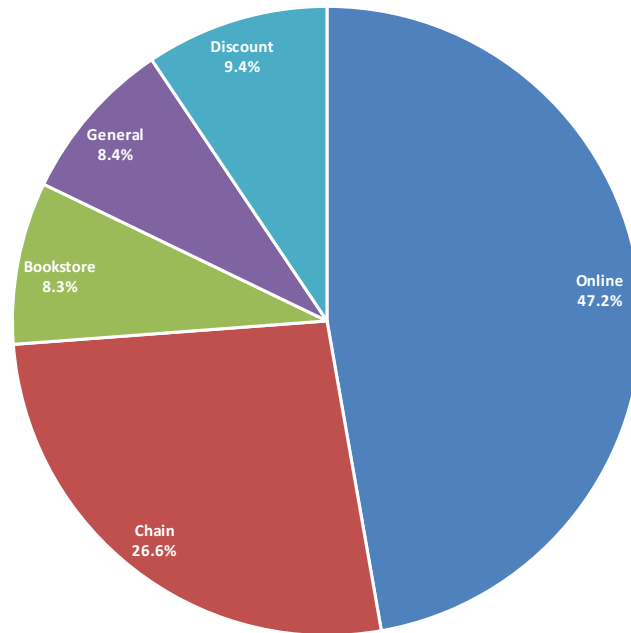
WHAT BUYERS PAID – BY SUBJECT



Did you buy the book at full price or did you buy it at a special price or on offer?
(2015 N=2,221)

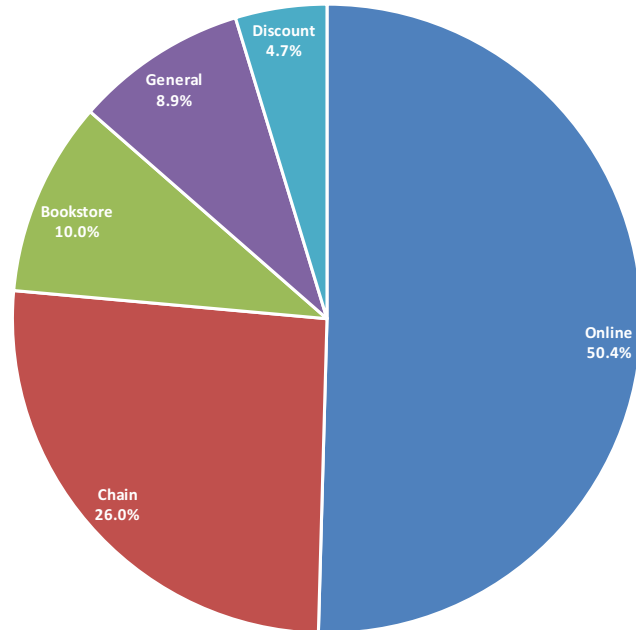
Appendix A: Channel Sales by Subject

CHANNEL SALES BY SUBJECT – FICTION



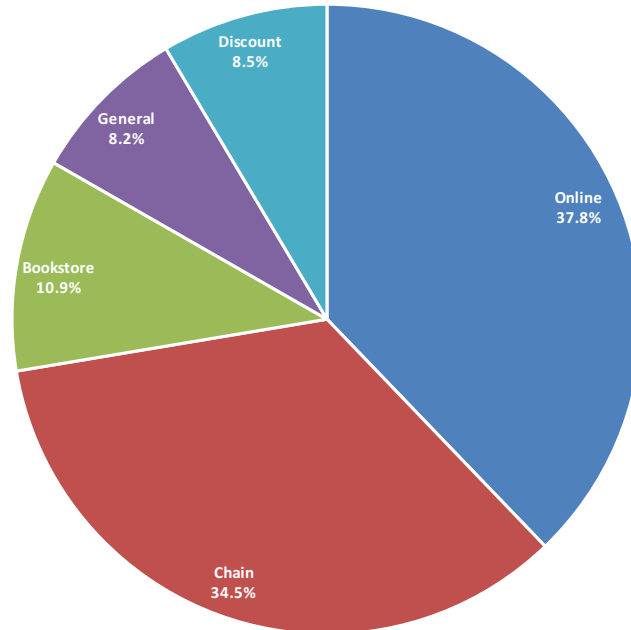
Question: Which one of the following categories best describes this book? Cross-tabbed with Where did you buy this book?
N=904

