

## DIGITAL BOOK CONSUMPTION AS A FORM OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION, BEFORE AND DURING THE PANDEMIC

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**Abstract.** *The present paper aims to analyze digital book consumption behavior, as a form of sustainable consumption, compared to traditional print book consumption, before and during the pandemic. After a brief theoretical presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of using the electronic book, especially from the perspective of environmental protection, the paper continues with a secondary analysis of statistical data regarding the current book market at the European and national level, as well as regarding the digital and printed book consumption behavior before and during the pandemic. The applied approach is based on qualitative research carried out through interviews with representatives of the publishers, but also with consumers, and book readers. Book consumption behavior in Romania hasn't changed significantly during the pandemic: the change was only the purchase channel that completely shifted to online, as well as increased interest in motivational and applied psychology books. People devoted more time to reading during this period due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. In response to being constantly connected to technology and social media, people prefer to read books in a classic way. The future of book consumption in the short to medium term is likely to split between online and offline to respond to new book consumption trends and behaviors, and online is likely to continue to grow. Considering the need to protect the environment through sustainable consumption, the future will probably belong to e-books, not that printed books will disappear altogether, but they will probably be more expensive and people will find it easier to consume e-books.*

**Keywords:** *book market; digital book; pandemic; printed book; sustainable consumption.*

### Introduction

Although the gadget industry has exploded locally, as well as globally, e-book sales have struggled. "The Internet brought the book a *click* away from the reader, and the pandemic period gave the impression of a revival of the percentage of readers. In fact,

the percentage of those who purchased books during the pandemic did not change significantly in Romania. However, the method of payment has seen important changes in this period of time, with Romanians preferring to purchase printed books online and paying by card" (Gîju, 2021).

The present paper aims to analyze digital book consumption behavior, as a form of sustainable consumption, compared to traditional print book consumption, before and during the pandemic. The first part of the paper consists of a brief theoretical presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of electronic book consumption, especially from the perspective of environmental protection. After a secondary analysis of statistical data regarding the current book market at the European and national levels, and regarding the digital and printed book consumption behavior before and during the pandemic, our research consisted of interviews with professionals in the book industry and consumers, book readers.

Players of the worldwide publishing industry commit themselves to a new sustainable business policy. They signed a 10 points document – "The Sustainable Development and Growth Publishers Compact (SDG)" that stipulates, among other, their main concerns about the environment, policies, and targets of their activity, themes they advocate, progress they register in fulfilling the mission of their business (United Nations, 2020).

The health crisis caused by the Covid-19 virus had and still has a major influence on consumer behavior, in just a few weeks after the pandemic began, it changed the way people behaved, regardless of the type of consumption we are referring to. Social distancing and location constraints have changed the habits of individuals to consume, but also to shop: 66% of people declared the quality and price of products as essential in the purchasing process during the pandemic. Another trend observed during this period was the orientation of purchases towards local products at the expense of imported ones: 33% of the respondents who participated in the research stated that during the pandemic they preferred to order food products online (Cârstoiu, 2020).

The book market has also been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Our research aims to identify and compare the consumption behavior of books in the digital and printed format before and during the pandemic, from the professionals (editors, marketing managers, and other categories of professionals involved in the book market) and book readers (consumers) point of view. The general objective is detailed in specific objectives aiming at characterizing the book purchasing during the lockdown and post-pandemic period, the book market evaluation during these two periods, and defining the preferences of the Romanian readers in those periods. As final conclusion, the paper designs a few of the book market trends: printed and/or digital formats.

## **1. The current book market at the European and national level**

When referring to books in electronic format there are both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is preservation over time, speed, price (lower than classic books), and nature protection. "The printed book consumes paper, therefore wood, it

consumes polluting chemical products (printing inks), it consumes energy to be multiplied in the printing press. It requires huge spaces for storage in publishing houses, until the sale phase - so, again, high costs. The electronic book: it does not pollute, its circulation never runs out, it does not require transport and storage - any home, online store, or library can house any number of titles. Any reader can purchase and download, in a few tens of seconds, any number of titles. Access to the book, therefore to the content, is, if not unlimited, in any case, increased thousands of times by the electronic book" (Michailov, 2014).

