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This is an author produced version of a paper published in

Publishing Research Quarterly (ISSN 1053-8801, eISSN 1936-4792)

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#### Citation Details

##### Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

LAING, A. and ROYLE, J., 2013. Bookselling online: an examination of consumer behaviour patterns. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

##### Citation for the publisher's version:

LAING, A. and ROYLE, J., 2013. Bookselling online: an examination of consumer behaviour patterns. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 29 (2), pp. 110-127.

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The final publication is available at Springer via <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12109-013-9318-3>

# **Bookselling online:**

**an examination of consumer behaviour patterns**

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## **Introduction**

The UK book trade is currently undergoing tremendous change, largely due to the continuing success of online bookselling and the advent of the e-book reader. While the UK book market in its entirety was worth £3.3 billion in 2010 [45] it is undergoing considerable development as channels to market continue to metamorphose from bricks and mortar sites to online and digital media. While the online bookselling market continues to prosper and sales of e-books become more established, especially in the UK [29], many chain bookshops are disappearing from UK high streets and in 2010, independents went out of business at the rate of two every week [45]. While the latest consumer reports note that book sales overall have suffered a slight year on year decline [32] as one might expect given the current economic situation in the UK, the online share of that market continues to increase as an overall proportion of book sales in the UK [32]. Indeed it is notable that bookselling has been one of the most resilient of retail sectors, with a relatively small decline in sales following several years of growth [44]. Amazon continues to retain a substantial share of traffic to online bookselling sites [57] and is third only to Waterstone's and WHSmith in the UK for book sales [44]. Given that in the current retail environment, brand is becoming increasingly important [13] it would seem that the dominance of Amazon online will be set to continue.

Despite the value of the bookselling sector to the UK economy and its ongoing state of dynamism, it is a relatively unexplored setting within an academic context. The aim of this paper is to examine and analyse consumer behaviour patterns in online bookshops, comparing them to traditional bookshop behaviour and noting any contrasts in preferences with regard to surroundings, facilities and experiences as well as examining the strongest purchase prompts which exist, both online and in the high street. The purpose of this is to enhance scholarly knowledge of online consumer behaviour, building upon existing research examining online consumer behaviour, and revealing further behaviour patterns which can be tested in other online settings, informing future theoretical research. There is also considerable scope for findings to contribute to industry approaches to marketing, both online and in traditional retailing environments. Both the UK and Scottish Governments [53, 59] have recently underlined the considerable contribution made to the economy by the creative and cultural industries, and are keen to encourage further business innovation and entrepreneurship in these fields. The current research contributes to this field of knowledge both in the academic and business spheres.

The paper reviews the current state of bookselling in the UK, outlining industry challenges facing booksellers both online and in the high street. A review of marketing literature relevant to the scope of the research follows, and the methodology sets out the research process.

### **Rationale and literature review**

While research into online environments and consumer behaviour online has become much more widespread in recent years, nevertheless, research into online bookselling is uncommon. In particular, an examination of the preferences and experiences of consumers in an online bookselling environment has not been undertaken to date, despite the significant economic contribution made by online bookselling to UK retailing and the potential for findings to inform further research in online retailing. Research examining online bookselling [55, 15] has tended to use the online bookselling setting as a conduit for studying other aspects of consumer behaviour – e.g. herding or consumer defection analysis - rather than examining bookshops and their consumers' experiences per se. Studies have been undertaken examining the impact of online customer reviews upon buying patterns and related consumer behaviour [17, 16, 46] and these studies help contextualise the current research. For instance, Chevalier and Mayzlin [17] examined the effects of book reviews on sales and found that 'an improvement in a book's reviews leads to an increase in relative sales at that site'. In a study examining reviews of a range of products, Mudambi and Schuff [46] found that product reviews do have an impact on sales, although the subtleties associated with review depth and product type tended to moderate the perceived helpfulness of the review. The current research builds upon this work, examining the popularity of customer reviews with online customers, as well as the popularity of 'personalised' online facilities such as linked recommendations. In their study of the link between hedonic tendencies and online shopping processes, Kim and Eastin [33] found that 'pre-purchase browsing time has a positive relationship with online buying frequency'. The current paper examines the browsing process online, comparing and contrasting these browsing processes with those in traditional bookshops. Given the growth of retailers as leisure outlets and destination stores, this is an important topic to examine and the current research enhances scholarly knowledge of consumer behaviour in this field. Serendipity and flow were topics raised by the current research in the context of browsing – particularly in traditional bookshops. While flow online has been studied [40, 26, 37], its existence in traditional bookshops has not been examined in any depth. The

current research builds on the work of Ballantine *et al* [7] and Soars [55] by examining whether the lack of a tactile quality within the online setting is important for the online book consumer. Ballantine *et al* [7] examine atmospherics and sensory stimuli respectively in their research and the impact which these qualities have upon consumer experience and behaviour. In her examination of how sales can be promoted using sensory stimuli, Soars [55] finds that these are powerful marketing tools, which in turn emphasises the lack of these kinds of qualities in e-tailing environments. The customisation of atmosphere in the online setting has been studied by Vrechopoulos [61] and the current research builds on this work, probing consumer experiences online and offline, eliciting comment about the contrasting experiences therein.

