



BNC RESEARCH

Deep Dive: The Biography & Autobiography Book Buyer

2016



BOOKNET
CANADA

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The Biography & Autobiography Book Buyer

About BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series

BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series takes an in-depth look at some of the biggest genres selling in Canada. The goal is for readers of these reports to have both an overview of sales patterns within the genre and a better understanding of the genre buyers themselves.

Data for these reports have been obtained through two primary sources:

- BookNet Canada's SalesData – representing approximately 85% of the trade market in Canada, SalesData tracks the weekly sale of print books across the country.
- BookNet Canada's Consumer Research – adult book-buying Canadians participate in online surveys about their book purchases from the prior month. Book buyers report on such information as: what they purchased; where they made the purchase; what influenced their purchase; and other quantitative data. Buyers were surveyed from the beginning of 2015 to the fall of 2016. The data represents 213 Biography book buyers representing 272 book purchases.

Data for this survey focuses on both books purchased by adults and, when reviewing sales trends, the sale of adult titles.

Overview of the Biography Buyer

In 2010, *The Guardian* published the article, “Biographers fear that publishers have lost their appetite for serious subjects” arguing that publishers are “playing it safe” by focusing on “better-known” topics like historical literary figures. In 2015, *The Independent* wrote about the rise of the literary biography and the fact that “ours is the era of Everybody’s Autobiography.”

In 2016, we find that the Biography category represents 3.84% of all print book sales in Canada, and just under 12% of all Non-Fiction book sales.

So, who buys Biography books? The average Biography buyer is:

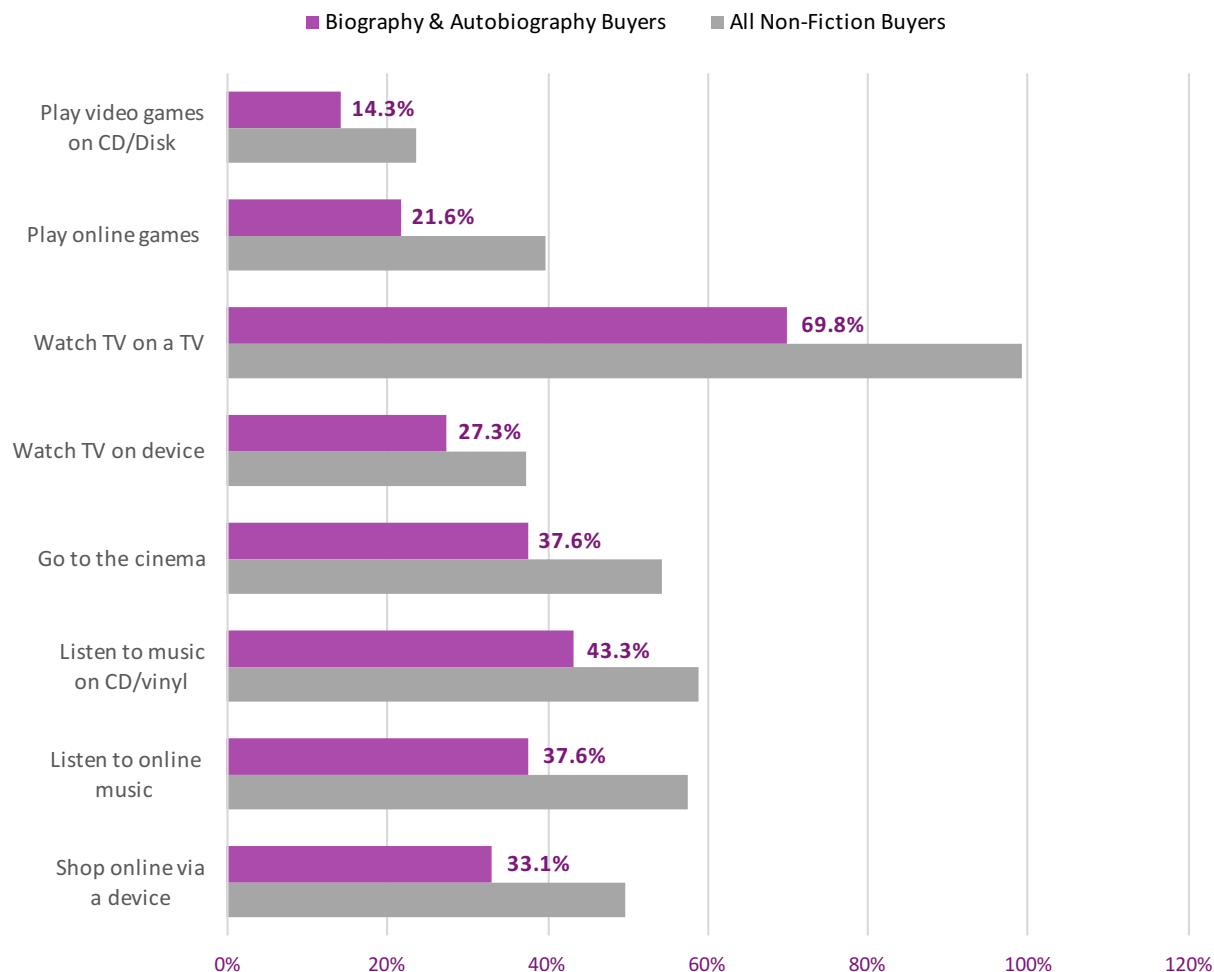
- female;
- 49 years of age;
- married;
- has a university degree; and,
- is most likely to reside in the Prairies (33%) and least likely to live in Western Canada (23%).

When we look at all reported purchases of Biography books, we find that the majority of purchases were made by those in the 30-44 age bracket. The graph below takes into account all 272 tracked purchases, so the age brackets that purchase in higher volume are more heavily represented.

¹Thorpe, Vanessa. “Biographers fear that publishers have lost their appetite for serious subjects” <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/nov/14/victoria-glendinning-biographies-publishers> November 14, 2010.