The weakness of the electronic format is the reduced sense of satisfaction of classic book lovers. Electronic books should not be perceived as a minus for the book market; they are not a replacement for printed books, but rather an adaptation to modern society's new trends and needs. Moreover, "individuals who already have habits of intensive reading on paper will also be those who will read digitally, and vice versa" (Gîju, 2021, p. 39).

During the lockdown, individuals were forced to buy more online, and these habits have persisted into the present and will somehow define the immediate future. Before the pandemic, brands focused on the core target, communicating in an emotional way, and people arrived at the point of sale and purchased the respective brands. The pandemic fundamentally changed the initial process: "It's about every click that buyers and consumers make on the Internet. It is increasingly difficult to follow the sequence of decisions, of interaction points from the moment a consumer hears about a brand to the moment he ends up consuming it at home" (Iordăchescu, 2021).

The pandemic also fundamentally changed how people searched for information about the brands they wanted to buy: they turned more to advise and word-of-mouth recommendations, becoming the main sources of influence in the purchase process. Influencer marketing substantially grew during this period: "Many of the influencers now have millions of followers. The impact of digital technology, in general, and social media, in particular, on consumer behavior is massive and omnipresent in their daily lives" (Sheth, 2020, pp. 280-283). One of the essential factors influencing the purchase process is social interaction; being permanently connected to social networks, people interact with each other to exchange opinions, recommendations, or information that can help them make a purchase decision (Yang, 2021).

The last years have marked, globally, an era of digitization of books, archives, and manuscripts existing in libraries around the world, a huge amount of information, with the aim of being accessed online by as many people as possible (Gîju, 2021). With this digitization process, printed books are converted into electronic books to be accessible to the public online. With this transformation, a new audience is emerging that prefers to read online and that we can define as an individual who uses certain gadgets or devices specially designed for reading, to satisfy the pleasure of reading (Gîju, 2021). In the antithesis is the traditional reader who still prefers to read classic books, purchasing printed books from specialized stores or online from websites that sell books.

With the release of the first e-book and the evolution of social media, it was predicted that the world would stop reading classic books, but this did not happen, and studies show that people prefer classic print books more than ever. In a survey conducted between January and February, 2021 by Pew Research, 65% of respondents said they had read classic printed books in the past year, with print remaining the most popular book format for those who read (Perrin, 2022).

Even though people's lives are increasingly invaded by technology through various gadgets suitable for online books, such as kindle, e-books, or various reading applications available on iPhones or virtual libraries, people still enjoy classic reading. Although the e-book market has enjoyed an upward trend in recent years, it remains a niche in Romania and globally. "Hundreds of thousands of books are still printed in the classic format in Romania and in the world, publishing houses exhibiting annually, at their (physical, but also virtual) stands, the newest editorials" (Gîju, 2021, pp. 20- 21).

The small number of e-reader owners, purchasing power, a small supply of titles, and a lack of demand are the main reasons why the digital book market remains small. Even if the digital book is not currently enjoying success, it will not disappear, on the contrary, it will coexist in parallel with the classic printed book (Michailov, 2014).

Currently, Romanian publishers consider electronic books a plus for the book market, and transitioning from a printed book to an electronic one is a natural transformation. To further emphasize the importance of this change, an analogy is made with the period in which there was a transition from papyrus to parchment, and then to manuscript and paper. E-reading is rather a new option for readers. The electronic book does not compete with the classic printed book, book formats are not in competition, but complements each other to meet the current needs of readers (Pătrășconiu, 2019, p. 5).

In 2020 the global book market was valued at \$132.1 billion and is expected to grow by 2.4% by 2028: "Technological innovations in the industry, with the emergence of e-books based on audio and video, attract consumers from all regions" (Grand View Research, 2021).

Rising consumer spending, along with an increased focus on personal development, is driving the book market. Consumers are more willing to spend on various products and services according to their hobbies and interests. In addition, more importance is given to leisure activities, leading to an increase in readership. Before the pandemic in 2017, the book market in Romania was estimated to have a turnover of approximately 100 million euros annually and was going to grow. In 2020, the most important 70 publishing houses on the Romanian market registered a decrease of 7.1% compared to 2019, reaching a value of approximately 84.06 million euros (Barbu, 2021a).

