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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
CONSUMER ATTITUDES**

in Relation to the Publishing Industry  
and the Environment

**KEYWORDS:**

**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, EMISSIONS, SUSTAINABILITY**

# ABSTRACT

Written amid a climate emergency, this paper investigates how the publishing industry is operating to convert its operations to reduce its carbon footprint as it works towards achieving climate neutral status. One of the main obstacles comes from the risk of making changes to the products they produce and whether consumers would be open to such changes.

In order to assess this, a questionnaire with 114 recipients was used to collect data relating to consumer attitudes towards books and the environment. Questions were used to determine whether consumers are open to change and whether changes in the production of books are viable from a commercial perspective.

The results show a general enthusiasm for books to be produced in environmentally sustainable methods, with respondents showing a willingness to support such behaviour. While the impact these changes might have on the consumer is generally undesirable, increased transparency seems the most effective way in spreading understanding for any changes that might take place to books and their price.

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## FULL ARTICLE

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the UK government committed to meeting the UN's sustainable development goals which aims to improve “peace, prosperity, access to healthcare and education and tackle climate change worldwide.”<sup>1</sup> Following efforts to meet this commitment, on 1 May 2019 the UK parliament declared an environment and climate emergency,<sup>2</sup> prompting the question: what can we do to encourage significant change? In order to meet these sustainable development goals by 2030, a collective responsibility falls to those governing countries and industries, and also to individuals themselves.

With significant sums of money at risk and employees' livelihoods at stake, a publishing company might be reluctant to veer from a proven methodology to contribute to meeting these sustainable development goals, potentially considering change as too economically risky, especially without evidence for its success. Case studies or the actions of others more willing to take this risk may be influential in whether a larger publishing company decides to adapt their operations in favour of a more environmentally sustainable approach, and such cases will likely be thoroughly examined if such a change is to be entertained.

Smaller independent publishers appear to be more willing to experiment with other methods. In their sustainability statement, And Other Stories acknowledges that larger publishers might view smaller presses such as themselves acting as a “guinea pig for the industry.” A smaller size can allow greater agility and flexibility, potentially managing shorter print runs and fewer publications. By printing their books in the UK, no staff flying within Europe (exploiting the rail networks instead), and using paper-only packaging for their books,<sup>3</sup> And Other Stories are actively creating a smaller carbon footprint, providing a model that other publishers could mimic in their attempt to do likewise.

Yet, despite these “guinea pigs”, larger publishers may be unwilling to entertain change without stronger confidence in the success of alternative methods. While it is possible for books to be made more environmentally sustainably—whether this means producing paper from alternative sources, printing locally, or reducing print runs and removing express delivery to customers—this is not possible without the support and acceptance from the end consumer: the reader.

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1 Lunn, J. (2019) *Sustainable Development Goals: How is the UK Performing?* [Online] House of Commons. Available from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/social-policy/health/sustainable-development-goals-how-is-the-uk-performing/> [Accessed: 03/07/2021].

2 BBC News (2019) *UK Parliament declares climate change emergency.* [Online] BBC News. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48126677> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

3 And Other Stories (No Date) *Sustainability Statement.* [Online] And Other Stories. Available from: <https://www.andotherstories.org/about-us/> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

If readers are unwilling to show that they are open to books evolving, and they do not reassure publishers that they will still buy books that may be of a different physical quality, then it is unlikely that companies will change the product to be more environmentally sustainable. Without this reassurance that customers will continue to buy their books, it might be unlikely that change will take place. Phillips also suggests that many who work in the publishing industry believe that the companies they work for have a strong social responsibility to act beyond just the means of the business, and what might be seen as social pressure from within the workforce is allegedly only increasing as the pressure to work in a socially responsible way increases.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims to provide data on consumer attitudes toward publishing environmentally sustainable books and how these attitudes could influence publishing in the future. By evaluating and sharing such findings, it may open discussion and encourage reflection on book production, allowing publishers to potentially explore methods to produce books with a reassurance that consumers are keen to see the products they treasure and champion produced in ways that have a reduced carbon footprint.

## 2 WHAT IS A CARBON FOOTPRINT?

Before considering further arguments or data, it is important to understand how an entity's emissions output is measured. Selin defines a carbon footprint as the volume of emissions associated with the activities of an entity, such as a business.<sup>5</sup> While the name implies a sole focus on carbon dioxide, the calculation includes other greenhouse gasses, such as methane and nitrous oxide.

Albeck-Ripka asserts that a carbon footprint is "the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions that come from the production, use and end-of-life of a product."<sup>6</sup> Emissions from an array of processes contribute to the calculation, making a carbon footprint a complicated calculation. For a book, contributing factors include, but are not limited to, the emissions from tree felling; turning the wood to pulp, then to paper; transporting the paper to the printer; the production of the book, inks, and glues; transporting the printed book to a retailer; and the book's end of life. This is considering only the production of the book itself, though other factors, such as office activities, are contributory too.<sup>7</sup> A product's carbon

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4 Phillips, A. (2019) Publishing and Corporate Social Responsibility. *The Oxford Handbook of Publishing*. Available from: [DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198794202.013.10](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198794202.013.10)

5 Selin, N. E. (2020) *Carbon Footprint*. [Online] Encyclopædia Britannica. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/science/carbon-footprint> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

6 Albeck-Ripka, L. (No Date) *How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint*. [Online] *The New York Times*. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-reduce-your-carbon-footprint> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

7 Berners-Lee, M. & Clark, D. (2010) *What is a Carbon Footprint?* [Online] *The Guardian*. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2010/jun/04/carbon-footprint-definition> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

footprint is not geographically limited, meaning that even if the offices are based in the UK, their overseas operations are also taken into account.

