

Insights Into Young Book Consumers' Behavior. Entrepreneurship Implications

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Abstract

This paper examines the reading practices of young book consumers, based on qualitative field research carried-out in Romania through semi-structured interviews. Moving beyond descriptive accounts of reading habits, the study explores the relationship between reading motivations, format preferences, and the perceived impact of books on everyday life within a relatively underexplored Eastern European context. The findings show that, despite time constraints and the presence of non-readers, reading remains a meaningful activity for many young individuals, driven primarily by intrinsic enjoyment and the pursuit of knowledge. Participants report a preference for non-fiction and romance genres, as well as for personally owned books in paperback and digital formats. However, the study also identifies a notable tension between the anticipated benefits of reading – often framed in terms of personal development and practical applicability – and its more limited perceived effects in everyday contexts. By highlighting this gap between the symbolic value attributed to reading and its experienced outcomes, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on contemporary reading cultures and challenges dominant narratives that position reading as a straightforward tool for self-improvement. In doing so, it offers a nuanced perspective on how young readers negotiate the role of books in their lives, with direct effects on practices in the publishing industry.

Keywords

Consumer behavior; young consumer; book; entrepreneurship; publishing industry

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Introduction

“If, for example, we consider books as medicine, we understand that it is good to have many at home rather than a few: when you want to feel better, then you go to the ‘medicine closet’ and choose a book. Not a random one, but the right book for that moment.” (Umberto Eco). Starting from Umberto Eco’s quote and sorrowful by the harsh Romanian reality where book consumption is at its lowest level within the European Union (EU) – according to Eurostat (2024), only 29.5% of Romanians have read books in the 12 months prior to the survey – in the present paper, we address, at an exploratory level, young book consumers’ behavior in Romania, aiming to draw a series of entrepreneurship implications. The painful findings of the EU statistics on income and living conditions (Eurostat, 2024) related to Romanian’s reading orientation might be mirrored also in the results of the PISA tests, where the 15-year-old Romanian students obtained an average score of 428 points, compared to the OECD average of 476 points (OECD, 2024). In a transition economy (Dragusin et al., 2010) marked by migration (Grosu & Constantin, 2013; Grosu & Dinu, 2016; Petrescu et. al, 2011; Săseanu & Petrescu, 2011), ageing (Drăgușin et al., 2017), but also by global trends

related to sustainability, digitalization, or derived from the COVID-19 pandemic's effects (Amicarelli et al., 2021; Ghita et al., 2022; Grosu, 2015, 2024; Paraschiv et al., 2024; Starosta et al., 2024), its renaissance lays in its population; the more educated and well-read its population is, the higher its chances of success.

In such a context, the present paper aims to answer a research question, with important societal impact, derived from a current practical issue: how can the book consumption behavior of young Romanians be described? Even if the question starts from a practical problem the Romanian society faces, this can be derived from previous studies investigating different aspects specific to the book market in Romania, too (Dinca & Dima, 2022; Orzaru et al., 2022; Saniuta et al., 2022). However, this is not a thoroughly explored area in the scientific literature, different gaps specific to the investigation of book consumers' behavior supporting further research, like the one developed in this paper, are outlined in the next section dedicated to literature review.

Thus, the paper aims to investigate the book consumers' behavior in Romania, focusing on the young population, respectively those aged between 16 and 35. The novelty of the paper consists in exploring different aspects specific to book consumers' behavior such as reading propensity and motivations, literary tastes, preferred book formats, and usefulness and internalization of the read information. Based on qualitative research consisting in semi-structured interviews with 30 young book consumers in Romania, the paper also aims to raise awareness about the importance of reading amid Romanians, especially the young ones, and to provide a series of useful insights to businesses acting in the publishing book industry. Consumers are at the core of any business and knowing and understanding their behavior is crucial for businesses' development (Grosu et al., 2025). Studying consumers' behavior in the publishing book industry in Romania becomes essential, especially as this is considered to be a barely standing industry, despite the high prices and the history of many past or still existing publishers on the market.

