

## 2015 Reader Survey

By: Marie Force

Two years after I conducted the first Reader Survey in 2013, I decided to re-run the survey to see what, if anything has changed in the last two years. The survey was conducted from May 6 to June 6, 2015 via Survey Monkey. The number of survey respondents more than doubled between 2013 and 2015, from 2,951 to 5,990. Readers were notified of the survey by authors via social media platforms and newsletter notifications. Disclaimer: this survey is NOT intended to be scientific. It is exactly what it appears to be: questions posed by authors and answered by readers. We make no claims that the survey is anything more than that.

To summarize the more interesting results and comparisons between the two surveys:

- Demographic data was added to the 2015 survey and we discovered that most of the readers who took the survey—95 percent— are female.
- Questions were added about subscription services and we found that nearly 82 percent (4900 out of 5990 respondents) do not belong to reader subscription services and most (76 percent) still buy books they can't get through subscription services.
- Another new question this year helped us document that more than 51 percent of readers are between the ages of 36 and 55, with a nearly equal split between readers in the 46-55 year-old group, which had a .9 percent lead over the 36-45 age group. The next largest age group, at 20 percent, is 56-65, followed by readers of the following ages: 26-35 (15 percent), 66-75 (7 percent), 18-25 (3 percent), those who didn't wish to respond (3 percent), 75 and older, at 1 percent, and under 18, at .2 percent.
- There was little change between the two surveys with regard to readers' preferred book format. The question allowed readers to choose all formats that apply. Ebooks still lead, though they took a 1 percent dip between the 2013 and 2015 surveys (78 percent versus 77 percent). In our last survey, I noted it was interesting that more than half of readers were still looking for their books in paperback. I also said there appeared to be a crossover between the two most popular formats, ebook and paperback, indicating some readers buy books in multiple formats when the paperback is available. In the 2015 survey, paperbacks took a slight dip, from 51 percent to 46 percent. Somewhat surprisingly, hardcover books saw a small increase as the preferred format, with 24 percent of readers saying they like to read them, compared to 22 percent in the 2013 survey.

<b>Preferred format</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
% Ebooks readers	78	77
% paperback readers	51	46
% hard cover book readers	22	24
All of the above	10	15
% audio books	8	9

- Readers still overwhelmingly choose romance as their favorite genre of fiction, although the percentage decreased slightly, from 81 percent in 2013 to 77 percent in 2015. Contemporary fiction remained the readers’ favorite subgenre, at 27 percent for both years. Erotic fiction, however, doubled in the percentage of readers who say it’s their favorite subgenre, from 10 to 20 percent.
- Kindle has grown in its popularity since the last survey (78 percent to 86 percent) and is still the platform leader for purchasing ebooks. Nook actually received fewer votes in 2015 (23 percent versus 20 percent in 2013), while iBooks gained a few percentage points (13 percent in 2013 versus 16 percent in 2015).

### Percentage of readers who buy from various platforms

	2013	2015
Kindle/Amazon	78	86
Nook/B&N	23	20
iBooks/Apple	13	16
Author’s website	12	13
Other	9	6
Kobo	7	7
I don’t buy ebooks	6	4
Google books	2	4
All of the above	1	1

- It’s interesting that the largest number of readers, 33 percent in 2013 and 35 percent in 2015, visited a brick and mortar bookstore twice in the past year. In 2013, the second largest percentage of readers, 24 percent, went once a month, while the second largest percentage in 2015, 26 percent, had not gone at all in the past year.
- A change in the way readers could respond to a question may make it seem that the number of readers who are more likely to buy a self-published book from an author known to them has declined. In 2013 the question, “Are you more or less likely to buy a self-published book from a known-to-you-author?” had two possible answers: More likely, which 95 percent of readers chose, and less likely, which 5 percent of readers chose. The 2015 readers had the following answer selections: More likely (51 percent), doesn’t matter (48) and less likely (2 percent).
- A larger percentage of readers in 2015 over 2013 used Facebook as the primary source of information about books (18 percent versus 32 percent in 2015), making it the most popular way for readers to get this information. Facebook was also the most popular way for readers to get information about authors in 2015, at 69 percent. In 2013, author websites took the top spot with

63 percent, followed by Facebook at 62 percent. Author websites came in second in 2015 at 53 percent. Eighty-eight percent of readers in 2015 said they follow their favorite author(s) on Facebook, which is a slight increase over 2013 (87 percent). Twitter and Pinterest did not fare so well with regard to readers following authors on those platforms. Sixty-two percent of readers said they don't follow their favorite authors on Twitter in 2015 (versus 61 percent in 2013) and 80 percent said they don't follow authors on Pinterest in 2015, compared with 84 percent in 2013. This could be because many authors don't use these platforms with the same frequency as they do Facebook.