To reduce their carbon footprint, businesses can use renewable energy, such as that produced by wind turbines, or by changing the methods of transportation and the distance products travel. Alternatively, businesses can engage in carbon offsetting activities to compensate for some or all of their carbon footprint.<sup>8</sup> Mock suggests that it can cost between \$3.30 (£2.67) and \$13.18 (£10.66) to purchase carbon offsets,<sup>9</sup> and these activities can take the form of planting trees or providing energy efficient products in less-developed countries. When a business is carbon neutral it removes as many carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere as it emits;<sup>10</sup> climate neutrality is the same concept, though the definition extends to all greenhouse gasses.<sup>11</sup>

It could be argued that carbon offsetting allows businesses to release harmful emissions into the atmosphere “guilt free.” An effective strategy of managing a carbon footprint could involve combining environmentally sustainable practices with carbon offsetting, ensuring as few emissions are released as possible while removing as much from the atmosphere as possible. Reducing the total emissions output will mean there is a lower volume of these harmful gasses in the atmosphere, slowing the negative effects these chemicals have on the planet.

### 3 WHAT ARE PUBLISHERS DOING TO REDUCE THEIR CARBON FOOTPRINT?

Opportunities for publishers to reduce their carbon footprint are plentiful, and many are already working to reduce their carbon footprint through carbon offsetting projects and stringent environmental policies.

Examples of efforts to offset a publisher's carbon emissions can be seen with Bonnier planting “10 trees for every new book published in 2020,”<sup>12</sup> and Penguin

8 Selin, N. E. (2020) *Carbon Footprint*. [Online] Encyclopædia Britannica. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/science/carbon-footprint> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

9 Mock, J. (2019) *How to Buy Carbon Offsets*. [Online]. *The New York Times*. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/climate/nyt-climate-newsletter-carbon-offsets.html> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

10 Clark, D. (2011) *A Complete Guide to Carbon Offsetting*. [Online] *The Guardian*. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/sep/16/carbon-offset-projects-carbon-emissions> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

11 Bernoville, T. (2021) *What is the difference between carbon-neutral, net-zero and climate positive?* [Online] Plan A Academy. Available from: <https://plana.earth/academy/what-is-difference-between-carbon-neutral-net-zero-climate-positive/> [Accessed: 12/06/2021].

12 Cowdrey, K. (2019) *Bonnier Books UK promises 10 trees for every book in 2020*. [Online] *The Bookseller*. Available from: [https://www.thebookseller.com/news/bonnier-books-uk-promises-10-trees-every-book-2020-1122716?fbclid=IwAR0e3pJWt3fJLpZ\\_-47rG25yT4kSFVfpeDI1P2biKhfULhnNNxgHfvVluXU](https://www.thebookseller.com/news/bonnier-books-uk-promises-10-trees-every-book-2020-1122716?fbclid=IwAR0e3pJWt3fJLpZ_-47rG25yT4kSFVfpeDI1P2biKhfULhnNNxgHfvVluXU) [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

Random House (PRH) planting a tree for every “new joiner to our company.”<sup>13</sup> PRH’s parent company, Bertelsmann, has declared that it aims to be “climate neutral by 2030” by using 100% green electricity and being more efficient with their energy.<sup>14</sup> This would see a 50% reduction (compared to 2018 figures) in greenhouse gasses created, capping their CO2 emissions at 500,000 tonnes while also offsetting any emissions they do produce.<sup>15</sup> Bertelsmann’s targets were formulated in association with the Science Based Target Initiative, using scientific recommendations to create their targets and the strategies to meet them.

Announced on Earth Day (22nd April 2021), PRH has furthered its efforts to act with express concern for the environment. According to *The Bookseller*,<sup>16</sup> both PRH and Springer Nature are now carbon neutral in their direct operations, pledging to be net carbon zero by 2040. With an environmental policy in place and mandatory sustainability training for staff, this effort highlights the potential actions publishers can take. What is more encouraging is that PRH acknowledges this is a step towards a larger goal: as they work to become carbon neutral in their indirect operations, they are offsetting emissions across their operations while developing future strategies. This proactive behaviour is both promising and possibly inspiring to others in the industry.

One example of exceptionally ‘green’ publishing can be found in Frances Lincoln Book’s *Greta and the Giants* by Zoe Tucker. The following changes were used to reduce the book’s carbon footprint in an effort to produce a book in the most environmentally sustainable way possible:<sup>17</sup>

- Printed in the UK by Severn, meaning no long-distance freighting of books. Severn print uses “eco-presses” using 100% renewable energy.<sup>18</sup>
- The book was printed on “100% FSC recycled paper,” reducing waste sent to landfill.