## **Methodology**

A total of 156 online questionnaires were undertaken with online bookshop users. These data were supported by in-depth interviews with bookshop strategists (both online and traditional) and face-to-face questionnaires with 100 in-store bookshop users. Three focus groups were then undertaken, with five, six and seven participants respectively, examining pertinent topics in more detail. The online questionnaire was designed to probe consumer responses to various aspects of online bookselling, ranging from frequency and duration of visits, to responses to online recommendations and customer reviews. It was delivered online, in order to focus upon consumers with online access as well as having the additional advantages of ease of administration, excising fieldwork, travel and paper costs and enhancing the speed of data gathering [22]. While this paper focuses on the findings from the online questionnaires, the broad scope of research undertaken serves to triangulate the information gathered from the online survey as well as underpinning the findings. The focus groups in particular elicited findings about consumer preferences and behaviour in online bookshops. Demographic information was gathered from the research participants, although this was not the main focus of the study. Each of the results in this study has been analysed in terms of gender responses and while the results were found to be broadly similar (especially bearing in mind the relatively small participation numbers), those instances where gender has a bearing upon the results is highlighted in the paper.

While there are concerns to be borne in mind when administering an online survey, such as access to online facilities and ease of use for all participants [30, 24] nevertheless the advantages of such an approach were considered to outweigh

those concerns, and were not considered to be significant in such a survey, where the central point of using an online questionnaire was to reach those using online facilities. While online questionnaires have the potential disadvantage of cutting out personal contact between researcher and participant, the current research allowed participants to add comments at various stages of the questionnaire, making it a more interactive process. This was a facility which many participants used, generating qualitative feedback as well as quantitative data. Given that the online questionnaire was triangulated within the context of broader research, much of which was itself qualitative, this impact was believed to be minimal.

### Visiting patterns in online bookshops

Demographic information gathered over the course of both online surveys reveal that the largest percentage of participants are in the age range 21 – 40. Table 1 sets out how other age ranges make up the online survey participants. For comparison, the breakdown of participants from the traditional bookshops is also included.

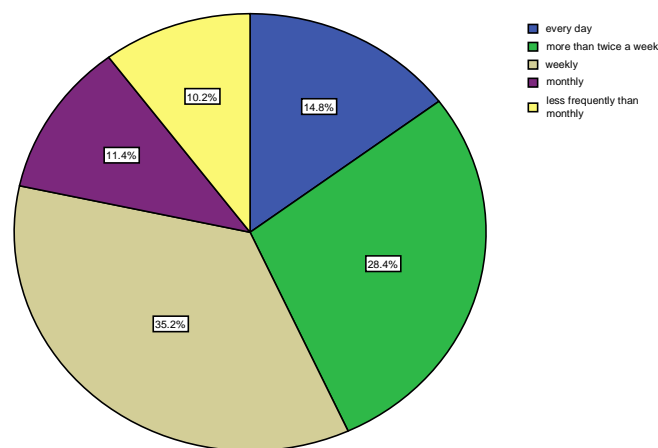
<b>Online</b>	Aged 20 and under	Age 21 - 30	Age 31 - 40	Age 41-50	Age 51 - 60	Aged 61 and over	Total
Number of participants	20	50	41	24	17	6	158
Percentage (approx)	12.8	33.1	25	14.5	10.5	4	99.9
<b>Traditional</b>	Aged 20 and under	Age 21 - 30	Age 31 - 40	Age 41-50	Age 51 - 60	Aged 61 and over	Aged 61 and over
Number of							

participants	14	35	28	13	6	4	100
and %age							

**Table 1**

**Age range of participants**

Respondents to the in-store surveys were split 61% women to 39% men. With regard to the online surveys, the percentage split was 64% women to 35% of men (with a single non-respondent). This is broadly in line with previous bookshop research, which has found that women tend to visit bookshops more than men [43]. Examining the frequency of visits to online bookshops, figure 1 illustrates the fact that just over 35% of the group surveyed visit online bookshops weekly and just over 28% visit more than twice a week. These groups make up the bulk of online bookshop visitors, the next biggest group being those who visit every day – almost 15% of respondents. Therefore, 78% of online bookshop visitors visit at least weekly. This is considerably more frequent than traditional bookshop visitors where just 33% were found to visit twice a week or more. Therefore, the research reveals a fundamental difference between the frequency of online as opposed to traditional bookshop visiting. (See Table 2).