CHANNEL SALES BY SUBJECT – NON-FICTION



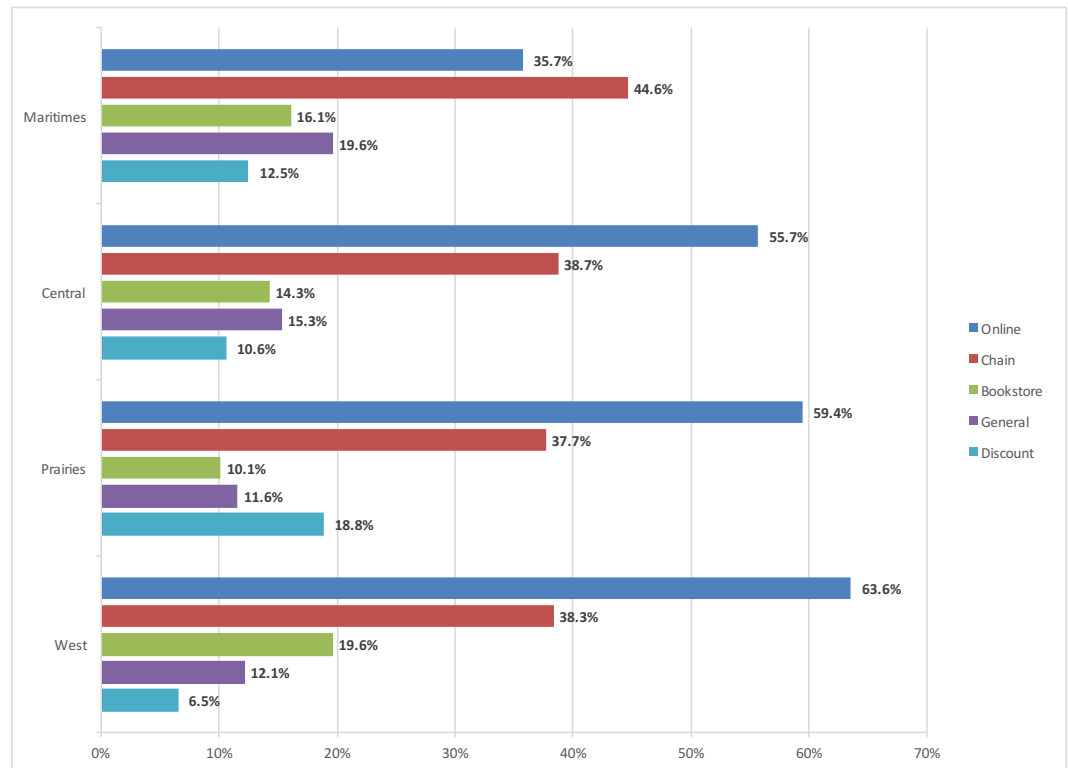
Question: Which one of the following categories best describes this book? Cross-tabbed with Where did you buy this book?
N=719

CHANNEL SALES BY SUBJECT – JUVENILE



Question: Which one of the following categories best describes this book? Cross-tabbed with Where did you buy this book?
N=281

Appendix B: Channel Sales by Region



Question: Where did you buy this book?

N=784

Acknowledgements

ABOUT BOOKNET CANADA

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market. BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print book sales through BNC SalesData.

Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as *The Globe and Mail* puts it, "the book industry's supply-chain nerve centre."

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BookNet Canada
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