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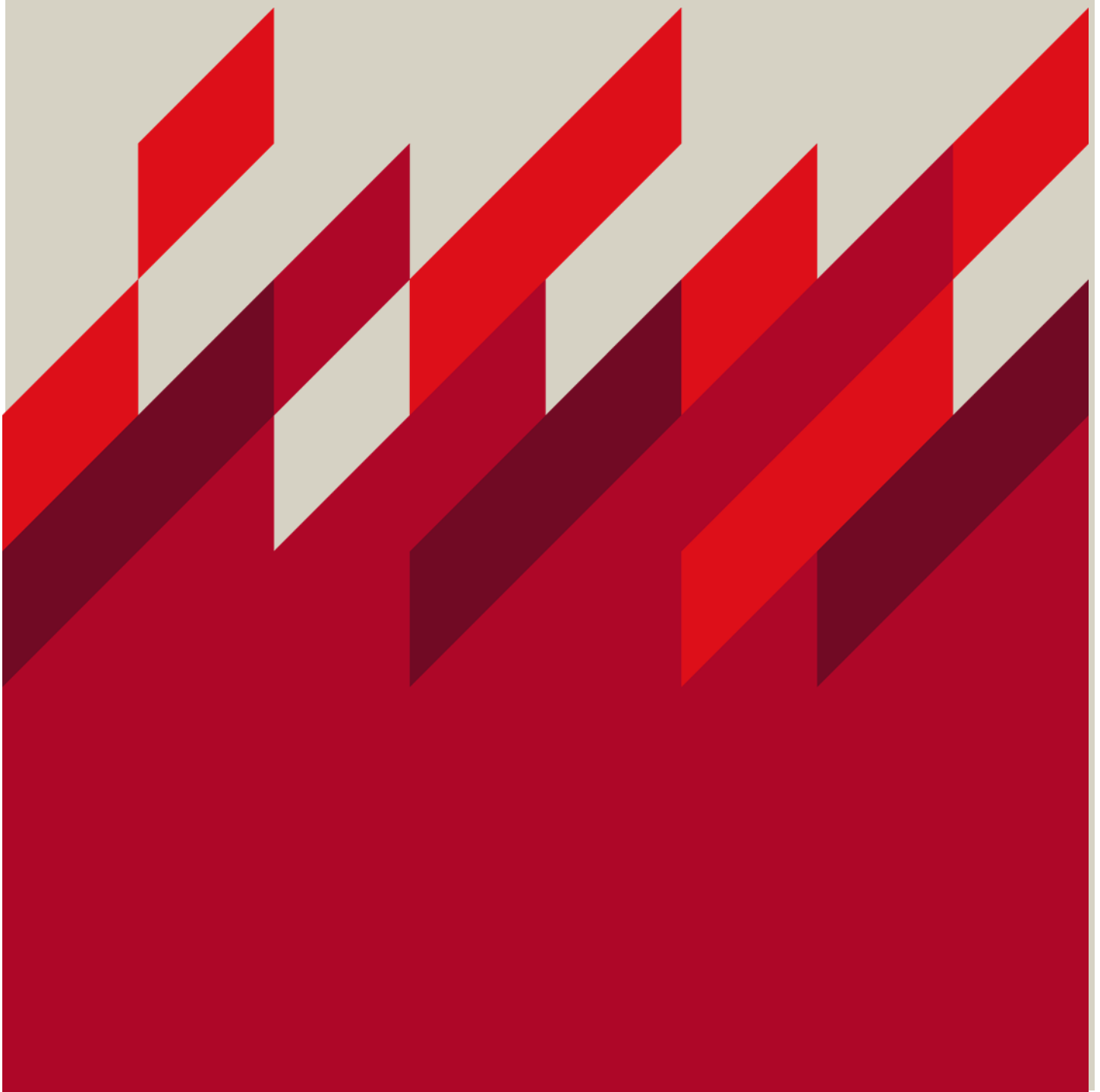


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## **Macquarie Economics Research Papers**

# **Australian Book Readers: Survey Method and Results**

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Australian book readers: Survey method and results

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# Australian Book Readers: Survey Method and Results

## PART I: Background and method

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years the Australian book industry has undergone radical change as a result of developments in information and communications technologies, particularly the growth of the internet and the advent of ebooks. These changes have had a profound impact on all sections of the industry, not least on the ultimate consumer, the book reader. This Report presents the principal results of a major survey of readers undertaken in 2016. The survey forms the third and final stage of a major study of Australia's changing book industry funded by the Australian Research Council (DP140101479) and Macquarie University. The first stage of the research examined the experiences of Australian book authors, culminating in a national survey of over 1,000 authors (Throsby, Zwar and Longden 2015). The second stage of the project, which focused on publishers, comprised 25 case studies of innovative Australian trade and education book publishers (Zwar 2016), and a survey of Australian publishers (Throsby, Zwar and Morgan 2016). This third stage of the study examines changing book readerships. In this stage of the project Macquarie University partnered with the Australia Council for the Arts. The additional funding and the research collaboration enabled by the Council's involvement made possible a more fine-grained investigation of readers' preferences, behaviour and attitudes and an increase in the sample size.

Just as earlier stages of this research examined the ways in which authors and publishers are innovating and responding to global change, this stage also investigates how book readers are adopting new technologies and changing their reading habits in response. In exploring the preferences, behaviour and attitudes of Australians towards books and reading, the survey set out in particular to find out how the advent of ebooks, the growth of online book retailing, and the role of social media – including developments driven by readers themselves – affect the ways in which Australians interact with books. The survey covered a broad range of reading pleasures and engagement to be derived from book reading, whatever the format.

This Report is divided into three parts. Following the above introduction, the remainder of Part I deals with the background to the survey and outlines the methodology used. Part II presents and discusses the principal results of the project. In Part III, we draw some conclusions.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

This project was developed in consultation with a wide range of participants in the industry, including authors, publishers, booksellers, librarians and educators. The research approach involved a series of stages: organisation of focus groups to assist in formulating the issues of concern to readers of different ages; design of the survey questionnaire; choice of survey method; and implementation of the survey. These stages are outlined in more detail below.

## **2.1 FOCUS GROUPS**

Four age groups of readers were targeted during the focus group process:

- Teenagers
- Young adults aged in their early 20s
- Adults aged 25-40
- Older adults including retirees

Three groups were conducted at Ryde Secondary College (Sydney) with Year 8 students. One group comprised female students (six participants), one group comprised male student (six participants) and one group was a mix of male and female students (seven participants). The groups contained students who read books for leisure and some who don't.

Five groups were conducted at Parramatta Library in Sydney. Three of these were conducted with book clubs which meet on the premises and two were open to the general public. The focus groups were comprised mostly of women, with only two males out of 15 participants in total. Participants from the library book club were skewed towards an older demographic with the majority being older adults (aged 50+) and retirees, although some younger working adults were also represented. All book club members were female and keen readers of a variety of genres.

The general public focus groups were recruited through advertising in the Parramatta Library Newsletter and digital posters at the main library desk. These groups consisted of working adults aged 25+ and were a mix of those who read regularly for pleasure and those who mainly read for work or study.

Young adults were targeted via a seminar about changes in the book industry with Masters students at Macquarie University (all students aged in their early 20s).

## **2.2 QUESTIONNAIRE**

Design of the questionnaire drew inspiration from several sources: a review of relevant literature about readers and reading; researchers' understanding of the book industry derived particularly from earlier stages in the larger project; and insights gained from the focus groups. The questionnaire was planned to cover the following topics:

- the role of book reading as part of the array of respondents' leisure activities;
- book reading habits and frequencies;
- preferences for different genres and formats;
- book buying and borrowing behaviour;
- factors influencing choice and sources of information;
- role of social media;
- children's books;
- attitudes to Australian books and the Australian book industry;
- recognition of the cultural value of books; and
- attitudes specifically to literary fiction.

In regard to children's books, it should be noted that respondents were to be aged 14 and older. The research was designed to include responses among the young-adult cohort of readers, and age 14 was deemed to be an appropriate lower cut-off point for capturing this

information. Since no younger children would be included in the survey, the section of the questionnaire relating to children's books was designed to investigate adults' buying of children's books and their reading of books to children.

The survey questionnaire was developed through multiple drafts, with feedback invited from major industry organisations, including

- Australian Booksellers Association
- Australian Poetry
- Australian Publishers Association
- Australian Society of Authors
- Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators
- Small Press Network
- Romance Writers of Australia

In addition a number of consultations were held with librarians, academics and others – details are given in the Acknowledgements.

### **2.3 SURVEY METHOD**

A survey such as this can be implemented in several different ways, including by personal face-to-face interview (the most expensive, but potentially yielding the most accurate data), by telephone (less expensive, but with some loss of precision), or over the Internet. In the first of these approaches, sampling would normally be carried out on a locational basis using a complete listing of the targeted population. In the case of telephone surveys, random dialling and CATI methods (computer-aided telephone interviewing) can be used. Use of the Internet either involves in-house development and administration of an online survey with direct recruitment of survey participants, or access to an online panel recruited by a market research company.

For the present survey we chose the last-mentioned approach, i.e. carrying out the survey via the Internet using an online panel recruited by a market research company. This decision was made for the following reasons:

- *Lower cost:* As there is no need for manual data entry, costs are lower for an online survey compared to a face-to-face or phone survey; however, an online survey creates other costs, namely costs of programming the survey.
- *Increased speed:* An online survey allows a great number of respondents to fill out the questionnaire at the same time, and not consecutively as is the case when interviewers are used. Further, the answers of respondents are automatically entered into a data sheet and therefore immediately accessible and free of mistakes possibly made during a third-party data entry process.
- *More flexibility:* Online surveys are clear and user-friendly in regard to questionnaire design, in that they only show questions a respondent is asked to answer. Questions that are not relevant to a particular respondent are skipped and do not appear on the respondent's screen while navigating through the survey.
- *Respondent convenience:* Respondents can complete the questionnaire when and where it suits them and there is no threat of interviewer influence.