²Thomson, Ian. “The rise of the literary memoir: How do you to balance truthfulness with drama?” <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-rise-of-the-literary-memoir-how-do-you-to-balance-truthfulness-with-drama-10041988.html>. February 12, 2015.

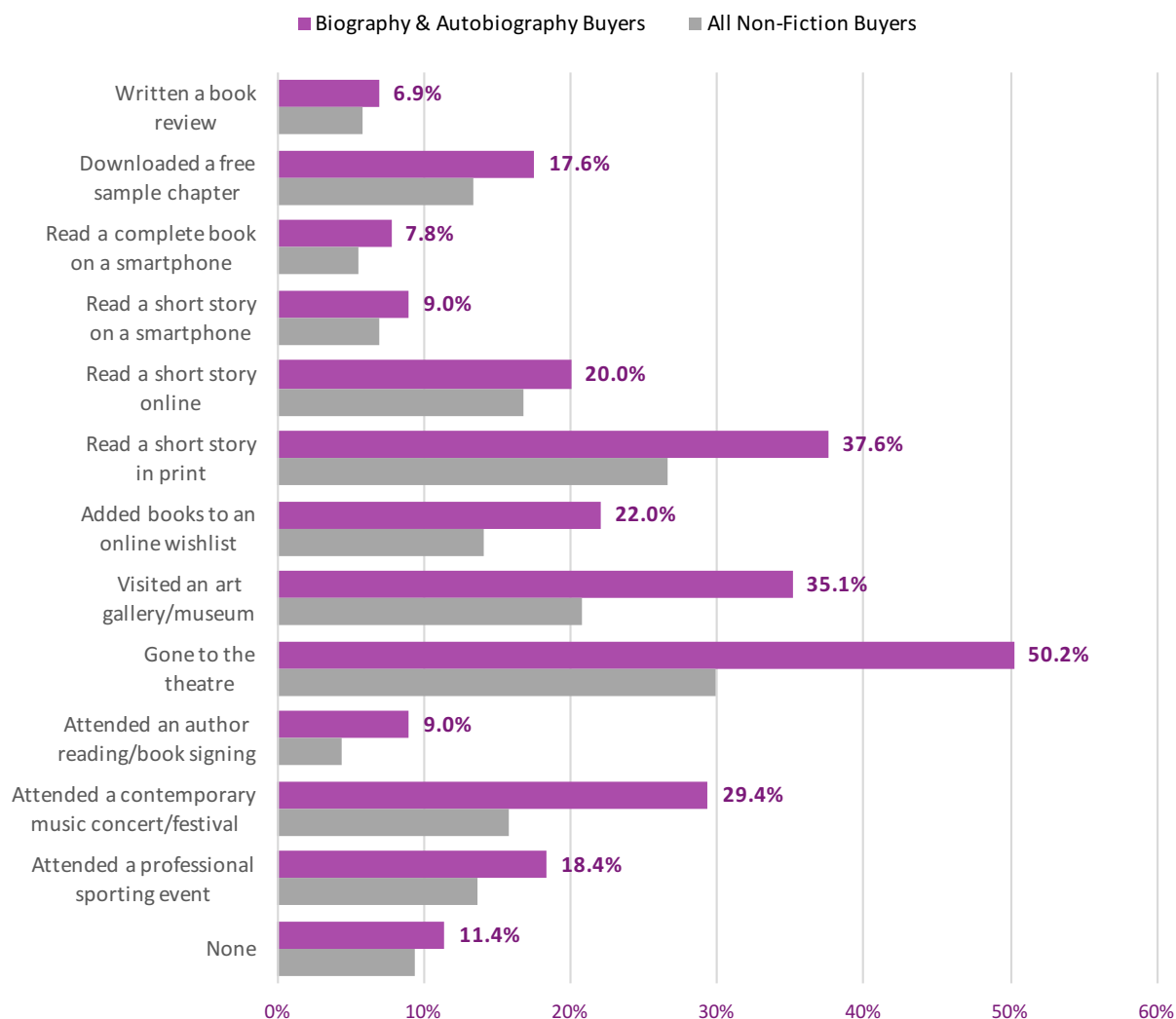
Activities Participated in Monthly



Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (N=245, N=1,434)

We also had a look at both book-related and non-book-related activities that Biography buyers have participated in over the last 12 months. Interestingly, although Biography buyers seem slightly less technologically inclined, they are much more likely than the average Non-Fiction buyer to download a free sample chapter, read on their phone, read short stories in print or online, and to add books to an online wish list.

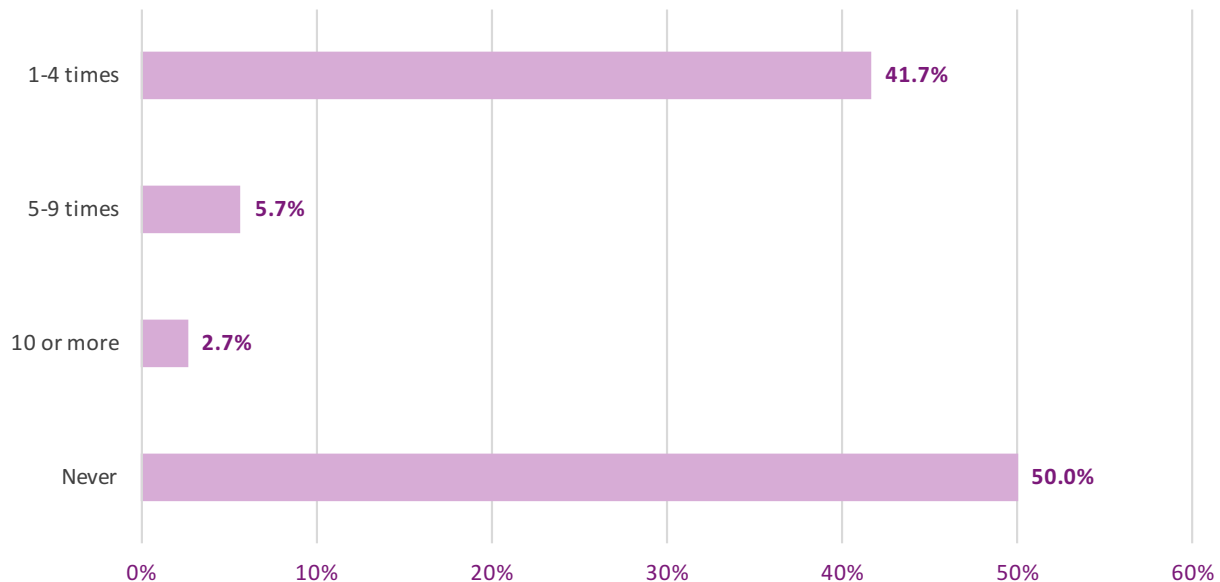
Activities in Last 12 Months



Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months? (N=245, N=2,067)

