Final Project: D.B. Shuster Social Media Marketing Campaign
Sins of a Spy Series
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DATA 765: Social Media Marketing
Prof. Weinberg ~ Spring 2022

Overview:
1. Goals
2. Rebranding Categories
3. Buyer Personas
4. Problems + Actions
5. Client vs. Competitors Analysis
6. Social Media Targeting
7. Strategy

Sections:
  1. **Goals**

     The overall goal of this campaign is simple: to increase traffic to the book series product pages on retail outlets (Amazon and Barnes & Noble) and to increase product sales. The D.B. Shuster brand was built as a spy thriller author that specializes in Russian mafia thrillers inspired by true crime and historical research. The first series "Kings of Brighton Beach" returned modest but positive ratings through the end of the series. This propelled into the next series, "Sins of a Spy", which has returned excellent review ratings but lagged in sales and therefore needs a rejuvenated marketing approach.

     This campaign will attempt to accomplish these goals by combining rebranding efforts underway (ie, name change) with targeted social media that is customized by existing consumers who have been attracted to the series. By reaching out to the untapped buyers market, we can drive sales and promote higher rankings on sites like Amazon, which have tricky algorithms for product ratings, also based on time on the shelf. As a rebranded series, time is of the essence!

  2. **Rebranding Categories**
     It is crucial to target the appropriate market categories since these help us channel advertising and social media to receptive audiences and reading communities. There are several possible book genres that relate to the Sins of a Spy series, such as:
     • Spy thriller
     • Historical fiction
   • Womens literature
     • Family saga

Historically, the D.B. Shuster brand has been marketed towards spy, mafia crime, and Russian/Jewish fiction audiences. While these audiences may have appreciated the previous series, the Sins of a Spy series has different themes (ie, mafia is not applicable here), and thus needs a category correction. In this campaign proposal, we will evaluate the spy, family saga, and historical fiction genres to study their demographics, analyze connections to book review data, and to produce a set of recommendations based on our analysis.

Possible Categories:
Spy thriller (also called "espionage" or "thriller") is defined as a genre of literature which focuses on various forms of espionage. It developed before the First World War (1914–18), when countries around the world began to form modern intelligence agencies (Goodreads.com). As a genre, spy fiction is thematically related to the adventure novel, the thriller and the politico–military thriller. It usually employs a serious tone. One of the most popular genres, it includes well-known top sellers such as *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* (Le Carré, 1963), *Casino Royale* (Fleming, 1953), and *The Bourne Identity* (Ludlum, 1980).

Spy thrillers were originally written by, for, and about men (while mysteries were dominated by women), however in 1978, women became lead characters, readers, and writers on a much more equal basis within the genre (Rodriguez, 2013). Ultimately, the shift towards women benefits the authors, since female readers have consumed mystery/thriller books at a much higher rate than male readers (57% compared to 39%), although the category remains the most popular genre for both genders (Marketingcharts.com, 2010).

D.B. Shuster's brand as a female writer is on track for the spy thriller market. Thrillers also target an older demographic, as evidenced by previous market research. According to historical sales, 28 percent of thriller readers are over 65 years of age, and 19 percent are aged 55-64 years (Statista, 2014). An older female reader would be an ideal consumer from the spy thriller genre for the Sins of the Spy series. According to Google Trends data (accessed 11 May 2022), searches for spy books over the 2019-present period have cyclically peaked in December of each year.
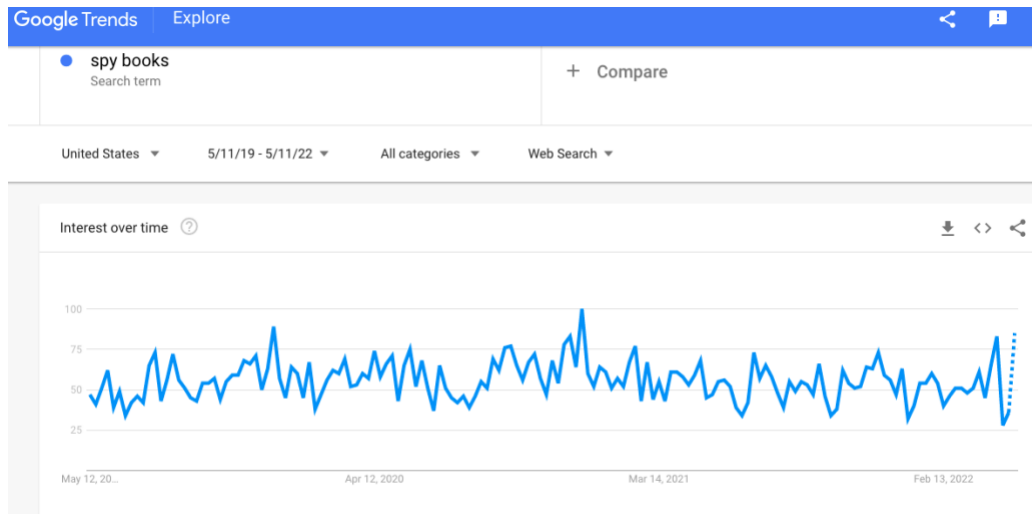
In terms of geography, spy books are searched for most frequently in Washington, DC metro area, along with several other midsize cities (Boston, Portland, and Denver). All of these Northern cities have defined winter seasons, so weather may play a role in preference for spy novels.
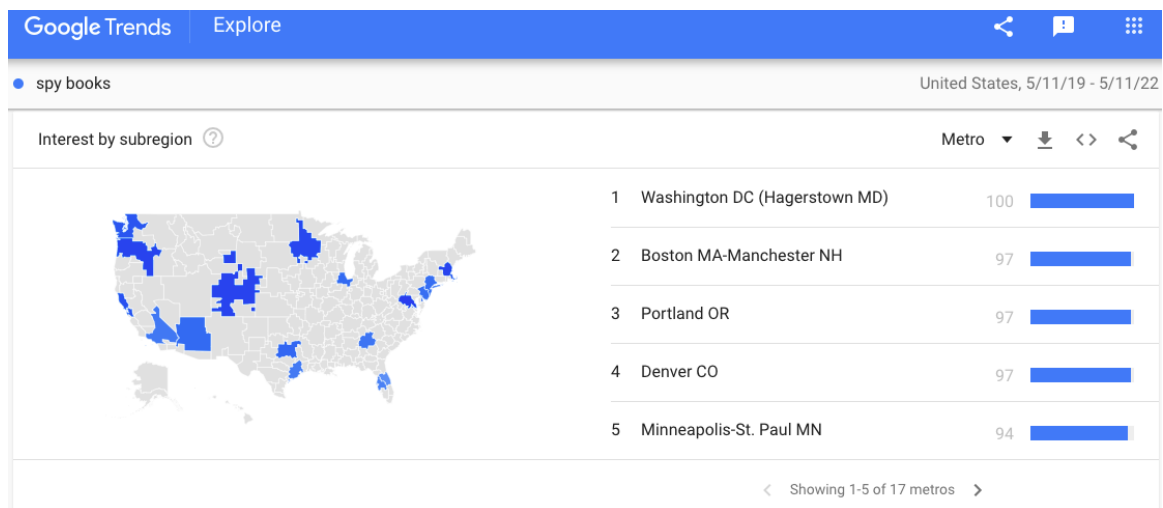