After a tendering process, a contract for administration of the survey was awarded to Roy Morgan Research, a market research company with an extensive nation-wide panel of potential respondents.

The implementation of the survey is described in Section 4 below.

### **3. POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The total population of Australia is estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to be approximately 24.3 million (June 2016). The target population for this survey is all Australians aged 14 years and above. The required sample size was set at 3,000 respondents, and standard national quotas were determined for the following categories:

- Gender
  - Males
  - Females
- Age
  - 14-17
  - 18-34
  - 35-64
  - 64+
- Location
  - Total NSW/ACT
  - Total VIC
  - Total QLD
  - Total SA/NT
  - Total WA
  - Total TAS

In the survey, potential respondents were eligible to proceed unless one of the categories into which they fell was already full.

### **4. SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION**

A pilot of the survey was run on 6 October 2016 using the Autopilot procedure whereby a computerised process auto-fills the survey and then the resulting data are checked to ensure that all logics, filtering and routing is functioning correctly. A soft launch followed on 7 October, with the survey attracting 234 respondents. As no major issues were revealed, the survey company proceeded to a full-launch on 10 October 2016. The survey achieved 2,678 completes over the first three days, after which a drop in completion rates occurred. Such a drop is common in online surveys, as potential respondents typically respond quickly to invitations or not at all. Reminder emails were sent out and the survey achieved the targeted number of valid completes (3,000) on 18 October 2016.

The questionnaire and survey procedure were approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Committee and the survey was run in strict compliance with the Committee's requirements. In addition, the introduction to the survey questionnaire contained the following information:

*Roy Morgan Research acts in compliance with the National Privacy Principles. All information provided to us is treated with the strictest confidence and will be used for research purposes only. We will never pass on your personal information without your express permission. No individual's information is published or distributed.*

A hyperlink to the Roy Morgan Research Privacy Policy was also provided.

The survey responses were de-identified and aggregated before provision of the data to the research team.

It is usual in panel surveys such as this one to provide some incentive to respondents to encourage their participation. In the present case respondents received redeemable points under the remuneration arrangements applying to Roy Morgan Research Panel members. In addition, in order to maximise respondent engagement and to encourage response, RMR offered all respondents who completed the survey the opportunity to enter a draw for one of four gift vouchers to the value of \$250.

A key requirement of the project is that the sample is nationally representative in terms of age, gender, income, geographic location and ethnicity. The screening quotas ensured that the sample generally satisfied this requirement, although some post-weighting was necessary. This weighting is based on an interlocking age, gender and location matrix using the survey company's latest (August 2016) population figures. In addition, two overlaying weights, consisting of income and ethnicity, were applied. All post-weighting was handled by the survey company and supplied to the research team in the form of a "weight" variable, which was used for the entire analysis. Thus all the results reported in the following sections of this report have been weighted, enabling their extrapolation subject to standard confidence intervals to the Australian adult (>14 yrs.) population.

Note that in presenting the results in the following pages we do not report statistical confidence intervals, because the methodology employed allows us to assume that the calculated means are the best point estimate of the relevant population statistic, and the sample sizes and standard deviations are such that margins of error are likely to be reasonably small. Nevertheless there is one particular issue that should be borne in mind in interpreting these results. Australians who have very low levels of literacy are unlikely to be represented in a commercial online survey panel. Data from the ABS (see Appendix 1) indicate that about 4 percent of people aged 15 to 74 years have very low levels of literacy which would preclude reading books for pleasure, and a further 10 percent have low literacy levels that could possibly restrict their options for recreational book reading to some extent. The impact of these considerations on the overall conclusions of this study is likely to be negligible.

## PART II: Principal results

### 5. BOOK READING HABITS

Reading books for pleasure (as distinct from for work or study purposes) competes for a person's time with all the many other ways in which we follow our leisure pursuits. Table 1 lists a range of leisure activities and their frequency among respondents to the survey. In this list, reading books comes next after the ubiquitous pastimes of browsing the internet and watching television, and ahead of other activities such as creative participation, exercising and sport. It appears that only one in twenty people (5%) never read books. It is noteworthy that when asked to indicate their *most* enjoyable activity from those listed in Table 1, 15 percent nominated book-reading ahead of the 10 percent who nominated the internet and the same percentage for television, with lesser percentages identifying the other activities as their top-ranked choice.

**Table 1. Frequency of leisure activities: percent of respondents**

	At least once per week	Less often than once per week	Never	Total
Browse the internet	95.7	2.8	1.5	100.0
Watch TV	92.0	5.6	2.4	100.0
Read books	65.5	29.1	5.4	100.0
Exercise (not sport)	59.3	27.7	13.0	100.0
Creative craft activity	57.5	33.5	9.0	100.0
Play video games	43.3	20.4	36.3	100.0
Creative art activity	33.9	38.1	28.0	100.0
Play sport	24.9	30.8	44.3	100.0

Frequency of reading books provides a basis for dividing the population into readers and non-readers, where the latter are defined as people who have not read all or part of a print book, ebook or audio book for pleasure or interest in the last twelve months<sup>1</sup>. In our sample, less than one-tenth of the population (8%) can be classified as non-readers according to this criterion. Readers in turn were separated into two clusters via k-means cluster analysis based on numbers of books read in the last twelve months and with distances computed using simple Euclidean distance. We call the two groups “occasional” readers (those who have read between 1 and 10 books in the last 12 months – 51% of the total sample) and “frequent” readers (more than 10 books – 41% of the sample).

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<sup>1</sup> There appears to be no standard definition of a book reader apart from criteria adopted from time to time in readership surveys and the like. Our decision to use the number of books read in the last twelve months as the discriminating criterion is consistent with analyses in the Pew Research Center's series of book-reading surveys in the US; see Perrin (2016).



**Table 2. Demographic characteristics of readers and non-readers: percentages within each group**

	Non- reader	Reader			Total
		Occasional	Frequent	Sub-total Readers	
<u>Gender (percent within group)</u>					
Female	24.6	46.1	61.1	52.8	50.4
Male	75.1	53.4	38.8	46.9	49.3
Other	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>Age (percent within group)</u>					
Under 30	31.0	27.1	15.5	22.0	22.7
30-59	43.0	48.7	46.8	47.8	47.5
60+	26.0	24.2	37.7	30.2	29.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>Highest level of education completed (percent within group)</u>					
HSC or lower	42.7	27.2	21.5	24.6	26.1
Post-secondary school diploma, Bachelor’s degree, etc.	42.8	48.2	46.1	47.2	46.9
Graduate diploma, postgraduate degree, etc.	14.0	23.3	30.5	26.5	25.5
Other	0.5	1.4	2.0	1.7	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>Average gross income (thousand Australian Dollars)</u>					
Total income	43.9	45.5	44.9	45.3	45.2
<i>n</i>	247	1478	1219	2697	2944

The characteristics of the different groups are shown in Table 2. We can compare these data with previous studies which have found that Australians with above-average rates of book reading for pleasure are more likely to be female, over 65, tertiary educated, and from an upper socio-economic bracket. In contrast, previous studies have found that Australians who have below-average rates of book reading are more likely to be male, under 30, high school educated and from a lower socio-economic bracket.<sup>2</sup> Our own sample demonstrates similar tendencies. As can be seen in Table 2, males are far more likely to be non-readers than females, while almost two-thirds of frequent readers are female. Second, almost 40 percent of frequent readers are over the age of 60, compared to just over 15 percent who are under 30. Third, non-readers are more strongly represented in the “HSC or lower” education category compared to readers, while frequent readers are more prominent in the “Graduate

<sup>2</sup> See A.C. Nielsen Company et al. (2001): 22.

diploma, postgraduate degree, etc.” category. Lastly, in contrast to earlier studies, there are no significant differences in annual earnings between groups.

In summary, apart from the latter result, our findings are generally consistent with the demographic characterisations of book readers found in previous studies.

The reading habits of the different groups are shown in Table 3. Overall we can see that Australians on average spend about seven hours reading each week (including books, the internet and other media), of which about 70 percent is reading for pleasure. The data indicate that Australians read or part-read about three books per month. The multicultural composition of book readership is indicated by the fact that about 9 percent of respondents read for pleasure in languages other than English. Some people suffer from a disability that affects their reading; the survey data show that 9 percent of respondents have a physical or health condition that makes reading books difficult or challenging.

**Table 3. Reading rates: percentages of respondents within each age group**

	Non-reader	Reader			Total
		Occasional	Frequent	Sub-total readers	
Total number of hours spent reading per week*	1.4	4.7	10.8	7.4	6.9
Number of hours spent reading for pleasure per week*	0.0	2.7	9.1	5.5	5.1
Number of books read per month	0.0	1.2	6.4	3.5	3.2
<i>n</i>	243	1481	1197	2678	2921
%	8.3	50.7	41.0	91.7	100.0

Notes: \* table based on not including a small number of outliers that responded they read 50 hours or above in total per week.

People read for a wide variety of reasons. Commonly cited reasons include escapism, relaxation, learning and enjoyment of the writing (New Zealand Book Council, 2016). We asked our focus group members about the reasons that they read for pleasure, and they tended to list reasons relating to three main themes: enjoyment, learning, and health. Therefore, in the survey respondents were offered lists of possible reasons under each of these three headings, and asked to indicate the main reasons they read for pleasure. The results are shown in Table 4, with reasons tabulated in descending order of importance in each case.