When it comes to public library use, Biography buyers are heavy library users. Half of them use their local public library, either online or in person. Of those, just under 42% visited their public library 1-4 times in the prior month.

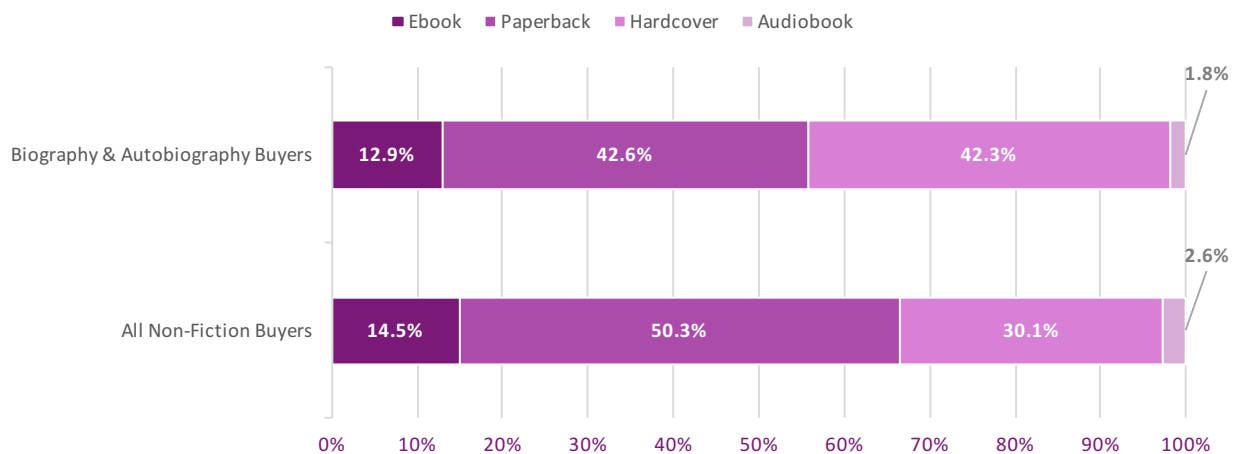
Use of Public Library



How many times have you visited the public library (online or in person) in the last month? (N=264)

Sales of Biography books are evenly split between paperback and hardcover, with 43% paperback and 42% hardcover. There are slightly fewer Biography buyers who purchase digitally than all Non-Fiction buyers. Just over two-and-a-half percent of Biography buyers indicated purchasing an audiobook, which may be accurate but there may also be some confusion when it comes to purchasing versus streaming or renting.

Format Distribution



What format is the book you purchased? (N=272, N=2,330)

The graph below looks not at whether Biography buyers participate in specific activities but rather at the frequency at which they participate — specifically how often they read books, newspapers, and magazines.

When it comes to reading print, Biography buyers are almost identical to the average Non-Fiction buyer. When it comes to reading digitally, however, Biography buyers are much less inclined to do so: 53% of Biography buyers don't read digitally at all compared to 41% of all Non-Fiction buyers.

Reading Frequency



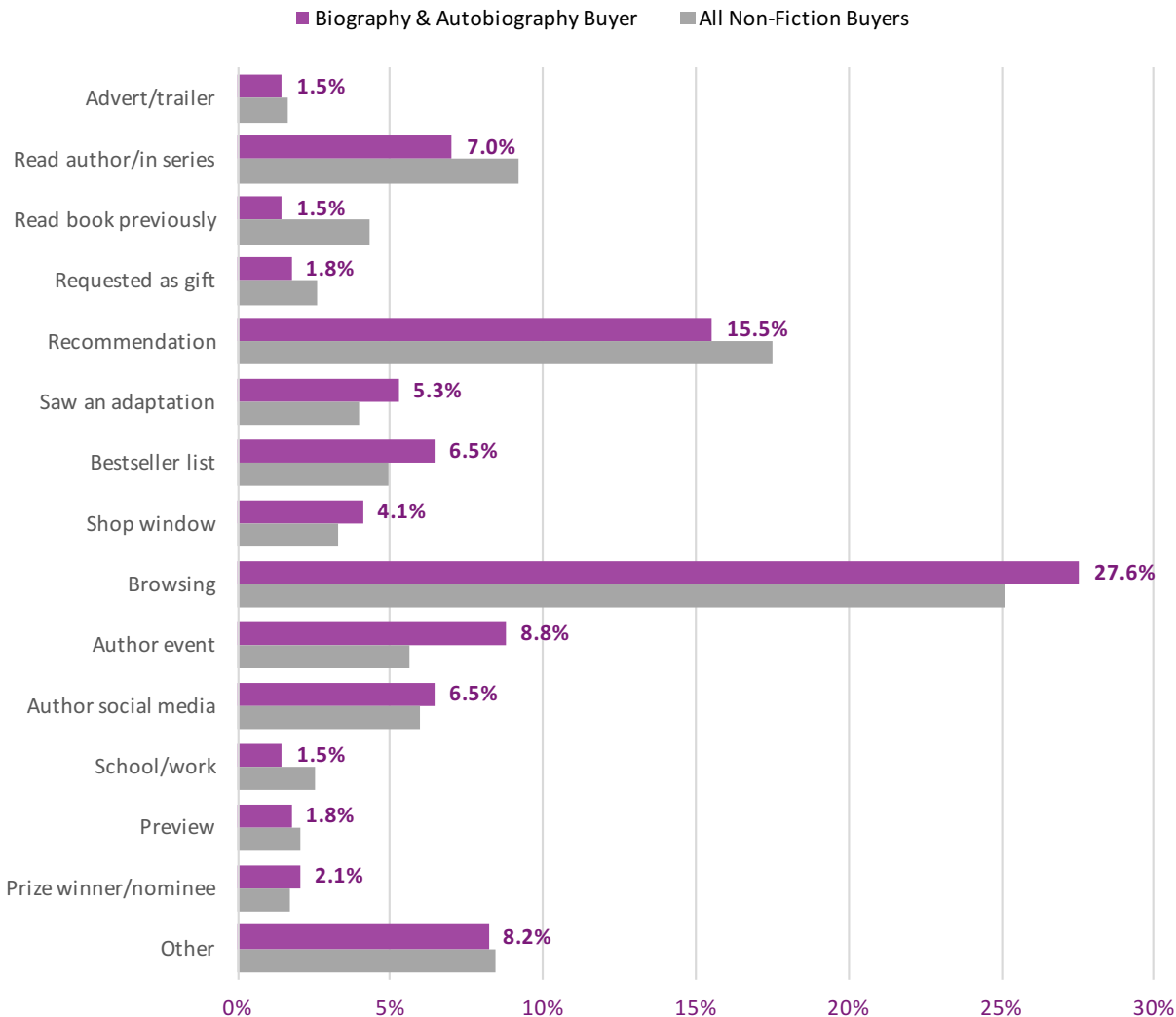
How often do you engage in the following activities? (N=245, N=2,067)