### *Author Engagement with Readers*

#### **Readers' primary source of information about books (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Facebook	18	32
Retail sites	17	12
Other	15	14
Goodreads	14	12
Review Sites	11	7
Author websites	10	7
Reader blogs	6	4
Author newsletters	5	9
Twitter	4	2

#### **Readers' primary source of information about favorite author (by percentage)**

Author websites	63	53
Facebook	62	69
Author newsletters	36	45
Goodreads	28	29
Reader blogs	20	18
Twitter	18	13
Retail sites	18	16
Other	9	7

### **Percentage of readers who subscribe to newsletter of favorite author**

	84	88
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### **Percentage of readers who subscribe to the blog of favorite author**

	56	50
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### **Percentage of readers who follow favorite author on**

Facebook	87	88
Twitter	39	38
Pinterest	16	20

- Reviews in general were only somewhat important to readers' decisions to purchase a book (53 percent in 2013 versus 52 percent in 2015).
- The percentage of readers who don't subscribe to book reviews such as RT Book Reviews, New York Times Sunday edition or Publishers Weekly rose from 81 percent in 2013 to 85 percent in 2015. It makes sense, then, that these publications rarely played a role in influencing reader decisions to purchase a book. However, for readers who do subscribe to these reviews, in 2015, 12 percent of readers said RT Book Reviews influenced their decision, followed by other (7 percent), New York Times Book Review (5 percent), Publishers Weekly (3 percent), Booklist (3 percent) and Kirkus (1 percent).
- Forty-three percent of readers in 2015 said "star ratings" on retail sites are not that important and they would try a low star-rating if they like the cover/teaser/sample, versus 38 percent of readers who said the same thing in 2013. Thirty-nine percent of readers responding to the 2015 survey said star ratings are somewhat important and that seeing low-star ratings will make them wait to buy a book, compared to 43 percent who said that in 2013.
- Free books continue to be a good way for authors to introduce themselves to new readers. In 2015, 40 percent of readers said a free book introduced them to a new author they wouldn't have tried without the free offering, which shows an increase of about 5 percentage points over readers who responded to the 2013 survey. And the percentage of readers who said they were extremely likely to buy a second book from an author if they enjoyed his or her free book remained at more than 84 percent for both years of the survey.
- Editors won't be pleased to hear that 32 percent of readers aren't bothered by typos.

### *Factors Impacting Readers' Decision to Buy*

**Endorsements' (cover blurb) from a well-known author's impact on readers' decision to buy an unknown author's book**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
No	59	61
Yes	41	39

**Impact of reviews on readers' decision to buy a book**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Somewhat	53	52
Not very much	22	25
Very much	18	14
Not at all	7	8

**Reviews that are most important to readers' decision to purchase a book (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Reader reviews on retail sites	48	56
Goodreads reviews	16	16
Blog reviews	13	10
Other	11	11
Publication reviews (i.e., RT book reviews, Publishers Weekly, Kirkus, etc.)	10	7

**Publications that have recently influenced readers' decision to buy a book or try a new author (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Not applicable	76	83
RT book reviews	12	8
Other	7	5
New York Times book review	5	3
Publishers Weekly	3	2
Booklist	3	3

Kirkus	1	1
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**The importance of star ratings on retail sites in readers' decision to buy books (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Somewhat important	43	39
Not that important	38	43
Not at all important	11	11
Very important	8	7

**The likelihood that a reader will buy a second book from an author if they enjoyed the author's first free book (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
Extremely likely	85	85
Somewhat likely	14	13
Somewhat unlikely	1	1
I have never bought a second book (only read free books)		
	1	1

**Are readers more likely to buy books from authors they may not know if they are New York Times or USA Today bestsellers (by percentage)?**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
No	72	74
Yes	28	26

**What aspects of a book keep readers coming back for more (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
All of the above	75	78
Characters	11	8

Storytelling	8	7
Writing	4	4
Other	2	2
Setting	.1	.2

**How often readers peruse the NYT or USA bestseller lists looking for new authors (by percentage)**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
<i>NYT</i>		
Never	60	66
Rarely	29	26
Monthly	7	5
Weekly	3	2
<i>USA</i>		
Never	68	73
Rarely	25	22
Monthly	4	3
Weekly	2	1

- It may be surprising that 74 percent of readers aren't more likely to purchase a book from an author they many not already know if the book has "New York Times Bestseller" or "USA Bestseller" with the author's name. In addition, 66 percent of readers say they never peruse the New York Times bestseller list looking for new authors to try, 26 say they rarely check the list, 5 percent check monthly and 2 percent check out the list weekly. Similar results were found when readers were asked how often they checked out the USA Today bestseller list, looking for new authors to try: 73 percent answered never, 22 percent said rarely, 3 percent answered monthly, and 1 percent said weekly.
- Eighty-eight percent of readers subscribe to the newsletter of their favorite authors and the majority of them (83 percent each ) want to hear about both upcoming and new releases, followed by news about other authors' books (50 percent), exciting news, such as awards or bestseller lists (45 percent), what their favorite author is reading (43 percent).
- BookBub continues to lead the pack for providing information about free or reduced price books. Seventy-six percent of readers subscribe to BookBub, (in 2013, this number was 49 percent) compared to 21 percent who chose Kindle Fire Department, and 12 percent who chose Pixels of Ink. Check out what "Other" answers included by reviewing the raw results.