**Table 4. Reasons for reading: percentage of respondents**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Proportion of respondents identifying the reason</b>
<b>(1) Enjoyment</b>	(%)
Drama of good stories/watch a good plot unfold	50.1
Escape reality/become immersed in another world	46.7
Stimulate my imagination and creativity	45.6
Read good writing	40.2
Pass the time/keep myself occupied	38.8
Spend time with my favourite authors/characters/settings	35.1
Be inspired/uplifted	29.6
Be part of a conversation about books	12.9
Read to another person	12.8
<b>(2) Learning</b>	
Learn about topics that interest me	50.6
Learn about the world through other people's experiences	39.2
Expand my world view	39.2
Engage with literature and ideas	29.1
Learn or improve practical skills	26.8
Improve my analytical/critical thinking	25.3
Help me reflect on/deal with life's challenges	18.8
Improve my writing	12.5
Improve reading speed/learn new words	11.6
<b>(3) Health</b>	
For relaxation/stress release	60.5
Improve mental health	24.8
Help sleep	21.7
For company	8.5
<i>n</i>	2699

The reasons for reading vary to some extent across age groups. For example, in the case of reading for enjoyment, younger people have a stronger preference than older people for reading to escape reality or to become immersed in another world (55% of under 30s compared to 36% of over 60s). On the other hand, in regard to reading for learning, 57 percent of older readers (60+) read to learn about topics that interest them and 33 percent read to learn or improve practical skills compared to 45 percent and 17 percent respectively

for younger readers (<30). When it comes to health, all age groups nominate reading for relaxation or stress release as the predominant reason, though this is somewhat more frequently nominated by older than by younger readers (66% compared to 51%).

There is also a broader cultural purpose to reading books that is more than merely utilitarian. In a later part of the survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Books make a contribution to my life that goes beyond their cost.” More than 70 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition, indicating a sense of benefit to the individual that transcends the more routine purposes of passing time, relieving stress, etc.

How have rates of book readership changed in recent years? Well-known factors prompting change include the ability to read books on mobile digital platforms, the increasing accessibility of other leisure options such as streamed TV programs, movies and music, and the proliferation of social media and other forms of online reading. During our preparatory research, we heard anecdotal accounts that even avid book readers are spending less time reading books than previously. For instance, a typical response was:

“If I think about it, when I would normally grab a book, I actually grab my iPad to catch up with something I didn’t see [on TV]” – Female, aged 40–50.

Furthermore, books themselves are facing new forms of competition for readers’ time and attention. In particular, anecdotal evidence suggests that the proliferation of social media has drastically changed reading patterns and behaviour. Our data indicate that almost two-thirds of Australians read social media, blogs or content on the internet every day, compared to under 30 percent who read some form of book every day.

Accordingly, we asked respondents about their reading habits compared to five years ago and, if they answered that they are spending less time reading nowadays, how are they spending this time instead. Respondents were asked about both their time spent reading a variety of media for pleasure and about books specifically as shown in Table 5. The results show that people appear to be spending slightly less time reading books compared to five years ago, but more time reading overall.

**Table 5. Reading time for pleasure compared to five years ago: percentages of respondents within each group**

Time spent compared to five years ago	Book reading time			Total reading time all media		
	Non-reader	Occasional reader	Frequent reader	Non-reader	Occasional reader	Frequent reader
Much more	5.8	11.0	26.3	12.1	21.2	32.4
A little more	3.4	14.1	19.0	9.8	14.9	18.6
About the same	39.8	29.8	35.0	36.3	29.6	32.0
A little less	9.5	21.6	13.1	7.0	18.5	10.1
Much less	41.4	23.4	6.6	34.7	15.8	6.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Respondents who spend less leisure time reading nowadays were asked to indicate their reasons why. The alternative “I have less time now because of work/study/family commitments” was selected as the most common reason, with a response rate of approximately two-thirds, suggesting that an increasing scarcity of leisure time is an important driving factor behind decreasing book readerships. Having said this, it is notable that, “I spend more time on other leisure activities” was also a common reason (38%), as it does give some credence to the hypothesis that increasing competition for Australian’s leisure time is causing decreasing readerships. The difference between age groups is also notable. For example, “I have less time now because of work/study/family commitments” decreases as age increases, with a particularly sharp drop for 60+ which loosely corresponds to the retirement age.

Participants who spend less time reading books than five years ago because they spend more time on other leisure activities (almost two-fifths of our respondents) were asked what were the other activities that were absorbing more of their leisure time. The results affirm casual observation regarding the proliferation of social media; the data show that 52 percent of respondents spend more time on social media these days, with as many as 76 percent among under 20s and 20–29 year olds. Age-related differentials across a range of other leisure activities are also of note. In particular, “Watching free-to-air TV/movies”, “On entertainment from streamed/online services such as Netflix and iTunes”, “Playing video games”, “Surfing the internet” and “Exercise/sport/gym” all exhibit a gentle U-shape in their response rates across age groups. In other words, they all decrease initially as age increases, reaching a low point for 40–49 year olds, before reversing trend and increasing among older age groups.

## **6. GENRE AND FORMAT PREFERENCES**

### **6.1 GENRE**

Economic evaluations of the demand for books, for example studies purporting to show the impact on demand of changes in book prices, have tended to treat books as a more or less homogenous commodity for the purposes of analysis. In fact, of course, books differ widely in terms of content, style, presentation, authorship and so on. The most immediate criterion for differentiation is on the basis of genre, firstly into the broad categories of fiction and non-fiction, and then into the specific genres within these categories, as explained further below.

Respondents to the survey were asked: “Which of the following types of books do you enjoy reading these days (including reading to children)?” followed by lists of genres separated into fiction and non-fiction. The lists of genres went through several iterations as we consulted with publishers, booksellers, librarians and teachers about categories that would be meaningful to survey respondents, rather than using book industry categories. The most frequently nominated genres are shown in Table 6. Among fiction books almost half of respondents indicated crime/mystery/thrillers as a category they enjoyed reading, while the most frequently nominated non-fiction genre was autobiography/biography/memoirs. It is noteworthy that literary fiction is read by 15 percent of the population, and poetry by almost 10 percent, ahead of some areas of genre fiction such as erotica and horror.

**Table 6. Most frequently nominated genres for reading for enjoyment: percentages of respondents nominating genres**

Fiction		Non-fiction	
Genre	%	Genre	%
Crime/mystery/thriller	48.5	Autobiography/biography/memoir	45.0
Historical	35.9	Cookbooks/food and drink	37.2
Contemporary/general fiction	33.4	History – general	28.2
Science fiction/fantasy	32.2	Humour	27.5
Classics	31.3	Gardening/home improvement	27.1
Romance	17.3	History – ancient	26.3
Young adult/teen	15.4	Travel guides/travel narratives	24.1
Literary	15.3	Crafts/hobbies/pets	23.9
Women’s	10.4	Health/diet/wellbeing	22.0
Poetry	9.2	History – military and war	20.7

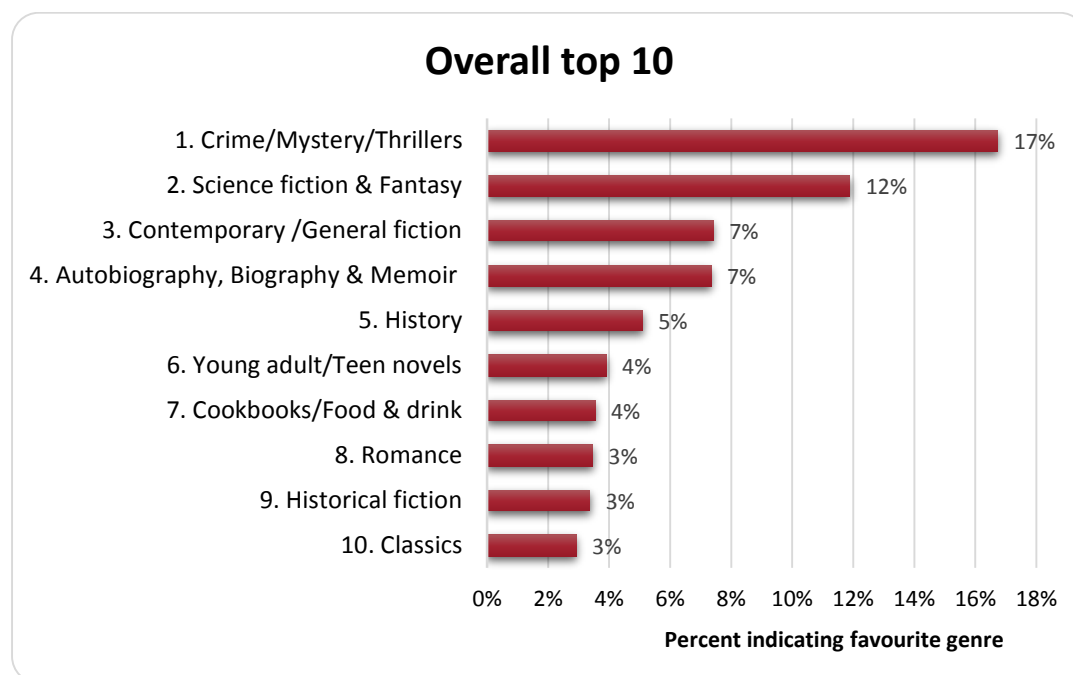
Readers of young adult fiction are of particular interest, given the increasing popularity of this genre in recent years (Beckton, 2015; Wyndham, 2016). Looking specifically at those respondents who indicated that they enjoy reading YA or teen novels these days (15.4% of the sample), we find that compared to the average Australian, these readers are younger (median age 30-34 compared to 45-49) and are predominantly female (67% compared to 50%). They use social media more frequently (73% reading social media every day compared to 63%) and have read more books in the last month (4.4 compared to 3.2).

Among the various genres read for enjoyment, respondents were asked to rank their top three. Combining all fiction and non-fiction categories, we show the overall top 10 favourite genres in Figure 1. The separate results for the top 10 favourite (adult) fiction and non-fiction genres are shown in Figures 2 and 3 respectively. We note that fiction genres comprise the first three genres in the overall top 10 list and seven out of 10 in this list. Once again crime fiction dominates in people’s preferences.