Family saga genre is defined as a genre of literature which "chronicles the lives and doings of a family or a number of related or interconnected families over a period of time. In novels (or sometimes sequences of novels) with a serious intent, this is often a thematic device used to portray particular historical events, changes of social circumstances, or the ebb and flow of fortunes from a multiple of perspectives." (Goodreads.com) The genre allows us to see how characters' most intimate ties change over time, often underlining the sentiment that life is a journey. A number of outstanding examples are also found in this genre, such as *The Thorn Birds* (McCullough, 1977), *Middlesex* (Eugenides, 2002), and *100 Years of Solitude* (García Márquez 1967). Kevin Mims argues the demise of the family saga genre to the breaking up of the

traditional nuclear family, however they have evolved in recent years to reflect the changing notions of family.

There is very limited information available on the family saga reading demographics. Family sagas are primarily targeted towards a female readership, which also aligns with the spy thriller demographic. According to Google Trends (accessed 11 May 2022), searches for "family saga" since May 2019 indicate relatively steady but cyclical interest, peaking in March and August of each year. This ties this genre heavily into holiday cycles.
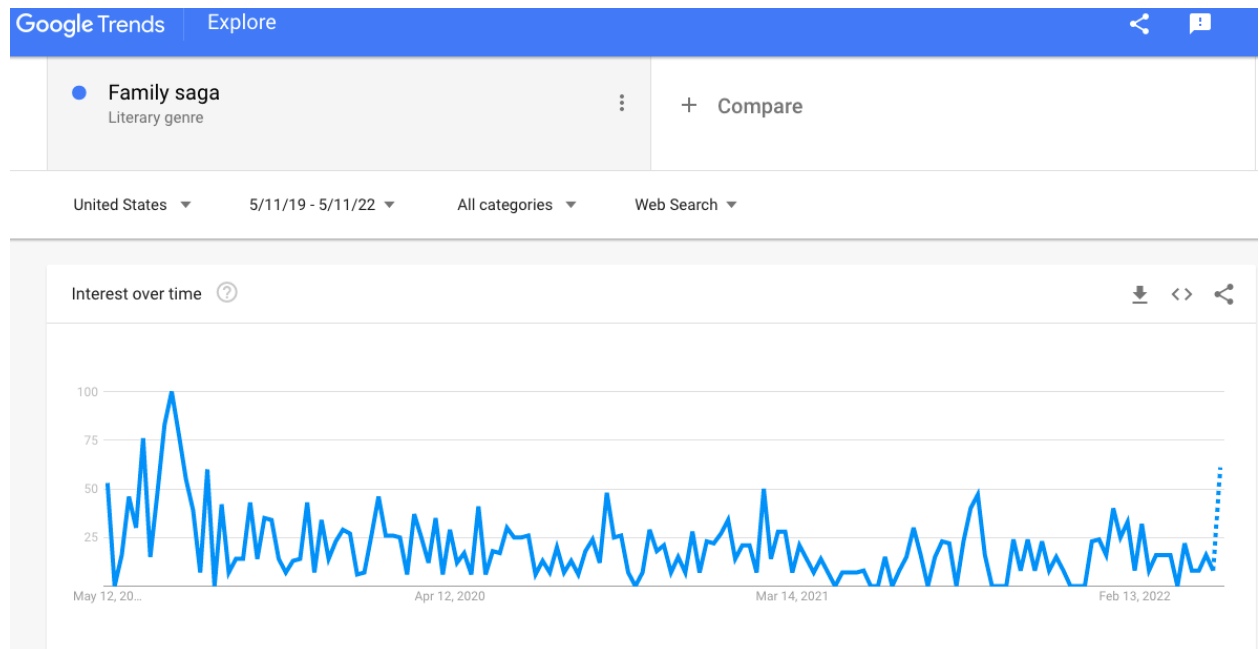

In terms of geographic interest within the same time period, Google Trends (accessed 11 May 2022) demonstrates a higher interest in the family saga genre among midsize American cities such as Sacramento, Washington DC, Atlanta and Chicago. While there is an overlap with the spy consumer, we can distinguish this grouping as more coastal.
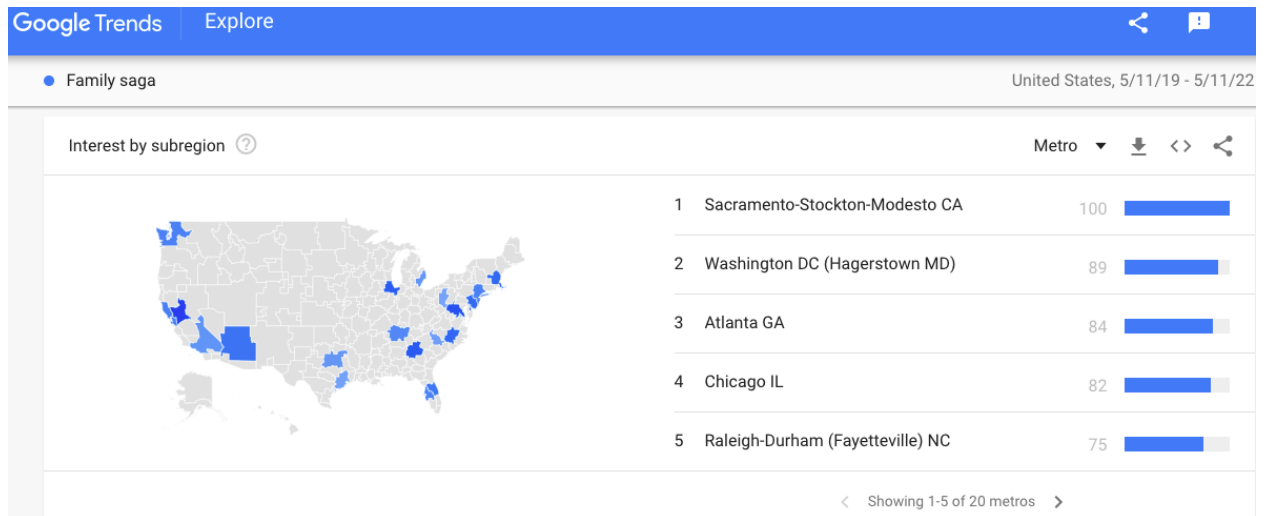
Historical fiction is a genre which sometimes overlaps with the above genres. It is defined as a story set in the past, frequently during a significant historical period. In historical fiction, "the time period is an important part of the setting and often of the story itself. Historical fiction may include fictional characters, well-known historical figures or a mixture of the two." (Goodreads.com) Popular examples of historical fiction include *The Warmth of Other Suns* (Wilkerson, 2011), *Pachinko* (Lee, 2017), and *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (Morris, 2018). Historical fiction fits as a genre for the Sins of a Spy series since it is set in the Communist-era Soviet Union and involves historical research.