1. Review of the scientific literature

The preferences of book consumers differ significantly depending on the era, trends, demographics and individual psychology. Even if this has been a subject of investigation for many years, the literature on "critical success factor of books and how people choose them" is still scarce (Leitao et al., 2018). These aspects are directly linked to book consumers' behavior, approached as the sum of decisions about the consumption (including buying, use and disposal), of a particular good, by decision making units over time (Hoyer et al., 2012). Different studies in the specific scientific literature approach the book consumers' behavior from various perspectives, focusing on consumers' preferences (Boraks et al., 1997; Chapman et al., 2007), factors influencing the preferences, like, for example, illustrations in books (Brookshire et al., 2002), purchasing behavior (Leitao et al., 2018), along with motivations for buying and reading (Burn and Tredinnick, 1994; Kraaykamp and Dijkstra, 1999; Summers, 2013), manifested demand (Ringstad and Løyland, 2006), ownership of digital possessions (Helm et al., 2018), amid others. Even if, subject to investigation, in terms of geographical areas, are, usually, more developed countries, a study in Romania, quantitative in nature, though not representative for the entire population, but rather exploratory in approach, can be found in the work of Orzaru et al. (2022). Different from their study, the one developed in the present paper addresses more in-depth issues, like, for example, the usefulness and the internalization of the read information. Contrastingly, studies addressing the book market in Romania can be found in different works, like, for example, the ones of Dinca and Dima (2022) or Saniuta et al. (2022). However, they are tackling various aspects, different than, but connected to the topic explored by the present paper. Respectively, Dinca and Dima (2022) focus on analyzing the changes in the purchasing habits of book consumers, during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on utilitarian and hedonic motivations. On the other hand, Saniuta et al. (2022, p.184) explore the extent to which "innovation in bookstores influences the buying behavior of customers".

Book reading preferences are mainly studied in the literature, focusing on the genre liked by consumers or on the desired book format (Chen & Granitz, 2010; Crosby, 2022; Huang & Hsieh, 2012; Kotaman & Tekin, 2018; Laing & Royle, 2013; Piters & Stokmans, 2000; Zhang & Kudva, 2014). For example, Piters and Stokmans (2000) outline that genre categorization has direct effects on consumers' preferences for books; "the more representative a book is for a particular genre, the greater the preference for the book". In the contemporary era, readers' preferences in terms of reading seem to migrate more in the direction of the format in which they tend to consume this form of media. Usually, studies advocate the inclination of consumers on both print and digital formats (Crosby, 2022). Furthermore, a comprehensive study developed by Zhang and Kudva (2014) in the United States of America, outlines that even "e-books have firmly established a place in people's lives, due to their convenience of access, e-books are not yet positioned to replace print books". However, taking into account the current hectic lifestyle, the constant evolution and

diversification of the market, as well as the limited physical space, there is a trend towards an alternative form of reading, which more and more readers are asking for to adapt to the current context. Therefore, “creators and publishers must supply both media to meet the needs of adopters, rejecters and convergers. For instance, book publishers currently offer novels in print, digital and audio formats”. (Chen & Granitz, 2010).

2. Research methodology

The present paper is based on an exploratory field research, qualitative in nature, developed with the aim to investigate the book consumers’ behavior in Romania, focusing on the young population, respectively those aged between 16 and 35. The developed research targets to understand, at micro-social level, how the phenomenon of reading manifests itself, as well as what are the effects that the research subjects observe on their lifestyle and on their own thinking. The research implied the development of semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide, developed in accordance with the research’s aim and objectives, consisting of nine questions, as presented in Table no. 1.

Table no. 1. Applied interview guide

Objective	Questions
O1. Determining the propensity of young people for reading.	1. How much do you like to read?
	2. How many books have you read in the last two months?
O2. Determining the motivations for young people’s reading activity.	3. Why are you reading?/ What are your main motivations towards reading?
O3. Identifying the literary genre preferences of young people.	4. What are the literary genres that you like most?
O4. Identifying the format in which young people read.	5. Which book format do you prefer?
	6. Do you, usually, buy the books, or, do you borrow them from the library or from Bookster or Voxa?
O5. Analyzing the effects of reading, as perceived by young people.	7. Do you appreciate that the books you have read helped you?
	8. How much have you appropriated from what you have read?
	9. How relevant (for yourselves) do you find the information you discovered in the books you have read?

The research was carried out in March 2025, in Bucharest, the capital-city, part of the most developed region in Romania, comparable with other European capital city regions (Davidescu et al., 2018), on a sample of 30 respondents randomly chosen. There were 17 females and 13 males in the sample, while in terms of age, this was composed of young people aged 16-35, pupils, students and young professionals, specifically: 3 interviewees aged between 16 and 18, 17 aged between 18 and 24 and 10 aged between 25 and 35. All the participants were informed about the aim and objectives of the research and about its academic nature. Participation in the research was voluntary; no interviewee was forced to participate in the research. To keep the confidentiality of the respondents, their identity is not revealed. At the same time the provided answers, in an aggregate form, became subject to content analysis, its main results being presented in the next section.