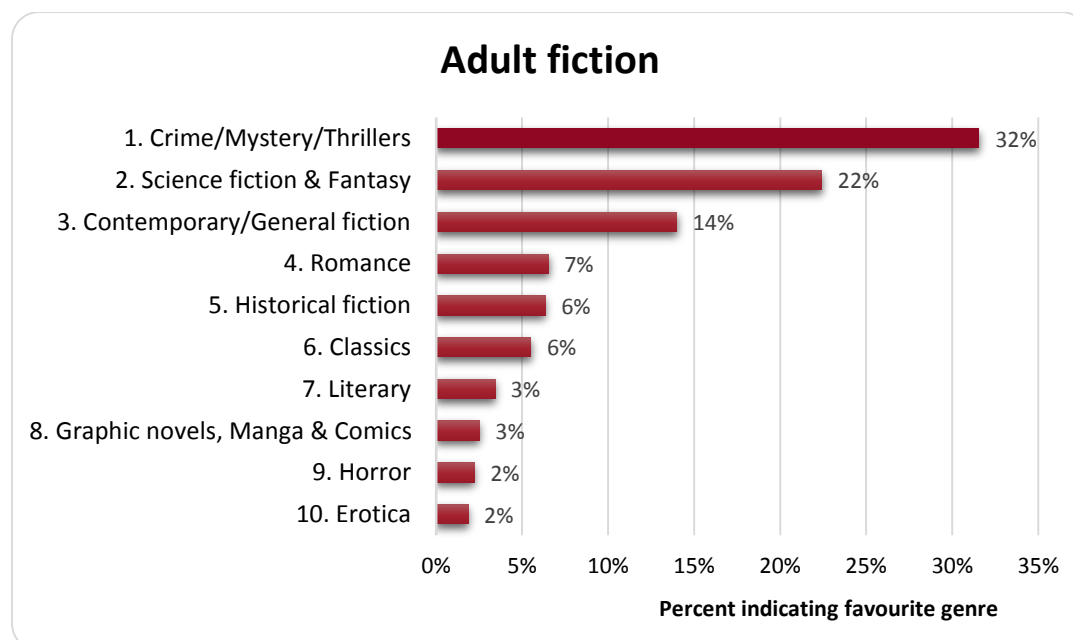
## 6.2 FORMAT

Comparisons of ebook and print sales in Australia are difficult because many ebooks are bought offshore and there is no single source of combined sales data. Senior executives have estimated their ebook sales in Australia at between 17-25 percent of sales turnover (Zwar 2016, p. 7), with probably a higher proportion of total volume owing to the lower average selling price of ebooks. However, the extent to which these sales data reflect actual reader engagement with ebooks relative to traditional formats is generally unknown. Hence we turn to our survey data to paint a more accurate picture.

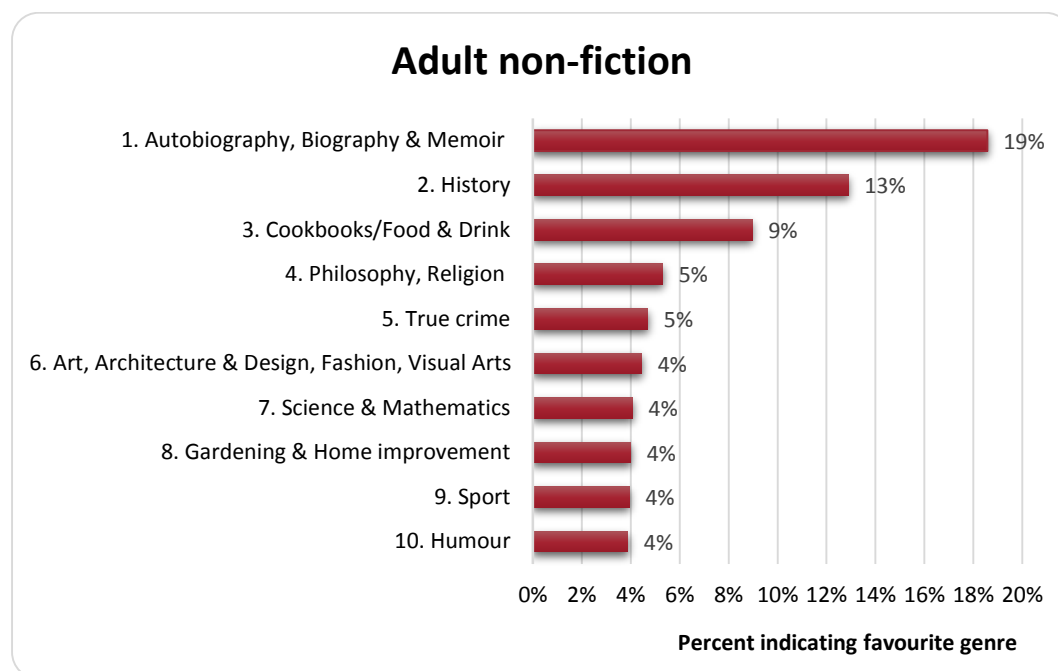
**Figure 1. Top 10 fiction/non-fiction genres ranked as no. 1 favourite: percentage of respondents**



**Figure 2. Top 10 adult fiction genres ranked as no. 1 favourite: percentages of respondents**



**Figure 3. Top 10 adult non-fiction genres ranked as no. 1 favourite: percentages of respondents**



The survey asked respondents about their engagement with different print and electronic book formats. The results show that just on 90 percent of people overall are print book readers, defined as anyone who reads any type of print book often or sometimes, and 53 percent are ebook readers, defined similarly as anyone who often or sometimes reads books in any type of electronic format. Audiobook readers specified in the same way comprise 12 percent of the population.

**Table 7. Frequency of reading books in different formats: percentages of respondents**

	Hard-back	Paper-back	iPad/tablet	Mobile	E-reader	Computer	Audio
Often	24.8	56.2	16.5	8.8	10.5	7.7	3.7
Sometimes	39.0	30.4	16.1	11.7	6.6	17.3	7.7
Rarely	28.3	10.1	17.1	15.3	9.4	20.0	15.0
Never	7.9	3.2	50.3	64.2	73.6	55.0	73.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	2699	2699	2699	2699	2699	2699	2699

Looking at data on reading formats in more detail, we list in Table 7 a range of possible formats, and indicate the frequency that the books Australians read fall into them. The dominance of print books over ebooks is striking, even after accounting for the lower turnover of ebooks relative to traditional formats. Print books' dominance is driven by paperback books, which are far more popular than hardback. In fact, readers are more than



twice as likely to read paperbacks often as hardbacks. This differential is influenced by both the greater availability of titles in paperback format, and the usually observed price differences between the two.

Amongst ebook readers, iPads/tablets stand out as the most popular format. Around one-third of respondents read ebooks either often or sometimes on an iPad or tablet device, almost double the share who often or sometimes read on a dedicated e-reader.

## **7. BUYING AND BORROWING BOOKS**

### **7.1 BOOK PURCHASES**

The survey data indicate that 43 percent of Australians bought a book in the month prior to the survey. The mean number of books purchased was 2.1 books. Among those people who had purchased at least one book last month, the mean number of books bought was just under 5. Of those respondents who bought at least one book, 64 percent were bought for themselves, 22 percent were bought for children and the remainder (14 percent) were bought as gifts. While both readers and non-readers bought more books for themselves than either for children or as gifting, the share of books bought for other people was larger for non-readers (58%) than for readers (28%). Looking at the formats of book purchases, we find that on average around 65 percent of books Australians bought for themselves were in print format; books purchased for children or as gifts were overwhelmingly in print format (97 percent and 91 percent respectively). While Australians tend to buy only a small percentage of books in non-print formats for either children or as gifting, one-third of books bought for self were in an e-book format.

Books can be purchased from bricks-and-mortar stores or from online sources. Respondents to the survey were asked to indicate the frequency with which they bought books from various suppliers. Table 8 lists the results. The most popular online stores are based overseas, such as Amazon, Apple and Book Depository; while the most popular bricks-and-mortar stores are book chains, including Dymocks, Collins Booksellers and QBD. Overall, bricks-and-mortar stores are still more popular than online ones, with 71 percent of respondents indicating that they purchased books from a bricks-and-mortar store (of any type) sometimes or often, whereas the proportion of respondents purchasing from any type of online supplier sometimes or often is 52 percent.

The popularity of second-hand outlets such as second-hand shops, book stalls at local markets, op shops and so on is apparent in Table 8, with about 40 percent of respondents indicating that they bought books for pleasure sometimes or often from these outlets. If such books are the work of contemporary Australian writers, it should be remembered that these second-hand sales provide no financial return to authors.

What prompts book buyers to make their purchases from different outlets? Survey respondents who utilised a particular outlet were asked the top three reasons why they chose that outlet. The major reasons for choosing to buy books online were overwhelmingly price, availability and convenience. For the major book chains, the most important reasons were convenience, availability and the ability to see and hold print books. Similar reasons were identified for independent local bookstores, although the two most frequently nominated reasons for patronising these bookshops were a desire to support Australian booksellers, and

customer service. Among bargain bookstores, supermarkets and second-hand outlets, the overwhelming reason was price.

**Table 8. Frequency of book purchases from different outlets: percentages of respondents**

Outlet	Frequency of book purchases (%)				Total
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Bricks-and-mortar outlets					
Major book chains	11.4	35.1	28.3	25.2	100.0
Independent local bookshops	8.5	28.9	28.6	34.0	100.0
Bargain book stores	6.0	23.9	29.7	40.5	100.0
Supermarkets, department stores	7.9	27.8	27.4	36.9	100.0
Second-hand outlets	13.4	25.6	26.3	34.7	100.0
Online suppliers					
Australian online suppliers	6.5	24.0	27.0	42.6	100.0
Overseas online suppliers	15.5	24.8	22.7	36.9	100.0

## 7.2 BORROWING BOOKS

Obtaining books free of charge, primarily by borrowing, is known to be an extensive source of reading material (New Zealand Book Council, 2016). Respondents indicated that they borrowed or received for free an average of around 1.8 books in the past month. As would be expected, readers tend to have borrowed more books than non-readers; readers borrowed an average of just on 2 books in the last month as compared with a negligible number for non-readers. Borrowing tends to become more prevalent as people age, with those over the age of 65 borrowing two or more books on average per month. The survey indicated that 85-90 year olds borrow on average 3.3 books per month as compared with 20-24 year olds who only borrow 1.3 books on average.