According to an author survey (Tod, 2015), readers of historical fiction were primarily women and over 50 years of age. They also read voraciously (over 30 books per year) and used social media to find new books and read reviews. According to Tod's survey, they most appreciate the ability to immerse in a historical time, and seek realistic dialogue as well as interesting and complex writing. Readers are most attracted to the 13th-16th century (contemporary period is ranked 6th), however authors most prefer to write contemporary in this genre. According to Google Trends (accessed 11 May 2022) interest in historical fiction over the past three years peaked in September 2020, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic. This likely reflected a decline in reading activity among women during the pandemic. It has not had cyclical peaks that compare to the other two genres and in the past few months is on a slight decline (but not out of range of typical reader interest).
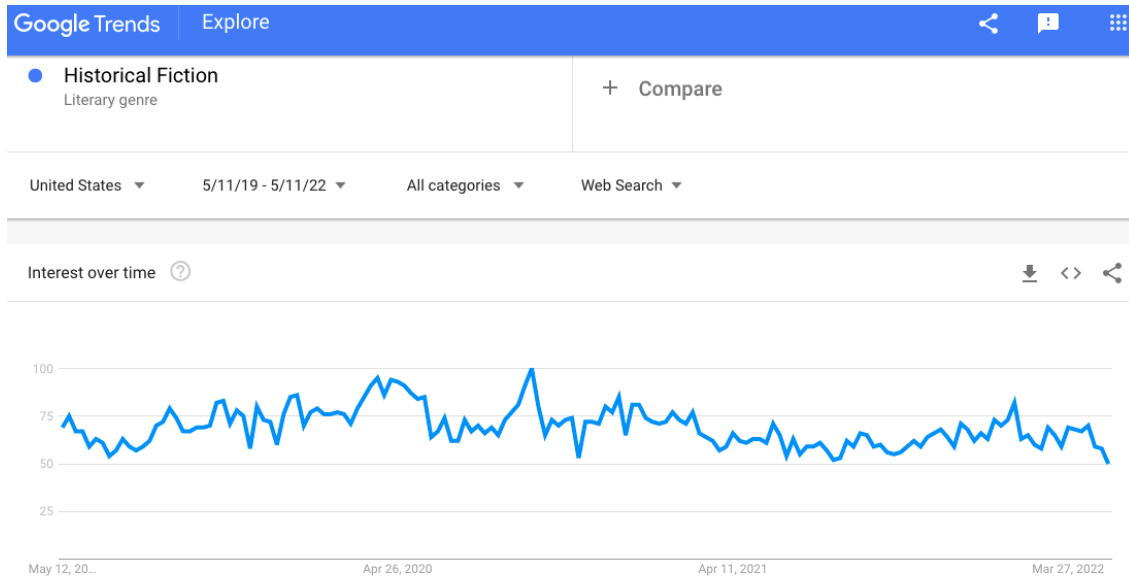
Historic fiction is consistently popular across all regions of the US, but more interest is found among readers in smaller cities like Portland, Maine, Burlington, Vermont, Charlottesville, Virginia and Salt Lake City, Utah. Readers in these cities are likely to have an interest in historical topics that connect them to local communities, and work fewer hours (with more time to read) than our family saga and spy readers.
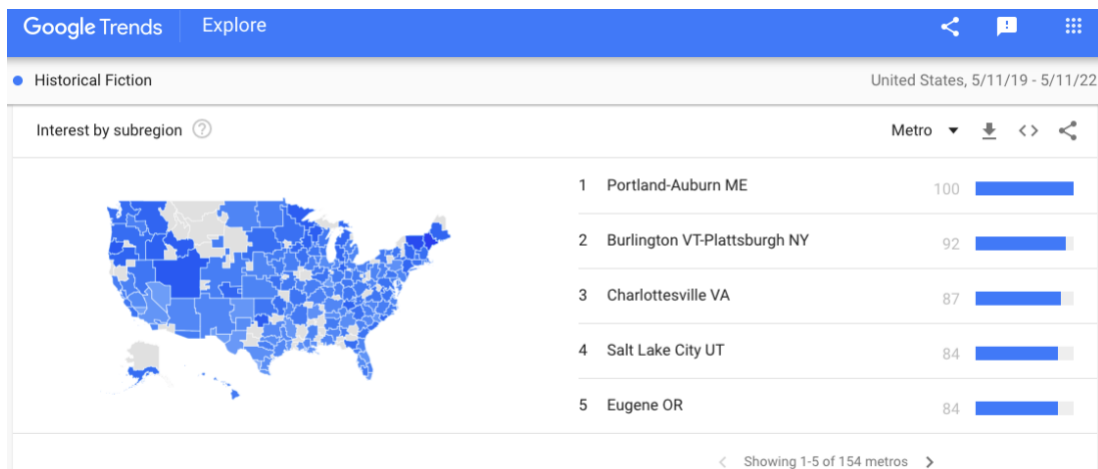
In comparing all three search terms in Google Trends, we see that historical fiction is undoubtedly more popular than either spy thrillers or family sagas. This may play into our decisions on final categories.
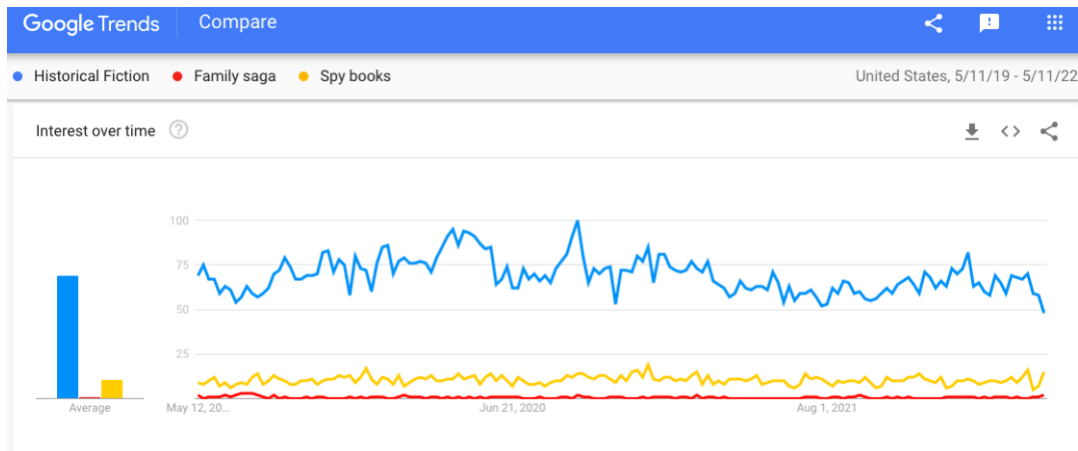
Geographical intersections between the family saga and spy thriller book genres on Google Trends (accessed 11 May 2022) place the DB Shuster brand as most likely selling in Atlanta, Orlando, and Chicago markets. The overlap between the two genre categories do not add up to the historical fiction geographic popularity, and they indicate that geographical microtargeting is less of an issue in historical fiction marketing.
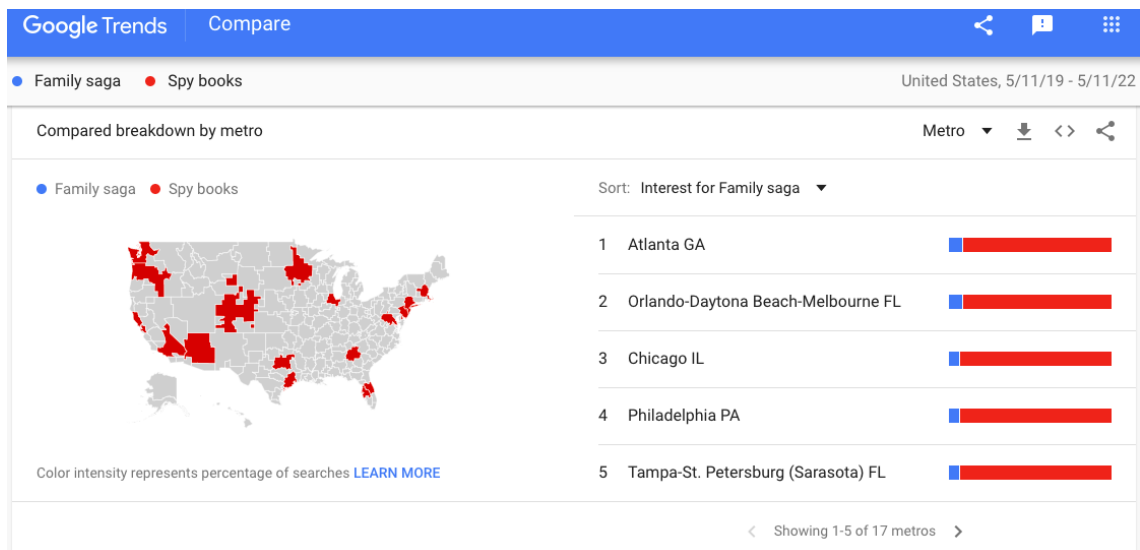
Ebooks and Market Trends