Discoverability and Decision to Buy

Book buyers must often choose amongst thousands of titles (or more), so how do they come to a decision? Below we take a look at some of the primary ways Biography buyers become aware of titles, where they make their purchases, and whether their purchases were planned or impulsive.

Following authors and attending author events are popular with Biography buyers. Also, finding books through browsing or in shop windows is also more popular than with the average Non-Fiction buyer.

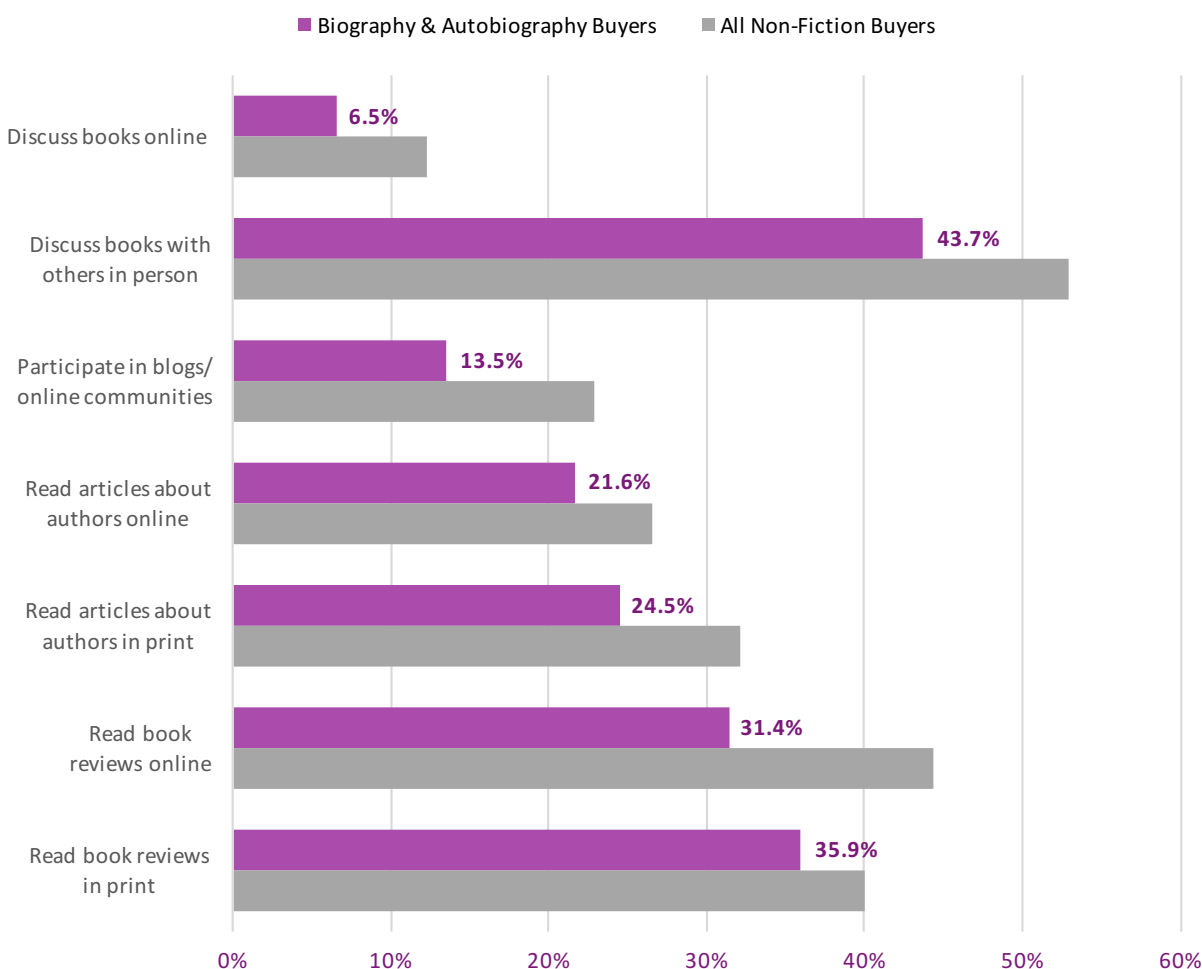
Awareness



How did you become aware of this book? (N=341, N=1,034)

Biography buyers tend to discuss books in person (43.7%) rather than online (6.5%). In reading book reviews or articles about authors, they tend to find these both online and in print, though reading book reviews in print is most common (35.9%).

