

AN INVESTIGATION INTO ASPECTS INFLUENCING
FICTION CHOICE FOR 18-35 YEAR OLDS

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the main factors important to fiction choice of readers between the ages of 18-35, which factors they consider most influential in deciding their choice and the types of book cover they found most attractive, specifically, whether increased detail was preferred over less detail on an attractive book cover and whether attractive covers were preferred overall.

In accordance with best practice in the research context a mixed methods study was carried out to investigate themes arising from a review of secondary literature. The first phase was to conduct a series of three focus groups with twelve participants, (four participants per group) with members selected by age, gender and reading frequency (ascertained by the number of books participants read per year). Each focus group was given the task of rating and discussing 100 book covers. This task worked as a stimulus to engage the group and led to animated discussions on the process of choosing fiction. The researcher monitored these talks and where necessary used prompts connected to the hypotheses and informed by a review of the literature as an outline in guiding the discussions. Some of the information the three focus groups collectively provided in rating the book covers was incorporated into a quantitative online survey instrument so that it could be tested against a wider sample of adults between the ages of 18 and 35. 144 respondents successfully completed the survey.

Key findings indicated that participants preferred attractive covers overall but there was no evidence to support a preference for attractive covers which were more complicated or related (showing more elements (1+) of the story) over ones which were less complicated/related (showing less(0-1) elements of the story). Participants considered author and above all prior knowledge of author most important when selecting fiction. Genre was a

greater consideration for participants who read less frequently (1-12 fiction books per year) than for participants who read more frequently (24-48+ fiction books per year). Publishers are rarely considered when selecting fiction aside from influencing the design of book covers which mark them out as part of a series. Despite this the literary reputation of the publisher was considered as more important than a reader's previous experience with a publisher. Finally, participants who read more frequently (24-48+ fiction books per year) liked more types of fiction and used more methods to find out about fiction to read than participants who read less frequently (1-12 fiction books per year). The report ends with an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study and with recommendations for further research.

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Chapter1 : Introduction

1.1 Popularity of fiction in the UK

The volume of books published and the variety of book titles available in the UK is among the highest per-capita figures in the world (Arnold, 2002). The value of the UK book market in 2006 is estimated to have been £3.3bn, a figure which has grown 3% since 2005. There were 1.6 million titles available for sale in the UK in 2006 of which 206,000 were new and revised titles, compared to 161,000 new and revised titles in 2004 (The Publishers Association, 2006).

Of this ever increasing range of printed material, fiction comprises the largest category of titles available and makes up the highest percentage of both public library issues and book retail sales (Book Marketing, 1998, England, 1995). This ensures that fiction accounts for two thirds of all reading activity and dominates all analyses of what adults read for pleasure (Shearer, 2001:28). In addition to this more people than ever in the UK are reading for pleasure. The BBC has conducted the most recent study in this area as part of their RaW (Reading and Writing) initiative for world book day 2006. Their survey conducted via face to face interviews with a 4,000-strong cross section of the UK adult population suggests that pleasure reading is paramount in people's lives and regarded as an important activity by 79% of adults (BBC, 2006).

Fiction books are experiential goods, meaning like music and film they provide sensory pleasure, variety, and cognitive stimulation (Keller, 1993; Park *et al.*, 1986) and must be experienced (in this case read) for the consumer to assess their value which is of a subjective and highly individual nature. Choosing a particular book to read is a highly personalised activity because it results from a combination of three broadly defined motivations which vary

between consumers. These motivations are: utilitarian (increasing knowledge), hedonic (personal enjoyment), as well as symbolic (for example being seen to be an intellectual) (Miesen, 2003). Choosing a book is therefore a highly involving activity because in these various ways books and the process of choosing a book itself are connected to personal identity (Leemans, 1988, Leemans and Stokmans 1992).

Despite these aspects which set books apart from other products and makes selecting them a more involving and subjective process, research has demonstrated that people do not always plan exactly which books they are going to choose and often select material on impulse. Recent public library statistics indicate that a large proportion of people do not always plan exactly which books to read and often rely on browsing. In 2004 for example 29.6% of adult library users in the UK visited the library specifically to browse in this way (LISU, 2005:116).

1.2 Browsing and fiction choice behaviour

The reliance on unplanned browsing remains whether fiction is obtained online, in libraries, bookshops, even when browsing friends' bookshelves. Ross (2001) found that both committed and casual readers often followed this pattern of "finding without seeking" (Ross, 1999) often choosing a book within a library, bookstore or online based on a display, a book-of-the-month label, a customer review or a promotion (d'Astous 2006, Stokmans, 1994). In recognition of this preferred method of choosing fiction material Grose and Line (1968) have even suggested that fiction be randomly shelved to help library patrons discover material by chance. Other research carried out in public libraries has indicated that the returned book cart (irrespective of whether the books it contains are new) often has a higher circulation rate than the books in the stacks (Sear, 1991:107). Explanations for this phenomenon range from 'information overload' where patrons find it

easier to deal with a smaller number of book choices to an interest in items because other patrons have recently borrowed them (Baker,1986:127, Ross, 2001:14). Whatever the explanation, this behaviour demonstrates the way in which fiction choices can often be unplanned selections. Any information concerning the aspects of a book which can divert a consumer's attention is therefore a valuable avenue of research.

Given the range and continued popularity of fiction materials and readers' reliance on unplanned browsing, it is surprising that only a limited number of studies have investigated the influence of aspects of a book which affect a reader's choice of fiction and help them select one out of the many thousands available. An overview of the research which does exist shows that when browsing to select new reading material, fiction readers choose works based on a combination of two broad areas: prior knowledge and information deduced from the physical book itself. Whether the fiction is obtained online or in person may presumably have some bearing on the influence of these aspects on the choice process however no study has yet addressed this.

The first area, that of prior knowledge gathered before a reader makes a selection covers a host of elements from the fame of the author, the reading experience sought, awareness of publisher, the ways a reader finds out about fiction material and even their mood at the time. Kamphuis (1991) identified thirteen separate attributes a reader considers in the process of choosing a book which comprised of a mixture of both areas (Kamphuis, 1991:475) and noted that expectations for a book were "mostly based on earlier experiences with or knowledge of the author in question" (Kamphuis, 1991:484).

Leemans and Stokmans (1991) isolated an average of twenty-nine (Leemans, 1991:499) while Ross (2001) discusses five broad categories which guide a potential reader when choosing a book. A follow up study by Leemans and Stokmans (1992) found that the most important attributes while choosing reading material in a book shop environment was the author's reputation, but

also indicated the person's past experience with the author, and the book's content, i.e., its theme and its genre as the second most important variables. d'Astous et al (2006) found evidence to suggest that author and publisher reputation were highly important to a potential reader's choice of book.

So although previous studies agree on some of the elements which a reader considers while choosing a book to read some indicate "at least three" as being important (d'Astous et al 2006:145) while others point to many more and all studies emphasise a different combination of elements connected to the author, the publisher of the book as being the most influential to choice.

The second broad area of book choice concerns information deduced from the physical book itself. The most obvious aspect of this category comprises of clues deduced from the design of the book cover and it is this which concerns the current study. Ross (2001) has suggested that readers use the cover "in order to match book choices to the reading experience desired" (Ross, 1991:17) as Kendrick (2001) asserts: "the style of covers [can] give you a clue to what [is] inside" (Kendrick, 2001:83).

1.3 The role of the book cover

Stokmans and Hendrickx (1994) have also noted the important role of the book cover in getting a reader's attention, inciting him or her to read the summary, examine its content and, eventually, buy it. Piters and Stokmans (1997) have argued that the book cover helps potential readers categorise the type of book and may lead to the formation of unconscious preferences. Very few studies however, have been conducted into exactly what type of images or style of design a potential reader might find pleasing. The most relevant and recent study in this area focused on the optimal design of the imagery of packaging of more conventional products such as candy, bacon and margarine (Underwood, 2001). Findings indicate that products whose packaging

included a more complex and realistic picture of the product attracted more consumer attention than those without. Martindale (1990) studied peoples' preferences for complex shapes and found that preference was strongly related to meaningfulness. So it is not just complexity in and of itself that stimulates preference but complexity connected to something meaningful. In this case it might well follow that more complicated book cover designs will be preferred if they appear to be connected to the story or contents of the book because this is a clear way of making them meaningful. This would also mean that the packaging of a book (its cover) would relate more closely to the story inside the book (its contents) thus also satisfying what Underwood (2001) found to be important for more conventional products in order to stimulate interest and build clear expectations in the minds of potential consumers.

These results would seem to indicate that meaningfulness and complexity of design will impact positively on a potential reader's evaluation of a book cover. Cutting (2003) however examined peoples' preferences for French impressionist paintings and found that complexity judgments were not correlated positively with preferences and a recently published study by d'Astous et al (2006) investigated the interest the cover designs of fiction and non fiction titles provoked in French Canadians and found that the attractiveness of the book cover had the most impact on reader interest in a book shop environment but not the "representativeness" or rather whether the book's cover is "representative of the content of the book" (d'Astous, 2006:139).

The current study is concerned with the influence aspects of these two areas of prior knowledge and information deduced from the physical book itself, specifically it's cover, have on the fiction choices of 18-35 year olds. It aims to investigate whether prior knowledge is rated more highly than fame or literary reputation, for authors and publishers, whether more frequent readers within the group like more types of fiction than less frequent readers and

whether they use more methods to find out about fiction than less frequent readers. The current study will also ascertain this age group's preferences for book covers, with regards to attractiveness, complexity and meaningfulness.

1.4 The 18-35 age group

This age group is an important demographic for fiction providers of all types. According to a number of studies, this age group is also more likely to include a high concentration of heavy readers defined as those classed as reading one or more fiction books per week for pleasure (Ross, 2001:7). Certainly people of this age are likely to be frequent purchasers of books. Spiller (1980) for example found that "buying is clearly practiced more by younger readers" (Spiller, 1980:253) particularly the 20-34 age group which provided the highest proportion (39%) of the fiction buyers in his study of fiction borrowers within UK public libraries. People of this age are also active library users representing approximately 23% of the total visitors to public libraries in the UK in 2004, a figure which has remained relatively consistent since 1997 (LISU, 2005:116). No study however has yet focused specifically on aspects of fiction choice in relation to the 18-35 age group.

1.5 Some problems with existing studies

Much of the available research on book selection was conducted in countries outside the UK a number of years ago (Duijx et al 1991, Kamphuis, 1991, Leemans and Stokmans, 1992, Sear, 1991, Leemans, 1988). In the case of preference for cover designs there has been very little research which concentrated specifically on book covers.

Studies which have focussed on both fiction and non fiction have served to outline differences in the choice processes readers go through in order to select these different types of material. Even studies which

concentrated on cover design noticed differences in the ways consumers were influenced by the cover designs of fiction and non fiction books (d'Astous, 2006). With this in mind the current study will focus exclusively on the covers of fiction books.

Numerous studies in this area took place in a book shop environment which they acknowledge could not guarantee a sample size of a particular population (d'Astous, 2006, Leemans and Stokmans, 1992 Stokmans and Hendrickx, 1994) and all call for further research to corroborate their findings and to bring additional knowledge. Gathering data on the factors which most influence the fiction choice of this particular group is therefore a valuable project which will contribute to the body of knowledge that can inform the providers and promoters of fiction materials when targeting interest in fiction stock.

1.6 Aim of Study

The aim of this two phase, sequential mixed methods study, then, is to investigate aspects of fiction choice among people aged 18-35. Specifically whether prior knowledge is rated more highly than fame or literary reputation, for authors and publishers, whether more frequent readers within the group like more types of fiction than less frequent readers and whether they use more methods to find out about fiction than less frequent readers. The current study will also ascertain this age group's preferences for book covers, with regards to attractiveness, complexity and meaningfulness.

1.7 Hypotheses

H1: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will rate more types of fiction as like or strongly like than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

H2: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will use more methods to find out about fiction books than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

H3: Participants will rate author and genre as the most important aspects in their choice of fiction.

H4: Participants will rate their previous experience of the author of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the author.

H5: Participants will rate their previous experience of the publisher of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the publisher.

H6: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers more than fiction books with unattractive covers.

H7: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers which show 1+ elements of the story more than fiction books with attractive covers which show 0-1 elements of the story.

1.8 Presentation of the Study

The study is presented in the form of a written report in 5 chapters. An introduction to the study's research context and presentation of hypotheses (Chapter 1) will be followed by a review of the literature (Chapter 2) and an explanation of its methodological framework (Chapter 3). Qualitative and quantitative results will then be presented (Chapter 4). Finally the conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research will be summarised and presented (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Attributes used to choose fiction in public libraries

An early study by Spiller (1980) identified a pattern of browsing and book choice which centered around the author of a work as the most influential factor in determining a borrower's choice. Spiller interviewed 500 fiction borrowers returning books to four different British public libraries and asked them how they usually chose novels. The following responses were given: author only 11%; authors/some browsing 22%; equal authors/browsing 36%; browsing/some authors 20%; browsing only 11% (Spiller, 1980, 245). He discovered that 54% chose novels by authors previously known to them (Spiller, 1980: 245) and 69% sought books of a particular type (Spiller, 1980: 250)

Yu L and O'Brien (1999) conducted research which would seem to confirm Spiller's early findings. In Yu and O'Brien's study qualitative data was collected from a sample of 221 readers while they used a library computer catalogue to search for reading material in two medium sized British public libraries. This experimental approach enabled Yu and O'Brien to gather participants' voluntary remarks on reading choice, reading frequency, preferences and methods of finding out about books.

From these interviews Yu and O'Brien found that many less frequent readers often concentrate on a limited range of book type and are loyal to a small number of specific authors whereas some usually more frequent readers tend to like a wider range of book types and will read a wider range of authors (Yu and O'Brien, 1999). They also identified author and category (or genre) as the main ways participants evaluate whether they would read a particular book (Yu, 1999:41). In addition Yu and O'Brien found that some readers nearly

always used author names in book searching; some almost always used browse/categories; the rest would usually combine different methods.

Both Yu and O'Brien and Spiller's studies were conducted in a public library environment and focused only on the behaviour of fiction borrowers within public libraries. It would appear that knowledge of the author and type of book are the two most important attributes which borrowers use to determine their choice of fiction within UK public libraries. Although it could be argued that this is hardly surprising given the way that libraries are organised, both studies still found a high proportion of readers who preferred to ignore the classification system and browse in an undirected way. On choosing a book these browsers still regarded author as a determining factor in their choice (Spiller, 1980:246) so there is evidence to support that prior knowledge of author and genre remain the most important considerations with regards to book choice even in undirected browsing.

In Spiller's study 46% of people borrowed books by authors unknown to them which they selected through browsing. In this situation Spiller found the most influential factors to be the blurb (78%), the text; principally the style of writing (29%) the visual impact of the cover design (27%) the title (19%) and finally the reputation of the publisher (11%) (Spiller, 1980: 248). While Spiller found the reputation of the publisher "rarely an important influence" (Spiller, 1980: 248) more recent studies conducted in a bookshop environment found that publisher reputation in fact had a statistically significant positive impact on readers' interest especially when the author was unknown (Leemans, 1988, d'Astous et al, 2006). Clearly this bears further investigation.

Spiller (1980) and Yu and O'Brien's (1999) studies were conducted 27 and 8 years ago respectively. Spiller found that people discovered the majority of new fiction to read through friends and reviews. This was followed by; browsing, television, radio, set books (course books for students), booklists

and films. His respondents the largest proportion of whom fell within the 20-34 age group mainly bought fiction in bookshops, secondhand bookshops and supermarkets followed by book clubs, airports and stations (Spiller, 1980: 246). It will be interesting to uncover whether any changes have occurred within this age group since this time. The dominance of recommendations from friends for example may now receive competition from online recommendation services such as Amazon. Some evidence for this is provided in a study by Sinha and Swearingen (2001) which compared the quality of recommendations provided by online systems and user's friends for 19 people within the age range of 20 to 35 years. Results indicated that although the users' friends provided more suitable recommendations users highly valued online system reviews because they were better able to alert the user to new and unexpected items (Sinha and Swearingen, 2001:5).

2.2 Attributes used to choose fiction in commercial environments

Research conducted in the Netherlands provides evidence that the important influence of prior knowledge of authors on book choice for public library borrowers remains within a commercial environment. Leemans and Stokmans (1991) presented a sample of 60 commercially available books to 50 participants individually. Participants selected their most preferred book, were asked to indicate the five most important attributes used in making their final choice and then had to rank these five attributes according to their importance.