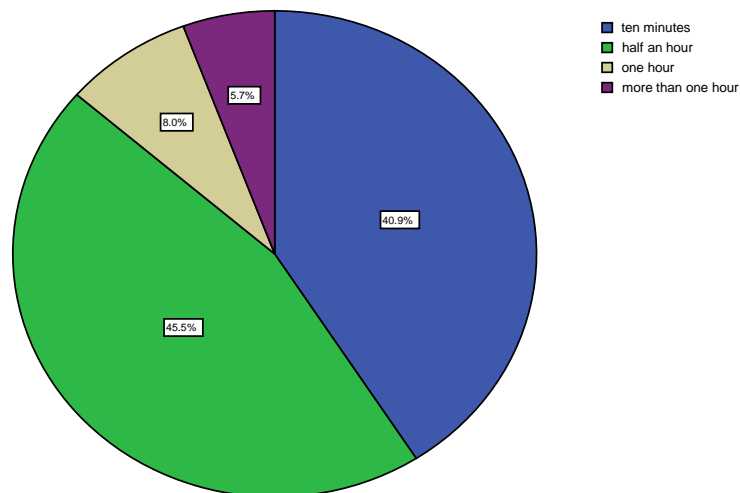


**Figure 1**

**Frequency of online visits**



It is interesting to compare these findings with those illustrated in figure 2, which show that the time spent on online visits tends to be rather limited. Almost 41% spend around 10 minutes, while 45% spend around half an hour there. Only 13% spend an hour or more in online bookshops. It is therefore clear, that although visitors to online bookshops tend to do so quite frequently (see figure 1), they tend to spend a relatively *small* amount of time on each visit. Kim and Eastin found that 'exploratory information-seeking behaviour induces more frequent, as well as longer, browsing' [33:84]. Given this finding in the light of the current research, it would seem that online shoppers need to be persuaded to spend more time browsing, since Kim and Eastin also found that 'frequent and longer browsing may also contribute to future purchase decisions' [33:84].



**Figure 2**

**Time spent on online visits**

Previous research examining consumer behaviour in *traditional* bookshops [35] found that 67% of shoppers in traditional bookshops tend to spend around half an hour there and 11% spend an hour or more. It seems that traditional book shopping is a more time consuming activity. This is certainly an approach which traditional bookshop managers have been pursuing with the widespread adoption of coffee shops and sofas and the promotion of bookshops as destination stores where one

can while away some time drinking coffee, browsing, people-watching or even working [27, 36, 19].

Table 2 demonstrates that online bookshop visitors tend to visit frequently, for short periods of time, whereas traditional bookshop visitors tend to visit less frequently but for longer periods.

	Daily	Twice Weekly	Weekly	Monthly	Less than Monthly	First visit	Frequency of visits
Online bookshop	14.8	28.4	35.2	11.4	10.2	0	%age
Traditional bookshop	0	8	25	28	32	7	
	More than an hour	About an hour	Half an hour	About ten minutes	Time spent on visits		
Online bookshop	5.7	8	45.4	40.9	%age		
Traditional* bookshop	1	11	67	20			

**Table 2**

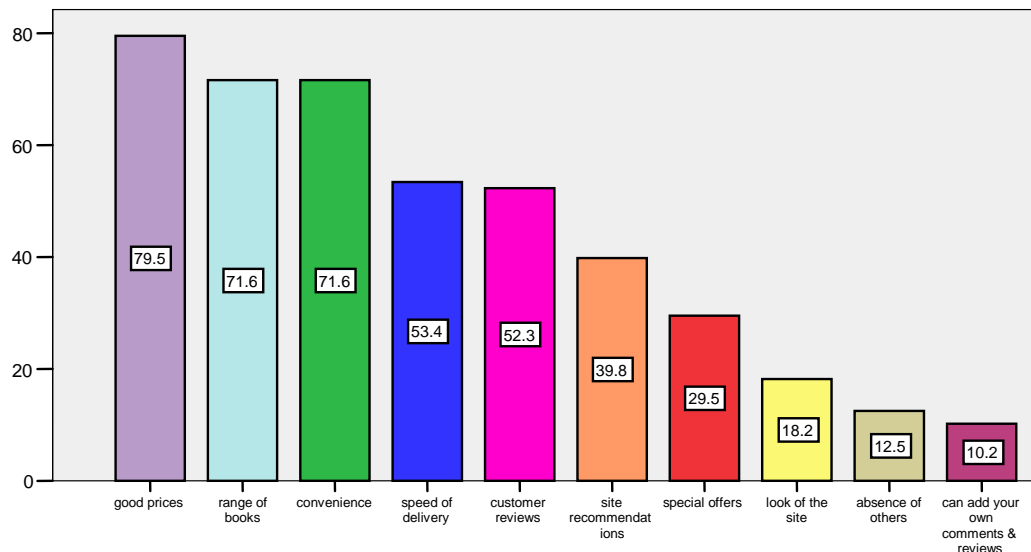
**Visiting behaviour of bookshop users**

\*Time spent on visits in traditional bookshops include 1% response which was indecipherable hence total not 100%

**Preferred online qualities**

The research found that range, convenience and price are vital elements of the shopping experience for online bookshop consumers. These qualities have