In Romania, there are approximately 1,000 publishing houses and 350 merchants according to a study carried out by KeysFin in 2016. Approximately 50% of bookstores and publishing houses are located in Bucharest, where almost 60% of the national business occurs, approximately 60 million euros annually (Negrescu, 2018). The top 10 publishing houses in Romania in 2020 according to their turnover and dynamics

compared to 2019 are as follows: Grup Editorial Litera – 16.2 million euros, a decrease of 12.6% compared to 2019; Art Klett – 5.9 million euros, an increase of 8% compared to 2019; Polirom – 5.8 million euros (-11%); Trei Publishing House – 4.2 million euros (-3%); Humanitas – 3.76 million euros (-7.8%), Paralela 45 – 3.73 million euros (-11.4%); Curtea Veche Publishing – 3.3 million euros (+1%); Booklet – 3.01 million euros (-10.4%); Didactica Publishing House – 2.9 million euros (+5.1%); RAO- 2.7 million euros (+0.1%) (Barbu, 2021a).

Following a CAWI-type analysis carried out within the Eureka Insights Consumer Panel, the most important categories of books that Romanians read in 2018 were: fiction, leisure hobby, psychology, pedagogy, foreign book, history, self-help (personal development), gastronomy, business, books for children, diets and fitness, philosophy, medicine, auxiliary textbooks for school, spirituality, foreign languages, exact sciences, art, architecture, and photography, travel guides books, religion, parenting and family, dictionaries, law and sociology (Eureka Insights, 2018).

Like many other industries, the book industry has been affected by the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus. Measures taken to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus have led to the closure of brick-and-mortar bookstores and a sharp drop in book sales. A study published by the Federation of European Publishers reveals that, in April 2020, book sales fell by up to 96% at the European level, with e-book sales failing to cover the losses recorded by physical bookstores. At the height of the crisis, book sales fell by 80% in Portugal and Spain, 85% in Italy, and 90% in Slovenia (Verheyen & Kraus Vom Cleff, 2021).

In 2020 in France, with the emergency and the introduction of quarantine, book sales fell by 96% in large bookstores and up to 89% in small bookstores compared to the same period in 2019. Germany saw a 47% drop in value in retail book sales, and in Italy, bookstore sales fell by up to 85%. Decreases of up to 90% were recorded in Spain and Slovenia. The UK market did not do better for books either, registering in May 2020, at only 18% of normal values, with publishers reporting decreases in turnover of up to 60%. In the same period, Belgian booksellers of French books recorded decreases of up to 95% of turnover" (Verheyen & Kraus Vom Cleff, 2021, p. 5).

Another negative effect of the pandemic was the impossibility of organizing book fairs, public readings, festivals, and other important events for authors and books. Book fairs (as well as other events, from book festivals to public readings in bookstores) have been stopped, rescheduled, or permanently moved online, at the time of the declaration of the state of emergency and entry into quarantine (Verheyen & Kraus Vom Cleff, 2021).

In Romania, the decrease in the book market was only 7.1%, because we are referring to a considerably smaller market, Romania being at the bottom of the ranking in book consumption even before the pandemic (Wall-Street, 2021).

In 2020 during the quarantine period, Romania recorded up to 30% increases compared to the previous year in online book sales. The preferred literature was thriller, romance,

and children's books. Some of the most sought-after poetry authors were Mihai Eminescu and Alexandru Macedonski (Wall-Street, 2021).

According to the GpecC e-commerce study in Romania, carried out by iSense Solutions, book sales increased by 113% in 2021 compared to 2020, reaching second place in terms of online sales, with the average value of purchases increasing from 127 to 269 lei (approx. increasing from 30 euro to 55 euro) (iSense solutions, 2021).

Between January and June 2020, 58% of Romanians aged 18-65 read books in print at least once, and after the relaxation of restrictions, the percentage dropped to 52%, while reading books in electronic format remained constant in the two reference periods, at 32% (Croitoru & Marinescu, 2021).