- Readers want what they want. Fifty-one percent of readers said if they want a book, they don't care what the price is. The question, "How price sensitive are you? Check all that apply" also found that 23 percent will not pay more than \$4.99 for an ebook. In another question regarding price, twenty-seven percent of readers say \$4.99 is the average price they would expect to pay for a full-length digital novel, 20 percent say \$3.99, 16 percent say \$5.99, 11 percent say \$2.99, 9 percent say \$7.99, and 7 percent say \$6.99. The majority of readers (37 percent) say the most they would expect to pay for a digital novella is \$.99, followed by 32 percent who say \$1.99 and 20 percent who say \$2.99.

## *Book Pricing*

### **Price sensitivity of readers**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
If I want the book, I don't care what the price is (by percentage)	52	51
Other (open ended)	31	25
I will not pay more than \$4.99 for an ebook	22	23
I am willing to pay more for an ebook published by a major publisher than for an ebook that is self-published	8	6
I will not pay more than \$2.99 for an ebook	7	10
I do not pay for ebooks. I wait until they are available for free and download them then	4	4
I will not pay more than \$.99 for an ebook	2	3

### **Average price readers expect to pay for a digital full-length novel**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
\$4.99	26	27
\$5.99	19	16



\$3.99	14	20
\$7.99	13	9
Other	11	9
\$6.99	10	7
\$2.99	6	11

**The most readers will pay for a digital novella**

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
\$.99	35	37
\$1.99	33	32
\$2.99	21	20
Other	12	11

- An endorsement (cover blurb) from a well-known author doesn't influence 62 percent of readers to buy the book of an unknown author.
- While 63 percent of readers say they have never purchased an audiobook (versus 69 percent in 2013), 20 percent of those who did bought them at Audible.com (versus 15 percent in 2013), 17 percent at Amazon (versus 11 percent in 2013) and 5 percent on iTunes (versus 7 percent in 2013). Twenty-one percent of those who purchased audio books bought 1 – 10 in the past year, compared with 5 percent who bought more than 20. This compares to 2013, when 18 percent of readers bought 1 – 10 audio books, 4 percent bought more than 20, and 4 percent bought 10 – 20.
- Fifty-two percent of readers have never watched a book trailer as part of their purchasing decision, a 1.5 percent decrease over the 2013 survey.
- The professionalism of a book cover remained top of the list of cover design elements that impact purchase decisions, with fifty-two percent of readers in both 2013 and 2015 selecting this. Readers, who were asked to select all cover design factors that apply to their purchase decisions, also listed appearance of the hero (31 percent), covers rarely influence them (31 percent), appearance of the heroine (25 percent), fonts used (17 percent), prefer illustrated covers (13 percent), other (10 percent) and I prefer designs without people (6 percent).
- When asked to respond to "I prefer to read stories that include (select one from multiple points of view, first-person points of view, the heroine's point of view only, the hero's point of view only), 54 percent of readers said it doesn't matter, which is up from 49 percent in 2013.

**Conclusions**

- Most respondents are female and between the ages of 36 and 55.

- While readers prefer ebooks, half still prefer paperbacks, and hardcovers inched up a bit between 2013 and 2015.
- Amazon/Kindle and iBooks/Apple grew in popularity between 2013 and 2015, while Nook/Barnes & Noble saw a slight decrease.
- Authors may be frustrated with some of Facebook's limitations, but for the time being, Facebook is still a powerful tool with which to engage with readers. The number of readers who use the social media platform as the primary source of information about books grew from 18 to 32 percent between 2013 and 2015. Facebook as the primary source of information about readers' favorite authors also saw an increase, from 62 to 69 percent. There was a smaller increase in the percentage of readers who follow their favorite authors on Facebook, from 87 to 88 percent. Author websites and newsletters are also popular ways for readers to get information. More than half of readers also subscribe to blogs of their favorite authors.
- Readers continue to disregard the price of a book they want (52 percent in 2013 and 51 percent in 2015) and will not pay more than \$4.99 for an ebook (22 percent in 2013 and 23 percent in 2015). Between 2013 and 2015, readers remained consistent in expecting to pay an average price of \$4.99 for an ebook (26 percent in 2013 and 27 percent in 2015) , but rather than paying \$5.99, which was the second largest percentage in 2013 (at 19 percent), the second largest percentage of readers in 2015, or 20 percent, will pay \$3.99.

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