3. Results and discussion

Of the 30 interviewed Romanian young adults, eight said they do not read in general. This may be an inclination towards the conviction that, indeed, the new generations no longer have a propensity for literature. However, given the qualitative nature of the research, this cannot be generalized, and further research is needed. Of the remaining 22 respondents, the vast majority read quite often, considering reading a pleasant activity. Surprisingly, the interviewed pupils and students showed considerable interest in reading. However, some of them read only when necessary, having mixed opinions about this activity, while others said they like very much to read, but they just don’t have the time to do it. Their demanding work schedule, the totally unbalanced work-life balance, leads to a lack of time for developing creative and pleasant activities for the respondents. The lack of time is a recurring problem that affects the inclination of young people to read: “I like to read a lot, but I don’t have much time.” (female, aged 20, student and intern); “I read quite often, whenever I have time.” (male, aged 25, employed in the banking and finance sector); “I haven’t read any books this year, although I’ve started about three. I didn’t have time.” (female, aged 34, physician); “I read a lot, whenever I have time! It’s my hobby, it relaxes me.” (female, aged 17, pupil).

Although the data obtained cannot provide an advanced interpretation depending on age, an inclination towards reading can be observed before key moments in various stages of respondents' life, such as the baccalaureate, or the defense of bachelor's / master thesis. The trend is on the rise around the ages of 17, 20, 25 and 33. The interviewed young people read out of passion, but also out of the desire to be better informed and to acquire new knowledge. However, there are still respondents that consider reading an obligation, probably instilled by school and/or parents, and read only when they really need information.: "I never liked to read. I had a lot of readings at school; all of them were outdated and extremely unpleasant [inappropriate language was replaced]. I read them because I had to. That's what I do now, too. I get my hands on a book only if it's extremely necessary." (female, aged 27, employed in commerce)

In terms of literary genres, the interviewed young people mainly prefer non-fiction books, closely followed by romance novels and thriller / mystery / crime novels. The interviewed young people do not have a strong preference for a particular literary genre and read quite diversely: "I read non-fiction books most often. I need most of them for my dissertation." (female, aged 24, student and employed in the commerce area); "When I read more, I chose non-fiction books or classics. I have the impression that this mean real literature." (female, aged 19, student)

Since the contemporary era represents the age of technology, this study also focused on investigating consumers' preferences in terms of the mostly preferred book formats and buying/lending behavior. Various companies have emerged on the Romanian book market that offer services such as online book lending, based on subscription. Two of the most representative examples in this sense refer to Bookster, which mainly serves companies and organizations, and Voxa, which offers access for any individual to a wide range of digital products, such as e-books and audio-books. If Bookster is a rental service that sends books in physical format by mail and courier, similar to the businesses of the early 2000s that gave cassettes and DVDs for rent, Voxa operates exclusively online. According to data provided by the companies, Voxa currently has "more than 200.000 users who read more than three times as much" (Voxa, 2025), while Bookster boasts about 190.000 readers, partnerships with 1.500 companies and 12 reads read on average per year by each reader, i.e. 9 million loans and about 170.000 reads, according to data available at the middle of April 2026 (Bookster, 2026).

The interviewees prefer to buy books. Borrowing is not such a preferred, nor common activity. Furthermore, very few respondents prefer to buy/lend books in digital and/or audio format on Kindle or Voxa, and only one uses Bookster, namely the respondent employed in the medical field: "I buy them all. I like to annotate on them, and I can't do that if it's not my book." (female, aged 19, student employed in the commercial area); "I buy everything I read. I support authors and create my own bookstore. My grandfather had a very big one. He instilled the pleasure of collecting books." (female, aged 33, working in the commercial area); "At work, they offered me Bookster, but I still stayed on Voxa. I was used to the app. It's nice to have both e-books and audiobooks on your phone. I love audio-books. I listen to them in the subway." (male, aged 30, programmer)

In terms of book format, the interviewed young people mainly prefer paperback and digital books, while very few would listen to an audiobook: "I only read paperbacks. They are comfortable." (female, aged 19, student and intern); "I don't listen to books. I don't think it means reading. I prefer paperbacks or hardcovers." (female, aged 17, pupil)