Their findings indicate that four attributes used in choosing fiction books stood out as significant to participants' selection process. These attribute were: 'you know/don't know the author', 'you are familiar with the author', 'genre' and 'theme' (Leemans and Stokmans,1991:496) These findings are valuable as they would appear to confirm exactly what people consider when evaluating an author and indicate that personal previous

experience is a highly significant consideration. Criticisms which could be made of this research are the small number of participants and the fact that it was conducted outside of the UK sixteen years ago. It could also be argued that some attributes within this study have the same meaning or content, for example “genre” and “theme” and “knowledge of the author” and familiarity with the author. Due to the exploratory character of their research, however Leemans and Stokmans (1991) could not attempt to cluster these attributes because the attributes were not standardised responses provided by the researcher but were supplied by the participants themselves during the task. As a result it would be difficult to group them according to the researchers’ own interpretations.

Kamphuis (1991) analysed the importance of author through a survey of 218 participants in a book purchase situation within four different book stores in four different cities in the Netherlands. He isolated thirteen attributes which participants in his research drew on when selecting a book to read and found that knowledge about the author and a participant’s experience with earlier work of an author contribute most to the purchasing decision of literary books. In other words people’s prior knowledge of an author is the most significant attribute in guiding their choice:

“When asked to give a reason why they had chosen the book at hand, most respondents gave an author-based answer; they were interested in the author and/or had already read books written by this author...(55%) already knew the author from earlier work and/or even possessed works by this very author.” (Kamphuis, 1991:479)

The emphasis placed on author based responses led him to suggest that readers view an author’s name as a brand (Kamphuis, 1991:474). His results indicate that rather than fame and reputation, a reader’s previous experience with an author is the most important attribute when evaluating an author in a

purchase environment. As with previous research the importance of prior experience with the author was followed by the theme of the book as having the greatest influence on purchasing decision.

Like Leemans and Stokmans (1991) Kamphuis conducted research in the Netherlands sixteen years ago which was exploratory in character and focused on a random sample of the population. Both studies' results indicate that a reader's previous experience with an author is a highly influential attribute while the literary reputation of the author and publisher were seldom mentioned by respondents. The most recent study in this area however conducted on French Canadians found that when prior knowledge of author was restricted the literary reputation of the author, that of the publisher and the attractiveness of the book cover had the most impact on reader interest in a book shop environment (d'Astous et al. 2006). In d'Astous et al's study of 120 people authors and titles and were fictitious and author reputation was stimulated by means of reviews placed on the book covers used as stimulus for participants. These results indicate that an author and publisher's literary reputation on reader choice may be more influential than the results of previous studies have indicated.

d'Astous et al (2006) however concentrated on both fiction and non-fiction works Again this research was conducted outside the UK in an uncontrolled environment (data was gathered outside of a popular bookshop during the middle of the day). This may have affected findings because the sample size was comprised largely of business school students. It will be interesting to confirm which factor is most influential for the 18-35 year old group which the current research will concentrate on: prior knowledge, fame or an author's literary reputation.

Finally in an American study by Ross (2001), research was conducted independent of a bookshop or library context in order to analyse fiction

readers' book choices. 194 participants who were “enthusiastic readers for pleasure” (Ross, 2001:7) were selected for interview and Ross found that “the single most important strategy for selection that readers used was to choose a book by a known and trusted author” (Ross, 2001:14) followed by genre which “was often used in conjunction with author” when choosing works (Ross,2001:14). These qualitative findings conducted support previous research gained through quantitative, mixed methods and experimental approaches in bookshop and library environments.

Significantly then although the methodologies of different studies into the phases of book choice have varied considerably using experiential, quantitative and qualitative approaches a review of the literature for both public libraries and commercial environments shows that there is considerable consensus on the importance of the author and particularly a reader's personal experience with the author in influencing the book selection of readers. There is however a need for further validation for this within this particular age group and also on the influence of other elements such as publisher and whether literary reputation, prior knowledge or fame are more influential to fiction choice.

2.3 The 18-35 age group and choice differences between heavy and light readers

People of the age range 18-35 represented approximately 23% of the total visitors to public libraries in the UK in 2004, a figure which remains relatively consistent (LISU:116). An indication of the value of this age range for public libraries is demonstrated in a study which evaluated the economic worth of libraries by the number of times a book is read and found that the highest number of reads per book was attributable to the 17–24 age group (Morris et al, 2002:82). This reading behavior may stem from readers of this age focusing on specific fiction books as part of academic courses however

these borrowers still represent a valuable market within public libraries and influences on their reading choices require further investigation.

Heavy readers of fiction are considered to be those who read a book or so a week for pleasure (Nell,1988:7, Ross,2001:7) and there is evidence that this age group may have a higher proportion of these readers than that reported for the wider population. Spiller (1980) and Kamphuis (1991) both use wide samples from the population yet Spiller found that the 20-34 age group was the largest group of fiction readers and the most active book buyers (Spiller, 1980:239, 253) and the average age of Kamphuis' fiction buying participants was 35. Ross (2001) cites a number of studies conducted in the United States and Canada which have found that experienced or heavy consumers of fiction, tend to be younger (i.e. under forty) rather than older (Ross, 2001:7). In Ross' own research which focussed particularly on heavy readers the largest proportion (44%) interviewed were aged 21-30 and the second largest proportion; (18%) were aged 31-40. 169 of Ross's heavy readers were selected by her postgraduate students who were asked to interview someone they knew to be a frequent reader for pleasure. Students on postgraduate courses are more likely to be under forty and arguably to have younger circles of friends and acquaintances from which to select their interviewee. Despite these arguable flaws there is still much evidence that adults between the ages of 18-35 should fall into the bracket most likely to have a high proportion of heavy consumers of fiction books.

Ross argues that choosing books successfully depends on how experienced the reader is (Ross, 2001:18). Miesen (2003) agrees that reading is directly affected by obstacles encountered in past reading and that if readers gain more experience with reading (which he describes as having a "greater perception of behavioural control") the likelihood of reading will increase (Meisen, 2003:192). Therefore it can be argued that because lighter or less frequent readers will have less reading experience they will be less motivated

to try different types of fiction and will like fewer types of books. Yu and O'Brien (1999) identified a group of less frequent readers who concentrated on a very limited range of book types and were loyal to a small number of specific authors and also a group of frequent readers who tended to like a wider range of book types and would read a wider range of authors. As Yu and O'Brien however propose a theoretical model of borrower behaviour which concentrates on no age group in particular and the average age of the Miesen's respondents was fifty-one years (Meisen, 2003:196) it will be interesting to see if this pattern applies to younger readers.

2.4 Relevance of a book cover

The design of a book cover clearly plays an important role in getting a reader's attention, inciting him or her to read the summary, examine its content and, eventually, buy, borrow, or otherwise obtain it. The cover acts as the book's packaging, its job is to communicate the type of reading experience potential readers can expect. Stocking visually attractive books within public libraries is acknowledged as an important feature which enhances the overall service (Sumison, 2002). Library users frequently rate the provision of a visually attractive book stock as an important factor to their use of public libraries in surveys conducted by CIPFA PLUS (Boheme1999). In a national survey of reading habits conducted in 1999, 66% of people said they chose books on the basis of their jackets (The Bookseller, 1999).

Research into visual information in advertisements has shown that imagery generally attracts more attention and is noticed before verbal advertising content (Bolen, 1984). Visual packaging information serves to attract consumers' attention and set their expectations (Stokes,1985) especially for experiential goods where it is difficult to fully evaluate the product beforehand (Zeithaml, 1988, Underwood et al 2001). Pictorial content at least for more conventional products such as household goods also tends to

be more influential in the decision-making process of consumers than verbal information (Alesandrini,1983). Only a limited number of studies however have examined the communicative effects of product packaging for more conventional products and very few have investigated the design of book covers.

2.5 Effects of attractiveness, relatedness and complexity of image on preference

Pictorial material is defined as any two-dimensional representation containing at least one element that is not alphabetic or numeric (Underwood, 2001). Homer and Gauntt (1992) find that the positive impact of pictorial material is enhanced by its complexity. Alesandrini and Sheikh (1983) also suggest that people favour realistic, complex pictures over abstract ones.

Underwood et al (2001) investigated the effect the inclusion or absence of a realistic, more complex picture of the product on the package had on consumer choice. They used virtual reality technology to simulate a grocery store environment on high resolution computer screens displaying three dimensional images of product packaging and monitored shopper's behaviour. Their study found that consumers reacted positively to the inclusion of realistic and more detailed product images on packaging and were more likely to give these products greater attention than products with abstract packaging imagery especially when the product or brand was unfamiliar.

Products with experiential benefits are defined as those which provide sensory pleasure, variety, and cognitive stimulation (Holbrook, 1982, Park et al., 1986) Underwood et al's research suggests that more detailed pictures positively influence customer preference because they can better evoke the experiential benefits of a product. Due to this they suggest that "a package

picture seems most likely to help low familiarity brands with moderate to high levels of experiential benefits” (Underwood, 2001:417).

Fiction books are an obvious category of product with high experiential benefits. Books have to be experienced or read to derive any of the benefits such as enjoyment or escape commonly cited by readers which they can provide. Research by Kamphuis (1991) has linked author to brand name. If Underwood’s study suggests that low familiarity brands will benefit most from more detailed packaging imagery this could mean that lesser known authors can benefit from dust jackets with more detailed imagery which reflects closely the contents of the book and subsequently the experience the reader will get from reading the book.

Underwood et al found that the inclusion of detailed pictures on an item’s packaging increased attention on an item but did not result in it being chosen more frequently. Their research however was based on the packaging of grocery products such as “candy, bacon and margarine” (Underwood, 2001:410). Choosing these products incurs a much lower level of personal involvement from a consumer than when choosing a fiction book and it is not clear how the higher levels of uncertainty connected to more experiential products such as fiction books will affect preference. Underwood et al acknowledge this and call for additional research into the effects of detailed pictures on more experiential products:

“Additional research is needed in this area to identify other highly experiential product categories that elicit imagery processing. Such products should benefit most from visual package information” (Underwood, 2001:416).

When Cutting (2003) investigated complexity and preference with regard to French impressionist paintings he discovered that people judged

complexity by “counting things, often people or trees, in the pictures” and perceived “images with more elements (as being) more complex” (Cutting, 2003:332). Despite the evidence for a preference for more complicated imagery on packaging suggested by Underwood (2001) Cutting’s research found that complexity judgments were not correlated positively with preferences for paintings.

Cutting’s results however are based on impressionist paintings which are not connected to a product, but rather constitute the product itself. Readers might evaluate a book’s cover in a different way to a painting because a book cover is designed to provide “clues” (Ross, 2001:18) to the reading experience provided by the content of the book. In this way it will be interesting to discover whether readers actually do prefer covers which reveal more elements of the story.

Research conducted by Martindale et al (1990) compared preferences for complex shapes with preferences for drawings and preferences for paintings and found that preference was more strongly related to meaningfulness than to complexity. In addition their results showed that complexity does turn out to be “a better predictor of preference when both representative and non representative paintings are studied” (Martindale, 1990:74).

Therefore if meaning is the main determinant of preference but complexity is a better predictor of preference when representative and non representative art is compared then book covers with more complex covers which are also more representative (in this case, of the book’s content) should be preferred overall.

Piters and Stokmans (2000) investigated representativeness and book covers. They focused on the extent to which the categorisation of a fiction

book cover by genre helps readers to single out their most preferred book. They hypothesised that how typical a book cover was of a specific genre, affects the preference for that book. They asked thirty two frequent and infrequent readers to judge how typical a book cover was and then state their preference for thirteen book covers from two different genres (literature and mystery). Their results show that 77 percent of all covers were classified correctly as to genre. Furthermore, the more representative a book was for a particular genre, the greater the preference for the book. Although their study did not investigate complexity and preference of book covers their results would certainly appear to provide further evidence for a positive relationship between how representative a book cover is (in this case how representative of its genre) and a potential reader's preference for it.

d'Astous et al (2006) investigated the attractiveness of the book cover and how well a book cover represented the contents of a book with regards to reader preference. They created thirteen mock covers for non existent fiction (novels) and non fiction (management texts) books. They pre tested these covers which were all by fictitious authors in order to select "covers differing systematically and significantly as regards their attractiveness and representativeness" (d'Astous et al, 2006:139) by asking a control group of participants to rate covers on two 7-point bipolar scales: "I find this cover attractive", "this cover represents well the content of the book". They were left with eight book covers which they then used as stimuli in conducting their research by standing outside a busy bookshop to gather data from passing customers.

In contrast to Piters and Stokmans (2000) d'Astous et al found that the so called 'representativeness' of the cover had no impact on participants' overall interest in the book stimuli and found that the only aspect of a book cover which led to greater consumer interest was it's attractiveness.

d'Astous et al (2006) only collected data from 120 participants and point out that "it is not clear, whether the effects observed in this study would be different had a wider sample of readers been used" (d'Astous, 2006:145) and call for further research to consolidate their results. Their study also used mock ups of actual books and it is difficult to say what effect this may have had on consumer choice they had only eight book covers and calculated the results of attractiveness across both fiction and nonfiction covers. They also report that there were differences in the way their participants evaluated the different types of book, for example author reputation was a more important consideration for textbooks than it was for novels. Also mood seemed to have an influence on the participants when choosing fiction covers but not textbook covers.

Given these factors it is reasonable to presume that participants evaluate cover attractiveness differently between fiction and nonfiction books. Furthermore their study was carried out outside the UK on French speaking Canadians. Recent research has shown that different nationalities have different reading patterns and different attitudes towards reading. Southerton et al (2007a) for example indicate a significant difference between the USA and European societies due to the fact that in America a distinct "reading class" (Southerton, 2007a) exists which is not present in other European countries. According to a survey conducted by the Canadian government in 1998, Canadians spent on average 2 hours 48 minutes each week (24 minutes a day) reading newspapers, magazines or books (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2001) compared to Britons who read between 4 and 6 hours a week according to a survey conducted for World Book Day 2001 (National Literacy Trust, 2007b). Given the possible variation in reading habits between countries it is possible that a study focusing on the fiction reading choices of specifically UK participants could yield different results.

2.6 Literature review: summary and conclusions

Although there are a limited number of studies which have focused on elements of the book choice process, the majority of these indicate that among the numerous attributes used by readers to narrow their selections the following stand out as having an important influence on choice: 1 the author, 2 the publisher, 3 the genre of the book and 4 the cover of the book

With regard to author and publisher there is uncertainty over which elements are most influential and some studies have not found the publisher to be a keen influence in book choice at all (Spiller 1980). Genre is clearly another influential factor to book choice but this study hypothesises following initial research by Yu and O'Brien (1999) that genre is less of a consideration for the more frequent readers of this age group.

With regards to the cover of the book, comparison with research on more conventional products would suggest that including more complex imagery related to the product on packaging will positively influence consumer choice especially for experiential goods. As books are highly experiential products it would appear that readers are likely to prefer an attractive but more complex image closely related or revealing elements of the story over an image which is also attractive but which shows fewer elements of the story.

In addition to these considerations it is likely that more frequent readers of fiction will differ significantly in the variety of fiction they will read from less frequent or light readers. Although there is evidence that people within the age range of 18-35 are heavy consumers of fiction there have been few studies which deliberately focus on the fiction choices of this group.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

3.1 Theoretical framework of study

The goal of this research is an empirical study of aspects of fiction choice which also embraces qualitative data. An overall deductive approach to the research is taken which required the controlled and systematic collection of data in order to facilitate hypothesis testing however the research also employed a mixed methods approach which ensured that valuable qualitative data was also collected.

The research consisted of three phases, a literature review, a series of three focus groups and finally a quantitative survey which enables results to be generalised and compared to previous studies conducted in this area.

3.2 Triangulation

“to include only quantitative and qualitative methods falls short of the major approaches being used today in the social and human sciences...The situation today is less quantitative versus qualitative and more how research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two” (Creswell, 2003:4)

The theory of triangulation is that qualitative and quantitative methods should be viewed as complimentary research processes which can combine to lessen the weakness inherit in a single method (Jick, 1979). Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods within a research project can help to capture “a more complete, holistic and contextual portrayal of the units under study” (Jick, 1979:603). The use of multiple methods can therefore uncover evidence which might have been neglected in a single method approach and help a researcher to understand when differing results occur.

In this way the overall strength of the multiple method design is that it allows researchers to be more confident of their results because they have investigated a problem from different perspectives. Triangulation has another constructive role within the research process because it “can stimulate the creation of inventive methods, new ways of capturing a problem to balance with conventional data-collection methods” (Jick 1979:608). This was true of the development of the data collection process within the current study as completing a literature review and incorporating qualitative methods while conducting task based focus groups led to elements of an experimental approach being adopted when conducting the focus groups which was highly successful. This allowed valuable qualitative data to strengthen the otherwise quantitative research structure.

3.3 The mixed method approach

The mixed method approach developed from the original concept of triangulation which held that the results from one method can help to develop or inform the other method (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham,1989). Within the current study both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed and qualitative data helped to develop the survey instrument.