13 Penguin Random House (No Date) *What We Offer: Being Responsible*. [Online] Penguin Random House. Available from: <https://www.penguinrandomhousecareers.co.uk/what-we-offer/> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

14 Leslie, F. (2020) *Bertelsmann aims to be climate neutral by 2030*. [Online] Penguin Random House. Available from: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/bertelsmann-aims-be-climate-neutral-2030-1192120>. [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

15 Bertelsmann. (2020) *Bertelsmann to Be Climate Neutral by 2030*. [Online] Bertelsmann. Available from: <https://www.bertelsmann.com/news-and-media/news/bertelsmann-to-be-climate-neutral-by-2030.jsp> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

16 Chandler, M. (2021) *PRH UK goes carbon neutral as trade marks Earth Day*. [Online] *The Bookseller*. Available from: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/prh-goes-carbon-neutral-trade-marks-earth-day-1256454> [Accessed 26/04/2021].

17 Cotton, K. (2019) *The making of Greta and the Giants: going green in the children's book industry*. [Online] BookMachine. Available from: [https://bookmachine.org/2019/10/29/the-making-of-greta-and-the-giants-going-green-in-the-childrens-book-industry/?fbclid=IwAR0pmuFapN98eYLiuKom3EmLiPAHctpdqToVz-Ko-vJIC-ct9jT8Ss\\_58Mg](https://bookmachine.org/2019/10/29/the-making-of-greta-and-the-giants-going-green-in-the-childrens-book-industry/?fbclid=IwAR0pmuFapN98eYLiuKom3EmLiPAHctpdqToVz-Ko-vJIC-ct9jT8Ss_58Mg) [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

18 Cowdrey, K. (2019) *Severn's green efforts earn company Greta and the Giants printing contract* [Online] *The Bookseller*. Available from: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/green-severn-wins-greta-and-giants-printing-contract-1096401> [Accessed 22/08/2021].



- One tree was planted for every pre-order, helping to offset harmful emissions in the atmosphere.
- All Point-of-Sale materials were made from recycled paper.

Katie Cotton, Publisher at Frances Lincoln, acknowledged that they do not make as much profit from the book as they typically would, but admitted that “printing sustainably has been a major selling point for the book.” Having published *Greta and the Giants*, Cotton alludes to transitioning all printing of their books from abroad to the UK. This would have a significant impact on their carbon footprint as the books would not have to be freighted from abroad to be sold in the UK. It also indicates that consumers were receptive to the sustainable production methods.

Elsewhere, independent publisher And Other Stories are working to ensure their operations are as sustainable as possible; taken from their Sustainability Statement,<sup>19</sup> the below outlines what they are doing to be more environmentally conscious.

1. Books are printed in the UK, “which lowers the carbon footprint for freight.”
2. Paper-only packaging is used when sending books themselves.
3. Employees do not fly within Europe, using digital conferencing and train travel instead.
4. None of their employees drive to work.
5. By signing up to the Climate Perks scheme, employees are rewarded for not travelling by plane for personal trips and holidays.
6. Books are made with long-lasting paper and acid-free components.

The final point from the list could be debated as to whether long-lasting products are actually more beneficial. Understanding consumer needs and attitudes is important: whilst many might keep a book for their lifetime, others might not. A book designed to last decades is perhaps not ideal for consumers who view books as disposable. An alternative option would be to give the consumer the option to pay more for a book that will last (which And Other Stories claims will be more expensive to produce) or to offer a cheaper book that can be recycled or biodegraded more easily, though this would likely invite criticism that creating books for this purpose is akin to using single-use plastics—it is still creating waste that needs disposing of, which then requires energy and resources.

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<sup>19</sup> And Other Stories (No Date) *Sustainability Statement*. [Online] And Other Stories. Available from: <https://www.andotherstories.org/about-us/> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

## 4 THE FSC

The foremost organisation responsible for the procurement of wood and paper is the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC): the “original pioneers of forest certification”, touting themselves as “the world’s most trusted sustainable forest management solution.”<sup>20</sup> The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) is another organisation involved in forestry management, and although both work to achieve the same goal, the FSC is a standards agency and most relevant to the publishing industry as it ensures a chain of custody throughout a supply chain. The FSC logo can be found on the imprint page and typically the back cover of any book that is from FSC accredited sources.

To be FSC accredited, a forest must be managed to “the highest environmental, social and economic standards.”<sup>21</sup> This means that when a tree is cut down another is planted in its place or allowed to naturally regenerate; it also demands that forests must be managed with “due respect” for the wildlife and people that live within them.

There are three varieties of paper certification:<sup>22</sup>

- FSC 100% – all the wood fibre in the product is sourced from an FSC accredited forest.
- FSC mix – the fibre in the product is sourced from a mixture of FSC accredited wood, reclaimed wood or fibre, and fibre from “other controlled sources.”
- FSC recycled – all of the fibre in the product is reclaimed material.