Most of the young people, among those who read, do not have a clear opinion about the relevance of the information they find in books. Others believe that what is found between the pages of a book is not at all or little relevant to the problems and situations encountered in real life: "What I read didn't help me at all. Anyway, I read out of obligation. A bunch of useless things [inappropriate language was replaced]. Time and money wasted. I'd better watch something on YouTube." (female, aged 18, pupil); "I don't know what to say... It's hard to say. I read about dragons. I haven't met dragons up to date. [laughs] The characters' feelings are somewhat relevant if the characters are well written, but I can't pronounce myself overall." (female, 20, student and intern); "What can I say... You don't find useful information in non-fiction either. Life beats the book." (female, aged 24, student employed in the commerce sector); "Yes! Yes! I learned a lot about emotional intelligence and toxic relationships by reading books that addressed such topics." (female, aged 19, student working in the commercial area)

Some of the young people interviewed have been helped by books throughout their lives, while others find that reading has been little to no help in navigating life's problems: "They helped me a lot, especially during the pandemic. I continued to work, but I lacked contact with others. The characters in the books were my best friends." (male, aged 27, student and programmer); "So and so... Some things are too perfect in books." (female, aged 24, student working in the commerce sector)

It seems that young people acquire, on average, very little of what they read. This correlates with previous data regarding the relevance of information and its usefulness/applicability in real life. This can be an alarm signal for the current book market, especially in the context in which literary preferences are mainly directed towards non-fiction books, which should contain a significantly higher amount of relevant and applicable information than romance novels, or thriller / mystery / crime novels.

Although the research did not follow the preferences of the young Romanian readers in terms of the language in which they choose to read or consume the content of a book, a very large number of respondents wanted to share the fact that they read, in almost equal percentages, both books in English and books in Romanian. All young people interviewed who read books in digital format or listen to audiobooks read mainly books in English, while respondents who prefer the physical format tend to oscillate between English, in the case of novels initially published in this language, and translation into Romanian, for more difficult books, or initially published in other languages. This translates into a clear preference of the interviewed young people for foreign authors, especially those from the Anglo-Saxon space, and a total lack of interest in Romanian authors, probably instilled by school and parents.

4. Discussions: focus on empirical and entrepreneurial implications

The paper focused on analyzing young book consumers' behavior in Romania, mainly tackling their reading propensity, motivation for reading, literary tastes, preferred book formats, and the effects of reading, such as the usefulness and internalization of the read information (Figure no. 1).

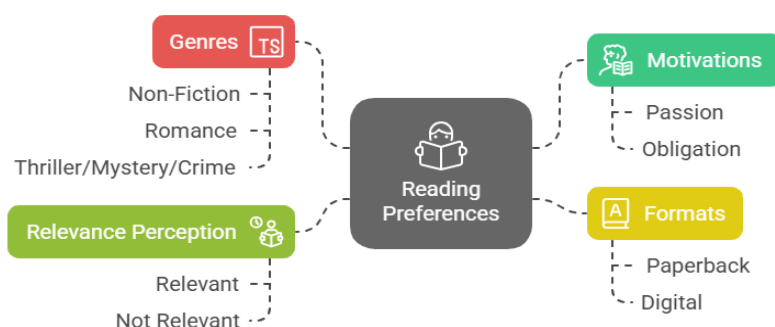


Figure no. 1. Young Romanian book consumers' preferences: main research outcomes

Source: developed by the authors, based on the carried-out research, using Napkin AI (Second Layer, Inc., 2026)

Some of the results of the present study are in line with previous findings outlined in the literature. For example, the fact that paperback is still the most preferred book format amid the investigated young Romanian consumers, compared to e-books or audio books, or the fact that buying and owning the book is preferred over borrowing, are in line with the findings of Orzaru et al. (2022). Contrastingly, our study revealed a high preference among the investigated consumers for non-fiction books, which is different from the aforementioned study, that outlined romance as the most preferred genre.

Besides its empirical implications, the present study might also provide various insights for the book publishing industry. For example, the development of the book market in Romania can be done by promoting, online and not only, other novels of the same genres, which follow topics in more depth, in a more attractive and attentive way to certain socio-economic / professional categories and, in particular, in some special or disadvantaged categories, poorly represented in the contemporary media. These genres can be distributed in a manner that replicates the successful model from the early 2000s, respectively, the "Adevarul" book collections. The volumes had reduced prices, were easily accessible, and were distributed at press kiosks, along with the current issue of the "Adevarul" newspaper. The collection was a real success. One day after the publication of the novel "Ion" by Liviu Rebreanu, all 160.000 printed copies were sold (Adevarul, 2008). Romania may well need this type of business models, as well as state-subsidized publishing houses and/or book collections, as there are in other European countries, such as France. Subsidized publishers and collections can have a beneficial effect not only on society and its literacy, but also on the market in general, which may experience a lower price of volumes than the current one by integrating competition.