A benefit of the mixed method research approach is that “one method can be nested within another method to provide insight into different levels of analysis” (Creswell, 2003:16). This is referred to as a sequential procedure where the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand the findings of one method with another method (Creswell, 2003). The current research project adopts a mixed method approach in this way. Research took the form of a sequential procedure beginning with a series of three focus groups which provide insights into the ways in which fiction readers aged 18-35 go about choosing new material to read and were based around a task which helped

select appropriate book cover stimulus to be included in the design of the second quantitative survey instrument.

The quantitative survey instrument provided statistical information derived from closed questions or “forced choice questions” (Foddy 1993:12). Using this method enabled the researcher to discover the importance of author and publisher to respondents’ selections and confirm which aspects: fame previous experience or literary reputation, were most influential to choice. The number of types of book respondents preferred was compared with frequency of reading. Respondents’ preferences for book covers were also analysed according to the hypotheses. Quantitative data then enabled results to be generalised and compared to previous studies conducted in this area.

3.4 Literature review methodology

A literature review is defined as “a critical summary and assessment of the range of existing materials dealing with knowledge and understanding in a given field” (Blaxter 1996:110). The literature review for the current study began in April and continued throughout the research process. The complex, multi-disciplinary nature of the subject under study required a thorough review of literature from a number of subject areas in order to absorb a large quantity of new information and unfamiliar theoretical ideas.

Conducting a review of the literature permitted previous research to be identified and analysed and allowed the main research gaps to be explored enabling the synthesis of previous research within the development of the current project. This helped to refine the aims and hypotheses of study outlined in Chapter 1.6-7 and provided the basis from which to guide focus group discussions.

A review of the literature on the topic also provided useful insights into standard practice for qualitative research generally, particularly the manner in which focus groups should be conducted in order to maximise the quantity and accuracy of information gathered. Researching the literature on book choice also provided examples of experimental research techniques used in previous studies based around stimulus based tasks. This helped guide the design of the qualitative data gathering task in the current research. Finally, the literature review highlighted examples of methodological best practice amongst previous mixed method studies undertaken in the field of librarianship, market research and the arts.

Findings of the literature review are discussed in depth in a single chapter at the start of this report however specific examples from within the studies will provide support to the themes emerging from the qualitative data collected during focus groups discussed in Chapter 4.1.

3.5 Conducting the literature review

The literature search was carried out in a variety of ways. The largest proportion of material was sourced online using university electronic resources, such as the databases: Web of Knowledge, ASSIA, and Library and Information Science Abstracts. Google Scholar was used to check references and search for additional material then university lists of e-journals were searched in order to gain access to relevant material.

Online library catalogues searched included Copac, and the individual online catalogues of the University of Sheffield, the University of Manchester and the Manchester Metropolitan University catalogue. Relevant material was selected through key word and author searches and through browsing the shelves in the indicated areas. Some information was found through serendipitous browsing online, while completing essays for other course

modules and while reading weekend newspapers. The search engines Google and Metacrawler were used to locate relevant websites. Module reading lists from the University of Sheffield's MA in Librarianship and the bibliographies of previous relevant MA dissertations also provided a useful source of information.

3.6 Focus group methodology

The group interview allows the researcher to collect higher quality data, as well as a greater quantity of data than in an individual interview. The group dynamic presents an opportunity for participants to challenge each other's views which produces in depth responses to interview questions (Denscombe, 2003:168). Also when group dynamics are favourable the participants can "act as co-researchers" (Kitzinger 1994:107) sometimes presenting new and unexpected directions or analysis of the areas under discussion.

Through conducting group discussions it is also possible to interview a greater number of participants in a shorter period of time than would be possible with individual interviews. This was an important consideration when conducting this study due to the limited time available. There are, however potential weaknesses connected to the focus group method which need to be recognised in order to prevent biased data collection. The main weakness is the potential for some views to be "drowned out...[or only expressed if they] are perceived to be 'acceptable' within the group" (Denscombe, 2003:168).

It was felt that this problem was largely averted in the current study through the use of prompts at key moments which helped to focus the discussion onto the research objectives of the project (see Appendix B). This approach also ensured that the discussion was moved where necessary onto quieter participants who showed signs of wanting to contribute. In addition

each group was also composed of no more than four participants. This made it easier for a less experienced researcher to manage the discussions.

Focus group participants were contacted on a relatively informal basis by phone or email a fortnight or so before the planned focus group date and were not a randomised sample. Instead a 'purposive sample' was selected; that is to say that they were deliberately selected on the basis that they fulfilled certain criteria. The focus groups were formed in accordance with guidelines traditionally followed in marketing research (Bellenger, Bernhardt, and Goldstucker 1976). Each group was composed of two women and two men. Individuals were prescreened for age (18-35), gender, and the frequency with which they read fiction books. In addition each member knew at least one other member of their group well. This was felt to be an important aspect. Morgan (1998) has argued that it is:

“essential that the participants in a group be compatible...Each participant needs to feel that other people around the table will understand and respect what she or he has to say...focus groups are not a viable option unless [participants] feel comfortable (Morgan, 1998:61).

It was felt that this was achieved within the current study through participants' familiarity with at least some members of their group which made them more open with each other and more inclined to challenge each other's views producing a richer discussion.

An effort was also made to ensure the immediate environment of the respondents was conducive to self-disclosure. Respondents were placed in a comfortable room with pictures on the wall, cushioned furniture, a rug, and soft lighting as recommended by Sirgy (1982:296) in addition they were offered refreshments throughout the process which was found to be a good

method of facilitating discussion by Kendrick (2001:86). Various researchers using the focus group method also recommend using “an interviewer who may be perceived by the respondents as similar to themselves in many respects” (Sirgy,1982:296). Hopefully this was achieved as the researcher fell within the age range of the participants and was known to the majority of the participants socially before the study was conducted.

When conducting focus groups a researcher must remain aware that the “group interview is not an opportunity for the researcher to pose questions to a sequence of individuals taking turns around a table” (Denscombe, 2003:168). Every effort was taken within the current study to avoid this situation. The theoretical basis for these groups and the way in which they were conducted ensured that this was less of a problem than anticipated as the majority of qualitative data which was gathered was often spontaneously volunteered by participants.

3.7 Definition of reading frequency within the current study

Within this study less frequent readers are defined as those reading 1-12 fiction books per year for pleasure and more frequent readers as those reading 24-48+ fiction books per year for pleasure. Although there was found to be consensus within the literature review that people within the age range of 18-35 would be heavy consumers of fiction there was little consensus across the various research studies concerning what exactly constituted a less or more frequent reader of fiction. Some studies tended towards measuring reading frequency in minutes per day spent reading books for pleasure (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2001, National Literacy trust 2007b, Southerton et al 2007a) although these did not always stipulate whether the books read were fiction books. Others categorised reading frequency through books read per week or per year (Miesen, 2003, Ross, 2001).

The current study embraced the books per year model because this research is primarily concerned with the choice of books as products rather than national literacy or the division of leisure time. It made sense therefore to categorise reading frequency by the number of fiction books read per year and therefore the number of books participants chose per year for their own reading pleasure. One reader could conceivably spend one hour per day reading and read six books per year while another could claim the same and read forty eight or more. Utilising the books per year model suited the aim of the current study because it was thought to be a better indicator of both reading frequency and the number of fiction choices made per year.

Less frequent readers within this study were classed as those reading 1-12 books per year and more frequent readers as those reading 24-48+ books per year. Although the range is smaller for the first group (12 books) than the larger group (24+ books), group sizes in terms of participants were approximately equal because the distribution of books read per year was skewed towards the group of less frequent readers: 41 survey respondents read 1-12 books per year while 38 survey respondents read 24-48+ books per year. A smaller range was therefore required to offset the dominance of the less frequent readers group in order to enable comparison of reading choice behaviour between more and less frequent readers.

3.8 Composition of the focus groups

Each group had two males and two females. Participant's estimated reading frequency (in books per year) was asked for during the email correspondence. The age range and the distribution of reading frequency for each group are displayed below in figure 1 (the numbers in the table correspond to the amount of participants who fell within each reading frequency i.e. Group 1 had two participants who read 1-6 books per year):

(figure 1.)

	age range	1-6 books per year	6-12 books per year	12-24 books per year	24-48 books per year	48+ books per year
Group 1	18-31	2	1	1		
Group 2	22-28		1	2	1	
Group 3	23-35			1	1	2

An effort was made to ensure that reading frequency of participants was fairly evenly distributed throughout the exercise but that each individual group was roughly weighted towards one area of the reading frequency spectrum. It was felt that too broad a range of reading frequency within each group might affect the discussions as readers may feel defensive discussing their reading habits. Yu and O'Brien (1999) for example took pains in their experimental task based research to ensure participants did not feel their reading habits were being judged in any way. It was thought that distributing the groups according to frequency in this way would encourage participants to talk more freely about their reading habits. As Morgan (1998) advises; each participant "needs to feel that other people around the table will understand and respect what she or he has to say" (Morgan, 1998:61).

3.9 Conducting the focus groups

The current study employed focus groups for two reasons: 1) to identify the book cover stimulus to include in the survey 2) to gather focus group participants' views on their methods of fiction choice. The way in which these specific aims were achieved will now be discussed in depth.

3.9.1 Selecting book covers

Focus group participants included illustrators, market research professionals, Ph.D students, and professional fiction book sellers. They were presented with 100 book cover images (5 covers per 20 titles). Ideas for titles and authors to include were sourced through browsing Amazon classic book lists, the BBC's big read (BBC, 2003) and the Guardians' librarians must read list (Pauli,2006).

The stimuli were all actual examples of book covers commercially available at the time of the research. Leemans and Stokmans (1991) provide an example for which types of book to include in a task of this nature. They too used fiction material available in the bookstore at the time their research was conducted. In their experiment they excluded some genres such as poetry from their sampling-frame, because they were purchased by very few consumers and included more titles in the genre of literary fiction because "more heterogeneity was expected to occur in the perception of these titles" (Leemans and Stokmans,1991:494).

The current study followed Leemans and Stokmans' example and included the covers of mainly classic literary fiction titles in the book stimulus task as literary fiction is often comprised of a blend of elements from various genres and therefore any prejudices against or preferences for genres which often have specific cover styles would hopefully be avoided. This was an important consideration as Piters and Stokmans (2000) for example have shown "the more representative a book was for a particular genre, the greater the preference for the book" (Piters and Stokmans, 2000:164). In addition the inclusion of older and classic literary titles was necessary in order to provide an adequate number of cover designs from which to choose the three covers to include in the survey. Cover images were located using Google image search, Amazon and Libweb.

Focus group participants were asked to order the covers into two piles attractive, and unattractive. From these piles were then selected those covers thought to be very attractive and very unattractive. The very attractive titles were then separated into two categories of complexity, those which showed 0-1 element of the story and those showing 1+ elements of the story. This technique of counting elements as a basic measure of complexity is supported in the literature by Cutting (2003) who makes the following statement regarding the methodology of his study on impressionist paintings:

“Since complexity cannot be defined with rigor in most domains I let the observers define it for themselves... Viewers were asked to make a judgment about which image was more complex... Inspecting the judgments for each pair suggests that viewers were simply counting things, often people or trees, in the pictures. Thus, they thought that images with more elements were more complex” (Cutting, 2003:332).

The current research followed this example in letting focus groups determine which book covers were more complex with regard to representing the book's content.

While the concept of package design is inherently multidimensional and incorporates multiple elements such as text, shape, size, colors, illustrations, material, and texture, etc, for the purpose of this study I encouraged participants to judge the overall design of the cover based on two considerations: attractiveness, and complexity with relation to the story i.e. which book covers seemed to be showing more or less elements that appeared to be connected to the contents of the book. Focus groups were asked to evaluate the cover design whether or not they had read the book. This measure was hard to control as within each group some had read most of the books while others had read very few. It was thought however that these readers

balanced each other when results were taken collectively from the group interview exercises so that the covers which were eventually chosen were informed by both views.

The fourteen titles included in the final questionnaire were chosen because each had covers which fell into each of three categories most often as judged by the three separate focus groups. These categories were: one unattractive cover, and two very attractive covers; one with (broadly) 0-1 elements of the story, the other with (broadly) 1+ (one or more) elements of the story as judged by the focus group (see Appendices D and E for examples of the final questionnaire and cover selections).

3.9.2 Gathering participant opinions

The researcher found that opinions on the various titles and authors included in the book selection task often arose spontaneously while participants ordered the covers. The resulting discussions were then loosely guided when necessary using the prompts provided in Appendix B.

Three of the studies analysed in the literature review conducted research by collecting data from participants in this way while they were otherwise engaged in specific tasks (Yu and O'Brien, 1999, d'Astous, 2006 Leemans and Stokmans, 1991). Yu and O'Brien (1999) claim that collecting data in this way ensured that participants remarks about themselves "were nearly completely voluntary, enabling the data to be treated as truly reflecting their preference, attitudes and habits" (Yu and O'Brien, 1999:39).

d'Astous et al (2006) also claim that the validity of results improves when participants are not aware of the research objectives and manipulations as they are less likely to "hide information about themselves which might be

threatening to their self image” (d’Astous et al, 2006:144). The current study followed this example in gathering qualitative data.

Each group discussion was recorded using a portable MP3 player in order to ensure that all verbal responses were collected fully and accurately, and to avoid the potential problem of the researcher substituting their own words for those of the participants.

Blaxter et. al. (1996) note that: “tape recording may make respondents anxious and less likely to reveal confidential information. Tapes also take a long time to transcribe and analyse” (Blaxter et al. 1996:154). This was not felt to be a problem within the current study, the MP3 player may have been regarded as a less formal device than a tape recorder and therefore it less obtrusive however this is difficult to confirm. Difficulties of transcription were lessened by this method of recording as it enabled discussions to be uploaded to computer which made replaying sections less time consuming during the analysis stage.

Notes were also taken through out the process and soon after the group meeting to record any relevant non-verbal communication. These notes were then combined with the transcriptions and helped to provide an accurate record of the discussions.

3.10 Survey methodology

The survey was designed and administered online using the survey instrument site Survey Monkey. Invitations to candidates aged 18-35 to complete the survey were issued through university and non-university email channels and also through social networking sites MySpace and Facebook. Commentators have frequently observed that this age range dominates these

two social networking sites (Doderro, 2005, Boyd, 2006, Schofield, 2007) and it was hoped that this would help to recruit a more varied sample.

During July 2007, through dissemination of the survey using these methods, 114 people 18-35 successfully completed questionnaires. The sample was comprised of 55 men and 59 women the mean age was 25.71 (s.d. = 12.02).

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire containing 28 items. The majority of these were Likert-like items based on a five point scale with some follow up forced ranking questions. Other questions asked for factual information such as age and gender and others allowed informants to select as few or as many options as was relevant from a prescribed list with optional text boxes allowing informants to specify other possibilities not already included.

The option fields of various questions were shaped by focus group discussions for example the selection of answers for question “what types of book do you read?” while informed by Joyce Saricks’ *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* and the ARRT Genre Fiction List was also shaped by the types of book most frequently mentioned by focus group participants.

The second section of the questionnaire asked candidates which book covers they preferred. There were fourteen different titles with three cover designs for each title as selected through conducting three focus groups. Survey candidates were asked to choose their preferred cover for each title.

The data gathered through the questionnaire was input into the statistical programme SPSS for the purposes of analysis. Means and standard deviations (s.d.) were also calculated where appropriate using Excel. To

analyse the statistical difference between variables ANOVAs and t-tests were performed.

3.11 Specific limitations of the research method

The limitations of the specific research methodology adopted within the current study are as follows. Focus group participants were exposed to a relatively small and specific set of book stimuli and just the front cover image was provided. While greater than the amount provided by Leemans and Stokmans (1991) it was not comparable to a true fiction choice situation which may have altered participants' preferences for various images. As participants were specifically asked to examine the covers, they may have tended to emphasise the visual considerations of their fiction choices within the group interview which might not apply in a real fiction selecting situation. While every effort was made to replicate book covers faithfully, due to colour printing costs the size of the covers was limited to a very small paperback size and some deterioration of the image quality for both the focus group participants and the survey respondents was unavoidable.

The current study tried to allow for specific author and title dislikes by featuring a range of books with a range of different covers for each title/author. It is difficult to estimate whether author preference played a strong part in image choice. As focus group participants understood that the goal of the exercise was to evaluate the overall cover design then it is hoped that this factor was not significant.

Research by Cutting (2003) analysed within the literature review found that familiarity with an image is a strong indicator of preference for impressionist paintings. He found that the more exposure his participants had to a stimulus, the more they tended to like it (Cutting 2003). While it is not clear exactly how these findings might impact upon preference for book

covers, an effort was made within this study to include cover combinations in the final survey instrument which focus group participants had remarked upon as being new to them. It is hoped that this aspect did not strongly affect the overall survey findings.

The survey was administered online, therefore participants would all have to have access to the internet to participate. It is difficult to say whether or not this affected the sample but it was decided that the ease of administering the survey outweighed any potential complications given the scope and timescale of the current study.