The FSC aims to help businesses take responsibility for the impacts of their operations by working with them to improve efficiency and to meet the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>23</sup> The UK’s largest publishing houses (PRH, Pan Macmillan, Hachette, HarperCollins) state on their websites that they use FSC certified paper in high percentages of the books they publish, demonstrating that they are taking environmental sustainability seriously by working to ensure that the raw materials used in the production of their books are sourced from well-managed, sustainable forests.

20 FSC (No Date) *About Us*. [Online] Forest Stewardship Council. Available from: <https://fsc.org/en/about-us> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

21 FSC (No Date) *For Business*. [Online] Forest Stewardship Council. Available from: <https://fsc.org/en/businesses> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

22 FSC (No Date) *About Us*. [Online] Forest Stewardship Council. Available from: <https://fsc.org/en/about-us> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

23 FSC (No Date) *For Business*. [Online] Forest Stewardship Council. Available from: <https://fsc.org/en/businesses> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

## 5 THE BOOK CHAIN PROJECT

Whilst the FSC has significant involvement across the publishing industry, it is specific to paper (e.g. toilet paper, tissue paper, etc.), not publishing. Instead, the Book Chain Project (BCP) was formed by Carnstone (an “independent management consultancy, specialising in corporate responsibility.”<sup>24</sup>) in 2006 to build “better supply chains for books.”<sup>25</sup> By giving publishers guidance on sustainable paper procurement and a method of reporting the chemicals used in inks and adhesives, the organisation helps publishers to work in an environmentally sustainable way.

The BCP monitors three key areas, all available from their ‘History’ page: forest sourcing, chemicals and materials, and labour and environment. When assessing material sourcing, the BCP created a new grading system by assessing the paper’s origins and whether the source forest is FSC certified. Doing so ensures “good practice in responsible paper sourcing,” and they also test the chemicals used in a book’s production to ensure they meet safety legislation in different parts of the world.<sup>26</sup> Working with 239 mills across the globe, they also provide resources that detail a forest risk assessment relating to the environment and surrounding ecosystems.<sup>27</sup>

Across the three areas, the BCP ensures one commonality: communication between publishers and supply chain businesses. Sharing data and best practices helps each business in the supply chain to work to the best possible standards, creating a more efficient supply chain. As a result, opportunity for change and progression will be shared across the industry instead of being isolated to a singular business.

Beyond setting standards, the BCP also works with publishers to conduct research and formulate new systems to benefit publishers and improve operations.

For publishers to further embrace change and to create books that might have a higher production cost, it requires support from readers, increased transparency, and potentially technological and logistical innovation to aid development toward reducing the industry’s carbon footprint. In order to determine whether consumers are willing and open to books changing, the next section details primary research on how potential changes to books might be received by consumers.

24 Carnstone (No Date) *Home*. [Online] Carnstone. Available from: <https://carnstone.com/home> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

25 Book Chain Project (No Date) *Home*. [Online] Book Chain Project. Available from: <https://bookchainproject.com/home> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

26 Book Chain Project (No Date) *History*. [Online] Book Chain Project. Available from: <https://bookchainproject.com/history> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

27 Everett, N. (2017) *The Future of the Printed Book*. London: The Book Chain Project.

## 6 PRIMARY RESEARCH: QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to understand consumer attitudes, an online questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was distributed via social media to better understand what consumers value. The questionnaire was shared using social media and drew 114 respondents, 54 of which were between 18–24 years old (47.4%). This is likely due to those following the researcher's social media accounts largely being of a similar age, with many attending university. This sample is not wholly representative of the broader population, though other respondents did come from a range of backgrounds and demographics, with respondents' occupations ranging from seamstresses, lifeguards, window cleaners, bankers, nurses, engineers and site managers, among others.

According to Saha and Van Lente, the typical main target audience for books is “a sort of 50-something middle class to upper middle-class white woman who reads a lot because she has time, and she has resources to spend on books.”<sup>28</sup> In the research discussed in this paper, 18% of respondents reported to be 45–54 years old.

Respondents were asked which format they prefer to read books. With a split of 78:26:10, consumers within the sample preferred to read books on paper instead of as an eBook or audiobook. With three times the amount of people preferring a paper book over a digital version, it could be suggested that publishers should adapt the products that are more in demand to have the greatest impact on their carbon footprint. Adapting less favoured products will likely not have the same impact as adapting their more popular products, especially as physical books likely have a greater carbon footprint due to their production and the need to be physically transported.

When asked why they preferred their chosen format, respondents gave a variety of answers. The most common reason for choosing a paper book is that they preferred having the weight of a book in their hands (33 responses), with many elaborating to say they like being able to track their progress and flip pages. Others refer to enjoying collecting physical books and the smell of them. These suggestions imply that books are sensory products and these experiences cannot be emulated in an eBook. The second highest reason given was that respondents want time away from screens, implying that many view reading eBooks as synonymous to watching TV or browsing social media.

Those that preferred to read eBooks do so because they are smaller to carry and more convenient to use and shop on. eBooks do not occupy the same physical space, making it an ideal choice for those with less space at home. Only one respondent claimed to read using an eBook because they believe it is more

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28 Saha, A. & Van Lente, S. (2020) *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing*. London: Goldsmiths Press.

environmentally friendly. The most common reason given by those that prefer audiobooks is that they can listen to a book while doing something else, making it a passive activity.