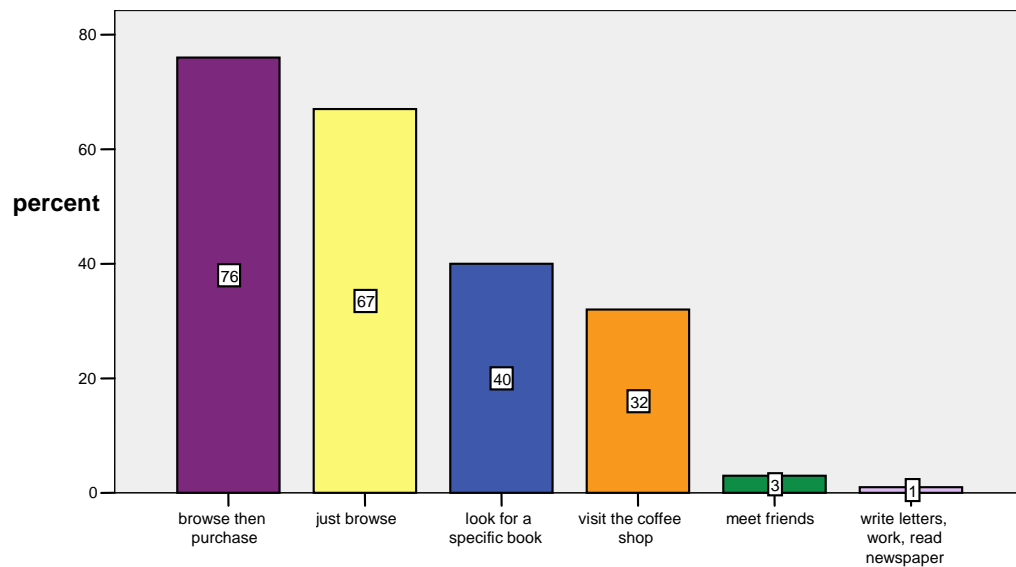
frequently been found to be among the most important for online consumers [56, 51, 33]. Research carried out by Key Note [49] found that convenience and greater choice were the key reasons cited for book shopping online (see figure 3) while research by BML [9] found that a book being ‘cheaper’ was a factor for 77% of people when choosing online purchasing over traditional bookshop purchasing.



**Figure 3**  
**Preferred online qualities**

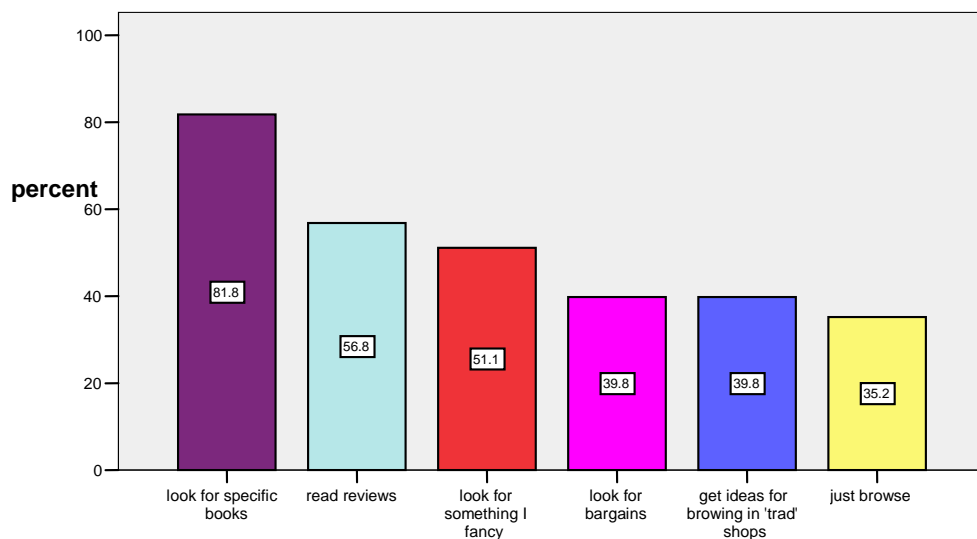
These findings build upon research by Mintel [42, 43] which underlines the key advantages which online bookselling can offer consumers: range, convenience, and easier access to obscure titles. However, while Mintel found that only a small proportion of traditional bookshop users purchase online [43] this contradicts findings from the current research which found that 53% of traditional store shoppers also buy online. Even more notably, the current research found that 97% of online consumers shop at traditional stores as well. Therefore, while we may refer to traditional consumers and online consumers, the current research demonstrates that in many cases these are the same consumers, visiting different retail environments [38]. The current research findings demonstrate that online bookshops are appealing to existing bookshop users, but it is more notable that a huge majority of online

shoppers are still shopping in traditional settings. This suggests that while price and convenience are important qualities online, they are not the only qualities which consumers are looking for, and that traditional bookshops are offering other distinct experiences, not possible online.



**Figure 4**  
**Consumer behaviour in traditional bookshops**

Comparing figure 4, which examines habitual behaviour in traditional bookshops, with figure 5, which looks at the habitual behaviour of online consumers, it is clear that people visit online bookshops with a much more focused purpose: almost 82% say they go with a particular book in mind. Contrast this with traditional bookshop users, who usually browse. Just 40% of them go to look for a specific book. In contrast, just 35% of online bookshop users say they 'just browse' online. Browsing is discussed in further detail below.