People borrow or obtain books free of charge from a variety of sources. Sharing books amongst friends is the most common source, with about two-fifths of respondents (43%) obtaining books this way. Otherwise, not surprisingly public libraries are the main source for borrowed books, with 39 percent of respondents indicating that they had borrowed a book from a library in the previous month. The largest age group utilising libraries as a source of borrowed books is readers in their 70s, with 54 percent of this cohort having borrowed a book from a public library in the previous month.

## 7.3 PIRACY

A further source of free books is via downloading from the internet without authorisation and without payment, i.e. through piracy. A report prepared for the Department of Communications found that ebooks are less likely to be illegally downloaded than movies,

music, video games and TV programs (TNS 2015). Nevertheless, Australian publishers have advised that ebook piracy is a growing concern, especially in education publishing (Zwar 2016). However, very little data are available about the extent and form of ebook piracy in Australia. Therefore, the survey asked respondents a series of questions about the reading of pirated ebooks and illegal downloads. It is important to note that there is a well-known tendency for respondents to understate their level of engagement in illegal activity. Hence respondents were reminded that their answers were de-identified and totally private and confidential. Despite the reminder, it is likely that some level of underreporting still occurred.

The extent of illegal downloading of books as indicated by the survey results is shown in Table 9. Bearing in the mind the above considerations about underreporting, the overall level of book piracy appears low, with just 8 percent of respondents reporting having engaged in downloading pirated ebooks. It might be expected that the level of illegal downloading will be correlated with age, hence Table 9 shows the proportion of respondents in each age group who download pirated books. It is clear that ebook piracy is indeed mostly undertaken by younger readers, especially in the age range 20–29. After age 40 the rate of book piracy drops sharply, falling from 11 percent of 30–39 year olds to 5 percent of 40–49 year olds. Photocopied textbooks or other educational resources are the most commonly downloaded form of ebook, confirming publishers’ concerns about educational book piracy. Most of the readers who download books for pleasure do so infrequently: three-quarters of them do so less than once a month.

**Table 9. Involvement in ebook piracy: percentages within each age group**

	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Total
Engages in ebook piracy	10.8	20.0	11.0	4.9	3.1	3.4	5.1	1.5	8.1
<i>n</i>	215	453	506	356	533	568	271	41	2943

## 8. FACTORS INFLUENCING BOOK READING AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR

### 8.1 READING CHOICES

As for most other experience goods, it is very difficult for a reader to evaluate the quality of a book in advance. Thus readers employ numerous search methods to combat this uncertainty, such as seeking signals pertaining to a book’s quality. Preliminary focus groups revealed that these signals take a range of different forms, including friends’ recommendations, the reputation of the author, book reviews and so on. On the basis of this information, a list of possible factors likely to influence choice was drawn up and survey respondents were asked to evaluate their importance. Table 10 shows the results. It is clear that personal preferences are the most important factors in book selection, with nearly 90 percent of respondents indicating “topic, subject, setting or style” as most important and over 75 percent nominating “read and enjoyed previous works by the author”.

**Table 10. Factors influencing book selection: percentages of respondents nominating factor as important or extremely important**

<b>Influencing factor</b>	<b>Total</b>
The topic, subject, setting or style	89.7
Read and enjoyed previous works by the author	77.9
The book is available in the format I want	62.6
Recommendation from a friend	59.7
The price	44.9
Reputation of the author	42.2
Reader book reviews	25.4
Type size	24.0
People are talking about this book	23.1
Professional book reviews	21.9
Won or shortlisted for a prize	21.0
Recommendation from a bookseller or librarian	20.5
The length of the book	20.3
Bestseller lists	18.6
The jacket cover	18.4
Promotional activity in the bookshop or library	7.9
Recommendation by public figures and celebrities	7.3
Cover endorsements	6.7
<i>n</i>	2697

Information about the quality of a book is conveyed to potential readers by such factors as the appearance of professional reviews in the book pages of newspapers and magazines or in the broadcast media, and by the nomination of a title for a major prize. It is unclear how important these sorts of factors are in influencing buyer behaviour and therefore the sales of a given title. In regard to prizes, for example, there is no doubt that being short-listed or winning an internationally famous prize such as the Man Booker has a significant effect on demand; it is not clear whether the same results are true for local prizes such as the Miles Franklin, the Stella, the Prime Minister's or various Premiers' awards, or any of the many other book awards and prizes in existence in Australia. Accordingly survey respondents were asked how important professional book reviews and being shortlisted or winning a major prize was in affecting their choice of a book to read for themselves. The data show that about one-fifth of readers acknowledge the influence of these factors; however almost twice as many indicate these factors as being unimportant. Given the literary orientation of most reviews/prizes, the influence of reviews is likely to be more marked amongst literary readers,

i.e. people who nominate literary fiction, biography/autobiography or literary non-fiction among their top three favourite genres. Indeed the data reveal a significant impact of reviews and prizes among these categories of readers. Table 11 indicates that reviews and prizes are much more likely to influence the choices of literary fiction and non-fiction readers than for the general population. However, the responses for readers preferring biography/autobiography are much the same as for everyone else.

**Table 11. Importance of reviews and prizes for reading choices: percent of readers within categories\***

Responses**	Readers favouring literary fiction	Readers favouring biography/autobiography	Readers favouring literary non-fiction	All readers and non-readers
<b><u>Professional book reviews</u></b>				
Important	42.7	23.5	39.8	21.9
Neither important nor unimportant	38.1	40.5	29.2	36.5
Unimportant	18.4	33.4	29.5	37.4
Don't know/can't say	0.8	2.6	1.5	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b><u>Won or shortlisted for a prize</u></b>				
Important	52.4	22.9	34.2	21.0
Neither important nor unimportant	28.6	39.0	52.6	35.8
Unimportant	17.6	34.8	13.2	39.3
Don't know/can't say	1.4	3.3	0.0	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	118	489	41	2944

Notes: \*Percentages calculated across readers nominating literary fiction/biography, autobiography/literary non-fiction respectively as one of their top three genres.

\*\* "Important" combines "Important" and "Extremely important" responses; likewise "Unimportant" combines "Unimportant" and "Extremely unimportant".

There are also some striking differences between age groups when it comes to book selection. First, under 20s rate "read and enjoyed previous works by the author" as conspicuously less important on average than do other age groups. Second, "reputation of the author" and "availability of desired format" appear to increase in importance with age. For instance, only 51 percent of under 20s evaluated "the book is available in the format I want" to be important, while 67 percent of respondents aged 80+ did. Similarly, the importance of "type size" increases slowly with age but jumps in importance for respondents aged 80+, reflecting

the increased probability of problems with eyesight in later stages of life. Lastly, younger readers are more likely to nominate “the jacket cover”, “promotional activity in the bookshop” and “recommendation by public figures & celebrities” than older ones. All three of these latter factors peak in importance for under 20s and then decline with older age groups. It can be noted that publishers report that these factors are important when marketing trade books in general (Zwar 2016).

## 8.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Where do readers find information about which books to read for pleasure? A distinction can be made between real and virtual sources. Table 12 lists a range of information sources in the physical and online/social media worlds. It is apparent that physical world sources are more prominent than online and social media ones. For instance, word-of-mouth and browsing in physical bookstores are the top two most commonly cited sources overall, with almost two-thirds and half of respondents citing them respectively, and both are physical world sources. In comparison, just over a third and a quarter of respondents cite the top two most common online and social media sources, online book retailers and publishers, and Facebook respectively.

**Table 12. Real and virtual sources of information about which books to read for pleasure: percent of respondents**

Physical world sources	Percent of respondents	Online and social media sources	Percent of respondents
Word-of-mouth	66.2	Online book retailers & publishers	36.9
Browsing in physical bookstores	52.8	Facebook	26.9
Print newspaper & magazines	36.1	Goodreads	13.3
Browsing in libraries	33.7	Book blogs/bloggers	10.2
Saw the author on TV/heard on radio	28.6	Online magazines & journals	9.7
From the book cover	19.2	YouTube/BookTube	8.4
Books that are shortlisted for/have won awards	16.8	Instagram	4.4
School and university	11.0	Twitter	4.0
Recommendations from librarians or teachers	10.9	Pinterest	3.9
Writers’ festivals	5.8	Online book clubs	3.3
Recommendations by public figures	5.4	Snapchat	2.1
Face-to-face book clubs	4.8	NetGalley	0.4
Other book events/talks	4.8		
Outdoor advertising (e.g. bus shelter, billboard)	4.6		
Book subscription services	2.2		
<i>n</i>	2944		2944

### 8.3 BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

The following question was put to survey respondents: If you have read a book that you really enjoyed, how do you recommend it to other people? The most commonly cited methods were in person (84%), lending a copy (33%) and giving a copy as a gift (21%). Just under 10 percent of respondents said they didn't recommend books to other people.

## 9. ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A key objective of this research project has been to map out the ways in which Australians engage with social media and the internet in relation to books and reading. Recent developments, such as fan fiction sites, reader blogs, YouTube, podcasts, fan art and fan videos are extending the consumption and production of books, and blurring the distinction between readers and authors. One strong area of growth has been forums in which non-professional authors upload their work for others to read and discuss. One reader described their appeal as follows:

"I do read on Wattpad and very often as I love reading stories that are written by ordinary people (not saying that authors aren't ordinary, just that they're so professional with how they write). I can't explain it but I feel the urge to read stories by people who are 'real'. Although, I also like reading actual (printed) books and have a bookshelf packed with books" – Female, aged 14.