## **2. Digital and printed book consumption behavior before and during the pandemic**

According to a study carried out by Starcom in 2020, at the level of consumption behavior of printed books in Romania, there were no significant changes compared to 2019. Young people and women were and remain the main buyers of books. Young people purchase books, especially for school, and women "continue to have the greatest affinity for prose and poetry. As expected, families with children have the highest affinity for children's books (most likely related to childcare), while singles, young singles, for specialist books (most likely related to education). Regardless of their age or status, people prefer bookstores as a purchase channel, most likely appreciating walking through the bookshelves as an authentic experience. Teenagers are the ones who read the most on a daily and weekly basis. Regarding e-book consumption, there were no significant changes" (Starcom, 2020, p. 12).

Regarding reading behavior before the pandemic, 40% of respondents read once a week, 30% read on average 2-3 times a week, and the rest read more often. On average, people read 4 times in a week. Regarding the length of the reading session, 13% of readers allocate between 15-30 minutes of their time for reading, 45% allocate between 31-45 minutes, 22% between 46-75 minutes, and 19% between 76-120 or several minutes. To summarize, in the urban environment, the average duration allocated to a reading session by Romanians is approximately 64 minutes (Eureka Insights, 2018). Before the pandemic, a market study was carried out regarding Romanians' book consumption and purchase behavior, from which it emerged that the audiobook and e-book formats represented 51% of online book sales in 2017 (Iacob, 2017).

During the pandemic, Romanians in the 36-59 age group mostly read novels and specialized books. Regarding reading frequency, women aged 36-59 read the most during the pandemic. Classic books, on paper, are the books preferred by most Romanians. Regarding the preference for purchasing books, Romanians like to purchase books, especially from bookstores, but due to the pandemic, many people have purchased books online. In the urban environment, in the context of the pandemic, 50% of individuals preferred books in classic printed format, the e-book being used by a much smaller percentage (including rural readers).

People preferred to read classic printed books to the detriment of electronic ones, one of the explanations being that "readers tired of the monitors they were connected to with telework or supervising children at online school" chose to read books in classic printed format (Gîju, 2021, pp. 111-112). A year and a half after the start of the pandemic in Romania, "e-book sales have dropped dramatically", due to the work carried out mainly at home, to which the children's online school is added, most Romanians prefer to read a book in classic format than to "browse it on a phone, tablet or e-reader" (Gîju, 2021, p. 117).

The health crisis has brought some changes regarding the consumption of books in our country, observing an increased interest in children's books, as well as in local writers such as Mircea Cărtărescu, Radu Paraschivescu and Ioana Pârvulescu (Cincea, 2022). People purchased books mainly online, increasing the importance of personal recommendations vs. recommendations made by publishing houses through paid advertisements in social media (Barbu, 2021b). And the consumption of e-books has increased, by more than 300% compared to the same period last year. Other changes during this period are related to preferences for the type of book read: personal development books, activity books for children, practical books for adults, and, above all, fiction books sold best. For obvious reasons, travel books had the weakest sales (Barbu, 2021c).

Internationally, in some countries budgets allocated to books have been cut from the shopping list of consumers in several countries such as Brazil, South Africa, the UK, France, and Spain, where people spent up to 49% less on purchasing books. In countries such as India and Korea, book consumption has remained at the same level as before the pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2020). As for the e-book market in Europe, e-book sales increased during the lockdown, but home-learning books were among the highly demanded literature, which recorded an advance of +62% in France and +134% in Spain. During the pandemic, Spain tripled its e-book sales (GFK, 2020).

In several countries, some publishers have preferred to release certain book titles only in electronic format. In some countries where bookstores were not forced to close, online and e-book sales failed to offset the decline in bookstore sales (Gabriel & Vanschoobeek, 2020).

### **3. Book consumption behavior in digital format vs. printed before and during the pandemic**

#### ***Research methodology***

The research aims to identify the consumption behavior of books in digital format compared to that of printed books before and during the pandemic, from a comparative perspective between the two periods. The research was carried out through the qualitative method, using the interview technique. The tool we used in data collection was the interview guide. In order to have a complete and objective picture of the situation, interviews were conducted with two groups of subjects: with representatives of the publishers, as well as with consumers, and book readers.