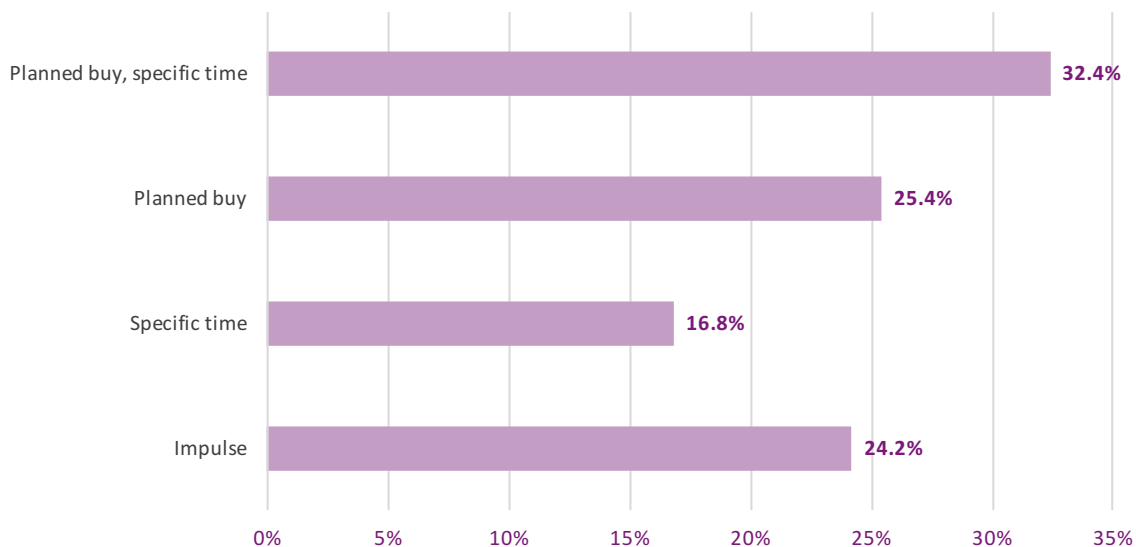
Book-Related Activities Participated in During Prior Month



Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (N=245, N=1,434)

Biography buyers are generally an organized bunch who like to fully plan their purchases (32%), meaning that they plan what to buy and when to buy it. That being said, 24% of Biography buyers reported a fully impulsive purchase: they didn't know they were going to buy any book, much less the particular one they chose, at the time of purchase.

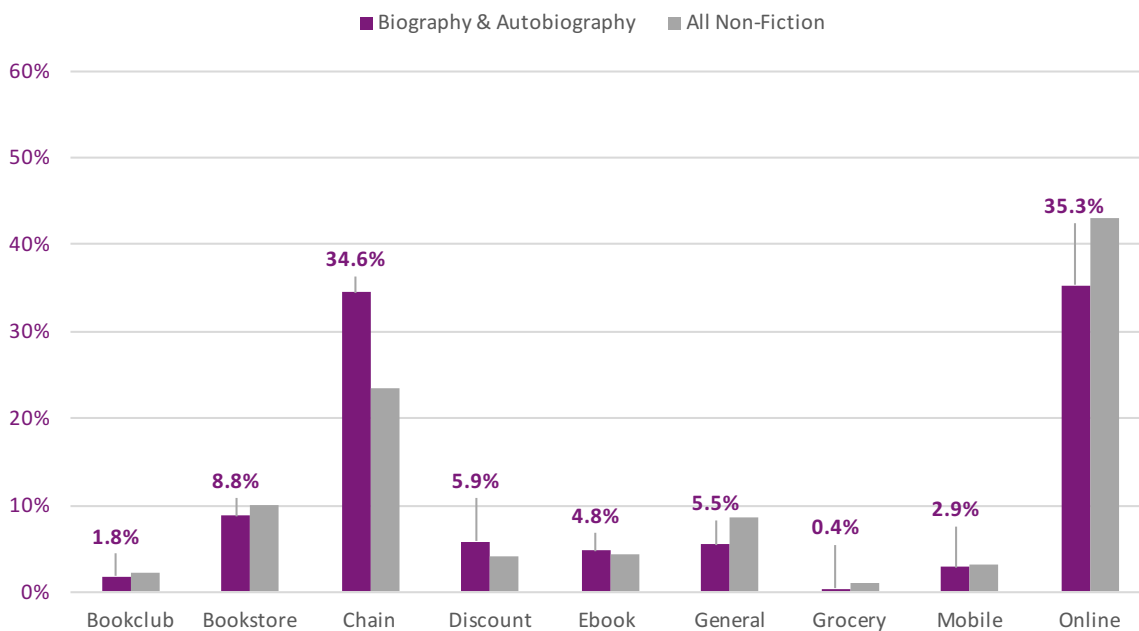
Impulse vs. Planned Purchase



Which of the following best describes your decision to buy this specific book at that time? (N=244)

Biography buyers predominantly shop online (35%). When online is combined with mobile and ebook purchases, these account for 43% of all purchases. Purchasing in a chain store comes in second at 35%, which is notably higher than for the average Non-Fiction book buyer.