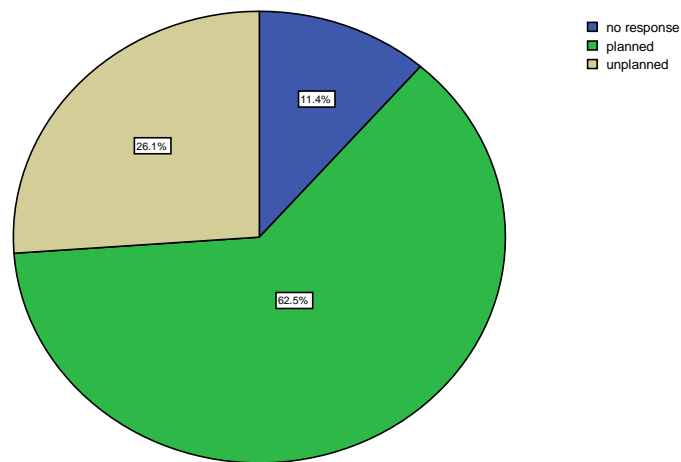


**Figure 5**

**Consumer behaviour in online bookshops**

**Impulse buying and purchase prompts**

In order to further investigate the kind of choosing mechanism which consumers engage online, as well as any element of ‘impulse’ buying online, survey participants were asked to say whether most of their online purchases were planned or unplanned. The current research acknowledges that the tendency to impulse buy may be influenced by hedonistic character traits of the online consumer [33] as well as forming a kind of ‘retail therapy’ [5]. Nevertheless, a snapshot of the research participants found the following: most online purchases appear to be planned (62.5%), whereas around 26% are unplanned (see figure 6). (The remaining 11% of respondents did not respond to this question).



**Figure 6**

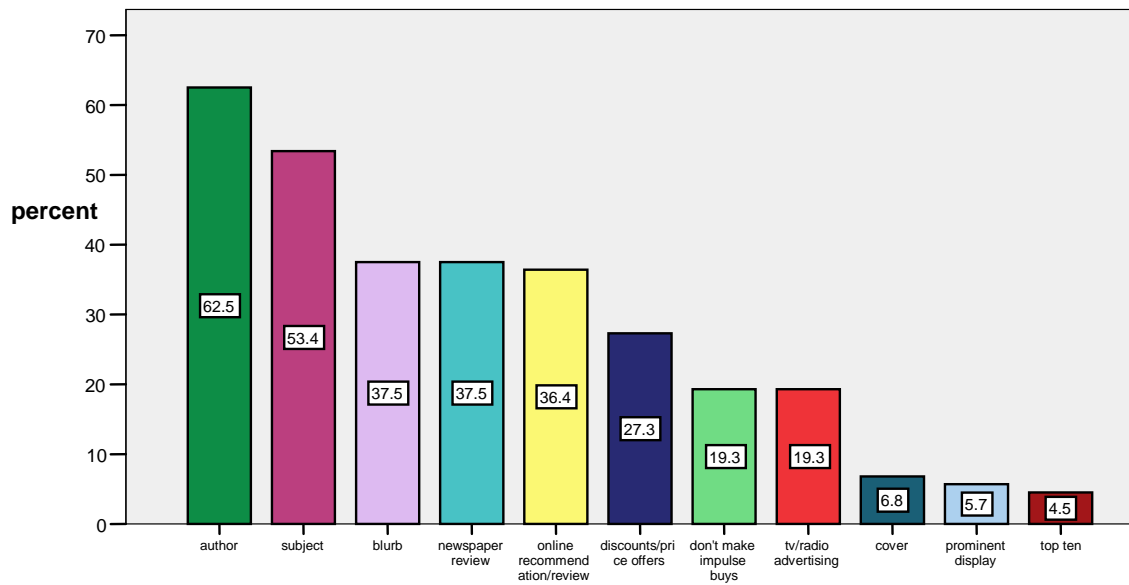
**Impulse buying online**

In an attempt to establish patterns of impulse buying, survey participants were asked in which bookselling environment (online or traditional) they felt more inclined to buy on impulse. The research found that the majority of those questioned are more likely to buy on impulse in traditional stores (59.1%) as opposed to online (10.2%). 28.4% of respondents thought the likelihood of buying on impulse was equal, whether shopping online or in a traditional store. While this result may at first seem rather surprising, given that the survey targeted users of online bookshops, earlier research had already established that the majority of online purchases are planned (figure 6) and that the most common activity online was to ‘look for specific books’ (figure 5). Moreover, browsing was found to be the most common activity in traditional bookshops (figure 4).

In order to examine the subject of impulse buying online, participants selected various qualities or facilities online which they felt might make them more inclined to buy on impulse. In order to contextualise these findings, the same question was asked of book buyers in chain bookshops (see figures 7 and 8). The most striking outcome is that, overall, there are notably lower percentages of online consumers being influenced to purchase on impulse. This is in line with the earlier finding, that online book buyers generally have a more focused idea of what they are buying,

whereas traditional bookshop users are more open to browsing and serendipitous finds. *Favourite authors* and *subject* areas of interest are the most influential factors for prompting purchases, both in traditional bookshops as well as online although *authors* are slightly more influential for online shoppers and *subject* areas of interest for traditional book shoppers. The *blurb* on the rear of the book and *newspaper reviews* take third and fourth place both for online and traditional shoppers, illustrating similarity in areas of influence. For online shoppers, online *recommendation and review* play an important part in prompting purchases for 36% of book shoppers. Previous research has also found that online customer reviews are looked upon favourably by other consumers. Chevalier and Mayzlin found that 'an improvement in a book's reviews leads to an increase in relative sales at that site' [17:345]. Chen noted that 'since it is more difficult to evaluate 'experience' goods before purchasing, consumers become more reliant on the opinions of other consumers' [16:1980]. It is notable that in their study of herd behaviour online Chen *et al* found that 'recommendations of other consumers exerted a greater influence on subject choices than recommendations of an expert' [15:1977]. This emphasises the vital role which C2C communication has in online bookselling. Adjei *et al* [1] also note the impact of online communities and C2C communications on customer purchase behaviour, but there are still gaps in our knowledge of how these kinds of communications direct consumers towards goods online. It is notable to see that 19% of online shoppers say they 'do not make impulse buys'. In contrast, for traditional shoppers, other purchase prompts remain at fairly substantial percentages, with *special offers* being the next most influential purchase prompt.