In order to identify the status of the book market, the changes that have taken place at its level and to identify if there have been major changes during this period, we have developed a set of questions that we addressed to some professionals in book editing. The specific objectives aimed at: identifying the characteristics of the books purchased during the quarantine/pandemic period and in the post-pandemic period; evaluation of the book market during the pandemic; defining the book format preferred by Romanians during the pandemic digital/classic printed format; sketching the future of book formats.

In order to analyze book consumption behaviors in depth and to identify if there have been changes during the pandemic period compared to the period before, the following objectives were aimed at understanding book consumers and their needs: understanding book consumer behavior in quarantine and pandemic period; identifying potential changes in book consumption during the quarantine and pandemic period compared to the previous period; the type of books preferred by book readers; understanding the motivations for book consumption. The interviews were conducted with a group of 20 people between the ages of 18 and 35, the age range that reads most frequently, both classic printed books and electronic books, as shown in the study *Trends of cultural consumption in Pandemic*, 2nd edition, produced by the National Institute for Cultural Research and Training (Croitoru, Marinescu, 2021). Our respondents are women and men, from the urban environment, passionate about reading, books, and social media communication. The interviews took place between May and June 2022.

### ***Analysis and interpretation of data***

*Analysis and interpretation of data obtained from interviews with professionals in the field*

Having to comply with the restrictions imposed by law in order to stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus, people had more time at their disposal, thus they paid more attention to reading: *"People seemed much more interested in the book at the beginning, to fill the spare time, initially they thought that everything would pass much faster. The material concerns intervened and I think the interest was diluted"* (P1). But not all people consistently read more, only those who are passionate about books: *"During the pandemic, people's preferences and priorities have changed dramatically along with the general insecurity induced by health and economic situation, so that only the most passionate readers have continued to consider the book a priority"* (P2).

Regarding book consumption in general, it did not change much during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period: *"Consumption decreased at the beginning of the pandemic, and then it adjusted, returned to pre-pandemic levels"* (P3).

Lately, publishers and industry specialists are facing other difficulties that have an even greater impact on book consumption. The inflation rate, gas, electricity, and food prices are testing the book industry more than the pandemic did: *"A gradual return to pre-pandemic normality has been tried and is being tried, even if - including now - the conditions are much more drastic (the increased price of paper, production costs,*



*electricity, etc.)" (P2); "We haven't noticed any other changes, except for price increases (paper, printing, distribution), but book consumption, in our country, has remained constant (perhaps because we haven't increased the selling prices yet)" (P4); "The war came, another kind of pandemic, it's worse than in a pandemic" (P5).*

According to specialists in the book industry, the main segment of the public who read both during the pandemic and before the pandemic, and who buys books in general, is the *"Intellectual and the pensioner from among intellectuals" (P4) or "the intellectual without money" (P5)*. However, during the pandemic, a new consumer profile took a better shape: *"those who were more dependent on mobility, travel, young people in corporations consumed more books" (P3)*

Regarding the evolution of book kinds, specialists in the book industry claim that there were no major changes, but there were new book types that were launched during the pandemic: *"suddenly there were books inspired by this phenomenon (pandemic), of research and interpretation (including politics), but especially intimate diaries, novels, poems. Having time and reasons to stay at home, writers produced" (P4)* and there was also an increased interest in books for children, motivational and psychology books: *"But I noticed an interest in children's books and psychology" (P1) "for motivational books, but I don't sell such books" (P5).*

Regarding the promotion of books during the pandemic, all the specialists in the industry answered firmly that the only way of promotion they used during the quarantine was the online channel and social media: *"As far as we are concerned, the activities of online promotion worked" (P1); "Through social media and, in general, online promotion" (P2).*

Consumer preferences during the pandemic underwent some changes in the type of book, but that also depended on the offer or what the respective publishing house promoted: *"There is a greater inclination towards Romanian writers" (P2)*. Not only people's preferences have changed, but also the reader itself *"I imagine that it's not the preferences that have changed, but the readers themselves, altogether, now a more pragmatic and hurried generation is emerging" (P4).*