There are many ways to be involved with books and reading on social media and the internet. Some of them are listed in Table 13. It appears that just over 30 percent of respondents are involved in some form with books and reading on social media and the internet often or sometimes. Since it can be expected that such involvements will be correlated with age, these results are disaggregated by age group. It is clear that indeed age constitutes a significant explanation of involvement with books and reading online and on social media. Note that while respondents under 20 tend to be the most involved through reading/watching material, slightly older age groups appear more involved in creation/production. For example, under 20s are the most likely group to read stories or poems on Wattpad or similar websites, while 30–39 year olds are the most likely group writing and posting stories on these sites.

## 10. CHILDREN AND BOOKS

The benefits of reading to children are significant. Previous studies have found that the frequency of reading to children has a direct causal effect on their schooling outcomes. According to a research report by Guyonne Kalb and Jan van Ours in partnership with the state government of Victoria's Department of Education and Early Childhood (2012), children who are read to frequently achieve higher scores on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and experience a positive effect on their reading and cognitive skills later in life (Kalb and van Ours 2012). It was therefore important in the survey to explore child-related reading activity among respondents. As noted in the introduction to this report, respondents to the survey do not include children below the age of 14. Thus the responses regarding children and reading are provided by adults, including young adults, in households with a child or children under the age of 13.

**Table 13. Ways of involvement with books and reading on social media and the internet, by age group: percentages of respondents within each age group**

	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Total
Involved in some form with books and reading on social media and the internet	41.6	37.8	45.6	26.9	26.2	22.1	18.2	15.3	30.9
Read stories/poems on Facebook and other general (not book specific) social media and blogs	18.0	21.4	27.8	16.7	14.2	11.2	4.9	3.1	16.6
Listen to podcasts, stream online books events e.g. festival talk, book launch	8.5	9.7	14.4	7.2	11.8	10.1	9.9	3.8	10.5
Read stories/poems on Wattpad, Tumblr, Archive of Our Own, fanfiction.net or similar websites	26.7	17.0	18.0	7.2	5.3	2.3	3.3	8.8	10.4
Watch/comment on YouTube or Book Tube videos about books	19.2	9.4	14.6	7.8	5.7	4.0	2.4	0.0	8.4
Post stories/poems on Facebook and other general (not book specific) social media and blogs	8.7	9.4	14.9	6.3	6.3	2.8	2.6	0.0	7.4
Post stories/poems on Wattpad, Tumblr, Archive of Our Own, fanfiction.net or similar websites	6.5	5.2	9.6	3.4	2.4	1.5	1.0	0.0	4.1
Post other original content e.g. fan art, fan videos, in any forum	6.8	4.4	7.3	2.8	2.9	1.1	1.5	0.0	3.6
Post YouTube or BookTube videos about books	5.5	2.5	7.8	2.4	1.7	1.0	0.0	0.0	2.9
Read stories in NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month)	4.1	4.3	7.5	1.6	2.5	0.6	0.0	0.0	3.0
Write stories in NaNoWriMo	3.3	3.5	5.9	0.9	1.7	0.3	0.0	0.0	2.3
<i>n</i>	215	452	508	357	532	568	272	40	2944

The frequencies of engagement with children in book-related activities among such households are shown in Table 14. The results indicate that a majority of households with children read to the children or encourage them to read every day or most days. Activities such as buying or borrowing a book for children or taking them to a bookshop or library are less frequent, but are nevertheless engaged in by a majority of households most weeks or most months. Overall these data suggest a widespread recognition in the community of the benefits that books and reading provide for children that we noted above.



**Table 14. Frequency with which a household member engages with child/children concerning books/reading\*: percentages of households with one or more children under 13 (n=669)**

	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total
Encourage a child to read	83.3	9.2	7.5	100.0
Read to the child/children	75.9	15.0	9.1	100.0
Borrow a book for the child/children	44.8	36.9	18.3	100.0
Take child/children to bookshop or library	36.1	48.9	15.0	100.0
Buy a book for the child/children	21.8	71.6	6.6	100.0
Attend story-time or rhyme-time in a library with the child/children	14.7	39.8	45.5	100.0

\* Note: Frequently = “Every day”, “Most days”, “Most weeks”; Occasionally = “Most months”, “Less often”; Never = “Never”

## 11. THE AUSTRALIAN BOOK INDUSTRY

### 11.1 BOOKS WRITTEN AND/OR SET IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian book industry comprises a long chain of participants beginning with authors and extending through agents, publishers, editors, printers, distributors and booksellers, and finishing up with readers. In fact it is more accurate to describe the industry as a value network rather than a chain. The industry produces books of all sorts, but is particularly responsible for producing Australian books – these could be defined as books written by Australian authors on Australian subjects published by Australian publishers and sold by Australian booksellers. But this definition is highly specific, and could be generalised, if so desired, to categorise as “Australian” any book written by an Australian author, or one by any author but set in Australia, and so on, as we discuss further below.

The question of “Australian books” is an issue of concern in the overall project of which this survey forms a part. We began consideration of this issue as it concerns readers by exploring it in the focus groups. Discussion in these groups revealed a general lack of awareness about “Australian books”, especially among younger readers. Older readers were more likely to be aware of the concept of Australian books, but tended to express different notions of what Australian books are. For example, one referred to “traditional” perceptions of Australian literature:

“It seems like Australian authors are always pigeon-holed... if you’re an Australian author you have to write Australian things, Australian country, Australian animals, it has to be very Australian rather than just being a book about a girl across the road...” – Female, 40–50.

In contrast, others referred to the diverse perspectives of Australian-authored books:

“There’s not only one Australia. There’s our new migrants, like, the first generation or second generation migrants have stories to tell that are still Australian stories” – Female, 50+.

Older readers in the focus groups were also more likely to choose Australian-authored books as part of their selections. One woman said,

“[I] try to always support Australian authors or Australian films... because we need to do that as well as reading other things” – Female, 50+.

In contrast, teenage readers in the focus groups were not familiar with the idea of Australian books or Australian-authored books as a category. When asked “Do you ever have Australian books that you like to read?”, the following responses were typical:

“[I] don’t think about it” – Female, 14.

“Don’t know, don’t care” – Male, 14.

Further discussion with the younger readers revealed that they have all read and enjoyed books by Australian authors but this is not a category they apply when choosing books to read. In short, the focus groups suggested there could be a generational difference in perceptions of Australian books.

In the survey we investigated these issues further. Respondents were asked whether they like to read books by Australian authors, including books set in Australian settings. The overall results are shown in Table 15. About one-third of respondents expressed a clearly positive attitude towards Australian-authored fiction, somewhat fewer for non-fiction by local writers. But almost half of respondents said they don’t think much about it, and a further 20 percent said they didn’t know or couldn’t say. As for books with Australian settings, between 40 and 50 percent of respondents said they like such books a little or a lot, with about one-third indicating that they didn’t care one way or the other.

Given the age-related observations from the focus groups reported above, it is relevant to consider the preferences of the full sample disaggregated by age. Analysis of the data shows that older age groups are more likely to like Australian-authored books than younger ones, while younger age groups are more likely to indicate that the nationality of the author doesn’t matter to them. For example, 35 percent of under 20s chose “Yes – but I don’t think much about it”, and 29 percent chose “No – but I don’t think much about it” for Australian-authored fiction books. Similarly, for Australian authored non-fiction, 25 percent of respondents under 20 chose “No – but I don’t think much about it”, compared to only about 7 percent of respondents aged over 60. It is interesting to note that this result is similar to the views of children in relation to TV programs. In particular, a 2013 study found that where a TV program was made didn’t matter for the vast majority (80%) of children (Screen Australia 2013).

Similar generational differences are apparent in respondents’ attitudes to books with Australian settings. Older readers are more likely to like fiction and non-fiction books with Australian settings than younger readers. For instance, respondents aged over 60 are more than twice as likely to like reading these types of fiction and non-fiction books a lot than respondents aged under 30 (39 percent compared to 17 percent for fiction, and 31 percent compared to 11 percent for non-fiction).

**Table 15. Preferences for Australian books: percent of respondents**

Responses	Fiction	Non-fiction
<b><u>Books by Australian authors</u></b>		
Yes – I like to read books by Australian authors	33.5	27.0
Yes – but I don't think much about it	31.3	32.0
No – but I don't think much about it	14.5	14.8
No – I don't like to read books by Australian authors	2.4	3.0
Don't know/can't say	18.4	23.1
Total	100.0	100.0
<b><u>Books with Australian settings</u></b>		
Yes – I like them a lot	29.7	23.8
Yes – I like them a little	17.1	18.4
I don't care one way or another	34.2	33.3
No – I dislike them a little	2.4	2.1
No – I dislike them a lot	2.1	1.6
Don't know/can't say	14.6	20.7
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	2944	2944

Whatever their preferences may be for their own reading, survey respondents were much more positive about the importance for children to read books set in Australia and written by Australian authors. Altogether just over 70 percent of respondents indicated that they strongly or slightly agreed with this proposition. Such a view was even expressed by non-readers – about 44 percent of them recognised the importance for children of reading Australian books.

## **11.2 CULTURAL VALUE OF THE AUSTRALIAN BOOK INDUSTRY**

The book industry can be seen as an economic entity like any other industry in the Australian economy. However it is argued that the products of the industry – books – are a cultural good, and as such are distinguished from normal commercial commodities because they yield some form of cultural value in addition to whatever economic value they possess. In other words, it is the cultural content of the output of the industry that is seen to set it apart and to warrant particular attention in public policy. For example, this characteristic of the industry was a significant factor in the considerations of two recent Australian government enquiries into books, the Book Industry Strategy Group (2010–2011) and the Book Industry Collaborative Council (2012–2013).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The reports of these two processes are published as BISG (2011) and BICC (2013).