Ebooks are one of the most practical book formats especially for indie authors on Amazon. That said, ebook sales only account for approximately 21% of total book sales on Amazon, and they account for approximately 64% of all ebook sales globally (Thomas, 2022). Ebook sales over the past three years have fluctuated. While ebook sales increased at the beginning of the pandemic, they have started to lag as brick-and-mortar bookstores have reopened. Ebook sales were down 8% through June 2021 while print book sales were up (NPD.com, 2021). On a positive note, other predicted trends

could work in favor of ebooks: a struggling retail environment and limitations in the post-pandemic supply chain that could accelerate ebook sales (Milliot, 2020). Admittedly, publishing data is limited (released data lags behind by 12 months) so this is speculation based on the previous analysis.

Monthly E-book Sales, 2018-2021 YTD
Year-over-year e-book sales declined 8% through June 2021
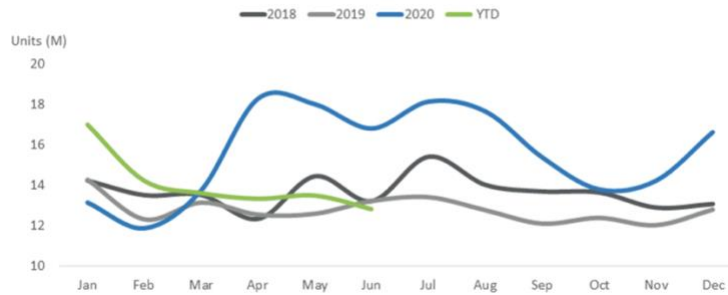
Source: The NPD Group/PubTrack Digital, 2018 through month ending June 2021, U.S. e-book sales only.
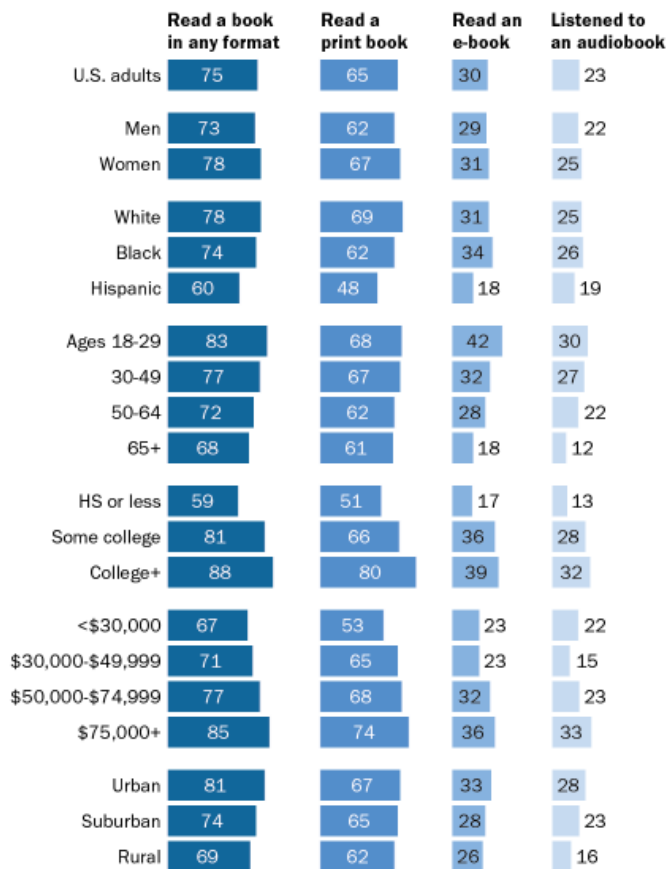
Other challenges in ebook sales come from the end of the pandemic. As the pandemic is expected to ease in 2023, analysts forecast two major trends in publishing: saturation and acceleration (Milliot, 2020). Publishers will release lots of content in the coming year that will make it difficult to gain attention for individual titles. This means that DB Shuster ebooks will have to compete more aggressively for a limited market.