The impact of the pandemic and especially the quarantine has been quite strong in terms of this market, but not as strong as it has happened in other industries. Even so, the impact was not felt in the same way by all publishers, bookshops or online stores, some were affected more and closed, others remained at the same level and others registered increases: *"Unfortunately the pandemic meant the end for some publishing houses, which were unable to manage the extremely low current interest in the book. For others, it meant extreme caution, which translated into a low number of editorial appearances. The result of these trends was a very small number of books sold" (P2); "I don't know, in general, the publishing house F. has stagnated" (P4); "Consumption decreased at the beginning of the pandemic, and then adjusted, returned to pre-pandemic levels" (P3)*. The post-pandemic period is still too short to draw any relevant conclusions, but book publishers state that during this period the book market seems to

be on a somewhat upward trend: *"The book market seems to be on a slightly upward path"* (P2).

Regarding the literature kinds, Romanians' preferences have not changed much, people are generally loyal to the book they consume. The only changes identified are the type of motivational books that has grown quite a lot in the last 10 years and the fact that people read less than 10 years ago: *"The same types of books are consumed, to which motivational books have been added, in congruence with the general trend"* (P2); *"Books were eaten on bread"* (P5).

Print books were undoubtedly the most purchased during the pandemic, however, publishers say there have been increases in e-book consumption. Regarding the future of printed and electronic books, book industry specialists don't see a replacement of classic printed books with electronic books any time soon, but they don't rule it out: *"change will occur constantly. But it will take a few years before we see the electronic book at the level of the printed one"* (P3); *"as a modern person gets used to reading on paper, and writing at the same time, probably after at least another generation, the electronic format will dominate. For Romanians, however, just as the horse-drawn cart has not yet disappeared from the roads, even national roads, the same is true with the book on paper: it will not disappear even after 100 years!"* (P4).

As long as these book formats exist on the market, specialists do not exclude the fact that the future of books may belong to the electronic format: *"electronic books, if they have a present, the more they will have a future, including in audio format, but also in another format now hard to anticipate, because the human mind works continuously"* (P4).

Referring to a small book market, book industry specialists argue that the book market value cannot really decrease, possibly it will remain constant or increase, but all this also depends on the economic situation of individuals: *"it will increase provided that the income (purchasing power) of the citizen (employee) increases in relation to inflation. Otherwise, I estimate a temporarily downward curve (a year or two) with an upward trend afterward, provided that the war in Ukraine does not spread to the rest of Europe"* (P4).

As for the future of literature preferences, specialists in the book industry do not expect very big changes, but there will be some trends that will redefine both the book format and the type: *"it will remain constant, with a qualitative addition to the graphic presentation, according to western models. At the same time, the paper book will become more expensive"* (P4); *"I think that, by and large, the same types of books (with small additions) will be successful"* (P2).

#### *Analysis and interpretation of data obtained from interviews with book readers*

During the three months of quarantine, the 18-35 age group read an average of about 10 books. Among the people interviewed there was only one person who declared that he had not read any books, and at the opposite pole we had young people who declared that they had read between 30 and 40 books: *"Around 30-40, I did not keep the evidence"* (C5).

In terms of reading behavior, most young people claim that they have not changed their reading habits at all, however the average number of books read in the first months of 2022 is 7 books, compared to the average number of books read in quarantine which is 10: *"No, there are periods when I read a lot and periods when I don't read at all, and this was not influenced by the quarantine. And in quarantine, I had moments when I read a lot, and moments when I didn't read at all"* (C10). However, the quarantine represented for some young people a moment of change in terms of their behavior towards books and the types they read: *"I'm ashamed to say that I don't really read books, but that's the truth. Quarantine was a miserable time. Being bored, isolated from the world, just me and my family in a house, electronic devices started to bore me too, I couldn't find anything new or interesting anymore, I was up-to-date with everything. I knew I had some books around the house that I had bought a long time ago, and I decided to slowly start reading them. So the lockdown made me start reading again"* (C18); *"It didn't influence me. Maybe the number of books read, yes"* (C19); *"Very much. The pandemic gave me the chance to get to know myself and that's how I discovered self-help literature that helped me during that time to get rid of certain dark thoughts and emotions and to develop myself"* (C3).