**Table 16. Responses to statements about the cultural value of the Australian book industry: percent of respondents in each group**

	Non-readers	Readers	Total
<b>1. Books make a contribution to Australian life that goes beyond their monetary value</b>			
Strongly agree	12.1	35.3	33.4
Slightly agree	23.7	34.5	33.6
Neither agree nor disagree	34.7	22.5	23.5
Slightly disagree	3.0	2.9	2.9
Strongly disagree	8.7	1.2	1.8
Don't know	17.8	3.7	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>2. Books by Australian writers about Australian subjects help us understand ourselves and our country</b>			
Strongly agree	15.5	30.9	29.6
Slightly agree	26.6	40.5	39.3
Neither agree nor disagree	29.9	21.6	22.3
Slightly disagree	5.7	2.6	2.9
Strongly disagree	6.7	1.2	1.7
Don't know	15.6	3.2	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>3. An Australian book industry is part of Australian culture</b>			
Strongly agree	13.5	32.7	31.1
Slightly agree	20.5	31.0	30.1
Neither agree nor disagree	32.0	25.2	25.7
Slightly disagree	3.7	3.9	3.9
Strongly disagree	9.8	1.8	2.5
Don't know	20.5	5.5	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	244	2700	2944

To what extent do members of the general Australian population attribute some cultural significance to Australian books and to the Australian publishing industry? In the survey respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about the cultural dimensions of the book industry. Table 16 shows the results for three of these statements:

- Books make a contribution to Australian life that goes beyond their monetary value.
- Books by Australian writers about Australian subjects help us understand ourselves and our country.
- An Australian book industry is part of Australian culture.

The results indicate that about two-thirds of Australians agree or strongly agree with each of the three statements, lending strong support to the proposition that the Australian public recognises the importance of books and the book industry in our cultural life. It is noteworthy that this positive attitude is shared by readers and non-readers alike; the sentiment may be somewhat less enthusiastically held among the latter, but even so, a third or more of them agreed with the statements.

### **11.3 INDIGENOUS BOOKS**

Fiction and non-fiction books by Indigenous authors and books about Indigenous cultures are a small but extremely important component of the Australian publishing scene. Almost two-thirds of Australians (63%) regard books by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers as important for Australian culture, including almost one-third (31%) of non-readers. This support for Indigenous writing does not fully translate into actual readership; nevertheless it is noteworthy that just over 40 percent (42%) of survey respondents indicated that books by Indigenous writers were of interest to them. These data are no doubt affected by the relatively small number of titles by Indigenous authors available in bookshops and libraries compared to the vast numbers of other types of book.

In regard to publishing, we note that Indigenous publishers play a distinctive role in bringing books of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to publication. Kerry Kilner and Peter Minter have written about the achievements of Indigenous publishers over the past 30 years.

Magabala, Aboriginal Studies Press, IAD Press, Keeaira Press, Indij Readers have all published primarily Indigenous authored works, while Black Ink Press, which started out publishing only Indigenous writing has expanded out into political and social commentary. These publishers, alongside UQP, through its BlackWriters Series and support for the David Unaipon Award, and Fremantle Press provide strong support for the publishing aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and thinkers (Kilner and Minter, 2014, p. 8).

While we would not expect Australians to have an insider's knowledge of Indigenous publishing, we were concerned to see if Indigenous publishers register as part of Australia's publishing landscape. Accordingly, survey respondents were asked whether they thought that Indigenous Australian publishers are important for books about Indigenous Australian cultures. Well over half of respondents (59%) agreed with the statement, including 36 percent of non-readers.

## 11.4 PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE BOOK INDUSTRY

Do the positive attitudes to the cultural significance of Australian books that we observed above translate into support for a locally-based publishing industry? Respondents to the survey were asked how important they thought it was that books written by Australian authors be published in Australia. A majority (60%) regarded this as important or extremely important, about one-quarter (24%) thought it neither important nor unimportant, and fewer than 10 percent expressed a negative view. Moreover, just over half (54%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the direct proposition that there should be public funding specifically for Australian writing. Nevertheless, some concern was expressed about book prices, with 57 percent of respondents believing that “books in Australia are too expensive”. This result is consistent with data on the importance of price in determining choice of books, although it is noteworthy that about 30 percent couldn’t care one way or the other on this point.

The data presented above provide support for the proposition that the Australian people recognise the cultural value generated by the Australian book industry. Some of this value may derive from purely artistic or cultural assessments of cultural significance, but some may reflect a perception in the community of a generalised public benefit yielded by the book industry’s existence and operations. Economists would regard such a benefit, if it exists, as a public good<sup>4</sup>, the value of which can be measured by analytical techniques such as the contingent valuation method (CVM). This method typically asks respondents what they would be willing to pay in a hypothetical market situation to expand some public good (Snowball 2008 p.78). The general theory holds that the stated willingness to pay for the increase in the public good represents the difference between the initial utility (as a function of income, prices, public goods and private goods before the increase) and the new level of utility (as a function of income, prices, public goods and private goods after the increase).

In the survey, respondents were presented the following hypothetical scenario and question:

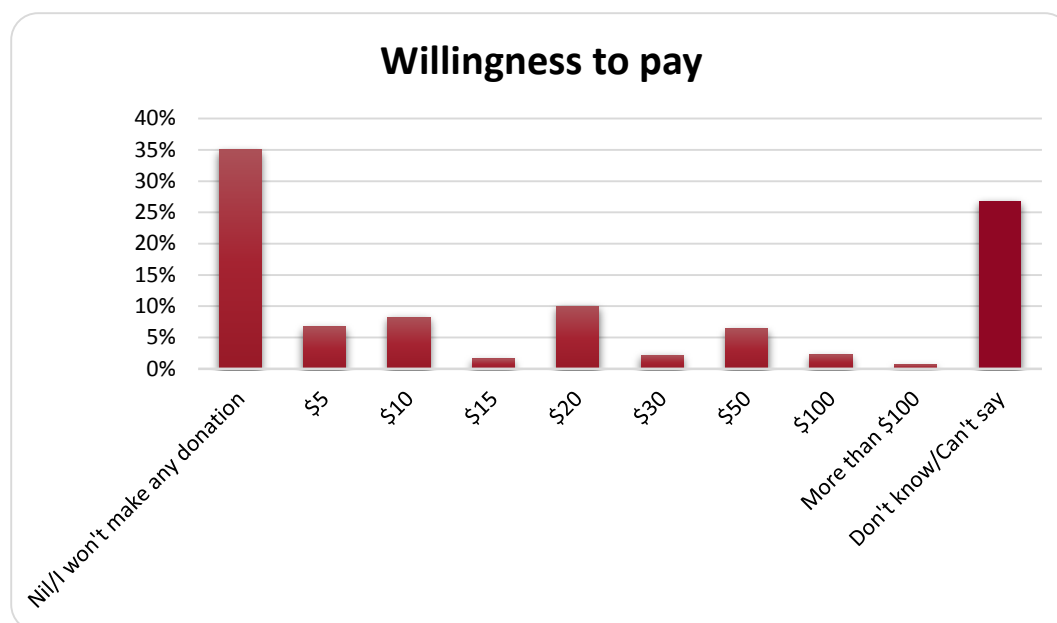
“Suppose a non-profit organisation were set up to help in supporting Australian authors to write books. The organisation would be financed by voluntary donations. How much (one-off) donation would you be prepared to make to such an organisation?”

The results are shown in Figure 4. Almost two-thirds of respondents either indicated that they wouldn’t make any donation or that they are unable to say how much they would give. Amongst the 38 percent of the entire sample that said they would donate something, the most common amount was \$20 (10 percent of the total sample, or 26 percent of those willing to donate). Across the entire sample (not including the “Don’t knows”), the median willingness to pay was \$5 per head, and the mean was \$14. Not surprisingly, readers were willing to donate more than non-readers (means of \$15.0 compared to \$3.6).

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<sup>4</sup> Defined in formal terms as a good that is both non-excludable (availability for one means availability for all) and non-rival (one person’s consumption of it does not diminish the amount available to others).

**Figure 4. Donation amounts to support the Australian book industry: percentages of respondents (n=2944)**



Results from CVM exercises such as this have to be interpreted with caution. In particular it should be noted that the measurement undertaken here is highly simplified, and does not constitute a full CVM application where all sources of bias are controlled for. Hence only the broadest conclusions can be drawn from the results. With this caveat in mind, we can say that this study provides some evidence for the existence of public-good benefits yielded by the Australian book industry, and that consumers on average value these benefits, although we cannot say how much this value is in financial terms. Nevertheless the policy implications of these findings point towards a generally positive attitude in the community towards some level of public support for Australian writers and publishers in the production of Australian books.

## 12. LITERARY FICTION

A small but significant segment of the Australian book landscape is that relating to literary fiction. The size of literary book readerships is not clear. A traditional view is that readerships of literary fiction are small in number; Australian publishers estimate that most works of literary fiction sell 2,000–3,000 copies (Zwar 2016). A 2015 survey of Australian authors found that literary fiction authors were the most likely of all book authors to report that they are financially worse off than five years ago as a result of changes in the industry, lending weight to the proposition that markets may be smaller than for some other types of books (Throsby, Zwar and Longden 2015).

There was some discussion in the focus groups about literary works. Some older participants spoke knowledgeably about their literary tastes while in another group the adult members were positive about classics but very sceptical about contemporary literary works. One adult woman dismissed the latter as, “books that use really big words that I just can’t be bothered to read.” There was spirited discussion in this focus group about what the members

perceived as pretensions associated with the claims made in the marketing and reviews of these contemporary literary titles. We found that teenage members of focus groups were unsure about the term “literary”. When we showed them draft lists of genres and asked for their feedback they circled the word literary and added a question-mark or asked what it meant. Even teenage participants who read books that could be considered literary did not apply this label to their choices.