Based on our research thus far, ebook demographics work well for the DB Shuster series. Among ebook consumers, there is a split between white and African American adult ebook readers, as well as by gender (although women have a narrow majority). We also see a split between age groups among readers under 30 yrs (42%), and over 50 yrs (46%) (Pew Research, 2022). The majority of ebook readers are college educated (39%), urban (33%) and make $75k+ per year (36%). Thankfully this is the target demographic for both spy thrillers and historical fiction. The following infographic from Pew Research Center (2022) reflects the narrow margins that ebook marketers must use to compete for their publishing space.

College graduates especially likely to say they read books in any format

% of U.S. adults who say they have _____ in the previous 12 months

	Read a book in any format	Read a print book	Read an e-book	Listened to an audiobook
U.S. adults	75	65	30	23
Men	73	62	29	22
Women	78	67	31	25
White	78	69	31	25
Black	74	62	34	26
Hispanic	60	48	18	19
Ages 18-29	83	68	42	30
30-49	77	67	32	27
50-64	72	62	28	22
65+	68	61	18	12
HS or less	59	51	17	13
Some college	81	66	36	28
College+	88	80	39	32
<$30,000	67	53	23	22
$30,000-$49,999	71	65	23	15
$50,000-$74,999	77	68	32	23
$75,000+	85	74	36	33
Urban	81	67	33	28
Suburban	74	65	28	23
Rural	69	62	26	16

Note: Those who gave other answers or no answer are not shown. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

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3. **Buyer Personas**

There is limited open demographic data on the family saga and historical fiction genres, however based on the available research I have identified the following three primary buyer personas:

Buyer Persona #1: Debra (spy thriller)

Debra is a white college educated female, over 50 years old. She is an avid ebooks reader, and likely Kindle user. Her social media of choice is Facebook, where she stays in touch with her book club, family and friends. She is also a mom, potentially with grandkids, possibly divorcee. Debra is middle class with a stable career (or potentially a

retiree). She resides in Washington, DC (or at least she did during her career). Her political leanings are feminist and conservative. In terms of socializing, Debra prefers in-person "adult socializing" (away from family…hence, the book club, the tennis club, the church/temple group). Drinks coffee, alcohol (aka "cocktail hour"). Her other consumer habits are sometimes inspired by the characters from her books (Jazz music, yoga, James Bond films, art galleries, the opera, etc.).

Buyer Persona #2: Samantha (family saga)
Samantha is a black college educated female, approx. 30-50 years old. She is an avid ebooks reader, but also likes books for the beach (to save the ereader). Her social media of choice is Instagram and Facebook, where she stays in touch with her family and friends. She is single with an intimate social circle and possibly a divorcee. Charlotte is middle class with a stable career, and some of her friends call her a "hipster". She resides in Sacramento, CA . Her political leanings are feminist and liberal. In terms of socializing, Charlotte prefers in-person "adult socializing" with her girlfriends in settings like the wine bar, the beach, or yoga class. She avidly drinks coffee and loves wine (as every good Californian does). She loves to read family sagas because they are long and allow her to spend hours fantasize about marrying into a large family. She also appreciates family saga formats on streaming video in series like "Bridgerton", "The Underground Railroad", and "First Wives Club".

Buyer Persona #3: Miriam (historical fiction)
Miriam is a married Jewish professor at Bowdoin College where she teaches philosophy. She lives in Portland, Maine with her husband (with two children who just graduated college). She is 55 years old, middle class, a homeowner, and has a casual circle of friends she meets at the cafe on occasion, or at book club. She is likely a conservative. Miriam loves to read historical fiction that has an edge to it, and she does it to pass time while her husband is out of the house, or to mentally escape the stresses of students and family. She tries to feel connected to her roots by reading Jewish authors on occasion, but she's more enticed by historical time periods and places. More than likely, she also reads spy thrillers written by women. Miriam is a voracious reader and writes reviews in her spare time on Goodreads and a blog, but she keeps up with her kids, friends and family on Facebook. She loves to patronize Portland's bookshops, but mostly purchases her ebooks on Amazon since she considers them to be a better value. Her clothing is mostly from Talbots and L.L. Bean. She plans to travel to Europe and Israel when she retires, and looks forward to having more time for her books (maybe even writing one of her own).

4. **Problems + Actions**
   Buyers like the three personas above are motivated by the following goals already accomplished by DB Shuster books:
   - **Escapism**—the author gives the buyers an ability to fantasize about living dangerously, outside the everyday life, or diving into family or history outside of the headaches of life

- **Character development**—a buyer like Samantha (based on her demographic) could be dealing with feelings of middle age family dissatisfaction, and seek Shuster novels to help her work through favorite character outcomes in a large family saga across a series
- **Authentic history**—a buyer like Miriam is motivated by the historical authenticity that helps to bring the plots alive. She wants to be educated by her fiction, and she appreciates small attentions to character plots and realistic dialogue that can engross a reader into the series.

These buyers sometimes have problems finding new books that interest them. A common complaint found in reviews and on blogs is they have a hard time finding the next great series and that the authors aren't producing more books in the series at their reading pace. These readers seek the D.B. Shuster brand to satisfy these needs.

Ultimately, the actions we wish our buyers to take are simple:
1. To buy into the series and stay engaged
2. To share positive reviews of the brand with family, friends, and a bookseller
3. To share experiences and become active "brand ambassadors" to the brand's community on social media

5. **Client vs. Competitors Analysis**
Historically, the DB Shuster brand has relatively positive ratings—for example, To Catch a Traitor (Sins of a Spy) has 4.7 out of 5 stars from 10 reviewers on Amazon (to date). Out of the top four reviewers, all have given five star ratings. These are excellent reviews, with headlines like
- "A gripping tale of fear and betrayal" ~ Becky (9 Sept 2018)
- "All at once tense, exciting, enlightening and nerve-wracking" ~ Dee (27 Aug 2018)
- "Thank goodness there will be a sequel-I want more" ~ JN Reviews (18 Sept 2018)
- "Excellent" ~ Dr. Patricia Eroh (26 Mar 2020)

Despite these stellar ratings, **To Catch a Traitor** was ranked as #24,074 in Espionage Thrillers. Since the reviews don't match the ranking, it is necessary to perform an evaluation of the series reviews to see if we can identify a better target genre (or two).

Data Collection:
In order to perform an analysis, I collected all searchable reviews of DB Shuster (92 total) as well as a sample of the most recent 100 Amazon reviews from five competitors. On Amazon, I decided to start with the ranking page for the current brand category of Espionage Thrillers. On this page, I looked for comps that would have similar background/themes, but also authors from a variety of experiences.