Finally, it appears that a few questionnaire respondents did not understand the term “literary fiction” which may have altered some respondents’ answers. In pretests of the survey however this was not highlighted as a problematic term.

Chapter 4 : Results

4.1 Focus group results

The main findings of the focus group will now be presented thematically alongside the relevant quantitative hypotheses in order to provide a contextual framework for the quantitative results presented in the following section (4.2). Within this study less frequent readers are defined as those reading 1-12 fiction books per year for pleasure and more frequent readers as those reading 24-48+ fiction books per year for pleasure.

4.1.1 Reading frequency and fiction choice

H1: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will rate more types of fiction as like or strongly like than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

H2: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will use more methods to find out about fiction books than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

Qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions would appear to support these hypotheses. Less frequent readers appeared to like fewer authors and be less likely to try different types of book than the more frequent readers within the groups as illustrated by the following quotes from less frequent readers:

“I think that my interests stay pretty constant ...I’ve identified what my taste is. Each time I choose a book I just go to the same section.”

“I’ll read a book and not know what to go for next. I usually just go for an author I know I like; another book by the same author.”

“I only read books that are light hearted, nothing serious nothing depressing, I have a few authors I like and I read their books mostly.”

“It’s a waste of time unless you’re picking them from a genre of books you know you’re going to like.”

In addition participants who read less frequently often confessed to feeling a lot of anxiety connected to the process of choosing a book:

“I get very angry if I feel like I’ve wasted my time reading a book, I need to know that I’ll definitely enjoy something even before I pick it up. If you read something and don’t enjoy it, you feel awful...like you’ve made a mistake.”

“I get stressed out sometimes in a bookshop if I don’t know what I want before I go in there...You do feel stupid for wasting time if you don’t come away with something you’ll enjoy. Even when I buy things online I need to know what I’m buying, I hate browsing for books! I’d rather just read ones other people have chosen for me.”

“I usually buy books so I want them to be of value to me, I don’t want to spend time and money reading crap. I’d be willing to experiment a little more in a library but I still only ever go with things other people had recommended but I wasn’t entirely sure I’d like. I’d never ever go with anything I hadn’t heard of.”

Such findings are consistent with other research in this area. Duijx et al (1991) comment on an important reason behind this anxiety:

“it is not easy to admit that a book bought is not worth reading, for this would imply that a bad choice has been made and that money has been invested in a mistake. Thus, in a sense, complaining about one’s choice of literary books is, in fact doubting one’s own ability to choose books, which might cause the sort of internal inconsistency that most individuals would like to avoid. (Duijx et al 1991: 446)

Ross (2001) also mentions the anger some of her interviewees felt at having made unsatisfactory choices and to quote one of her interviewees; “wasting my time” (Ross, 2001:12). It is possible that participants in the current study who were infrequent readers were more anxious about the process of choosing a book because their experience of reading was more concentrated; they were less able to shrug off the disappointment of an unsuccessful read. As one less frequent reader stated:

“If you read a million books a year or whatever you can write off bad ones but if you only read something like six books a year and three of them you weren’t impressed with, that’s like if half of all the books you read were awful...”

Consequently these readers were less likely to experiment with different authors, genres and types of fiction. Ross (2001) found “each unsuccessful choice decreases the...reader’s desire to read” (Ross, 2001:9) this finding was supported by qualitative evidence within the current study. More frequent readers tended not to resent the time spent searching for books and tended to be less specific about author and genre preference.

“I won’t read just anything that comes to hand but I’ll give most things a chance...I don’t have set in stone favourites”

“Time doesn’t count as a cost to me, I don’t see reading as a costly endeavour in that way because you’ve always learned something by reading a book even if it’s just that you don’t like it.”

“I really like well written books with good metaphors. I don’t mind what genre it is so long as it’s well written. I’ve read deeply in a few different authors but lots of authors and genres appeal to me.”

Participants who read more frequently admitted to often making mistakes when choosing a book to read but appeared to have developed strategies for coping with wrong, disappointing or difficult choices:

“I usually try and mix up the reading experience by reading one long type of fiction interspersed with shorter types. Currently I’ve been reading Infinite Jest for a year while reading shorter books at the same time, I read a play by Ionesco last week just to break it up.”

“If I’m reading a book I like to finish it...even if I’m not really enjoying it, I want to feel like I can have a full opinion on it and how can you if you’ve not read the whole thing?...In that situation I just start another book and sort of use that as a crutch to get through the one I don’t like so much or am finding hard going...two chapters of one, one chapter of the other.”

“Change and variety is good in reading, you can’t let one bad book put you off all books... that’ll not happen if you’re willing to try things... you can’t be so invested in just a few authors.”

So while less frequent readers cut down the risk of not liking the next book by limiting their choices to specific genres or authors, often reading everything by a particular author before moving onto another through word of mouth, more frequent readers appeared to read too often to pursue this

strategy alone and tended to consciously vary their reading experiences to compensate for challenging books or simply books not to their taste.

Less frequent readers generally used fewer methods to discover fiction to read. Despite being active computer users and often resenting the time spent physically searching for and reading books, this group did not appear to often buy or search for books online which is perhaps surprising given the time saving benefits of online transactions. This appeared to be because they preferred to rely on friends and family to provide them with often unsolicited gifts and recommendations:

“I get most of my books through recommendations from friends- if people give me a book rather than telling me it’s good because I probably won’t go out to find it, also [I’ll read it] only if I trust my friend’s opinion.”

“I’ll buy books that are three for two in Waterstones at Christmas time. I don’t use the library or shop online really. I don’t read that many books. I borrow from my Mum more than going and getting them. I find people buy me some for Christmas and I’ll read those over the year or I’ll borrow them off people in my family.”

Duijx et al (1991) observed that “because reading is not a primary leisure activity for infrequent readers” they

“are less aware of the current state of fiction production and reading, i.e. who is writing, what has been written, what other people are reading, etc. When they do feel like reading occasionally, the specific impetus for reading may vary (e.g. hospitalisation, on holiday, recommendation by somebody or influenced by the media, etc) (Duijx et al, 1991:45).

This was found to be true within this study. Participants who were less frequent readers read when they “*had nothing else better to do*” or set time aside to read specific books which received particular media attention notably Harry Potter which was a title focused on enthusiastically by participants within Group 1 anticipating the release of the new book in the series.

More frequent readers while also heavily referencing recommendations from friends and family invariably went on to mention a host of additional methods and often a systematic approach to finding and choosing new fiction material:

“Reading review sections, blogs, podcasts, word of mouth recommendations...I have a wish list on Amazon, I browse Amazon in my spare time and add products to my wish list then depending on my mood and finances I’ll sometimes go on a spree and buy them. I sometimes use lists by other people, I found a list by Anthony Burgess of the best 99 novels in English since 1939 so I’ve bookmarked that...Also, going to bookshops for something else or specifically to browse, seeing a book you like and then adding it to your Amazon wish list because you want to pay less for it...it’s nice to handle books properly before you buy them.”

“Amazon recommendations, friend recommendations and other authors talking about the book...I used to systematically work Amazon recommendations, just to get good recommendations back...you know systematically telling them which books you already had so they’d stop recommending them to you and you’d get new ones and also telling them not to recommend based on a book I had but didn’t like.”

“I enjoy Amazon lists, I’ll type in a book I’ve read before and liked, one of my top fives, then I just scroll through other people’s lists to see

what else they have recommended. I've found that on architecture and design blogs there are discussions on good covers as design objects and sometimes that will turn me onto new things to read. Also, I like recommendations from other people. When people have the same books I love I'm more likely to investigate their bookshelves. It's very rare I ever come across anything in Waterstones I haven't heard of via the internet... I'll always write things down to look for in future, I have a moleskin of lists...I use charity shops to find books but they're always things I've put on my list or previously come across."

For these more frequent readers the internet and Amazon in particular is clearly both a key alerting source, a tool which enables an ongoing search for fiction material, and a preferred method of obtaining fiction. A number of frequent readers appeared to centre their process of fiction choice around these online services because 1) they complimented their preferred search strategies, 2) blended easily with work commitments and 3) in some ways facilitated the social aspects of reading for example through online book clubs. The following three quotes clearly illustrate these motivations:

1) *"I do sometimes rely on chance, I don't usually know what I'm looking for, it can be anything...I think the way the internet works reflects my searching strategies...It's just a mess of interconnected things and I think this has broadened my chance to find out about things I like because they're more likely to be linked up and there's more and more to find out about...You can find out about new releases far quicker online."*

2) *"Based on the amount of time I spend on the internet at work...based on my current circumstances and my job I'd say that in terms of where I get information from and actually obtain books it's*

about a 75 to 25 % split in favour of online rather than real world scenarios.”

3) *“I find lists and communities on the internet, usually when I’m doing something else, there’s this live journal group the ‘bookyoucrew’, to be a member you have to post a list of your top 20 books and you have to justify your choices and some people go on there and get ripped apart, I wouldn’t want to try and join but I sometimes read the posts for book ideas and that leads you onto other things.”*

For these frequent readers the internet plays a key role in choosing fiction because of its ability to facilitate both a directed and serendipitous pursuit of information within a short time frame. Many participants mentioned finding things by chance online while browsing for other things or logging into email accounts and seeing a news story on their home page. Only one participant consciously relied on serendipity or chance to choose fiction outside of the internet and they had developed a highly unusual personal system of locating fiction based entirely on chance:

“I don’t go specifically looking at reviews and I don’t look at the authors. Often I’ll hit a vein of things I like but I don’t plan my reading; I’ll often see something in a free magazine in the dentists so the next time I’m at the dentists I’ll purposefully look at the free magazines or something. It’s random. I graze. My reading habits are like that as well I graze, reading a bit of one book then dipping into another.”

This participant was the only group member who did not have access to a personal computer at home or work. It is difficult to say if this would

have influenced a search strategy however as their system was honed to exclude computers and online purchases:

“I know you can get things cheaper on Play but I still find more things I like to read my way”

This participant was notable for being an exception to the overall trend of frequent readers who preferred to browse for fiction online.

4.1.2 The importance of author, genre and publisher to fiction choice

H3: Participants will rate author and genre as the most important aspects in their choice of fiction.

H4: Participants will rate their previous experience of the author of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the author.

H5: Participants will rate their previous experience of the publisher of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the

Author and genre appeared to dominate the search strategies of most participants with prior knowledge of an author rated especially highly. Both more and less frequent readers in all groups thought that their own previous experience with an author affected their fiction choice more highly than both fame and literary reputation although literary reputation was seen as equally influential by some:

“I won’t read anything unless I have someone else’s recommendation or I know it to be written by someone scholarly or respectable.”

“I look for the authors I like to see if there’s something I’ve not read by them...or then I might look for authors recommended by friends.”

“Authors that are from the same contemporary group, that’s another way I find good fiction to read, people who were writing at the same time and influenced each other.”

Very few participants mentioned the publisher as a factor which influenced their fiction choice in any way. Participants who did suggest the publisher as an important consideration focused on small independent presses connected to a particular favourite author which printed specific types of fiction material often as limited edition works:

“[my fiction choice] depends on what I like first followed by the publisher, usually if it’s a weird small press and looks kind of cheap I’m interested.”

“I like those heavy paper covers, recycled paper covers mainly because I read some stuff from Black Sparrow Press- Buchowski, and I guess I was just conditioned then to like books with heavy paper covers.”

“I look out for stuff published by David Eggers’ Mc Sweeney’s stuff, and I pay attention to comic book publishers mainly the independent ones because you know what you’re getting with Marvel and DC...It’s like with main stream book publishing, the big publisher put out equal amounts of good and terrible and the independent presses are often more interesting, for comics I’ll always look at stuff by drawn and quarterly and Fantagraphics.”

“Denis Cooper’s own press Little House On The Bowery...I think small independent publishers can take more risks, often you’ll find something totally unusual and weird...also if you really like an author you’ll find new stuff by reading what they choose to publish and you get an insight on their work...”

Overwhelmingly when participants mentioned the publisher of a book it was connected to the in house design of a book often when book jackets were designed as part of a series of different authors produced by the publisher:

“Simple covers are best, I like ranges by Oxford and Penguin Collections, I look out for those...the orange sixties covers look really good on a shelf and they’re usually classics, ones you should get round to reading...”

“Sometimes there’s a series by a publisher, I’ll get them because they looked nice, Vertigo vintage classics are always subtly designed, they look classy...”

“Sometimes I look for publishers but only because of how they present the book. I wouldn’t just read a book because of a publisher. I like the uniformity of how they look on the shelf, I would never buy the cheap £1 classics if I could afford the silver spine [Penguin Classics] modern art cover.”

It seemed that in this way a publisher’s packaging style helps reader’s locate fiction in the same way that logos and branded packaging do in conventional products. Unlike conventional products however there was little brand loyalty as participants rarely chose books based on the publisher alone but used the colour schemes of various series as a way to locate new material

by similar authors. Beyond providing pleasing dust jacket the majority of focus group participants rarely considered publishers as a factor to their fiction choice at all. Participants who did were mostly interested in independent and specialist presses often connected to favourite authors.

In conclusion most participants cited recommendations from a trusted source as being the most important factor to their fiction choice and to their search for fiction followed by author and especially prior knowledge of author, then genre according to the hypotheses however publisher was rarely mentioned as a factor which influenced fiction choice.

4.1.3 Preference for covers

H6: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers more than fiction books with unattractive covers.

H7: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers which show 1+ elements of the story more than fiction books with attractive covers which show 0-1 elements of the story.

There was a general consensus on which covers were considered unattractive and overall there was a strong preference for the covers considered more attractive. Participants also appeared to prefer the more complicated covers and there was some evidence that some participants appreciated cover designs which were linked to the content of the book either directly or indirectly:

“Covers have to be dramatic for me to like them. I think it depends on the genre as well. If I had knowledge of the subject of the book it would be whether the cover represents well in my opinion the content

of the book or the style of the genre, or was an innovative approach to it...like the Tess of the d'Urbevilles new one."

"I like abstract designs rather than "this is the character" and it showing you a detailed picture of the people in the story. I like it if it immediately doesn't have anything to do with the story but afterwards you realise why they've designed it that way and it makes you think about the book more, if it's subtle, I like it."

Although this was certainly not true for all participants:

"I think the best book covers are nice and simple- I hate book covers which give part of the book away, I like a pattern on the front or a blank cover so I can imagine the characters better myself."

"Simple covers are like a wrapping paper, I like to be surprised by a book's content and pleased by what's inside. If a book has a fancy cover it's like read me! Read me! and I'm like leave me alone, I'll choose my own!"

Participants often expressed distrust of complicated covers in this way. The main negative accusation was that of being over designed or trying too hard to attract their attention which they felt reflected badly on the contents of the book:

"I'm automatically suspicious of a book with a too fancy cover, why is it trying to lure me in? Like that Marquis de Sade or Candide one... the new covers are all jazzed up and beautiful but who would want to actually read them?"

An additional finding which arose from the focus groups with regards to book cover design was that participants were strongly opposed to books which had been made into films having covers which referenced the film:

“I don’t like film covers, no one wants to be seen to be the guy reading the book after the film. It’s snobby but you want to be seen to have just discovered it in your dad’s attic or something, even if you saw the film and wanted to read the book from that. I think it’s about not being told you should read something.”

“People might want to talk to you about it on trains or whatever if you’ve got a book with a film cover. I hate that. If you read a book it’s like a private experience, you might want to share it with your friends but if everyone’s reading the same thing it cheapens the experience...It makes you feel like everyone else, like your imagination is the same as everyone else’s...I read to get away from everyone else.”

“I never want to buy it if it’s got a picture of the film on the front...I want to make up my own characters in my head not be reminded of the film.”

This is an interesting finding given research reported on by Verdaasdonk (1991) which showed that “consumers who have experience with both literary books and films appear to be disinclined to establish a strong link between their choices from either medium” (Verdaasdonk, 1991:419). Verdaasdonk suggested that media use, such as reading a book or watching a movie is dependent on consumers’ weighting of media in terms of the specific and unique experiences they provide. These findings certainly appear to be supported by qualitative data in the current study. Participants objected to book covers displaying imagery from a film because, as according to one participant:

“What it is for me is that the book came first, not the film, when they put the film cover on the front it’s like the book becomes part of the film and can’t stand alone.”

This participant in particular would appear to agree with Verdaasdonk’s findings implying that they view reading and watching a film as unique experiences which should remain independent of each other. Blending a film and a book appeared to interfere with the uniqueness of each experience for many participants. Some participants felt that reading a book with a cover which references a film had the effect of depersonalising a private experience. For some participants then filmic book covers appear to interfere with two of the three broadly defined motivations for reading (Miesen, 2003): hedonic (personal enjoyment) for example the participant above whose reading experience was spoilt by a film cover because they “*want to make up [their] own characters... not be reminded of the film.*” and symbolic (for example being seen to be an intellectual) for example the participant above who claims that “*no one wants to be seen to be the guy reading the book after the film.*” There was no evidence arising from focus groups that filmic covers compromised utilitarian (increasing knowledge) motivations for reading fiction.