These suggestions imply that we view physical books as “things of beauty,”<sup>29</sup> and that it is hard to have an “emotional relationship with what you’re reading if it’s on an e-reader.”<sup>30</sup>

Of the 114 responses, 87 (76.3%) said they expected to pay more for a book that has been produced in a more environmentally friendly way. This question was asked to determine consumer expectations regarding environmentally friendly books, however, what one expects might not be the same as what they are prepared to do. In an attempt to uncover a consumer’s actual behaviour, respondents were given a hypothetical scenario:

*Imagine you are in a bookstore hoping to buy a new release from your favourite author. When you get to the shop, you see there are two editions available, both identical in content and appearance. The only difference is that one is produced in an environmentally friendly way and costs £14.99, the other is produced in a manner that is not environmentally friendly, and costs £9.99. Which edition would you buy?*

The results found that 50 (43.9%) respondents would buy the more environmentally friendly edition. This shows that while consumers expect to pay more for sustainable products, the majority are less willing to pay more for them when an otherwise identical book is available at a lower price. It could also be argued that for over 30% of respondents (the difference between those who expected to pay more but if given the choice would choose to pay for the cheaper book), a book being produced in a sustainable way is not an augmented benefit (an additional benefit that adds value to what the customer is already paying for, as according to Baverstock and Bowen<sup>31</sup>), and therefore they do not see it as a selling point.

A potential argument is that consumers might see paying £5 more for an environmentally produced book as too much. To determine the highest value a consumer would pay for an environmentally produced book, respondents were asked what the highest price might be that they would spend on a book that has been produced in an environmentally friendly way, if an otherwise identical £9.99 copy was also available. The results can be found in Figure 2.

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29 Coccozza, P. (2017) *How eBooks lost their shine: ‘Kindles now look clunky and unhip’*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/27/how-ebooks-lost-their-shine-kindles-look-clunky-unhip> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

30 Handley, L. (2019) *Physical books still outsell e-books — and here’s why*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/19/physical-books-still-oussell-e-books-and-heres-why.html> [Accessed: 18/04/2021].

31 Baverstock, A. & Bowen, S. (2019) *How to Market Books*. London: Routledge.

The above chart shows that 26% of respondents would pay up to £12.99 for a sustainably produced book if there was also a £9.99 copy available, with 19% of respondents putting £14.99 as the maximum. These values could suggest that consumers are willing to pay more for books that are produced in a more environmentally sustainable manner, potentially showing that publishers need not be afraid to set a book's retail value higher to absorb production costs and maintain a similar profit margin.

Even when responses from those who said they did not expect to pay more for an environmentally produced book are removed, the above trend remains.

Respondents were given the opportunity to explain why they would not expect to pay more for an environmentally produced book when an alternative was available. Responses were varied, with many saying that they expect a sustainably produced book to be made from recycled paper and to be of lower

## In which format do you prefer to consume books?

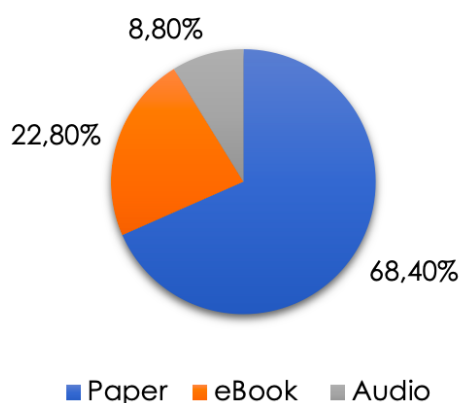


Figure 1: A chart to show how the sample prefer to consume literature.

quality, and so would not expect to pay more, especially as it is "still the same content." Others called for sustainably produced books to be the norm, requesting there be no alternative to a sustainably produced copy. This reflects the idea that many consumers expect books to be made environmentally sustainably and this quality should not be a selling point.

One response said that if they knew why there was a higher price point and how "the extra costs had been accrued ... [they would] be very likely to buy the environmentally friendly version." This response shows that consumers are perhaps seeking greater transparency to justify the higher expense, as other responses admit to not knowing much about the topic.

Yet, another group claimed that a higher price point is unnecessary, with one response asserting the need to “incentivise a green methodology across everything we do.” It appears many consumers expect businesses to absorb these expenses to preserve the price for the consumer, with one response saying a “greener attitude ... cannot come at a significant premium to the consumer—it must be an economically attractive option.”

Figure 3 shows a correlation in the data: those who read more books are less inclined to buy the sustainably produced book for £14.99. A possible explanation for this is that those who buy more books in a year would be looking to reduce their spend per book, whereas those who buy fewer books a year might be more willing to spend more on something they buy less frequently.

For example, 62.5% of 45–55-year-olds in this study (those who reportedly read the most books per year) did not expect to pay more for an environmentally sustainable book, and if given the option, this same proportion would pay £9.99 for a non-environmentally sustainable book if a £14.99 environmentally friendly copy were available. This suggests that there might need to be other benefits to buying environmentally produced books, such as in-store incentives like receiving double points on a rewards scheme, or exclusive, limited-edition content and cover designs.