- **Williams, Beatriz. Our Woman in Moscow: A Novel.** 2021. William Morrow Publisher.

From the Espionage Thrillers chart on Amazon, this title was ranked at #5. It is a spy story told from the perspective of the women, which is a similar angle, and is also set in Russia. When I went to this book page, it is listed as #1 in Espionage Thrillers, so it had some previous success. It has 2,195 ratings.

- **Quinn, Kate. The Rose Code.** 2021. William Morrow Publisher.

In the Espionage Thriller chart, this novel was ranked at #13. It is a book based on a true story about three codebreaker women in England's Bletchley Park during WWII whose work influenced the outcome of the Nazis. I chose this novel because it was another from a female author that centered around female characters in the category. From the page description, it sounds a bit like Hidden Figures meets WWII spy story. The female characters are also the center of the story here and connections to a real story make it intriguing. It has 21, 588 ratings.

- **Patterson, R. J. Behind Enemy Lines (Titus Black Thriller Series).** Independently published, 2020.

Next, I selected a title that was listed in the "Similar books based on genre" promotions from the To Catch a Traitor page on Amazon. It was ranked at #5,546 in Espionage thrillers, and #2,449 in Political Fiction, and #2,737 in Men's Adventure Fiction. The cross-listings of this book was interesting, as well as the success for an independently published author. The book is about a CIA operative who must smuggle himself into a Russian prison to recover a downed air force pilot. It has 915 ratings.

- **Craig, Charmaine. Miss Burma: A Novel.** Grove Press, 2017.

Miss Burma was a "New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice" and "Amazon Best Book of the Month (Literature & Fiction)" among other accolades. It is "a multigenerational saga [which] portrays the emergence of modern Burma—through British colonialism, wartime occupation by the Japanese, and the independence era" (New Yorker). Charmaine Craig is a creative writing professor at UC Riverside. The book was only rated 4.2 out of 5 stars with 253 ratings.

- **Adams, Alina. The Nesting Dolls.** Harper, 2020

This book had some similarity with Sins of a Spy in both theme and cross-genre categorization (in historical fiction that is both Russian and Jewish). Editorial reviews in the book description say it "takes us on the complicated path through the fascinating history of Communist Russia and Russian immigration to the United States in that rarest of literary treats: a multi-generational saga". This author writes for TV soaps, as well as romance novels. The book is ranked #96 on Amazon's historical Russian fiction category, and rated 4 out of 5 stars with 328 ratings.

N-Gram Keyword Analysis:

In order to analyze the reviews, I first created a bigram analysis of two-word keyword combinations from the reviews data of both DB Shuster and the competitors. The bigram counts of Sins of a Spy reviews reveal there is an interest in the fast pace, historical themes, gripping tension, and kgb agent aspects to the series.

Bigrams Frequency of
Sins of a Spy:

bigram <chr>	n <int>
fast paced	7
love historical	6
gripping tale	5
kgb agent	5
voluntarily leaving	5
acclaimed titles	4
eagerly awaits	4
emotionally rewarding	4
exceptional purposely	4
love prevails	4
nationally acclaimed	4
ny bestsellers	4
russian mafia	4
sheer chaos	4
wise choice	4
added depth	3
compelling historical	3
fear bravery	3
gripping glimpse	3
hope displayed	3
intricate weaving	3
jews removed	3
mob crimes	3
multiple viewpoint	3

Comps:

bigram <chr>	n <int>
cold war	31
world war	22
bletchley park	20
soviet union	18
spy ring	17
titus black	16
nesting dolls	15
sasha digby	13
sumner fox	13
character development	12
twin sisters	12
cambridge spy	9
family drama	7
real life	7
russian jewish	7
spy thriller	7
twin sister	7
war era	7
american diplomat	6
diplomat husband	6
guy burgess	6
husband sasha	6
iris digby	6
sister iris	6

I then applied the same process to produce bigram counts for the competitor reviews. The top comps bigram keywords are more history-focused: cold war, world war, bletchley park, Soviet Union, and spy ring returns in the fifth place rank. Characters are also mentioned more frequently here than in the Shuster bigrams. This could indicate the Shuster readers finding difficulty identifying with characters and more interested in the plot mechanics.

To analyze these relationships further, I conducted a network analysis of bigram keywords using the igraph package. The first plot depicted Shuster's Sins of a Spy reviews in bigram frequency with a minimum frequency of two occurrences, along with the directional strength of keywords.
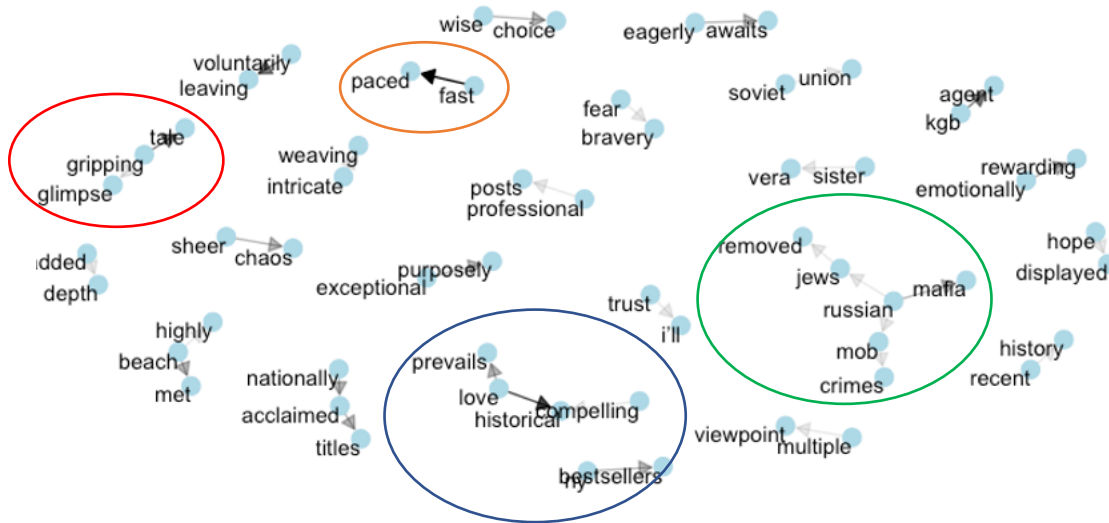
The data shows two larger connections between words outside of the bigrams: the connections between "mafia", "russian", "jews" and the "historical", "compelling", "love" keyword cluster. The strongest directional association occurred in the "historical", "fast", and "gripping" clusters. The "Russian" and "jews" cluster is the largest networked cluster, but without direction. According to the network layout, the more complex connections appear on the periphery. Now we will compare the networked relationships with those of the competitors:
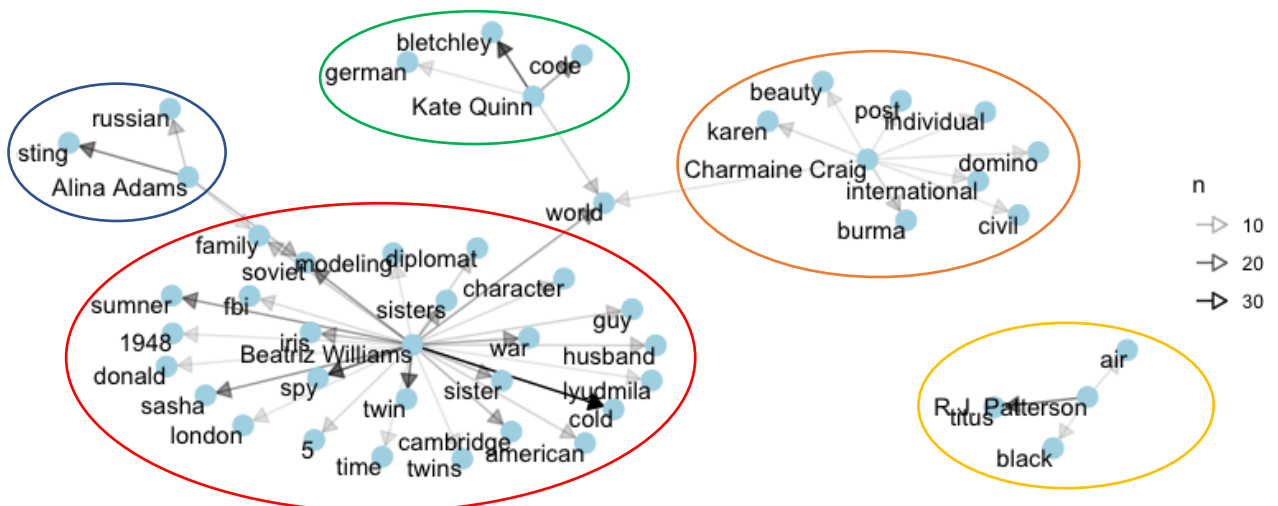