Most interview participants stated that their reading behavior had not changed significantly. Despite the fact that the time for reading decreased quite a bit after the quarantine period and especially after the return to normality, many readers in the 18-35 age group stated that they read to the same extent or even more: *"I read more books, the psychoanalytic or psychological ones are interesting, the ones that make you know the person better"* (C16); *"Since I was already working from home before the pandemic, my habits remained almost unchanged, but towards the end of 2021 I started reading a lot in the evening, after 10-11 pm"* (C13); *"The frequency of reading actually increased, compared to the first part of the pandemic"* (C4).

The return to normality didn't bring significant changes in reading behavior, on the contrary, young people read just as much: *"Besides the fact that I don't read that much anymore due to lack of free time, my behavior has remained unchanged. I continue to read the same kinds of books and the method I use to read them has not changed"* (C17); *"I read a lot more than I watch Netflix and I go outside more"* (C11).

The types of books they read during this period have not undergone major changes, with most respondents claiming that they have not changed their preferences: *"I can't say that I have changed the type of books I read. I generally read fantasy, drama, romance or historical books"* (C8), *"Personal development, psychology, memoirs. The types of books that attract me have been the same for several years, they have not changed during the pandemic or not related to it"* (C12); *"Diversified, mostly thriller, fantasy and general fiction then and now"* (C2).

During the quarantine period, some readers turned to personal development and psychology books, a habit that didn't persist even after the quarantine was over. Young people felt the need to find a balance and connect with themselves, so they felt the need to read more books on personal development, sociology and psychology: *"Back then I was reading self-help (personal development) and scientific, now I read literature, fiction"*

*(for school), scientific literature" (C19); "During the pandemic, I read social, psychological books in particular, and currently I read the same kind of books, but also about management or social media" (C11); "Then personal development, now fiction" (C13).*

Also during the quarantine period, we also noticed an increase in fiction and fantasy. From a desire to disconnect from negative news and social media, some young people preferred to read books that let themselves be carried away in other worlds: *"During the pandemic I read a lot of fiction, especially historical, and now I'm heading more often towards non-fiction, memoirs and thrillers" (C12); "I started reading fantasy, thriller and personal development, and now I read a lot of fantasy, thriller and romance" (C6); "During the quarantine, I read a lot of science fiction, detective and mystery books, but also classics, now I read more comics and graphic novels" (C8).*

Most respondents associate reading with relaxation, satisfying curiosities, learning, transforming oneself, as well as disconnecting from everyday life: *"Books relax me, they transport me to a parallel universe, where I can step into the shoes of other characters and experience, together with them, certain experiences and feelings. Books and reading in general expand your vocabulary and help develop creativity. When I read, I like to imagine the action unfolding in my mind, build the characters and change their experiences step by step, depending on how the action changes too" (C15). But more than that, books give them pleasure and the opportunity to connect with themselves: "I read sometimes to find myself" (C1); "For pleasure and to stay educated/informed. It resonates with my personal wisdom value" (C11).*

When buying a book, the 18-35 age group is mainly motivated by the satisfaction of the desire for knowledge/self-knowledge, progress, and satisfaction of curiosity: *"Problems that arise in my life (an emotional problem occurs - I get a self-help book that I think it would help me)" (C7); "Personal / professional progress" (C14); "Basically curiosity, if it looks like an interesting book or if I have a book in the series and want to know how the story continues. Also, curiosity if a book is recommended to me by a friend" (C2).*

According to the answers received, young people in the age group of 18-35 buy their books mainly online, regardless of whether we are referring to classic printed books or electronic books: *"I only buy online from Elefant, Libris, and Okian" (C14); "Cărturești, Amazon for Kindle" (C2); "Cărturești and Elefant, they have discounts and a wide variety of products, I don't know if I have bought from other sites" (C10). As for their favorite store, most young people prefer to buy their books, especially from the websites elefant.ro and cărturești.ro.*

Before selecting a book, young people rely on reviews, on recommendations from friends, and acquaintances, but also depending on the summary or the subject of the books: *"I read the synopsis, then the first chapter/a few fragments (they are always available)" (C5); "First, I look at the book description. If I'm not convinced, I try to look for reviews, both in English and in Romanian, related to the respective book. This is usually where I decide whether or not I'm really interested in reading that book. Then I look at the price, and promotions. The author is also a criterion by which I am guided. I don't really*