## 7 DISCUSSION

As 87 of the 114 respondents (76.3%) expected to pay more for an environmentally produced book, publishers could take this information as indicative that producing books in a more expensive manner could still return a similar profit. However, the fact that only 50 respondents (43.9%) said they would buy the environmentally produced book instead of a more affordable alternative shows consumers place value for money as a higher priority than buying sustainably. The question was devised to uncover consumer attitudes, but if consumers were asked whether they would buy the book without a cheaper alternative, perhaps the data would show a different trend and provide better insight into whether publishers could feasibly raise prices.

Despite this, publishers can find comfort in the fact that consumers do buy higher priced books even if they have a cheaper alternative. For example, the Penguin Classics collection retails at a higher price despite containing the same story as other versions. Readers are potentially drawn to the clothbound cover design, premium paper stock and spacious page design, and an introduction by a contemporary author or critic, or exclusive content. For example, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is available from Waterstones for prices varying from £4.99–£20.00 (as of June 2021), showing that even if consumers have a choice, they might be attracted by the more expensive copy. It will be down to the publisher to ensure the book has the necessary augmented benefits to attract buyers.



When considering how much more to price a book, this paper could also offer a rough guide. 28.9% of respondents reported that the most they would pay for an environmentally produced book is £12.99 (£3 more than the 'normally' produced book). £11.99 and £14.99 were also frequently chosen, with 17.5% and 19.3% chosen respectively. This resulted in 72 (63.2%) respondents claiming they would be willing to pay between £3 and £5 more for a sustainably produced book.

The questionnaires did show an enthusiasm for environmentally produced books, with some respondents suggesting it should be the norm. Some responses criticised the idea of raising prices to compensate for the higher production costs, arguing that increasing the price discourages the reader from making a 'greener' choice, and it is likely that any price change would face some sort of negative response, inviting arguments about accessibility as price increases might make books less affordable for some demographic groups.

### What is the highest price you would pay for an environmentally friendly book if a cheaper alternative were available for £9.99?

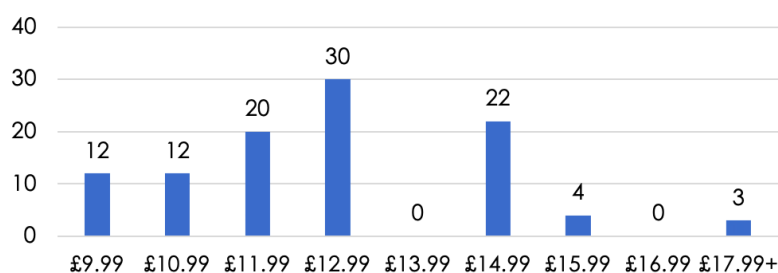


Figure 2: A chart to show how the highest price respondents would pay if they were given choice between a book produced in an environmentally friendly manner and one that was not.

The conversation surrounding the environment and pricing is likely to be a contentious one. If a consequence is inevitable—such as a higher retail price, for example—it may be best to engage consumers to spread understanding. Whilst increased transparency will likely not satisfy everyone, it will show how a decision has been made and demonstrate what a publisher is doing to reduce their carbon footprint, clarifying that the higher retail price is for an environmental benefit over financial growth.

Equally, transparency between publishing companies should be further encouraged. The disparity between consumers who expect to pay more for an environmentally sustainably produced book and those who would pay more in reality shows that sustainable production is not a selling point, limiting its use as an advantage over competition. As a result, there is likely little benefit in concealing the



information associated with 'greener' publishing practices; with the Book Chain Project already sharing information between publishers who have signed up to the scheme, increasing the number of publishers who are contributing their findings and research will help to benefit the industry, creating a new standard that all publishers can endeavour to achieve.

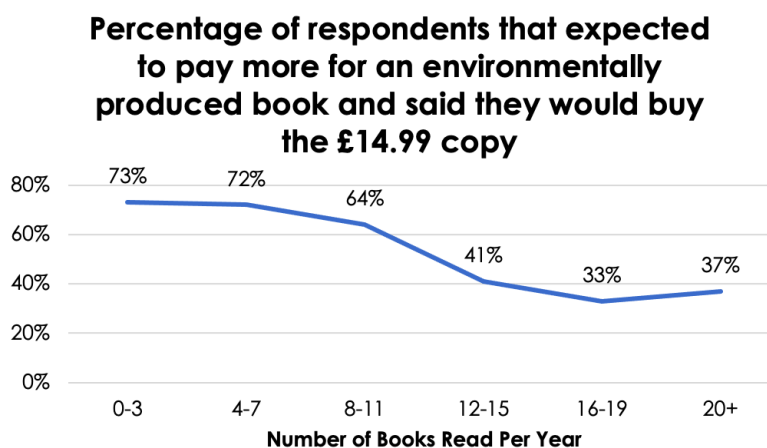


Figure 3: A chart showing the percentage of participants who said they would pay £14.99 for an environmentally produced book if a £9.99 alternative was available. These respondents also said they would expect to pay more for an environmentally produced book.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

With the above research considered, it appears that most consumers still prefer reading paper books to digital copies. Therefore, publishers should adapt how their most popular products are made to have a stronger impact on their carbon footprint. Additionally, printed books may have a larger carbon footprint than producing digital copies, and so adapting books will be working to reduce one of a publishing company's largest contributors to its carbon footprint.