Furthermore, the Romanian book market is currently focused almost exclusively on the printed book format, on paper, with soft covers and hardcovers. Digitalization is needed in the book sector for a good distribution of materials. Digitalization can come in the context in which numerous reading competitions have

appeared, such as the “Battle of the Books”, which invite children and young people to discover new titles from contemporary literature, both domestic and foreign. However, there is a book deficit that many libraries in the country have, and they cannot provide the participants with the necessary number of copies at the same time. It is perfectly natural that a library cannot hold multiple copies of each novel in its inventories, but libraries in more developed countries have implemented a digitalization model that comes precisely in solving this issue, focusing on obtaining copyright for novels in digital and audio format. This transition to digital books can facilitate access to creative materials and increase young people’s interest in reading.

The development of the book market also attracts the development of educational programs, literary events and promotional campaigns, designed to attract other young people towards reading. By creating new target groups, the market expands, the influx of new materials is allowed, and the price adjusts according to competition and demand.

A strong book industry, with a developed book market behind it, stimulates Romanian writers and promotes them both in the country and abroad. By adopting the national culture and art on the territory of Romania, the first step towards their promotion and cultivation abroad is already taken. Currently, Romania has very few established writers translated abroad, and because most of them are not encouraged and promoted, even the Romanian public does not show an inclination towards them. That is why Romanian publishing houses are forced to buy translation rights from abroad, without “exporting” anything abroad.

Not only investments in human capital can be stimulated through the development of the book market in Romania, but also investments in education and culture, as well as in the business of publishing houses. A developed market means the creation of new jobs that can contribute to the national economic development. The development of the book market in Romania is necessary to increase the educational level, strengthen the national culture and stimulate the economy, and the achievement of a well-developed book market starts from knowing its consumers’ preferences, the topic explored in this paper.

Conclusions

The paper analyzed empirically and at a microsocial level the preferences of the young book consumer in Romania, based on semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents. The research showed that, even if there were young people that do not read, in general, there are still young people that enjoy, even love reading. The interviewed young people read out of passion, but also out of the desire to be better informed and to acquire new knowledge. However, there are still respondents that consider reading an obligation, probably instilled by school and/or parents. Generally, young people read non-fiction and romance books predominantly, quite often, despite the lack of time, or would like to read more often if the schedule allowed them. Furthermore, the interviewees consider reading a hobby, or perceive it as a relaxing activity, and they prefer to buy the books they read, mainly paperback. The idea of having their own library is appealing to the respondents, who like to feel the books and to take notes on them while reading. Borrowing books is not such a preferred, nor common activity among the respondents, not being very attractive to services like Voxa or Bookster. Digital books are amid interviewees’ preferences, too, while audiobooks are less preferred. Some of the books read by interviewees have some effects on their lives, but a relatively low applicability in real life, compared to their expectations. Furthermore, even if the research did not aim at identifying the preferences of the young Romanian readers in terms of the language in which they choose to read, a very large number of respondents wanted to share the fact that they read books, in almost equal percentages, both in English and Romanian.

The results obtained underline the importance of a multidisciplinary approach and the need for an in-depth analysis to obtain a complete picture over the book consumers’ behavior in Romania. Through the conclusions formulated, the paper contributes to the development of knowledge in the field, while offering practical solutions and recommendations for their application in real contexts. It is essential that future research continues to explore this topic, given the complexity and dynamics of the field, as well as the limitation of the present research related to the small number of participants to the study, considering its qualitative nature, and also to their regional affiliation only to the capital-city of Romania. However, the study provides a solid basis for future investigations. The findings of this study lay the foundation for a more complex and comprehensive quantitative research, representative at national level, focused on investigating the Romanian book consumers’ behavior, with direct implication on the publishing industry. Cross-country comparative studies might also be developed to analyze the situation in different economies, either more or less developed. There is a need for more thorough research into the needs of the current generations, to establish the effects on the book market. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study might bring important information for businesses active in the publishing industry, who would like to better adapt their strategies to their consumers’ behavior.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement:

Based on the research results, Napkin AI was used to generate figure no. 1.

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