Here, we see that Beatriz Williams produces the most networked connections, with the strongest directional relationship towards "cold" and "spy" keywords. Others produce directional connections to their plot themes, with Alina Adams strongly connected to Russian, R.J. Patterson connected to the character Titus, and Kate Quinn connected to locale (Bletchely Park). While Charmaine Craig was second most frequent in number of keyword occurrences, she did not have any directionality in her networked keywords. Her most central theme was "international."

In the comparison of D.B. Shuster's networked keywords and those of the comps, it appears that Shuster's reviewers are responsive to plot traits such as "gripping", "fast pace", and "compelling love", while her competitors' reviewers are more responsive to specific characters, places and identifying the genre. Sins of a Spy series is more closely comparable to Beatriz Williams in the combination of spy and historical fiction genres. Both authors produce similar responses from readers who strongly identify with the genre, and also have interest in the plot development.

Statistical Correlation:
In order to confirm the visualized relationships, I next compared the statistical correlations between review keywords, examining co-occurrence within each review to generate the strength of their association. The first result produced a correlation of all keywords for Shuster's Sins of a Spy series as they aligned to the three identified genre keywords ("spy", "family", "historical").
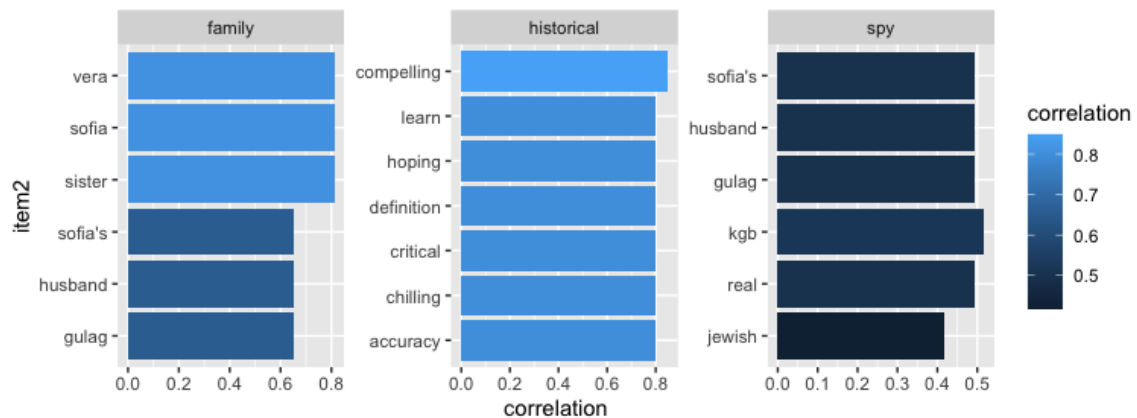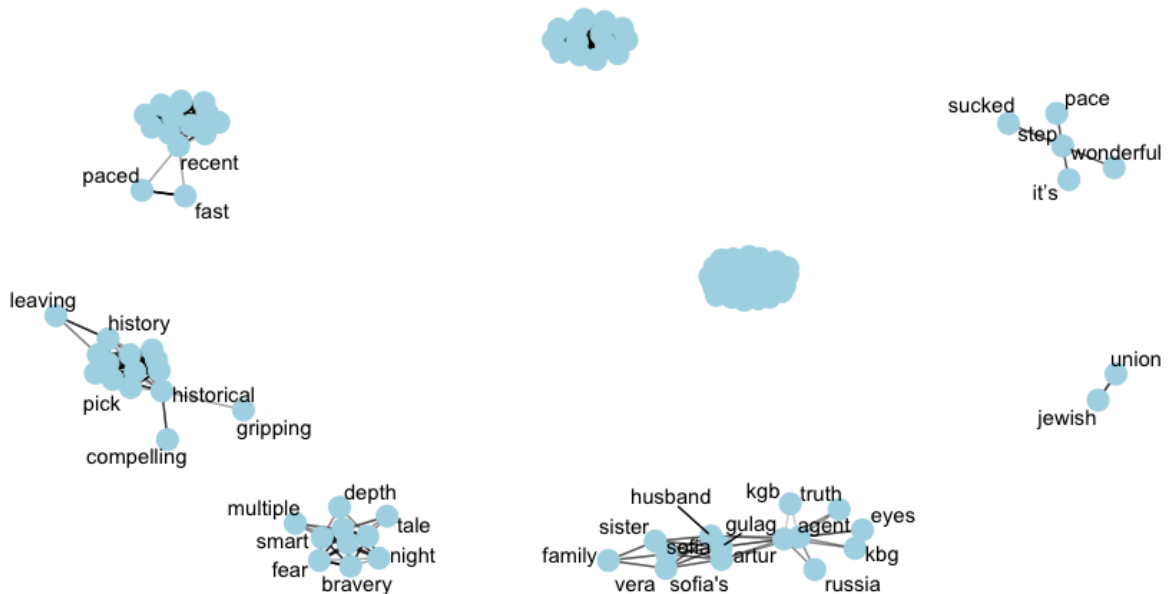

The resulting analysis demonstrates that the family saga genre more frequently produces responses to individual characters, the historical genre mostly correlates to descriptives of plot characteristics, and the spy genre produces a connection to both characters and theme. The strongest correlation is within historical fiction and the weakest with the spy thriller. This confirms our theory that the spy thriller genre is not an effective marketing category.