If a book were to have its production altered to be more environmentally sustainable, consumers appear to expect the product to cost more than a less sustainable alternative, though if given the choice, consumers would prefer to pay for the less sustainable alternative. This suggests that being produced in an environmentally sustainable manner is not a selling point for a book. To further investigate the impact of a price increase, research could investigate whether a consumer would still pay for a book they wanted to buy if it were at a higher price and there was no alternative copy.

It could perhaps be argued that the majority of consumers are open to books increasing in price, providing this increase is compensating for a difference in the book's production. Without justification for the price increase consumers may be less supportive, therefore transparency in why the price change is in place

and a brief explanation as to how the costs have been incurred could help to reassure consumers that the expense is for a cause other than increased profit. If these conditions are in place, consumers appear willing to spend up to £12.99 on a new book, though no more than £14.99, with most respondents willing to pay £12.99 or less.

The most environmentally conscious way to buy and read books as a consumer would be to buy and read those that already exist. Libraries, book-swap schemes, and second-hand bookstores offer greener alternatives to buying new books whose production continues to have an impact on the environment.

To further reassure publishers, additional research could be conducted using a larger, broader sample. If any changes are to be made to a book's production, a publisher will likely want to see proof copies of a book produced with greater care for the environment, while assessing all of the relevant costs and consequences that come with it. Possibly the most informative method of assessing this would be to run a trial period with a specific title, using an adapted methodology to produce the book. This would generate real-world data and allow a publisher to determine whether the changes are economically sustainable for the company.

Every entity involved in the lifecycle of a book has a responsibility to ensure that they are operating as environmentally sustainably as they feasibly can. This includes not only the publisher and the printer, but the consumer, too. Engaging in activities to reduce our carbon footprint is something that most people in the UK can do, and with continued efforts to reduce climate change, this collaboration and innovation within industry will help consumers to reduce their carbon footprint in turn.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

**Blank copy of online questionnaire. For closed questions, respondents had the choice of selecting their answer by ticking a box.**

**Which age bracket are you in?**

- 18-24     25-34     35-44     45-54     55-64     65+

**What is your occupation?**

**What is your preferred method to 'read' books?**

- Paper book     eBook/Kindle     Audio     Other

If other, please specify how:

**Why do you prefer to read books this way?**

**Approximately how many books do you 'read' per year?**

- 0-3     4-7     8-11     12-15     16-19     20+

**When ordering a book online, how important is next day delivery to you?**

- Extremely Important     Very Important     Somewhat Important  
 Not So Important     Not Important At All

**Order the following from most important factor to least important when you are buying a book (type the numbers in order of importance, starting with which you think is most important):**

- Cover Design/Artwork     Reviews from newspapers and other authors  
 Blurb/Synopsis     Recommendations from friends and family  
 Paper Quality     I have seen people talk about this book on social media

**Would you expect to pay more for a book that is made in an environmentally friendly way?**

- Yes    No

**If yes: If a 'normal' paperback copy costs £9.99, select the highest price you would pay for a paperback book that is produced in an environmentally friendly way.**

- £9.99    £10.99    £11.99    £12.99    £13.99  
 £14.99    £15.99    £16.99    £17.99+

**If no: explain below why you do not expect to pay more for a book that has been produced in an environmentally conscious way.**

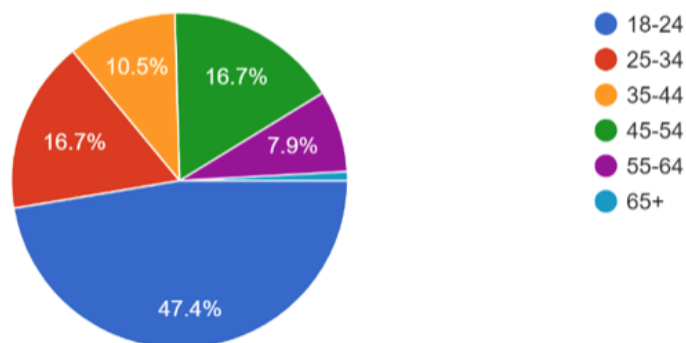
**Imagine you are in a bookstore hoping to buy a new release from your favourite author. When you get to the shop, you see there are two editions available, both identical in content and appearance. The only difference is that one is produced in an environmentally friendly way and costs £14.99, the other is produced in a manner that is not environmentally friendly way, and costs £9.99. Which edition would you buy?**

- £9.99 and less environmentally friendly  
 £14.99 and more environmentally friendly

## Appendix 2 — Primary Research Data

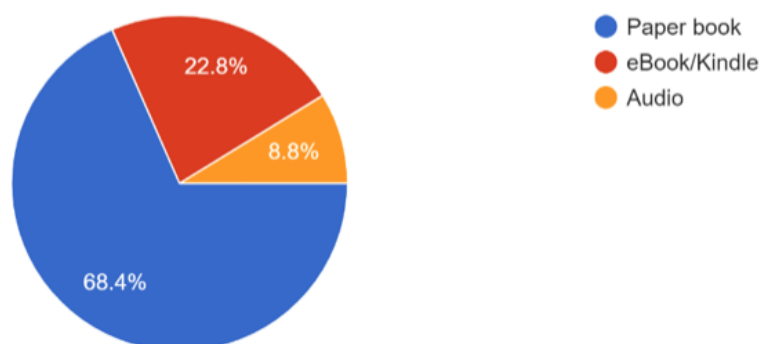
Which age bracket are you in?