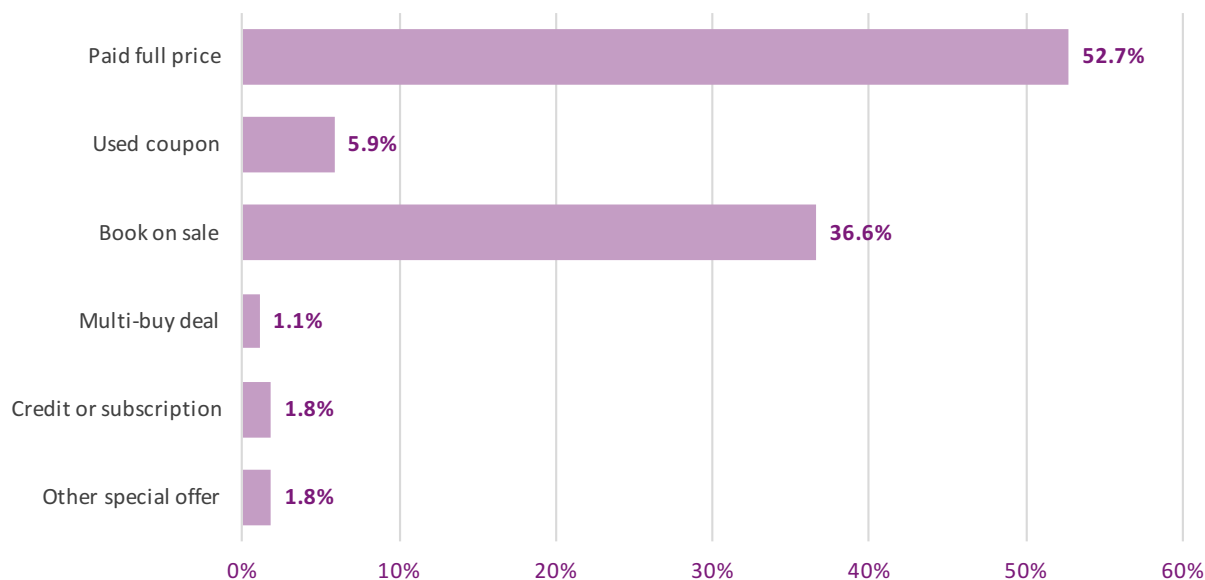
Purchase by Channel



How would you describe where you bought this book? (N=272, N=2,330)

Non-Fiction buyers are generally more willing to pay full price than are Fiction buyers, and Biography buyers are no exception. Almost 53% of purchases were paid at full price, with 37% bought on sale.

Discounted Pricing



Did you buy the book at full price or did you buy it at a special price or offer? (N=273)

When asked if they thought the book they purchased was a good value for the money, Biography book buyers said 60% of their purchases were excellent value. This is on the upper end of the Non-Fiction categories that were reviewed in this series. Just over 7% felt that pricing is fair and 33% found it to be good.

Using BiblioShare, BookNet Canada's bibliographic database, the average list prices for Biography books published in 2016, broken out by format, are as follows:

List Price

Hardcover	Paperback	Ebook	Audiobook
\$40.73	\$25.67	\$16.74	\$32.99

When we asked respondents what prices they paid for their Biography books, we found that prices were notably lower than the list prices above. Two things to keep in mind are: 1) these numbers are based on buyers' potentially unreliable recollections of what they paid, and 2) retailers often offer consumers discounts off the full retail/list price.

Selling Price

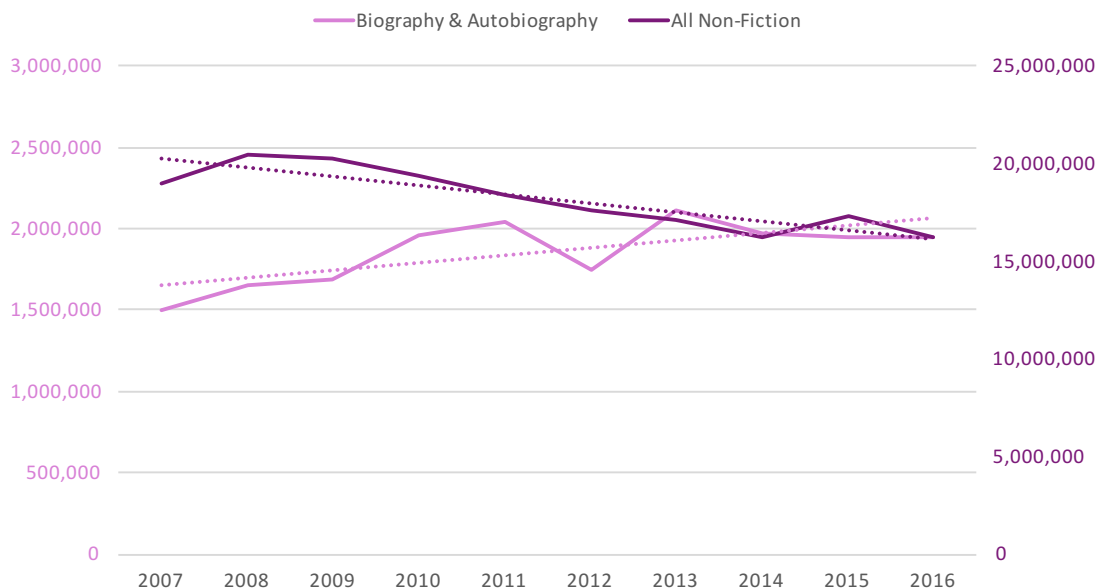
	Hardcover	Paperback	Ebook	Audiobook
Biography	\$20.09	\$15.00	\$10.41	\$15.74

How much did you pay for this book (before tax)? (N=304)