Many participants enthusiastically and openly admitted to buying books on the strength of their covers:

“I’ve definitely bought books based on cover before...It’s Superman, I bought that one after seeing the cover...I bought it on impulse because Ware designed it.”

“I’ve definitely bought books not knowing anything about them on the basis of their covers but I think there’s a good link between

contemporary literary fiction and contemporary graphic design, as art forms they seem to borrow from each other. If a book has a clever cover then there must be some clever content to produce that.”

“I think the cover is the most influential factor for me...I’ve been looking for an edition of Tom’s Midnight Garden with a nice cover, a grown up cover.”

This was surprising given the assertion in the literature that participants would be reluctant to admit to choosing a book based on its cover as this would demonstrate “an irrational behaviour” (d’Astous, 2006:144).

Many participants also admitted that they can be put off a fiction choice by a cover design alone especially if they know little about the contents of the book:

“That book The Road by Cormac McCarthy has a disgusting cover. It’s a really good book but I like the author so I knew I was going to read it but I think if I hadn’t known the author it would have put me off picking it up.”

“I don’t go to bookshops, online I find a book based on its content, I’ll read the summary first and if that attracts me to it I’ll read the reviews. Then the cover can give you an idea if it’s the sort of book you usually read. The cover can actually put you off then if you’re not sure about a book.”

Mirzoeff (1999) claims that we live in an increasingly visual world; “work and leisure are increasingly centred on visual media...human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before” (Mirzoeff,1999:1). He alleges that the advent of the internet has hastened the

development of our predominantly “visual culture” (Mirzoeff, 1999:1). Perhaps participants’ open admission of evaluating books based on their covers provides support for Mirzoeff’s theory that the stigma against visual media, particularly among the academic establishment is lessening for an age group immersed in an increasingly visual society. Either way it indicates that book covers can be a highly important factor for 18-35 year olds and admitting so is less of an issue than previous research would suggest. Of course the fact that focus group exercises were based around evaluating book cover designs may have influenced these statements through making them seem more permissible.

4.1.4 Preference for book covers and fiction buying

Interest in the book cover was an important issue for all participants but there was a definite increase in interest for readers who enjoyed collecting books. In Spillers’ study 11% bought because they liked collecting books (Spiller, 1980:246) but there was an even higher proportion of collectors among the current study’s focus group participants. with almost half (five people) admitting that they mainly bought rather than borrowed books because they enjoyed collecting. Reasons for collecting books varied although a strong influence was an appreciation of the book as an object in itself:

“I actually buy books without reading them I’m a bit of a bibliophile; I like the touch of them and the smell of them.”

“It is important for a book to look nice, I buy most of my books at the moment so I want them to be a nice object to own.”

Duijx et al (1991) have indicated that a strong motivation for book collecting lies outside the actual reading experience as the way in which the aspired intellectual and social status of the reader/buyer can be reflected in his/her

choice of literary books (Duijx,1991:446). There was some evidence for this within the current study where some participants felt that owning books proved that they had read them:

“I like to own books, sometimes I feel like CDs and magazines and things that I’ve collected in the past are things people don’t buy anymore. I envisage having a lot of fiction books in a future house. If you borrow something from a library it’s like you’ve never read them if you don’t have them, it’s satisfying finishing something and putting it on your shelf.”

Participants often also saw collecting books in this way as an investment for the future. Participants who did use libraries did so mainly as a way of trying out new authors:

“I think the library’s good for trying out new authors but because of my present situation it’s easier for me to just buy books...”

This is a practice recorded by Ross (2001) who claimed that “libraries are a resource that supports readers in taking risks with new and unfamiliar authors, genres, or subject areas” (Ross, 2001: 790). As Spiller (1980) observed “buying is clearly practiced more by younger readers” (Spiller, 1980:253) and the 20-34 age group in particular which provided 39% of the fiction buyers in his study. These findings were supported by qualitative results of focus groups within the current study the majority of whose participants fell within this specific age range and overwhelmingly bought the majority of their fiction.

4.2 Survey results

The main findings of the survey will now be presented. As in 4.1 hypotheses are highlighted and the corresponding results presented directly beneath.

4.2.1 Reading frequency and fiction choice

H1: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will rate more types of fiction as like or strongly like than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

Quantitative data supported this hypothesis: respondents who read 1-12 books per year liked significantly less types of books than respondents who read 24-48+ books per year: The mean number of types rated as like or strongly like was 3.7 for the 41 respondents who read 1-12 books per year (s.d.= 1.7) and 5.5 for the 39 respondents who read 24-48+ books per year (s.d.=2.0). This difference was significant: $(t(77)=4.205, p<.001)$.

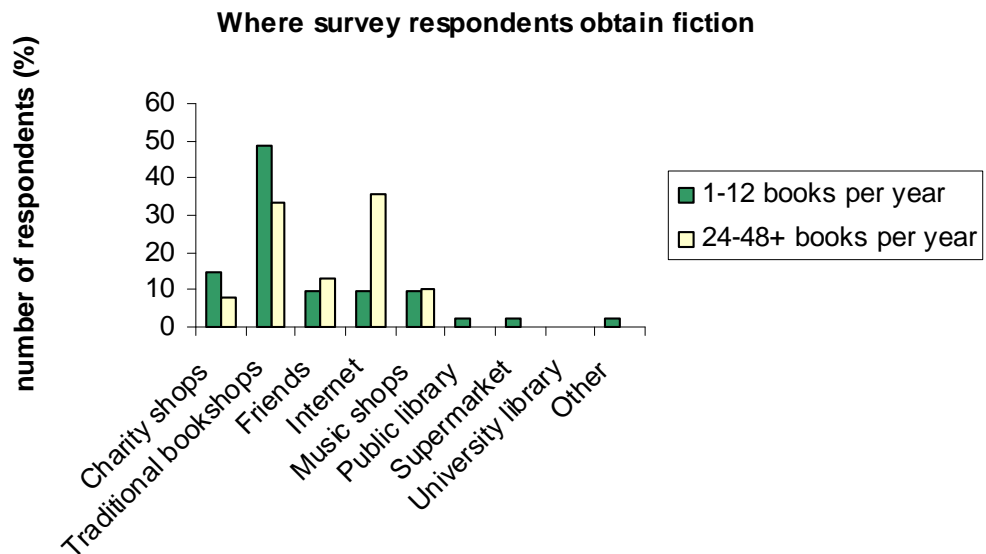
H2: Participants who are more frequent readers (24-48+ books per year) of fiction will use more methods to find out about fiction books than participants who are less frequent readers (1-12 books per year) of fiction.

Quantitative data supported this hypothesis: respondents who read 24-48+ books per year used an average of 6.95 (s.d.= 2.45) different methods to find out about fiction books, compared to respondents who read 1-12 books per year who used an average of 4.02 (s.d. = 1.46) different methods. This difference was significant: $(t(78)=6.53, p<.0005)$.

Survey results also revealed that of the 41 respondents who read 1-12 books per year the majority 48.8% (20 respondents) obtained their fiction almost

exclusively from traditional bookshops such as Waterstones. The majority 35.9% (14 respondents) of the 39 respondents who read 24-48+ books per year obtained their fiction online from internet sites such as Amazon although this was very closely followed by traditional bookshops which 33.3% (13 respondents) chose as the place they usually obtain fiction (see figure 2).

(figure 2)



4.2.2 The importance of author, genre and publisher to fiction choice

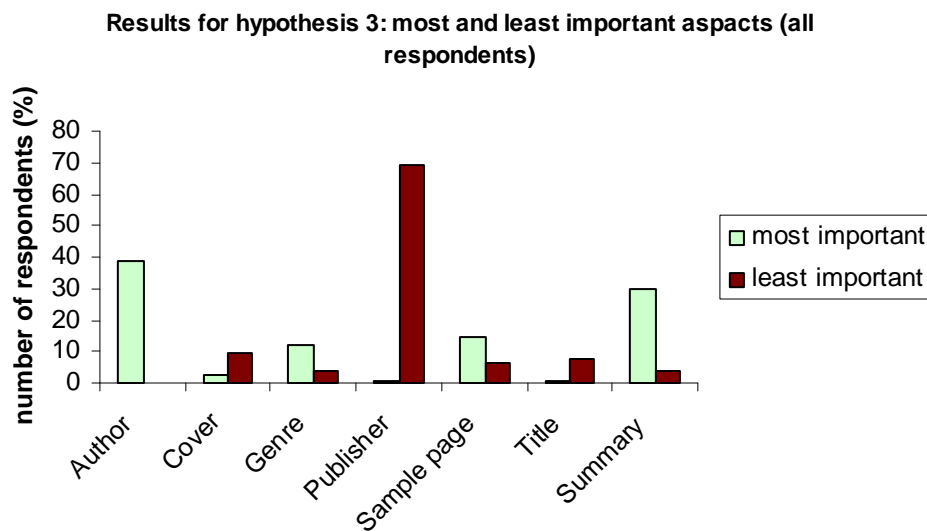
H3: Participants will rate author and genre as the most important aspects in their choice of fiction.

Quantitative data only partially supported this hypothesis. Author was rated the most important aspect by the majority of respondents. Genre was rated the fourth most important overall.

Respondents were asked to rank the author's importance to their selection of fiction out of seven variables (selected from ones most frequently mentioned in both focus groups and supporting literature): author, cover

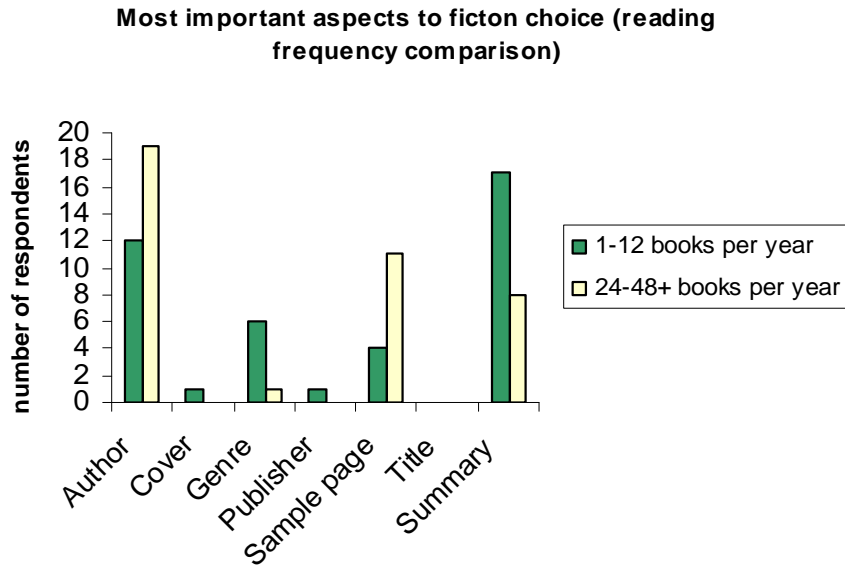
design, genre, publisher, sample page, title and summary. Altogether 44 (36%) respondents out of 114 rated author as the most important aspect in their choice of fiction. Genre was rated the most important aspect by 14 (12.3%) respondents out of 144 making it the fourth most highly rated aspect after author, summary and sample page (see figure 3).

(figure 3)



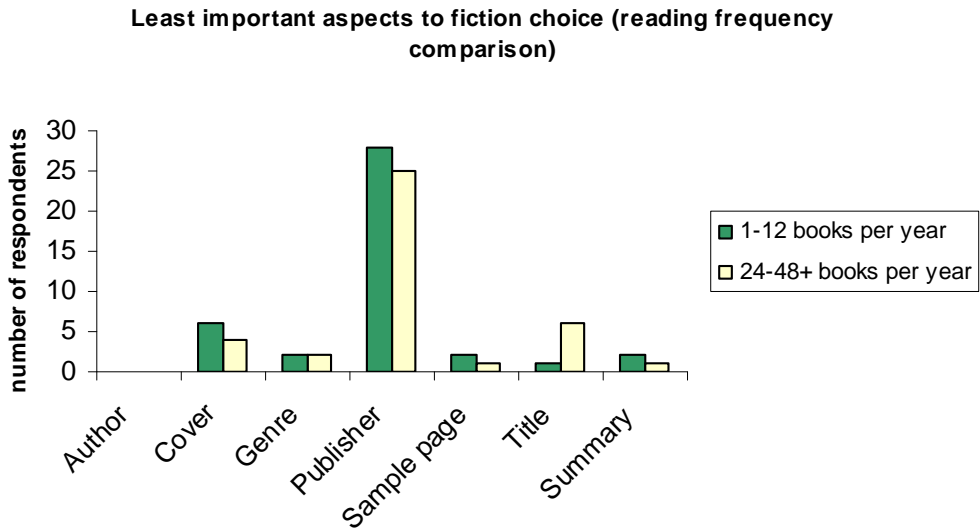
These results varied with reading frequency. The 41 respondents who read 1-12 books per year (see figure 4) rated the most important aspects as summary (41.5%, 17 respondents) followed by author (29.3%, 12 respondents) then genre (14.6%, 6 respondents) and least important aspects (see figure 5) as publisher (68.2%, 28 respondents) then cover (14.6%, 6 respondents). The 39 respondents who read 24-48+ books per year rated the most important aspects (see figure 4) as author (48.7%, 19 respondents) followed by sample page (28.2%, 11 respondents) and then summary (20.5%, 8 respondents) and least important aspects (see figure 5) as publisher (64.1%, 25 respondents) then title (15.4%, 6 respondents).

(figure 4)



Publisher was consistently rated the least important aspect of fiction choice overall and across both groups with only 1 respondent out of 114 rating it as most important to their fiction choice and altogether 69.3% (79 respondents) ranking it as the least important aspect when selecting fiction (see figure 5).

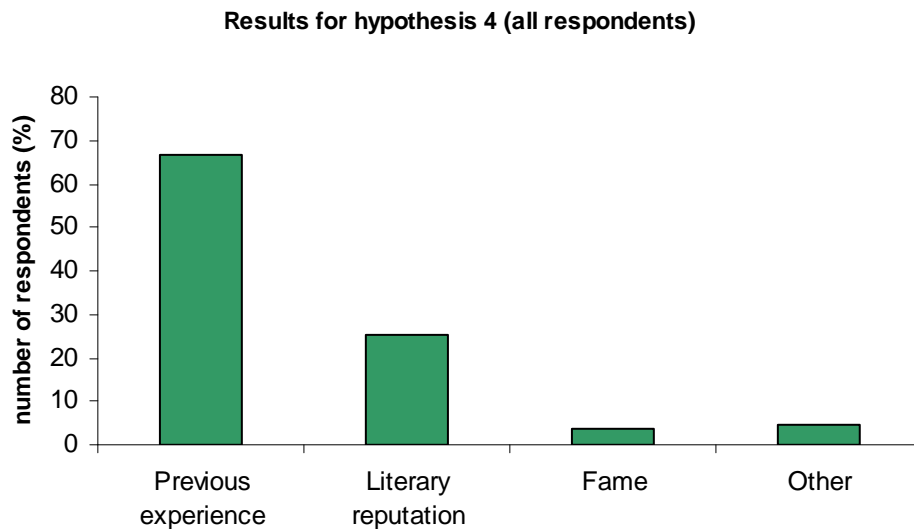
(figure 5)



H4: Participants will rate their previous experience of the author of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the author.

Quantitative data supported this hypothesis: the majority of survey respondents (66.7%, 76 respondents) rated their previous experience of the author as more important than literary reputation (25.4%, 24 respondents) or fame (3.5% 4 respondents) with little variation across reading frequency.

(figure 6)

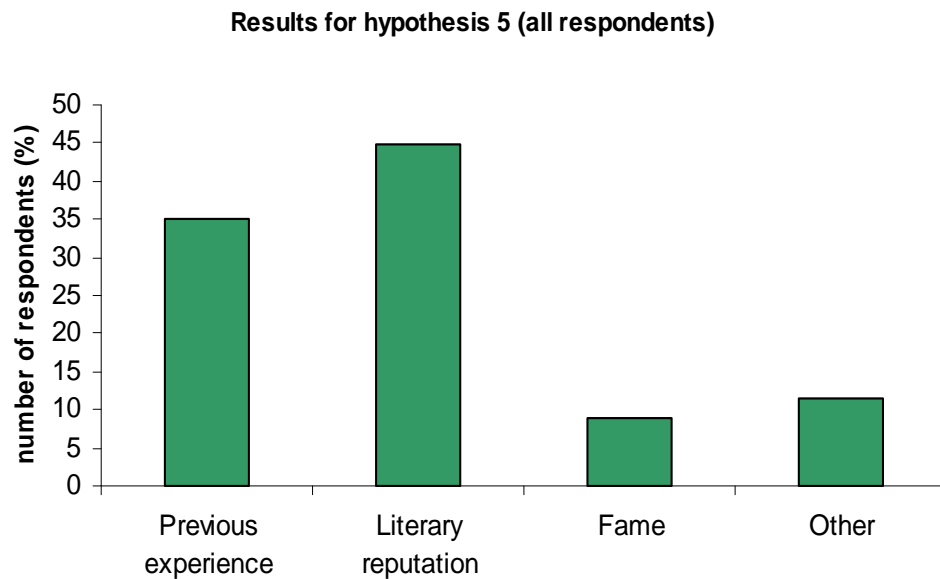


Responses for the “Other” category (4.4%, 5 respondents) comprised of respondents asserting that they considered a mix of previous experience and literary reputation and found it hard to choose between the categories, e.g.: “tricky! more of a mix of 1 and 2- might be debut novel”.