114 responses



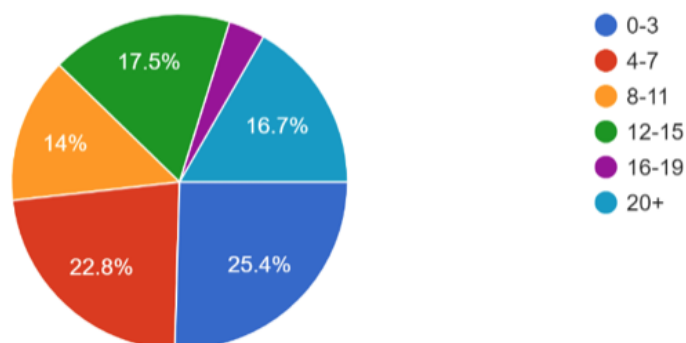
What is your preferred method to consume books

114 responses



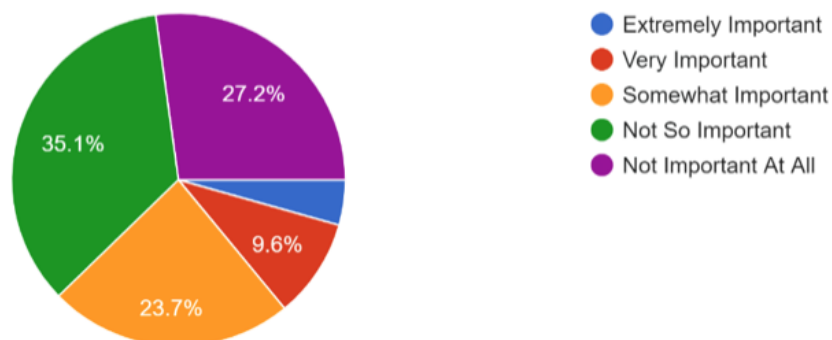
Approximately how many books do you consume per year?

114 responses



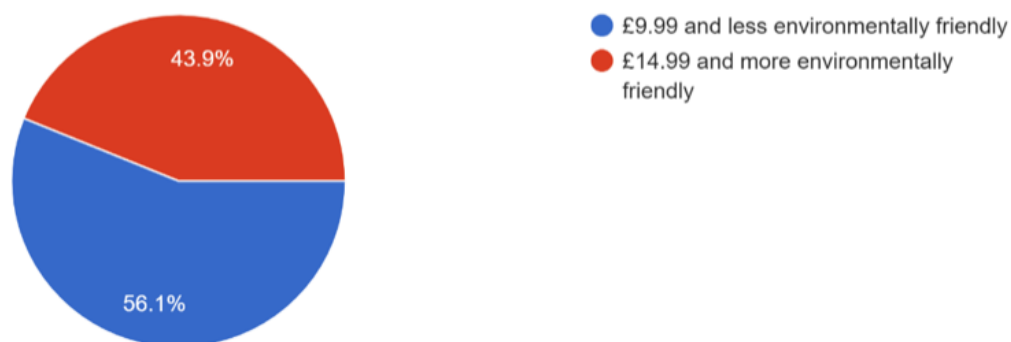
When ordering a book online, how important is next day delivery to you?

114 responses



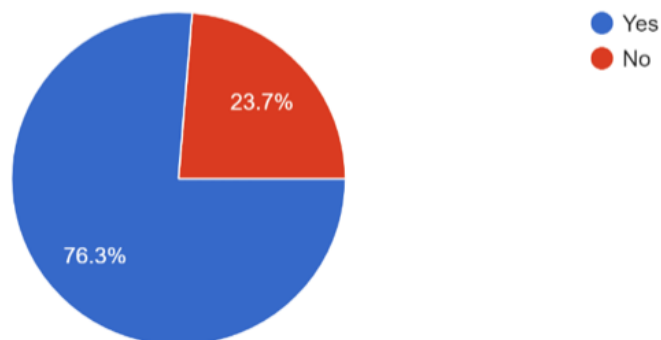
Imagine you are in a bookstore hoping to buy a new release from your favourite author. When you get to the shop, you see there are two editions available, and costs £9.99. Which edition would you buy?

114 responses



Would you expect to pay more for a book that is made in an environmentally friendly way?

114 responses





If yes: If a 'normal' paperback copy costs £9.99, select the highest price you would pay for a paperback book that is produced in an environmentally friendly way.

103 responses