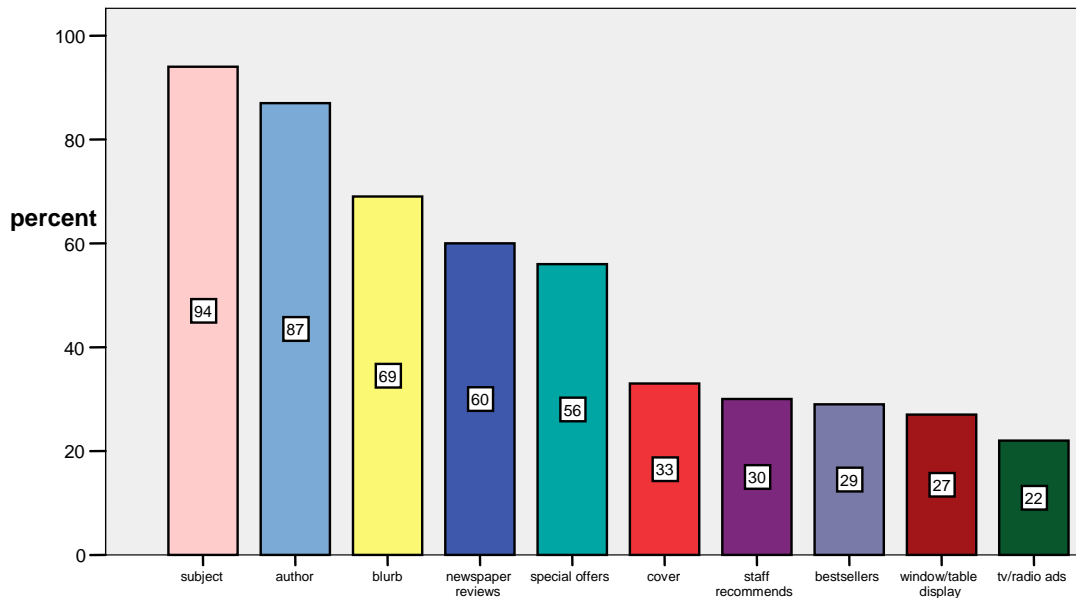
The research found that consumers in traditional bookshops are more open to purchase prompts, and that these shoppers are more inclined to spend time and browse in store. Online settings have the great advantage of hundreds of customer reviews, easily accessible to consumers, yet traditional bookshops have the advantage of their visitors being more inclined to impulse buy in the first place. The important point regarding the differences in behaviour established, between online and traditional bookselling is in anticipating future strategy and how these different retail environments can maximise their marketing success. This is discussed in the Managerial recommendations.



**Figure 7**

**Qualities influencing purchase online**





**Figure 8**  
**Qualities influencing purchase in chain bookshops**

Gender differentiation is accepted as a valid factor in marketing and advertising [41, 60, 20] although separate advertising approaches according to gender are uncommon [21] possibly because of the problems of practically implementing these. The current research found that *favourite authors*, the *blurb* on the back of the book, *bestsellers*, and *radio and TV advertising* all influenced the purchasing habits of women more strongly than men, in traditional stores. Coley and Burgess [20] found that women were more susceptible to atmospheric cues, and this is certainly in line with the current research. It is also worth noting that significantly more women than men enjoyed *people watching* in coffee shops, although further studies with a greater gender focus and a larger sample size would need to investigate this finding more fully. Nevertheless, it can tentatively be suggested that women are rather more open to persuasion in bookshops than men, who seem to be more dedicated to their favourite subjects and adhere to this criterion more rigidly than women when book shopping. A more focused approach by men is certainly supported by other research

examining gender differences [39] and this finding can be used to inform marketing approaches both online and in the high street.

### **Browsing online**

As Rowley [52] notes, browsing is not just a 'choosing mechanism' or a means to an end, but a valid activity in itself which affords the browser pleasure. The research participants were keenly aware of the differences when contrasting browsing online with browsing in a traditional bookshop. Time was found to be an important quality linked to traditional bookshop browsing; the ability to lose oneself and perhaps find something unexpected. This finding builds upon Kim and Eastin's research [33] which found that more time spent browsing may lead to future purchase decisions. Although flow has not been studied in the traditional retailing context of bookselling, several researchers have studied this phenomenon online [40, 26, 37]. The current research finds that the serendipity of browsing is vital in traditional bookshops whereas online browsing tends to be a more linear process for consumers, albeit with some exceptions, as detailed below.