H5: Participants will rate their previous experience of the publisher of a fiction book as more important than literary reputation or fame of the publisher.

Quantitative data did not support this hypothesis: the majority of survey respondents (44.7%, 51 respondents) rated literary reputation over their previous experience of the publisher (35.1%, 40 respondents) and fame (8.8%, 10 respondents) with little variation across reading frequency.

(figure 7)



In the responses given in the “Other” category (11.4%, 13 respondents) overwhelmingly reported that they did not consider the publisher at all when choosing fiction e.g.: “Not relevant”, “Do not generally consider publisher”, “Never consider publisher”.

4.2.3 Preference for covers

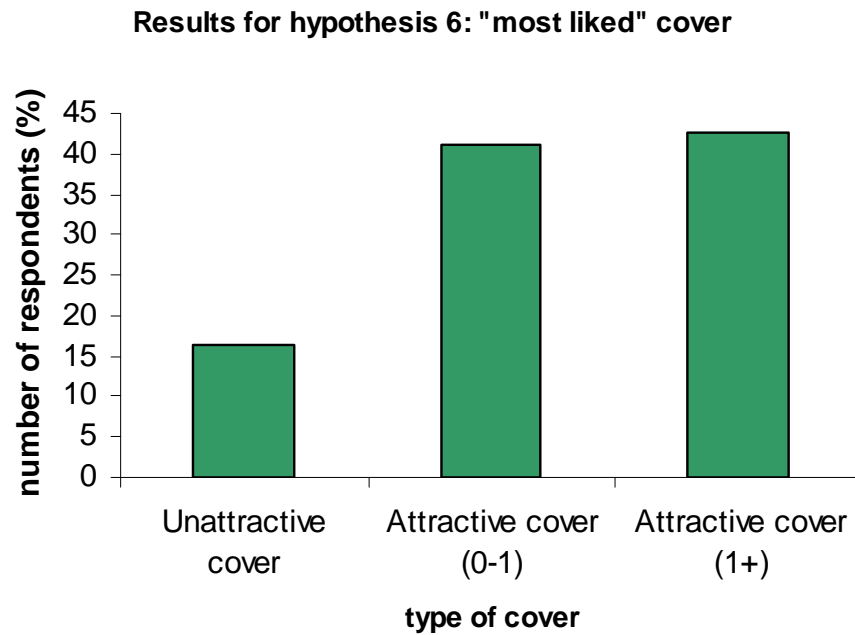
H6: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers more than fiction books with unattractive covers.

Quantitative data supported this hypothesis. Results show that people were significantly:

- 1) less likely to rate unattractive covers as their “most liked” and
- 2) more likely to rate unattractive covers as their “least liked”

A repeated measures ANOVA, with one within subjects factor of book cover category (3 levels) was performed, and it was found that book cover category had a significant effect on rating of favourite cover ($F(2) = 12.6$, $p < .001$). Follow up t-tests found that this effect was due to the significantly lower number of respondents (mean = 16.4%, s.d. = 8.8%) who preferred the unattractive cover (see figure 8). This was significantly lower than both the percentage who preferred the attractive cover with less elements (0-1) of the story (mean = 41.0%, s.d. = 13.9% $t(13) = 5.08$, $p < .001$) and the percentage who preferred the attractive cover with more elements (1+) of the story (mean = 42.6%, s.d. = 14.5%; $t(13) = 5.02$, $p < .001$). Ratings for the two types of attractive cover, however, were not significantly different ($t(13) = 0.21$, $p < .835$).

(figure 8)



H7: Participants will prefer fiction books with attractive covers which show 1+ elements of the story more than fiction books with attractive covers which show 0-1 elements of the story.

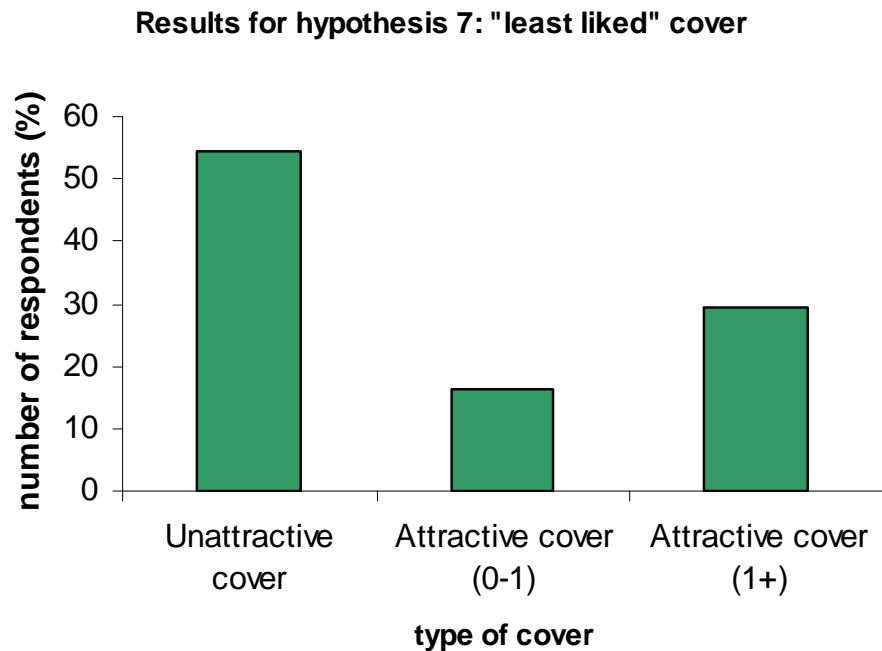
Quantitative did not support this hypothesis:

- 1) The comparison between the “most liked” scores for the two types of attractive covers showed that they were not significantly different.
- 2) The comparison between the “least liked” scores for the two types of attractive books showed that more people actually rated the more complex cover (with 1+ elements of the story) as their least favourite.

A repeated measures ANOVA, with one within subjects factor of book cover category (3 levels) was performed, and it was found that book cover category had a significant effect on rating of least favourite cover ($F(2) = 22.3$, $p < .001$). Follow up t-tests found that this was due to a significantly higher

number of respondents (mean = 54.3%, s.d. = 14.1%) rating the unattractive book as their least favourite. This was significantly higher than both the percentage who rated the attractive cover with less elements (0-1) of the story as their least favourite (mean = 16.1% s.d. = 8.6%; $t(13) = 7.65, p < .001$) and the percentage who rated the attractive cover with more elements (1+) of the story as their least favourite (mean = 29.6%, s.d. = 14.0%; $t(13) = 3.43, p < .005$). There was also a significant difference between the two types of attractive cover ($t(13) = 2.74, p < .017$), where respondents were more likely to rate the attractive cover with more elements (1+) of the story as their least favourite (see figure 9).

(figure 9)



Chapter 5 : Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Main findings of quantitative and qualitative results

Combining the two methods of data collection produced largely consistent and convergent results. Main findings of the study indicated that:

- ❖ Participants preferred attractive covers overall but there was no evidence to support a preference for attractive covers which were more complicated or related (showing more elements (1+) of the story) over ones which were less complicated/related (showing less(0-1) elements of the story).

This finding was in keeping with the majority of the previous research in the area as discussed in the literature review. In the most similar study to the research carried out for the current report d'Astous et al (2006) found that French Canadian participants in their experimental study conducted outside a bookshop showed no preference for the relevancy of book covers. In their report d'Astous et al (2006) claimed that the covers of fiction books were more closely scrutinised and had more influence over choice than the covers of non-fiction texts. Their research focused on fiction and non fiction texts and called for further research to support their findings. Fiction book covers have been found to have a heightened influence on consumers because of the greater difficulty to evaluate experiential products. The current study supposed that different patterns of preference might have been observed in respondents' preference for covers in a study which focused exclusively on fiction covers. The results of the current study however supports d'Astous et al's (2006) research by confirming that no preference for more complicated or related covers is obtained if fiction covers are focused on within the 18-35 year old age group. These results also provide some evidence that Cutting's

(2003) conclusion that complexity judgments are not correlated positively with preferences for paintings can be extended to include book cover designs.

The evidence that consumers will prefer packaging (Underwood et al, 2001) which was more complicated/realistic and meaningful as presented in the literature review therefore was not supported based on the evidence of this study. Neither were findings by Martindale (1990) which indicated that complexity in images such as drawings and paintings is “a better predictor of preference when both representative and non representative paintings are studied” (Martindale, 1990:74). In the current study the book covers were mainly composed of drawn and painted images however there was no clear preference for the more highly representative covers.

Focus group discussions may provide some insight into this finding. Participants who disliked more complicated or related covers usually cited two reasons. The first reason was that they distrusted complicated covers. They accused them of being over designed or trying too hard to attract their attention which they felt reflected badly on the contents of the book:

“I’m automatically suspicious of a book with a too fancy cover, why is it trying to lure me in?”

The second reason was that they felt complicated covers which were too closely related to the book’s contents compromised their enjoyment of the book by giving too much of the story away:

“ I hate book covers which give part of the book away, I like a pattern on the front or a blank cover so I can imagine the characters better myself.”

This was also one of the main reasons behind the general dislike for film based covers. These same participants however often conceded that they did appreciate related or complex book covers if were less obviously revealing of the book's content before they had read the book in question. As one participant explains:

“ rather than “this is the character” and it showing you a detailed picture of the people in the story, I like it if it immediately doesn't have anything to do with the story but afterwards you realise why they've designed it that way and it makes you think about the book more.”

In this way focus group data coupled with survey responses suggests that there may be a scale of preference for complexity in book cover design. Where a consumer falls upon this scale however is clearly highly subjective although there is clearly some agreement over what makes a cover more generally attractive or unattractive. Covers which were judged most unattractive by the majority of focus group participants and subsequently by the survey respondents for example were most often the non representative covers included within the current study. Further research is therefore recommended to investigate optimum complexity preferences in book cover design.

- ❖ Participants considered author and above all prior knowledge of author most important when selecting fiction. Genre was a greater consideration for participants who read less frequently (1-12 fiction books per year) than for participants who read more frequently (24-48+ fiction books per year).

Focus group and survey results would appear to generally confirm the evidence for the overall importance of prior knowledge of author as both a searching strategy and influential aspect of fiction choice in itself as discussed

in the literature review. Many participants mentioned entering author names and often previously read and enjoyed book titles into Amazon in order to generate fiction recommendations to be bought whether online or from a book store or tried out through borrowing them from a library. Genre was found to be a less important consideration for some participants within the current study than a review of existing literature would suggest. Certainly it was a far more important consideration for survey respondents and focus group participants who read 1-12 books per year. This group rated the most important aspects as summary (41.5%, 17 respondents) followed by author (29.3%, 12 respondents) then genre (14.6%, 6 respondents) compared to survey respondents and focus group participants who read 24-48+ books per year who rated the most important aspects as author (48.7%, 19 respondents) followed by sample page (28.2%, 11 respondents) and then summary (20.5%, 8 respondents) (see figure 4).

This pattern of survey responses would seem to support focus group evidence which indicated that more frequent readers were less likely to register a firm preference for specific genres. Focus group evidence also indicated that participants who read more frequently (24-48+ books per year) were less likely to be loyal to particular authors and had not often read everything by a single author which was a method of repeating successful or enjoyed reading experiences pursued by many participants who read less frequently.

- ❖ Publishers are rarely considered when selecting fiction aside from influencing the design of a book's cover which marks it out as part of a series (eg Gollancz scifi master works, Vintage classics). Despite this the literary reputation of the publisher was considered as more important than previous experience with a publisher.

The extent to which publishers were avowedly not considered as an influencing factor of fiction choice was quite surprising in that publisher was ranked the least important consideration when choosing fiction by both more and less frequent readers. In the 1-12 books per year group 43.9% (18 respondents) rated it as “least important” out of the seven considerations most frequently mentioned as affecting fiction choice both within the literature discussed in the literature review and within focus group discussions: author, cover, genre, publisher, sample page, title and summary. In the 24-48+ books per year group 64.1% (25 respondents) also rated it as the least important consideration.

Overall then, the publisher was consistently rated the least important aspect of fiction choice with only 1 respondent out of 114 rating it as most important to their fiction choice and altogether 69.3% (79 respondents) ranking it as the least important aspect when selecting fiction. These findings supported earlier research conducted within public libraries by Spiller (1980) who found that the publisher was not a high consideration for many library users.

An important theme with regards to this finding which arose from the qualitative data was that participants often only considered the publisher with regards to the book’s design. There is also evidence for this within previous research conducted by Spiller (1980) who found that “the only publisher whose name cropped up with any regularity was Gollancz whose thrillers and science fiction books were easily recognisable by their covers” (Spiller,1980:248). In the survey carried out in the current study Gollancz received three mentions. The most highly cited publisher was Penguin which received eight mentions followed by Vintage which received five. When mentioning these publishers however, respondents still usually cited particular series which are recognisable by their distinctive covers in the same way as Gollancz books for example “Penguin Classics” or “Vintage Classics”.

The extent to which often independent presses were mentioned was more closely connected to both particular (often cult) authors and again distinctive book cover design:

“I like those heavy paper covers, recycled paper covers mainly because I read some stuff from Black Sparrow Press- Buchowski, and I guess I was just conditioned then to like books with heavy paper covers.”

This participant voices a common thread among several focus group participants who based their preferences for covers on previous successful reading experiences in that they sought to repeat through paying closer attention to books with similar cover designs:

“I think there’s a good link between contemporary literary fiction and contemporary graphic design...If a book has a clever cover then there must be some clever content to produce that.”

In this way the literary reputation of a publisher and the subsequent value placed on a particular publisher was often closely connected to a reader’s previous experience of authors published by the company and the presentation of distinctive book designs.

- ❖ Participants who read more frequently (24-48+ fiction books per year) liked more types of fiction and used more methods to find out about fiction to read than participants who read less frequently (1-12 fiction books per year).

Evidence to support these findings arose from focus group discussions and survey responses and supported examples discussed in the literature. Research

by Yu and O'Brien (1999) for example indicated that readers could be grouped by reading frequency because this had an effect on their fiction choices and search strategies. The current study confirms that this is true for the 18-35 age group. Within focus groups there was a pronounced trend for participants who were more frequent readers to be less exclusively focused on specific genres or types of book. This pattern was mirrored by survey respondents as those who read less frequently rated fewer types of book as "like" or "strongly like" than respondents who read more frequently.

As indicated by focus group discussions survey results also showed that more frequent readers among the survey respondents used significantly more methods to discover new fiction to read. This supports the observation by Ross (2001) following her interviews with frequent readers that "average readers... are likely to have developed fewer successful strategies for choosing books" (Ross, 2001:9).

Also in keeping with focus group discussions, respondents who read 24-48+ books per year were slightly more likely to obtain their fiction online from internet sites such as Amazon with 35.9% (14 respondents) claiming to obtain most of their fiction this way. Traditional bookshops such as Waterstones however also remained a highly popular source for books among more frequent readers with 33.3% (13 respondents) of this group claiming to obtain most of their fiction from bookshops. Respondents who read 1-12 books per year however clearly preferred to obtain books from traditional book shops with 48.8% (20 respondents) choosing traditional bookshops, and only 9.6% selecting internet sites as the place they obtained most of the fiction they read (4 respondents) (see figure 2). Such results were supported by focus group discussions where as one less frequent reader put it:

"I'll buy books that are three for two in Waterstones... I don't use the library or shop online really. I don't read that many books..."

5.2 Final comment

Leemans and Stokmans (1991) indicated that book attributes are hardly physical and that most attributes require some degree of prior knowledge to evaluate them. The absence of functional benefits makes fiction books highly subjective quantities and means that book attributes and the way in which they are evaluated varies considerably between consumers.

Due to the vast and ever increasing quantity of books available any attempt to trace patterns in the attributes consumers use within the subjective arena of fiction selection especially with regards to book cover preferences can provide valuable insight into an area where a limited amount of research has been carried out.

The current study focused on 18-35 year olds because they are a key market for fiction providers as frequent book buyers and a stable proportion of library users. There is also some evidence that more frequent readers fall into this age range. It found this age group to be largely comparable with findings of previous studies which have not focussed on a specific age range.