As we noted in section 6.1 above, around 15 percent of Australians indicated that they enjoy reading literary fiction these days. However, the observation about a lack of concern for literary fiction amongst youngsters that came out of the focus groups is reflected in the fact that only 5 percent of respondents under 20 years of age said that they currently enjoy reading books in this genre.

These data concern people’s current reading patterns in general terms. Later in the survey, we turned our attention specifically onto literary fiction to investigate people’s likes/dislikes in more detail. We distinguished between classics and contemporary novels, the former described as books written by authors such as Dickens or Jane Austen, and the latter described as “books that could be eligible for a literary prize like the Booker Prize, the Miles Franklin, etc.”. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements such as “I like to read literary classics ...” The data show that just under half (45%) agreed that they like literary classics, and just over half (51%) agreed that they like literary fiction by contemporary writers. It is noteworthy that, when questioned in this more focussed context, young Australians demonstrated a liking for literary works that is higher than previously indicated, as shown in Table 17. Indeed somewhere between 35 and 45 percent of young Australians aged less than 20 agreed that they like books of classic and/or contemporary literary fiction, suggesting some modification to the picture painted by the focus group results described above.

**Table 17. Liking for literary fiction, by age groups: percent of respondents in each age group**

	<b>Under 20</b>	<b>20-39</b>	<b>40-59</b>	<b>60-79</b>	<b>80+</b>	<b>Total</b>
Liking literary classics	37.4	45.4	47.3	44.9	48.7	45.3
Liking contemporary literary fiction	42.2	50.3	49.5	53.8	51.5	50.5
Liking literary fiction by Australian authors	28.1	38.2	52	59.2	69.3	48.1
<i>n</i>	215	959	890	840	40	2944



We turn now to *Australian* literary fiction as a particular category of this genre. In doing so, we must address the question of what it is that is understood to comprise Australian literature. This is a matter of some uncertainty.<sup>5</sup> For example, Nicholas Birns notes that:

“Patrick White was brought up in Australia, lived his mature life in Australia, and wrote largely about Australia, but his years in England, his study of French and German culture, and his wartime sojourn in Greece and the Middle East, are crucial to understanding him. Christina Stead and Shirley Hazzard both grew up in Sydney, but both wrote their greatest work in New York, and are still considered—and consider themselves to be—Australian writers. Australia’s most prestigious literary award, the Miles Franklin, originally was to be given only to a book that depicted ‘Australian life in any of its phases.’ These restrictive criteria were tacitly broadened only in the 2000s” (Birns 2015, p. 1).

Despite these problems, we adopted for the purposes of the survey the definitions of literary fiction noted above, and asked respondents whether they liked literary fiction specifically by Australian authors (past or present). Again, around half of the sample (48%) indicated a liking for such books, as shown in the last line of Table 17, with a strong preference amongst older readers. In comparison to literary classics and contemporary literary fiction, this time, younger readers were somewhat less enthusiastic, reflecting the lack of concern among young people for Australian-ness as a specific discriminator in forming their reading preferences that we noted earlier. Even so, it is worth pointing out that about 30 percent of readers under 20 expressed a liking for literary works by Australian writers.

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<sup>5</sup> For some scholarly contributions to the long-running debate surrounding the concept of Australian literature see, for example, Carter (2000), Dixon (2010), Dixon and Rooney (2013), Gelder (2013).

## PART III: Conclusions

The disruptions caused by changing technologies that have profoundly affected the book industry at large in recent years are evident in changes over time in the attitudes and behaviour of the industry's ultimate consumer, the book reader. The survey of Australian book readers reported herein has identified points of continuity with previous studies, and some significant departures that are attributable to the disruptions underway in the industry and perhaps in the lives of Australians overall. The demographics of readers still skew towards older, female, tertiary-educated Australians as observed in earlier studies, although we find that readers do not necessarily come from higher income categories.

Authors and publishers are aware of the competition for Australians' leisure time, and the survey confirms that change is underway. Book readers are spending slightly less time reading books now than they did five years ago, citing the importance of work/study/family commitments and the appeal of other leisure activities. This is particularly evident among younger readers under 20 years of age, suggesting that authors and publishers are correct in turning to innovative forms of marketing to reach young Australians and to inculcate in them a sense of membership in book reading cultures.

In keeping with this, the findings also map out the ways that younger book readers engage with book culture on social media and the Internet. Two-thirds of Australians are involved with books and reading on social media and the Internet in a rich variety of ways; while traditional book history scholarship conceives of book readers as active participants in book culture (rather than passive recipients of a book's content), social media and the Internet allow readers to engage with one another on these new platforms in large numbers. Such opportunities offer all sorts of prospects for technological creativity, including filming and posting video fan clips and creating fan art, as well as the better-known phenomenon of fan fiction. Our survey findings distinguish between Australians who *read* or *consume* these creative endeavours, and those who *create* and *contribute* them. We find that younger Australians are more likely to read these sorts of works rather than contributing their own, while Australians aged 30-39 are the most likely group both to read and to make contributions. The findings suggest that there is considerable scope for further research into these new platforms for book culture.

Our investigation into Australians' sources of books confirms the continued relevance of bricks and mortar bookstores for sales of books, and libraries as an important source for borrowing. However, the data also point to the widespread popularity of second-hand book sources, with 40 percent of Australians using these sometimes or often, suggesting there is potential to investigate the role of these types of outlets further. Our results also confirm the importance of print formats as the most popular choice of readers, and show that iPads or other tablet devices are more popular than dedicated e-readers.

More unusual findings came up in relation to interest in reading Australian books, although we note that there is no single definition of this term. Older readers appear to be more conscious than younger ones of the idea of "Australian books" as a distinctive identifier. However this is not to say that young Australians don't read Australian books – they do read and enjoy them, but they don't pay much attention to the Australian dimensions (whether

via the author or the setting) of the books they choose to read. This finding hints at the possibility that a cultural shift may be underway, reflecting the fact that younger Australians are “born global” in their cultural access and expectations; as such they are not so much influenced in their reading habits by the cultural nationalist movements which have affected older generations.

In regard to the category of literary fiction as a specific genre, around half of the Australian reading population like literary classics and literary fiction by contemporary writers. It is noteworthy that young Australians demonstrate a liking for literary works that is not very different from that of older people. However, young readers’ attitudes to literary fiction in general do not extend to specifically Australian literary works, again demonstrating a lack of concern for Australian-ness among the younger generation. We conclude that the role and value of Australian literary books and culture may need to be reconceptualised and communicated to younger Australians in new ways that are relevant to them, if the public support which enables their creation is to continue.

An area of particular interest in the Australian cultural landscape is books by Indigenous writers, many of which are produced by specialist Indigenous publishers. The data reveal a high level of appreciation of the role of Indigenous publishers, with over half of Australians agreeing that they are important for producing books about Indigenous Australian cultures, a finding that underlines the importance of the government support provided to these organisations which is vital for their continued operation. Readers too are interested in books about Indigenous cultures; almost two-thirds of Australians regard books by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers as important for Australian culture.

Finally, this study has revealed a generally positive attitude in the community towards some level of public support for Australian writers and publishers in the production of Australian books. A substantial majority of our sample said they regard it as important or extremely important that books written by Australian authors be published in Australia. Moreover, just over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the direct proposition that there should be public funding specifically for Australian writing.

In conclusion, we note that the reports on the Australian book industry produced by two recent enquiries, the Book Industry Strategy Group and the Book Industry Collaborative Council, drew attention to the significant contribution of books to Australian cultural life. Our survey has provided objective quantitative evidence on the extent to which Australians recognise this cultural value, and endorse the role that public policy should play in delivering these cultural benefits to the community now and in the future.

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# Appendix I

## A note on literacy levels

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports data from the 2011–12 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which indicate substantial rates of low literacy skills in the Australian adult population<sup>6</sup>. The ABS reports that:

Around 3.7% (620,000) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years had literacy skills at Below Level 1, a further 10% (1.7 million) at Level 1, 30% (5.0 million) at Level 2, 38% (6.3 million) at Level 3, 14% (2.4 million) at Level 4, and 1.2% (200,000) at Level 5.

The two lowest skills levels referred to here are explained by the ABS as follows:

*Below Level 1:* The tasks at this level require the respondent to read brief texts on familiar topics to locate a single piece of specific information. There is seldom any competing information in the text and the requested information is identical in form to information in the question or directive. The respondent may be required to locate information in short continuous texts. However, in this case, the information can be located as if the text were non-continuous in format. Only basic vocabulary knowledge is required, and the reader is not required to understand the structure of sentences or paragraphs or make use of other text features. Tasks below Level 1 do not make use of any features specific to digital texts.

*Level 1:* Most of the tasks at this level require the respondent to read relatively short digital or print continuous, non-continuous, or mixed texts to locate a single piece of information that is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. Some tasks, such as those involving non-continuous texts, may require the respondent to enter personal information onto a document. Little, if any, competing information is present. Some tasks may require simple cycling through more than one piece of information. Knowledge and skill in recognising basic vocabulary determining the meaning of sentences, and reading paragraphs of text is expected.

Low literacy skills may result from several factors, including dyslexia, hyperlexia or a common reading disability. Gough and Tunmer (1986) propose a simple model of reading, which holds that reading equals the product of decoding and comprehension. Hence low literacy skills may result from an inability to decode (dyslexia), an inability to comprehend (hyperlexia), or a combination of both (a common reading disability).

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<sup>6</sup> See Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-12* ABS Cat. No. 4228.0, issued 9 October.



The available research on literacy skills in Australia has some implications for this report. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that adult Australians with these skill levels may be less likely to read books for pleasure. If this inference is correct, it suggests that approximately 3.7 percent of Australians are unlikely to read books due to a substantial level of illiteracy and 10 percent of Australians may be restricted in their options for recreational book reading due to low levels of literacy. Thus our results may overstate the prevalence of book readerships in the national population, although the extent of any such overstatement is likely to be relatively minor.



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