

Bringing e-Readers Into the Discussion

Survey sees increase in e-book popularity among book clubs.

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How is the e-book revolution playing out in that beloved bastion of literary fandom, the book club? That's just what the website Reading Group Choices (RGC) sought to find out in a recent survey of e-book usage among book club members. The survey, conducted on RGC's website and through a physical mailing from Jan. 1 to March 25, 2011, encompassed thousands of reading groups representing over 200,000 readers, according to a company press release. The 2011 survey asked about reading group habits in 2010. (A similar survey last year asked about reading group habits in 2009.)

As it turns out, book clubs are increasingly incorporating e-books into the mix. Though the 2011 survey found the "vast majority" of book club members still prefer the printed book, 25.5 percent reported using an e-reader in 2010, compared to 15.6 percent in 2009. The Amazon Kindle leads the way among e-reading book club members, with 59 percent owning Kindles. The Nook ranked second at 29 percent. Almost 20 percent read e-books on tablets.

An interesting factor noted by RGC owner Barbara Mead is the way book club members' preferences may effect e-book adoption. As she notes, 60 percent of titles purchased in e-book format (in the general marketplace) are in the romance fiction category. Book club members, however, tend to favor literary fiction and memoirs.

Book Business Extra asked Mead about this, as well as for more information on the survey and other book club trends (such as use of social media).

Extra: Newer e-readers (such as the Kobo Touch) are incorporating social sharing features into their devices. Do you see this as impacting book group use? More generally, do you see book groups making increasing use of social media?

Mead: Yes, definitely. Book clubs can now share and discuss book passages, get a read on friends' reviews and to-be-read list, and lend e-books—all from the e-reader.

The social integrations coming out for book club are virtually endless. Book clubs are now connecting on Facebook, Ning, Meetup, Squiddo, LibraryThing and other social platforms to discuss books online, and with a wider audience beyond their in-person book clubs. In 2010, 22.1 percent of reading group members used social networking sites to learn about books to discuss. Of those, most use Goodreads [71.7 percent] and Facebook [66.8 percent]. [Fewer use Library Thing (18.8 percent), Shelfari (17.8 percent) and Twitter (10.2 percent).]

RGC has introduced a variety of new "social" programs like our Author Chats on Facebook to

bridge the gap between authors and book clubs, offer book clubs unprecedented access into the lives and work of writers, forging the author-reader bond.

Extra: Are there any other stats from the new study not featured in the press release that you can share?

Mead: 34.6 percent of reading group members listened to audiobooks in 2010 ... and they usually listened in the car (83.9 percent). [They also listened while "multitasking" (45.5 percent), while just relaxing (15.5 percent) and while on the bus, train or plane (9.6 percent).]

Book Business Extra: You mention that some of the most popular genres on e-books (e.g., romance) are not as popular with book clubs. Do you expect book clubs' predilection for literary fiction to cause e-book adoption to lag behind the general population?

Barbara Mead: I doubt it. There are a number of other reasons book groups will find e-readers useful in supporting their discussions ... [so] I expect the trend to continue. Book club members are so passionate about their books that they will look for any avenue to read and discuss them.

Extra: How do you think the closing of so many physical bookstores will impact the above?

Mead: It's curious—a few years ago, independent bookstores feared that the large chains would put them out of business. Now, one of the largest bookstore chains is closing, and the independent bookstores are still around. The "indies" offer book advice and expertise that readers seem to enjoy. And many of the indies have websites that offer e-books as well as paperbacks and hardcovers. So I think that the indies are adapting to and supporting the current trends, and so are book groups.

Book Club Device Usage

Percentage of books read by reading group members on various devices in 2009 and 2010:

	2009	2010
Amazon Kindle	78.2%	58.8%
B&N Nook	6.9%	25.8%
Apple iPad	[*]	18.6%
Sony Digital Book	11.7%	7.7%
Mobile Phone	[*]	7.4%
Laptop computer or PC	[*]	0.6%
Other tablet computer	[*]	0.8%
Other	9.0%	1.6%

*Included in "Other in Reading Group Choices" survey of 2009 users

Source: 2011 Reading Group Survey conducted by Reading Group Choices.