Results did show however that within this age range the way in which fiction attributes are assessed and obtained can differ significantly with reading frequency, that a book's publisher is rarely considered, and that attractiveness remains an important variable with regards to book cover preference.

5.3 Implications for fiction providers.

A large amount of readers in the current study mentioned their dominant use of online sites such as Amazon to obtain fiction recommendations and peruse book covers. Libraries which could tailor their

catalogues to suggest recommendations to borrowers in a similar way to Amazon might expect to boost circulation of fiction stock.

Many readers mentioned relying on lists and particularly online lists in order to find new fiction material to read. Prominent library and bookshop displays remain a valuable aid to such readers. Perhaps online library accounts could be introduced which suggest a new list of recommended authors when borrowers log in to renew items. Otherwise lists of most popular titles or lists under other headings would appear to remain a useful guide to people of this age.

Covers remain an important consideration for readers of this age group many of whom within this study openly admitted to choosing books on the basis of covers, only 9.6% 11 respondents out of 114 rated cover design as the least important consideration when choosing fiction. Qualitative evidence within this study suggests that a book cover plays an important role in raising awareness of publisher series and can otherwise help match personal interests to potential reading matter. Libraries and other fiction providers should therefore aim to maintain attractive fiction stock where possible and could perhaps incorporate cover imagery into online catalogue records of fiction books.

Readers are mainly aware of publishers through the distinctive book covers of the various series of works they distribute. Readers also appear to judge the literary reputation of a publisher through exterior visual devices such as cover design. Marketing a brand image in this way therefore is highly successful approach for publishing companies amongst people of this age group.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

Results of the current study would appear to support previous research in this area particularly d'Astous et al (2006) with regard to preference for book covers. The number of survey respondents (114) however was smaller than hoped for. It remains to be seen whether research conducted with a greater number of participants would have produced varying results.

Within the current study it was difficult to standardise the level of complexity on the covers as it is such a subjective aspect. Some covers in the 1+ group had up to six elements some covers had just two. Some research into preference and complexity has suggested that the preference for complicated imagery decreases if the image becomes too complex (Cutting, 2003). While as great a number of covers as possible were included in the current study to try and assuage this potential effect, further research using more standardised book cover stimulus is required to ascertain if this affects the preference for book covers.

It was difficult to allow for which participants had read the titles used as stimulus within the focus groups. Perhaps controlling for this would have had an effect on results although this did not have any observable effect as participants were evaluating the cover design alone. The inclusion of different authors also worked to provoke discussion within the groups.

The theory of mere exposure states that the more exposure we have to a stimulus, the more we will tend to like it (Cutting 2003, 334). Some evidence for mere exposure effects in choosing a book cover was indicated within the focus groups as participants often remarked that they had “seen a cover before” and liked it best or that they liked “the main cover” or the most widespread cover design for a particular title. Some survey respondents felt strongly enough about the cover designs that they sent email feedback

enquiring why the “proper cover” and certain widespread covers were not represented. It would be interesting to investigate this further with regard to preference for book covers.

Future research could also delve more deeply into how internet use has affected browsing habits of fiction readers of this age group. Focus group discussions highlighted the key importance of online information sources for frequent readers of this age where there appeared to be a trend towards obtaining information from online lists.

WORDS: 19,612

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Appendix A

Script for focus group:

Thank you all for coming today and agreeing to participate in my research.

I am trying to find out more about how people of the 18-35 year old age group go about choosing books to read. Please make any contributions to the discussion and activities that you think worthwhile. Anything that you can reveal about your fiction selection process (even if you do not consciously have one) is of interest.

In case anyone has any concerns about anonymity I'd like to take this opportunity to reassure everyone that all comments will be anonymous and the dissertation itself will only be available in the University of Sheffield library. I will record discussions for my own reference and any record will be disposed of after I have completed my project

I would like to begin this session with an exercise which will help me in designing the second part of my study.

On the table in front of you are some book cover designs, please could you first of all as a group order these covers into two piles. Those which you consider attractive and those which you feel are less attractive. Use the paper chart for a guide if that helps.

Okay, now finally I would like you to take the most attractive covers and divide them as a group into two piles. One pile with covers that you think hint at 0-1 elements of the story and the other with covers which you think show 1 or more elements of the story

Please do not worry if you have not read the book, I'd like you to divide the covers based on those which seem to you to be hinting a little more or a little less about the contents of the book.

Remember these books have been selected at random and this is not a test of your reading tastes in any way.

(Listen throughout this process and try to guide any discussions sparked off by the stimulus using below questions 1-5 below, not necessarily in order where necessary and appropriate).

Appendix B

Focus group prompt outline:

1). How did you choose your last book?

Prompts

- What sort of factors influence your mood when you choose fiction?
- What sort of a reading experience do you like best or most often go for?

2). How do you find out about new fiction books to read?

Prompts

- Do you have a system?
- How important to your selection are recommendations from friends or family or other authors?

3). What would you say attracts you most about a book cover?

Prompts

- How do you interpret the cover information, what elements do you take most notice of?
- Is there anything you particularly like/dislike

4). Which elements of a book (not on it's cover) do you consider important to your choice?

Prompts

- Subject or genre/ setting?
- Style? Literary/popular
- Characters depicted
- Is the physical size of the book ever a consideration?

5) Is cost (in time or price) a factor in your choice?

Prompts

- Costs in effort taken to read it
- How about how easy it is to obtain a book?

Appendix C

Example of email invitation to complete a questionnaire:

My name is Rachel Graham, and I am an MA Librarianship student at the University of Sheffield investigating aspects connected to the way people aged 18-35 choose fiction.

My supervisor is Briony Train (Briony Train <B.Train@sheffield.ac.uk>) I would be very grateful if you could follow the link below and complete my questionnaire on choosing fiction. The survey will take from 10-15 minutes to complete.

All data you provide will remain totally confidential in line with the Department's ethics procedures. This project has been approved by the Department's Ethics Committee, and the University's Ethics Committee supervises ethical procedures around the University.

Here is the survey link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=IKYt8iDE0tAb_2bZvaEphebg_3d_3d

Many thanks!

Rachel Graham (lip06rag@shef.ac.uk)

Appendix D

Two extracts from the final online survey

1)

Choosing Fiction

1. About this survey

I am an MA Librarianship student at the University of Sheffield investigating aspects connected to the way people aged 18-35 choose fiction.

The following questionnaire will take from 10-15 minutes to complete and is completely anonymous. All data you provide will remain totally confidential in line with the Department's ethics procedures. This project has been approved by the Department's Ethics Committee, and the University's Ethics Committee supervises ethical procedures around the University.

2. Your fiction preferences and how you obtain your fiction

1. Are you?

Male

Female

2. Age?

3. Roughly how many fiction books do you read per year?

1-6 (approx. 1 book every 1-6 months)

6-12 (between 1 book every 6 months to 1 book per month)

12-24 (between 1 and 2 books per month)

24-48 (between 2 and 4 books per month)

48+ (more than 4 books per month)

4. Please indicate the types of fiction you like to read

	Strongly like	Like	Neither like nor dislike	Dislike	Strongly dislike
Action Adventure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fantasy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Horror	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Literary fiction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poetry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Romance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Science Fiction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Western	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>				

5. How do you find new fiction books to read?

Browsing online (blogs, communities,)

Searching online booksellers

Browsing in bookstores or libraries

Looking for genre labels

Limiting searching to certain subject or genre areas

Monitoring displays of new books/ just returned shelves

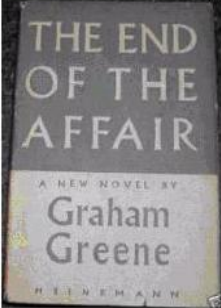
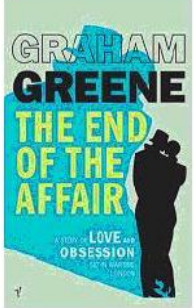
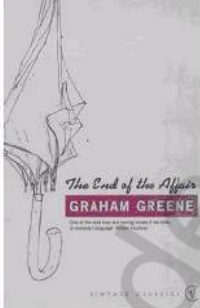
Recommendations from friends, co-workers or family members

2)

Choosing Fiction
 reviews, TV promotions)

Clues on the cover used to determine the reading experience offered	3	3	3	3	3
Elements of the book not on the cover (e.g. characters depicted, ending, thickness, story setting)	3	3	3	3	3
Cost in time or money involved in accessing the book	3	3	3	3	3

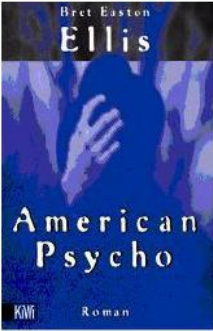
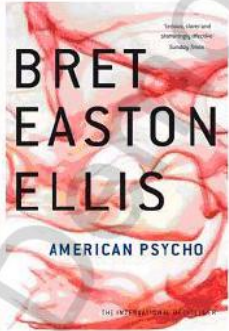
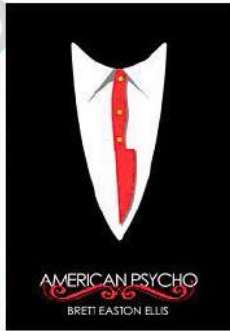
3. Which Fiction book covers do you prefer?

A B C

1. Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

	A	B	C
Most liked	3	3	3
Least liked	3	3	3

A B C

2. Which cover do you prefer?

	A	B	C
Most liked	3	3	3
Least liked	3	3	3

Appendix E

The full survey (reproduced as closely as possible for ease of reading using Word)

Please note the format of the following survey questions appeared differently in the online version of this questionnaire (see extracts 1 and 2 as presented in Appendix D). They are reproduced here as closely and as concisely as possible within the formatting limitations of Word

Choosing Fiction

About this survey

I am an MA Librarianship student at the University of Sheffield investigating aspects connected to the way people aged 18-35 choose fiction.

The following questionnaire will take from 10-15 minutes to complete and is completely anonymous. All data you provide will remain totally confidential in line with the Department's ethics procedures. This project has been approved by the Department's Ethics Committee, and the University's Ethics Committee supervises ethical procedures around the University.

1.) Are you? Male Female

2.) Age:.....

3.) Roughly how many fiction books do you read per year? (Please tick)

- 1-6 (approx 1 book every 1-6 months)
- 6-12 (between 1 book every 6 months to 1 book per month)
- 12-24 (between 1 and 2 books per month)
- 24-48 (between 2 and 4 books per month)
- 48+ (more than 4 books per month)

4.) Please indicate the types of fiction you like to read by placing a tick in the appropriate box below.

	Strongly like	Somewhat like	Neither like nor dislike	Somewhat dislike	Strongly dislike
Action Adventure					
Classics					
Crime					
Fantasy					
Horror					
Literary fiction					
Poetry					
Romance					
Science Fiction					
Western					

5.) How do you find new fiction books to read (Please tick)

- Browsing online (blogs, communities, social networking applications)
- Searching online booksellers
- Browsing in bookstores or libraries
- Looking for genre labels
- Limiting searching to certain subject or genre areas
- Monitoring displays of new books and "just returned" shelves.
- Recommendations from friends, co-workers or family members

- Reviews or advertisements in newspapers, magazines, internet, radio and television
- Viewing dramatized productions of an authors' work in stage-plays, television or films.
- Books highlighted by trusted, favored authors, either within their own books or on publicity blurbs.
- Lists (prize-winning books; books made familiar on course curricula; lists of recommended books produced by libraries, literary critics, or other readers)
- Serendipity (chance discovery)
- Other (please specify).....

6.) Which method (of those listed above) do you use most often to discover new fiction books to read?

.....

7.) Where do you obtain fiction? (Please tick)

- Charity shops
- Traditional bookshop (eg. Waterstones, Borders, Blackwells)
- Friends
- Internet sites
- Music shops which also sell books (eg. Fopp, Music Zone, HMV, Virgin)
- Public Library
- Supermarket
- University Library

Other (please state)

8.) Of the places listed above where do you obtain most of the fiction you read? (Please indicate ONE place only)

.....

9.) How important to your choice of fiction are the following seven aspects?

Please rank them in order of importance 1-7

Author

Cover design

Genre

Publisher

Sample Page

Title

Summary /description

10.) What is the most important factor when considering the **author** of a fiction book?

Previous experience of the author

Literary reputation of author

Fame of the author

Other (please state).....

11.) What is the most important factor when considering the **cover** of a fiction book?

If I considered the cover to be attractive

A strong link between cover image and title / subject of book

Positive reviews displayed on the cover

Other (please state).....

12.) What is the most important factor when considering the **publisher** of a fiction book?

Previous experience of the publisher

Literary reputation of publisher

Fame of publisher

Other (please state).....

13.) Do you have any favourite publishers? (please tick one box)

Yes (Please state).....

No

I don't consider the publisher when choosing fiction.

14.) Which of these five elements exerts the most influence when you choose fiction? Please rate them from 1 to 5.

..... Reading experience wanted: "what mood am I in?"

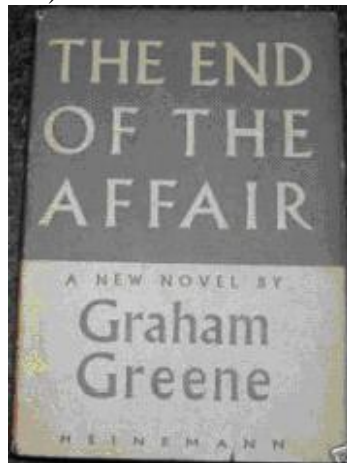
..... The methods or sources I use to find out about new books (friends suggestions, reviews, TV promotions)

..... Elements of a book that I take into account in order to match book choices to the reading experience desired

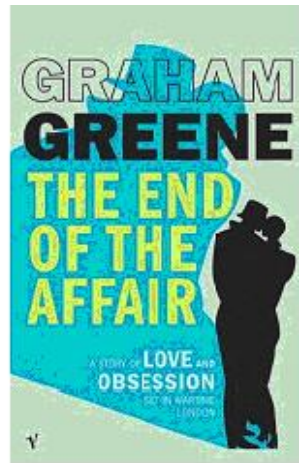
..... Clues on the book itself used to determine the reading experience offered

..... Cost in time or money involved for me in getting intellectual or physical access to a particular book

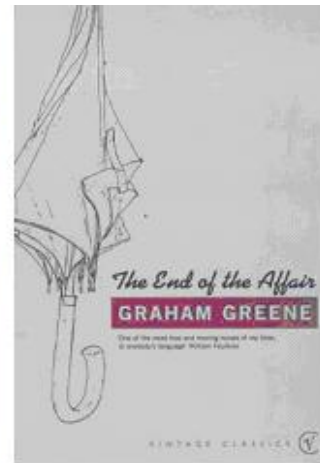
15.)



A



B



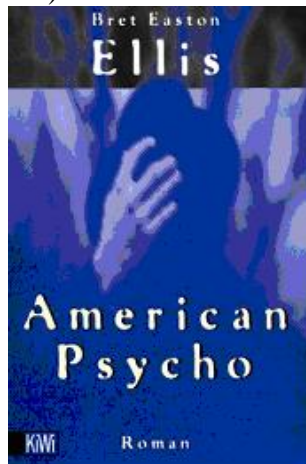
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

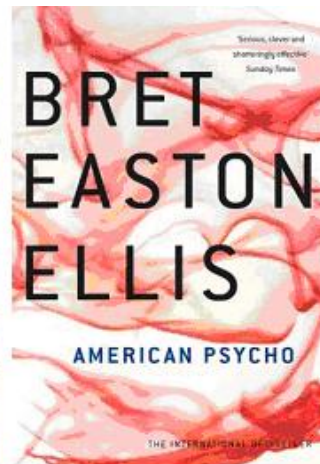
Most liked

Least liked

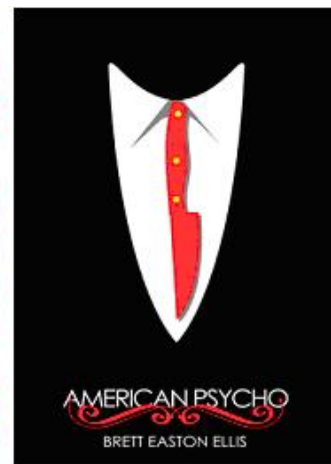
16.)