Focus group discussion around browsing experiences from the current research clearly demonstrates the inherent differences between the focused online process and the more leisurely sequence of events which constitute 'traditional' browsing:

I tend to examine a narrower range of subjects / genres online, but those in more depth. In a traditional bookshop I may find myself in an unfamiliar place and examine books that I would not even think about when online.

You generally need a starting point even to browse online. In a traditional bookshop you can mooch and see what catches your eye.

Nevertheless, one focus group participant's experience of online book shopping was echoed by many others;

I was looking for quite a specific book on Amazon, and then there was, you know they have these things 'oh people who bought your book bought also this and this' (*murmurs of assent*) and somehow it caught my eye and I ordered that one book and that's it, I'm an addict now!

This subtle shift in attitude towards online book buying was evidenced by many focus group participants; namely, they had initially been wary of buying anything other than specific titles or academic books online, but had been drawn in by reviews and recommendations and had found it possible to 'browse' online – albeit to browse in a different way to how browsing is done in a traditional bookshop. Mintel [43] found that people are more inclined to browse in traditional bookshops, rather than online, concurring with the current study. However, recent trade research [58] disputes this, finding that 38% of people prefer browsing online, while 25% prefer browsing in high street chains. It should be noted though, that the trade research referred to used an online questionnaire, which may have increased the likelihood of an online browsing preference. It is also important to be clear about what we mean by 'browsing'. It may be in this instance the term is used to mean information gathering, whereas in the current paper, it refers to a much more leisurely serendipitous activity. There is considerable scope for online retailing to explore a more serendipitous offering (see Managerial recommendations) just as traditional booksellers must capitalise financially upon the tendency for their consumers to spend more time in store. More imaginative, esoteric choices which consumers can pick up and browse, can give a competitive advantage over the online environment.

### **Touch and immediacy**

Generally positive comments were made about the process of online shopping by consumers, but the physical processes of browsing in a traditional bookshop with its sights, sounds, smells and tactile experiences were elements mentioned by consumers as to why many preferred shopping in traditional bookshops. Research commissioned by The Bookseller (the leading book trade periodical) found that while consumers are still extremely keen on discounting, they are 'also hungry for a good retail experience in addition to, or even over, discounting' [58]. The opportunity to pick up and leaf through books are important qualities for consumers, and are absent from the online book buying experience. This finding was supported by the research which found that almost 89% said the tactile quality of book shopping was one which they missed when shopping online. The importance of a tactile element for many consumers is established [18, 48, 55, 7] and was also supported by online participants in the current research, one of whom commented that,

Online book shopping will never match the full experience you get walking into a traditional bookshop. It is not just the books but the whole

experience of sight, sound and smell of the shop and interacting with other browsers.

Almost 57% of online bookshop users said that they check book availability online, then purchase in a traditional bookshop. The most common reason given for this behaviour was a desire to check the book physically – to pick it up, leaf through, and check the contents. However, this also applied in the opposite direction, with 69.3% of traditional book shoppers checking books in-store, then purchasing online. 75% of those who do this, cited 'better prices' as their motivation. Given current economic pressures upon consumers, it is possible that this kind of price-checking approach will become more common, increasing pressure upon traditional bookshops. Many online book shoppers also said that they missed the atmosphere of traditional book shopping and simply spending time in the bookshop setting. It is worth noting however that as new technologies develop allowing more sophisticated customisation and one-to-one marketing to online consumers to be developed, there is more scope for the development and tailoring of online atmosphere for consumers [61]. Yet, there is considerable scope for traditional retailers to capitalise upon the tactile atmospheric advantages [34] which are integral to a bricks and mortar setting and to be more overt about these kinds of qualities on offer, which are absent from an online retail experience.

While the success of online book retailing suggests that delayed gratification is not a major factor, nevertheless immediacy is clearly a key benefit for traditional booksellers, both in terms of product (if the required goods are in stock) and place.

### **Range and the Long Tail**

Anderson suggests that the increasingly disparate identities of consumers and consumer groups (in terms of segmentation) and their growing demand for obscure items, paired with an escalating interest in niche markets has resulted in consumers searching for increasingly individualistic items. This has resulted in a sales pattern consisting of a Long Tail [3, 4] particularly relevant to online sales patterns, given the ease with which obscure or difficult to find titles can be sourced [12]. Anderson's theory is supported in the context of the book trade by Key Note [31], which found that few books will sell in excess of 2000 copies, and bestsellers (those selling in the region of 75,000 copies) are the exception rather than the rule. Anderson contends that 'long tail businesses treat consumers as individuals, offering mass customisation as an alternative to mass market fare' [3:218]. This point illustrates not only the successes of online bookselling, but also the increasing difficulty which traditional

retailers have. Their formulaic approach to book marketing is no longer satisfactory given the current move towards customisation and one-to-one marketing which exploit available online technologies [23].