Sales Analysis of the Biography Category

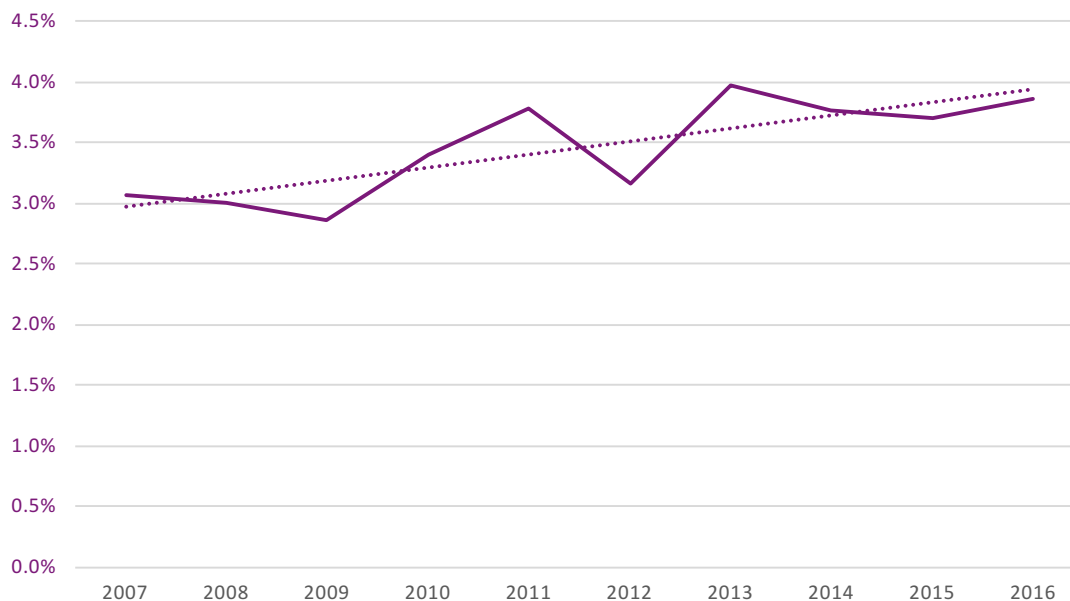
BookNet Canada has tracked the sale of print books in the Canadian trade market for more than 10 years. During this time, the sale of the Biography category has slowly but clearly continued to increase. We see variations year-over-year, but this can be due to a handful of high-selling titles. Comparatively, the Biography category continues to increase while Non-Fiction overall has seen a notable decline.

Volume Sold



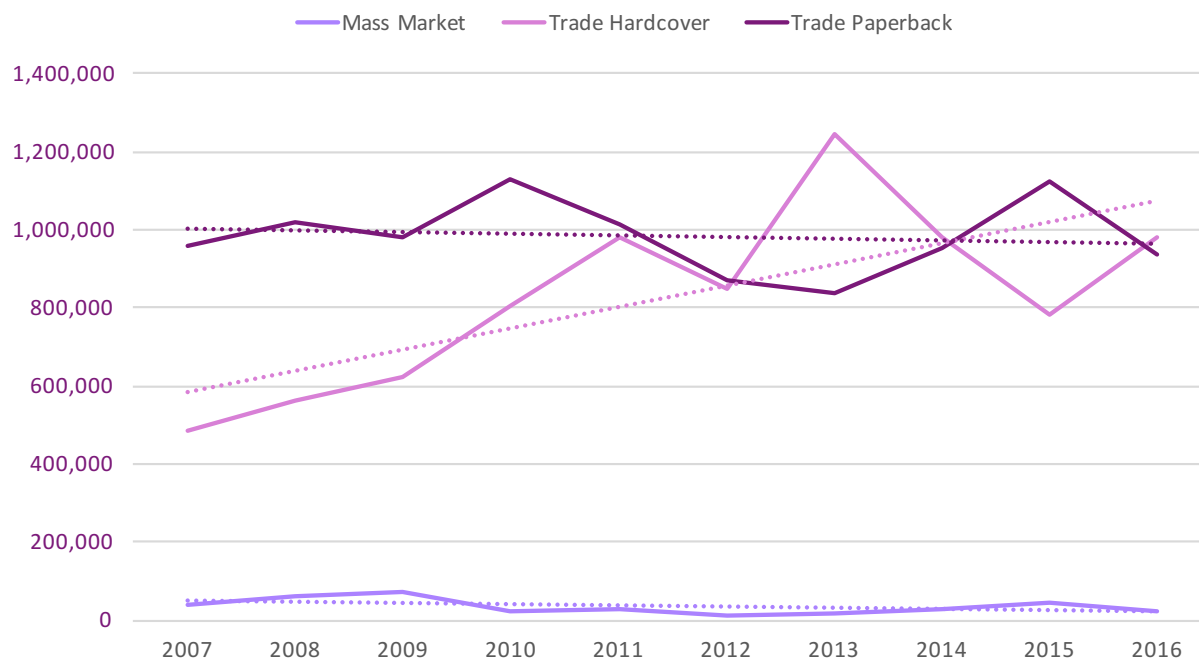
When we look at the Biography category's share of the overall print market, we see an increase of approximately 1% over the past 10 years. Fluctuations in years such as 2011 and 2014 could be due to very large sales on a limited number of titles.

Market Share



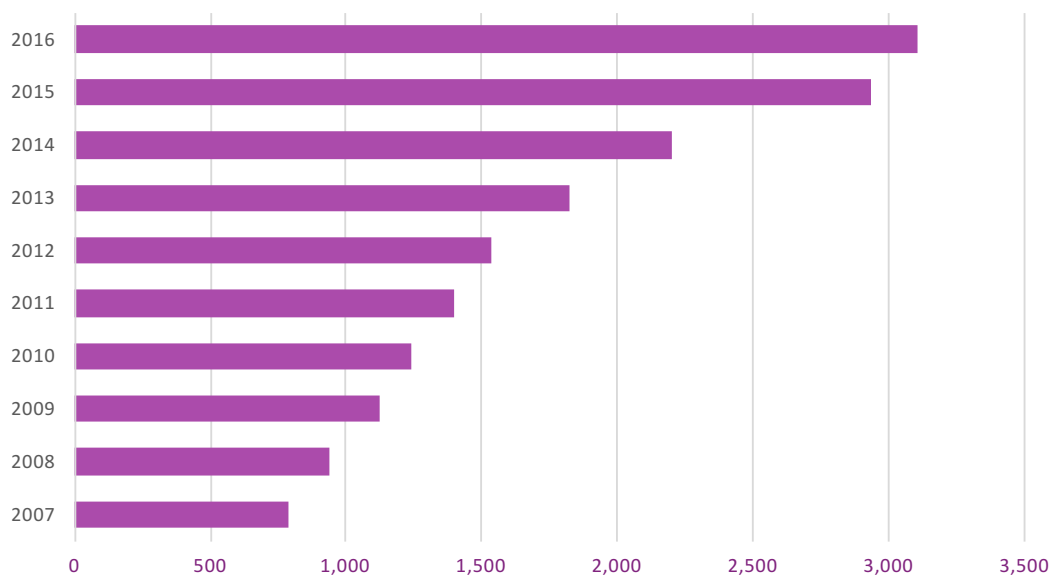
Perhaps not surprisingly, when examining how formats have performed over the past 10 years, we find that mass-market titles have never sold particularly well. Where we are seeing a shift is in the growth of hardcover and a slight decline in paperback sales.