A



B



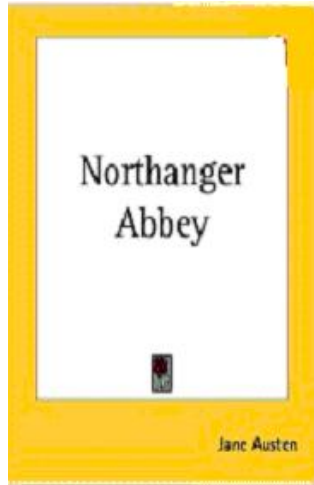
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Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

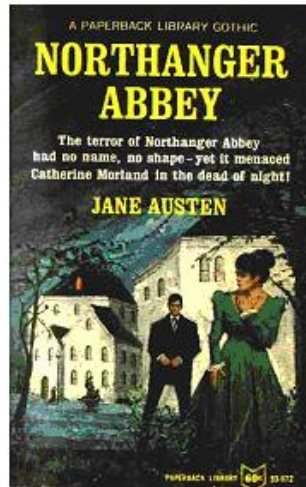
Most liked

Least liked

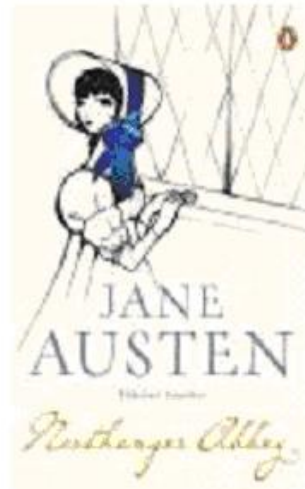
17.)



A



B



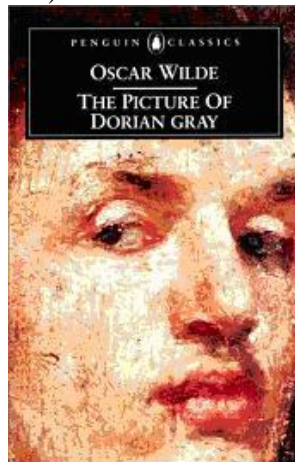
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

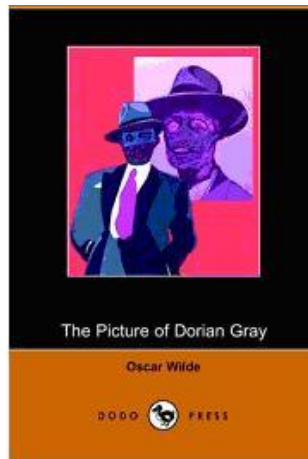
Most liked

Least liked

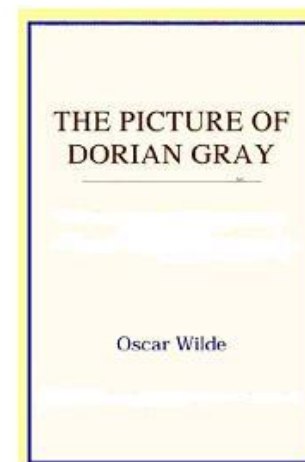
18.)



A



B



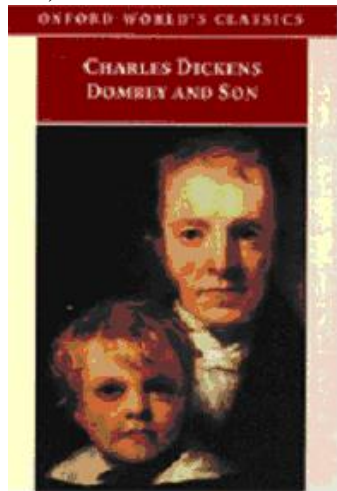
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

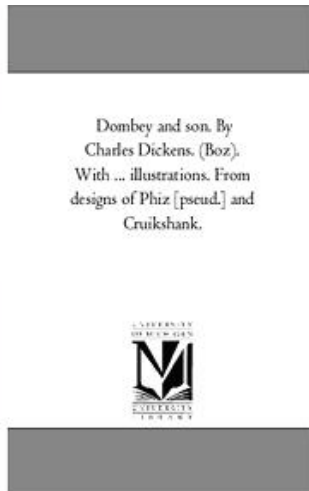
Most liked

Least liked

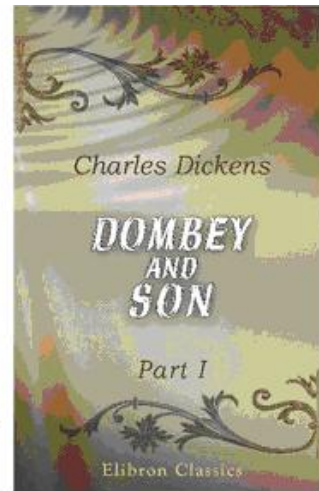
19.)



A



B



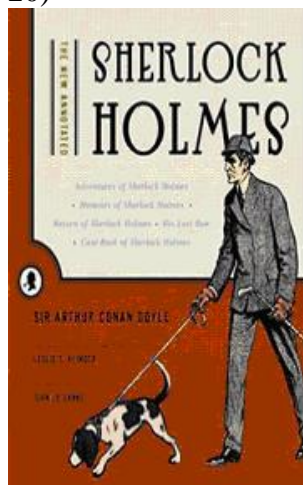
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

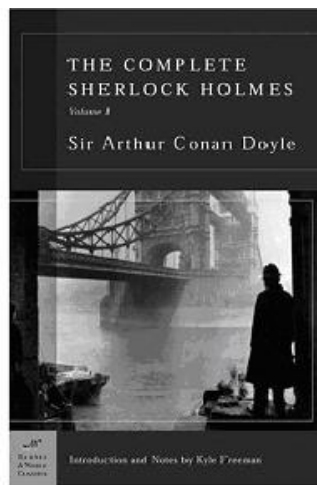
Most liked

Least liked

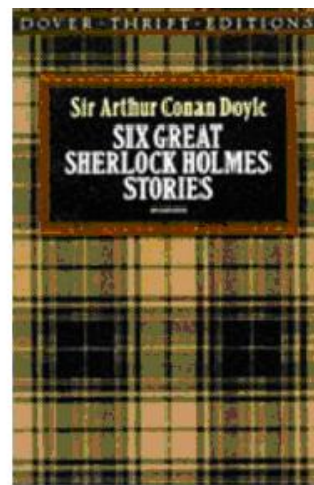
20)



A



B



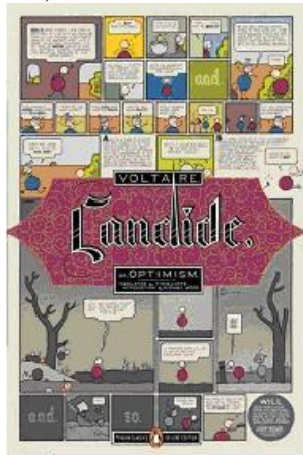
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

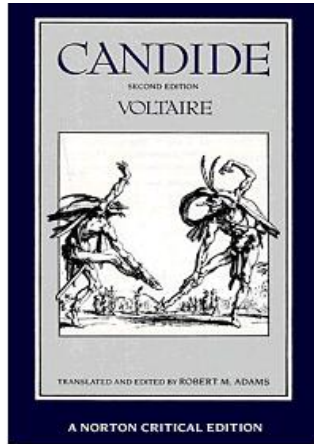
Most liked

Least liked

21.)



A



B



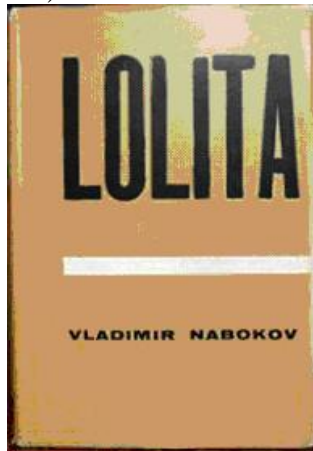
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

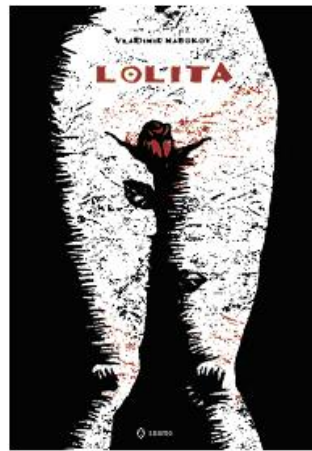
Most liked

Least liked

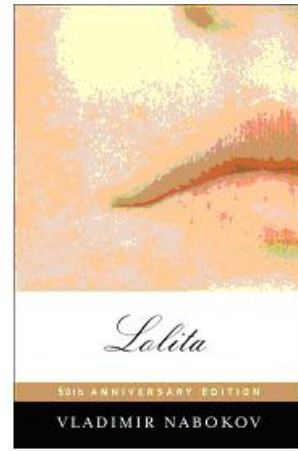
22.)



A



B



C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

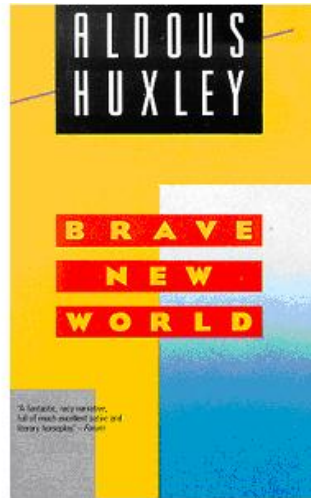
Most liked

Least liked

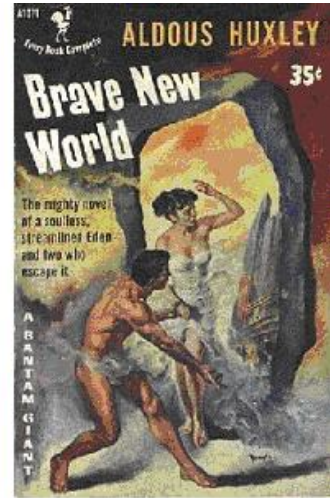
23.)



A



B



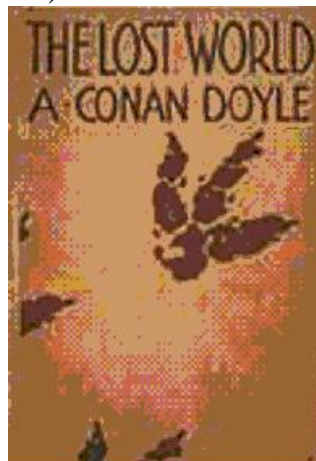
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

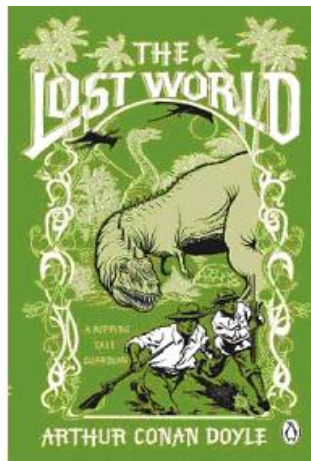
Most liked

Least liked

24.)



A



B



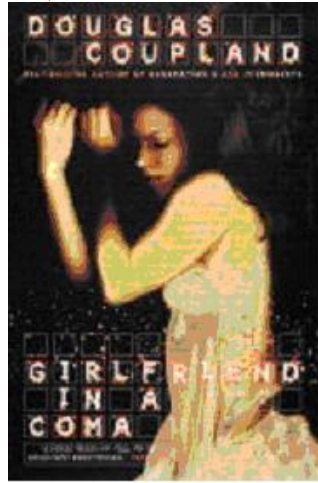
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

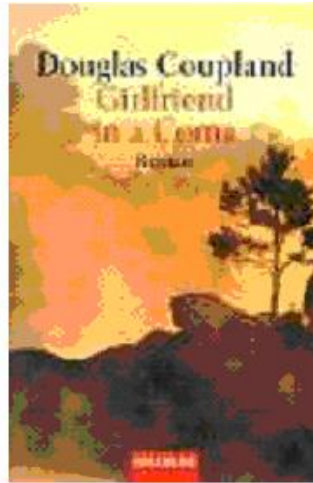
Most liked

Least liked

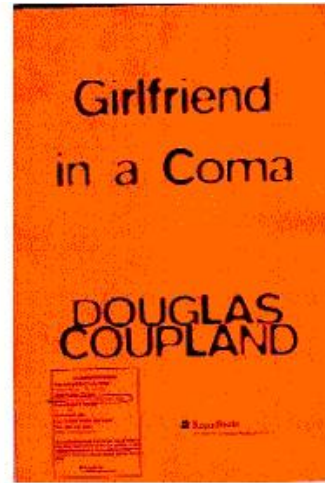
25.)



A



B



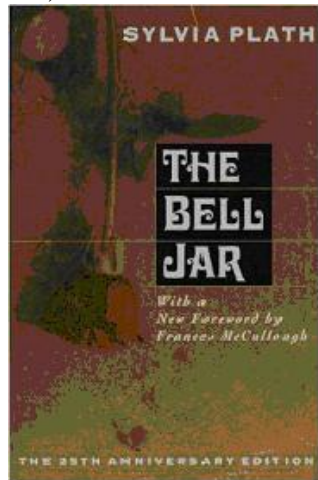
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

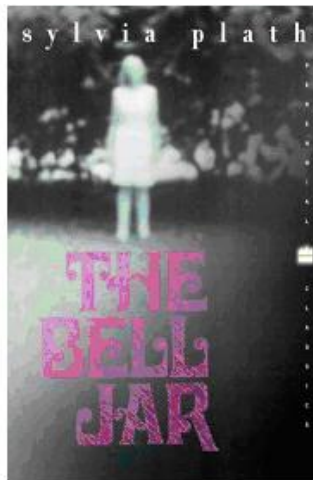
Most liked

Least liked

26.)



A



B



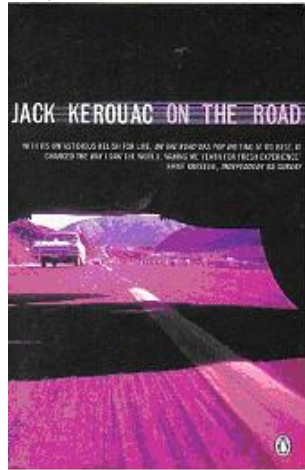
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

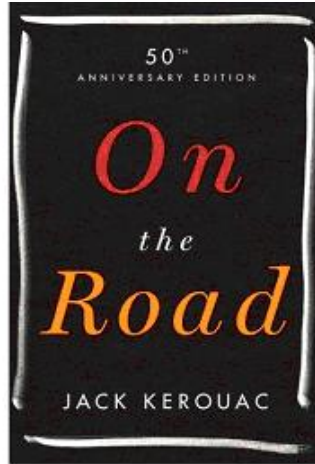
Most liked

Least liked

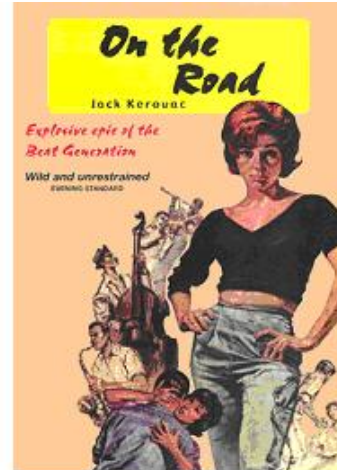
27.)



A



B



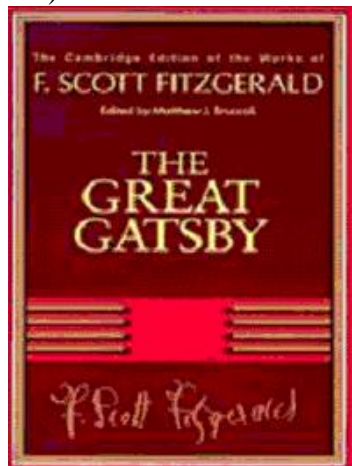
C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

Most liked

Least liked

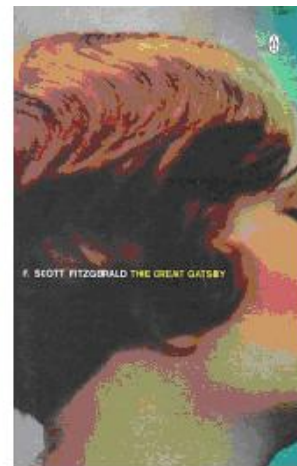
28.)



A



B



C

Which cover do you prefer A, B or C?

Most liked

Least liked

Appendix F

Guide to cover layout in survey questions 15-28

Question, cover number and author	Unattractive	Attractive	Attractive + more details
Question 15 Cover 1 Greene	A	C	B
Question 16 Cover 2 Ellis	A	B	C
Question 17 Cover 3 Austen	A	C	B
Question 18 Cover 4 Ellison	C	A	B
Question 19 Cover 5 Dickens	B	C	A
Question 20 Cover 6 Doyle (Sherlock)	C	A	B
Question 21 Cover 7 Voltaire	C	B	A
Question 22 Cover 8 Nabokov	A	C	B
Question 23 Cover 9 Huxley	B	A	C
Question 24 Cover 10 Doyle (Lost World)	C	A	B
Question 25 Cover 11 Coupland	C	B	A
Question 26 Cover 12 Plath	A	B	C
Question 27 Cover 13 Kerouac	B	A	C
Question 28 Cover 14 Fitzgerald	A	C	B