The access to range via Amazon is considerably greater than that which even the largest of high street or out of town bookstores can offer. Brynjolfsson *et al* [10] note that Amazon.com can easily afford the consumer access to approximately 2.3 million books in print, contrasted with approximately 40,000 to 100,000 books stocked in a typical large high street store [10]. There is also cause to believe that consumers may develop a 'taste' for niche products which may be further developed by producers of these products realising the scope for further sales and further development of 'niche-supporting' technologies such as search tools and recommendation tools [11]. These might feasibly lead to an even longer long tail with a wider spread of sales of obscure titles. It is worth noting however, that there is a degree of disparity across retailers regarding their access to e-books: Amazon was recently advertising access to 750,000 e-titles [2] whereas the recently launched Google e-bookstore boasts of access to over 3 million titles. E-books have been adopted both by online retailers as well as traditional booksellers, like Waterstone's and Blackwell's, considerably extending the range of both. Sales of e-books have become firmly established, proving to be particularly successful in the UK [29] and demonstrating steady sales growth. While the Amazon Kindle e-book reader dominates the market, Google have recently launched their own e-bookstore with access to over 3 million titles [25]. The e-book will inevitably lead to changes in buying behaviour from consumers given that while e-book sales represent less than 2% of all books bought among those consumers who buy them, 19% buy exclusively e-books and 25 % buy mostly e-books, cutting back on print purchases [50]. The impact of e-book development is already being felt in bookshops, with falling print sales being blamed, at least partially upon e-book sales [47, 8]. This marks a further shift away from traditional book buying towards digital formats. Further research needs to be undertaken in order to underpin our understanding of consumer behaviour in digital environments, foresighting what is next for industry and academic study. While choice and range online can never be matched by traditional bookshop environments, this does not change the fact that bookshops in the high street have a unique offering: they need to promote the idea of the bookshop as a destination with more vigour, exploiting serendipitous browsing, coffee shops and promoting unusual and recommended choices.

## **Conclusions**

This empirical research establishes that there are differences in consumer behaviour when comparing online and traditional consumer behaviour in bookshops. Most notably, online consumers take a more focused, swifter approach to online shopping than traditional book shoppers who tend towards a more time consuming, serendipitous approach. Although recent research has shown that consumers are becoming more inclined to browse online [58, 14] this is an area which needs further research, as technological advances enhance the online browsing process, maximising the impact of recommendations and reviews [17, 46]. The current research demonstrates the considerable crossover between online and traditional shoppers, with 53% of traditional shoppers also shopping online and 97% of online shoppers also shopping in traditional stores. This contradicts previous market research [43] which found that only a small proportion of traditional bookshop users] purchase online. While consumers seem to be influenced by similar purchase prompts when making unplanned purchases (*author* and *subject* matter especially), these factors are more influential for consumers in traditional settings, than online. Overall, consumers online were less inclined to make unplanned purchases, and less inclined to be influenced by purchase prompts.

The current research enhances our knowledge of consumer behaviour in both traditional and online bookshops and has scope to inform future theoretical research, should the findings be examined in other retail environments. Further scholarly research is necessary in order to establish the dynamics of consumer relationships with online technologies, in the light of continuing digital advancement, the growth of social media and its implications for book marketing and consumer behaviour. The topic of immediacy is worthy of further research, examining how delayed fulfilment impacts upon consumer behaviour in online settings, perhaps examining the use of wish lists or shopping cart abandonment. Scope for further research also lies within the field of the long tail, for instance examining how range development may have changed buying and reading habits given the ease of access to disparate titles and the dissatisfaction felt by consumers regarding the limited, formulaic range in traditional stores [36].

## **Managerial recommendations**

A clear advantage which traditional bookshops have over online bookshops is their ability to capitalise upon the serendipity of the traditional experience and to encourage impulse buying. However, this would suggest that there is more potential

for online sites to explore and develop the possibility of serendipitous browsing online rather than the current focus on 'guided' browsing which is led by links to recommendations and other readers' preferences. If online bookshops can synthesise the serendipity of the traditional browsing experience then there is further scope for online bookshops – and indeed other online retailers - to rival the serendipity of browsing in traditional bookshops and the inclination to impulse buy. Perhaps some sort of 'visual shelving' where spines of books are available to browse, or themed 'tables' where online consumers can shift books around according to what they believe other online consumers would enjoy. Traditional bookshops have tables which are at the mercy of consumers putting odd books down upon them – many serendipitous discoveries are made this way, due to the inherent disorder of real bookshops with real customers. Online bookshops might explore this avenue as another way to mimic the serendipity of browsing in traditional bookshops. As technology continues to develop, further research is needed to monitor consumer interaction with these technologies in the online setting. For example the control of atmosphere in e-tailing is on the research agenda [61] but requires further study.

Traditional bookshops should capitalise upon a sense of community, exploiting facilities which are not available online, such as coffee shops, comfortable seating and encouraging the spending of time. Past research has found these facilities to be popular with customers, encouraging them to stay longer in store [35] and often to spend more. In short, traditional bookshops need to maximise those qualities which online bookshops lack in order to ensure economic survival, encouraging the development of bookshops as a social space; a destination, perhaps even a 'leisure' store [6, 28]. Traditional stores retain the considerable competitive advantages (over online) of providing a tactile environment for customers, immediacy of purchase and of having the potential of offering a setting where it is pleasurable to spend time browsing and visiting the coffee shop. There is scope to engender a much stronger community feeling within bookshops; a 'third place' [35] and this is an advantage which traditional bookshops have over online bookshops - one which they need to exploit.

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