Sales by Format



There is a wide selection of titles available in the Biography genre. When we review all the titles that sold in 2016, we find that the category is fairly backlist heavy, which shows that books have the potential to stay around for some time. The graph below shows the number of titles still selling in the Canadian market, available by year of publication. Unsurprisingly, 2016 has the greatest number of available titles, but going back over a 10-year period we find that almost 1,000 titles with a 2007 publication date are still selling.

Volume of Titles Selling in 2016 by Publication Year



For recent, top-selling authors in this category, we find quite a few autobiographies from current, high-profile figures in popular culture, such as Amy Schumer, Wayne Gretzky, and Bruce Springsteen, but we also find authors who have not released books in a couple of years such as Jenny Lee Smith and Cheryl Strayed. The 10 bestselling Biography & Autobiography books in Canada for 2015-2016 are from:

1. Jenny Lee Smith and Helen Edwards
2. Wayne Gretzky and Kirstie McLellan Day
3. Chris Kyle, Scott McEwen, and Jim DeFelice
4. Cheryl Strayed
5. Bruce Springsteen
6. Amy Schumer
7. Jenny Lawson
8. Malala Yousafzai
9. Chris Hadfield
10. Laura Hillenbrand

Perennial Bestsellers

Perennial bestsellers refer not to the top-selling books (i.e., books that have sold the most) but rather the most consistent bestsellers, year over year. The perennial bestsellers listed here were identified by searching for titles that ranked well every year from 2013 to 2016. If you are building a Biography section in a bookstore, these are the tried and true titles from the last four years. To be included on this list, a Biography title had to rank within the top 300 for each of the four years — a rank threshold that was determined by how widely we had to search to compile a list of 30 titles.

Title	Contributor	ISBN	Publisher	Binding	List Price	Pub Date
Lean In	Sandberg, Sheryl	9780385349949	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	HT	\$28.95	11-03-2013
Orange Is the New Black	Kerman, Piper	9780385523394	Random House Publishing	TP	\$19.00	08-03-2011
The Happiness Project	Rubin, Gretchen	9781443414562	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$17.99	24-04-2012
The Glass Castle	Walls, Jeannette	9780743247542	Scribner	TP	\$23.00	17-01-2006
Let's Pretend This Never Happened	Lawson, Jenny	9780425261019	Penguin Publishing	TP	\$17.00	05-03-2013
Wherever I Wind Up	Dickey, R. A.	9780452299016	Penguin Publishing	TP	\$22.00	26-03-2013
A Stolen Life	Dugard, Jaycee	9781451629194	Simon & Schuster, Inc	TP	\$18.99	03-07-2012
Long Walk to Freedom	Mandela, Nelson	9780316548182	Little Brown & Company	TP	\$23.50	01-10-1995
American Sniper	Kyle, Chris; McEwen, Scott; DeFelice, Jim	9780062238863	HarperCollins Publishers	MM	\$12.50	29-01-2013

Perennial Bestsellers continued

Title	Contributor	ISBN	Publisher	Binding	List Price	Pub Date
Tuesdays with Morrie	Albom, Mitch	9780767905923	Crown/Archetype	TP	\$20.00	08-10-2002
Call the Midwife	Worth, Jennifer	9780143123255	Penguin Publishing Group	TP	\$22.00	29-08-2012
The Lost Girls	Baggett, Jennifer; Corbett, Holly C.; Pressner, Amanda	9780061689079	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$19.99	26-04-2011
Scar Tissue	Kiedis, Anthony	9781401307455	Hyperion Press	TP	\$22.00	19-10-2005
Life	Richards, Keith	9780316034418	Little Brown & Company	TP	\$21.50	03-05-2011
How to Be a Woman	Moran, Caitlin	9780062124296	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$19.99	17-07-2012
Infidel	Hirsi Ali, Ayaan	9780743289696	Free Press	TP	\$20.00	01-04-2008
Eat, Pray, Love	Gilbert, Elizabeth	9780143038412	Penguin Publishing	TP	\$22.00	30-01-2007
Prisoner of Tehran	Nemat, Marina	9780143052173	Penguin Canada	TP	\$20.00	08-04-2008
Just Kids	Smith, Patti	9780060936228	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$20.00	02-11-2010
Open	Agassi, Andre	9780307388407	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	TP	\$23.00	10-08-2010
Einstein	Isaacson, Walter	9780743264747	Simon & Schuster, Inc	TP	\$23.99	13-05-2008
Gandhi - An Autobiography	Gandhi, Mohandas K.	9781554551835	Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Ltd	TP	\$16.00	24-02-2011
The Dirt	Lee, Tommy; Neil, Vince; Mars, Mick; Sixx, Nikki; Strauss, Neil	9780060989156	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$24.99	09-07-2002
Maus I and II Paperback Boxed Set	Spiegelman, Art	9780679748403	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	TP	\$39.90	19-10-1993
The Heroin Diaries	Sixx, Nikki	9781416511946	VH1 Books	TP	\$23.50	28-10-2008
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas	Thompson, Hunter S.; Steadman, Ralph	9780679785897	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	TP	\$20.00	12-05-1998
Slash	Slash; Bozza, Anthony	9780061351433	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$21.00	21-10-2008
A Million Little Pieces	Frey, James	9780307276902	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	TP	\$22.00	22-09-2005
Medium Raw	Bourdain, Anthony	9780061718953	HarperCollins Publishers	TP	\$19.99	03-05-2011
Girl, Interrupted	Kaysen, Susanna	9780679746041	Knopf Doubleday Publishing	TP	\$20.00	19-04-1994