The second keyword correlation analysis produced an analysis of the comps keywords and their relationship to the same genre categories.
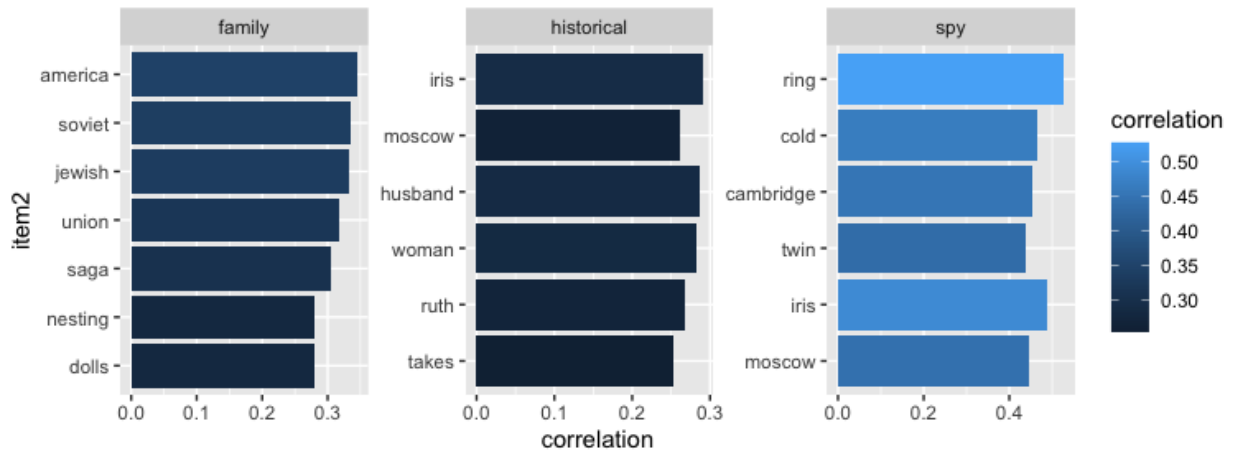
In the case of the comps, the spy genre produced the highest keyword correlation for these authors, even though two of the authors (Charmaine Craig and Alina Adams) are marketed as historical fiction. There may be some miscategorization amongst their novels as well.

A final network plot of Shuster's correlated keywords was produced filtering for a correlation coefficient above 0.7 (at least moderate positive strength). This plot demonstrates the relative distance between the significant keyword clusters.

This networked analysis demonstrates that the relative proximity between the historical fiction and family saga keyword correlations is close in comparison to other keyword themes in the review data. This means that the distance between these two types of buyers is relatively narrow, and we can assume that a marketing strategy for one audience will likely also be effective with the other genre audience.

Based on this analysis, I believe it would be best to first optimize marketing efforts based on values of historical fiction readers: compelling plot, learning without nonfiction, and historical accuracy (as well as targeted demographics). Secondly, I would recommend adding in content that addresses valued keywords for family saga readers: fans' attachment to characters Sofia, Vera, her husband, and fear of the gulag (Soviet forced labor camps). The networked correlations confirm a shift away from the spy genre and towards the historical fiction and family saga categories is an appropriate move.

6. **Social Media Targeting**

   Recommendations are to target buyers that correspond to the demographic segmentation of historical fiction and family saga genres. As outlined at the beginning of this report, these are primarily women over 50 yrs old, middle class, who use social media to conduct book searches, and read a lot of books per year. They must also be ebook readers, although family saga readers do also enjoy paperbacks for holiday vacations. According to Pew Research Center data (2021), 70% of adults over 50 use Facebook, Youtube (83%), Pinterest (38%), and to a lesser extent Twitter (18%). Based on my research on fiction buyer demographics, they are likely to be found on Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and Youtube. Developing social media content in these formats is recommended.

   Some other planning recommendations include:
   - Create a visible hierarchy in SM that drives readers into the Facebook page as a central community point
   - Add links to all other SM, Amazon pages on Facebook
   - Create a blog to improve SEO
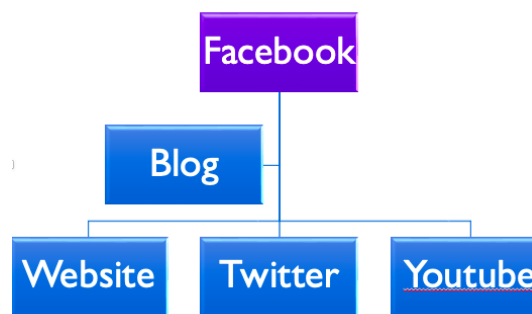
7. **Strategy**

   The following steps are recommended to implement targeting towards historical fiction and family saga consumers:
   - Rebranding is key
   - Focus on Facebook community development--

⇒ Plan monthly or bi-weekly FB posts that capitalize on related history trivia, emotional appeals of spending time with family, seasonal beach reading (use Hootsuite to develop content and a posting schedule, so you can plan out a month in advance)

⇒ Remind audience about the values of remembering history and family connections

⇒ Send out fan surveys to ask for their interest in characters, Russian history trivia games, etc.

- Develop a blog that is aimed towards historical and family saga readers (maybe Russian Jewish history, Russian intelligence, Russian mafia trivia, Family/Character trivia/bio pages, etc.)

  ⇒ Write reviews of other books that could be background reading for fans (ie, historical nonfiction)

  ⇒ Advertise book clubs that have read the series, related book events

- Rework the website to match the rebrand. Add new book covers and blog

- Later step—develop a Youtube channel for DB Gables. This can include existing video content from past book club talks, presentations on Russian intelligence, podcast interviews, and playlists of favorite Russian history and Jewish documentary content already available on Youtube (ie, nothing new)

These recommended steps are easily achievable and will help to both pivot towards the ideal audiences as well as boost SEO *without paying for additional advertising*. Finally, it is recommended to generate new books in the series as quickly as possible, since both family saga and historical fiction readers consume a lot of books per year, and many of the reviewers demanded the next books in the series.

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