*read Romanian authors, so I look at international literature when looking for books" (C7); "It should be one of the topics I'm already interested in. I don't buy books just to buy, but on the contrary, I buy the books I want to read" (C20).*

Most respondents prefer to read books in the classic printed format, but they do not completely reject the idea of reading books in electronic format. They prefer classic books due to the reading experience that gives readers a certain comfort, but also a sense of fulfillment in creating their own library: *"I prefer to read books in the classic, printed format. I can focus much better on the action, giving you a certain feeling of being able to flip through the book's pages. Besides, I have several bookshelves and they look very nice sitting there" (C2); "100% printed book. I have had enough of staring at phones and laptops, let alone reading e-books on these nasty blue screens. I prefer printed books because they don't tire my eyes, they help me to concentrate, to immerse myself better in the story, and even simply turning a page is a super, unmatched sensation" (C16); "I prefer the printed book, but I also like to read electronic books" (C15).*

If they had to inspire someone to read, most respondents said they would try to motivate people by emphasizing the benefits of books. *"I would tell him to try, because reading is the most wonderful thing in the world. I would tell her how I started reading, that it wasn't the best friendship at first (I hated reading when I was little) and I would give her some recommendations" (C2); "I would tell him that he will discover new universes with every book he reads. He will learn a lot from the characters and the situations they are put in, he will cry, he will laugh, and he will want to hit all the walls with his book when a character does something stupid. He will discover a new world, right in his mind" (C9); "I would give him a book as a gift that would awaken this passion" (C16).*

However, respondents believe that people cannot be persuaded to read by other people, and the love of books must be felt, not influenced by other people, because it doesn't work: *"I don't think I would try to persuade someone to read, you can't convince someone to do things they don't want to do, especially if they are things they should be doing for pleasure. I wouldn't convince people to read it, they have to convince themselves, I can only tell them as I would say for any other matter to give it a chance that maybe they will like it" (C2); "There is no universal message that you can get a person to read. Yes, many ideas and texts come to my mind, from the motivational and classic to the most profound and funny, but first I need to know the person in question. I need to know how she thinks, and what's stopping her from giving reading a chance, and read her for a few minutes, or any speech I might have prepared will be completely useless. In addition, before I show him the benefits of reading, I would look for a common topic (eg: fashion, travel, food, heroes) so that I can subtly bring books into the discussion" (C9).*

Even if they prefer books in classic printed format, all interview participants stated that they read books in electronic format: *"Yes, I read some books in electronic format, especially those that were not translated or found in bookstores in our country" (C5); "I've read it a few times, but I'm not a fan" (C4); "Yes, more. Last year I read one out of curiosity, and the topic caught my eye, it's called Sing Backwards and Weep, a memoir by the lead singer of a band I like. I had found it free (pirated) on the net, I didn't know if it was*

*available here in physical format and I couldn't wait any longer, I hurried and read it in PDF format, on my laptop. I ate it in 2 days" (C9).*

Most of the interviewees don't have special devices for e-books, but when reading an e-book they mainly use their phone, laptop, or tablet: *"Laptop or tablet, but the tablet is easier to use because it is easier to take anywhere" (C20); "in general, the laptop or the mobile phone, it depends on each individual situation" (C19); "The laptop or the phone... more the laptop, I'd say. I have a program that puts a semi-transparent red filter over the screen, making reading easier and less tiring for the eyes" (C8).*

Those who own special devices for electronic books such as Kindle or e-book reader, prefer to use them occasionally or not at all: *"I use it more when I go on vacation" (C4); "very rarely, once every few months" (C10); "I have an e-book, but I don't use it at all. In fact, someone received it as a gift and gave it to me, hoping I would use it" (C2).*

### **Research conclusions**

Regarding the first specific objective of the research based on interviews with book industry specialists, namely to identify the characteristics of book purchase during the period of quarantine and pandemic and in the post-pandemic period, the main change was the purchase channel that completely shifted to online, as well as increased interest in motivational and applied psychology books. At the behavioral level, people devoted more time to reading during this period due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, which didn't allow them to invest time in other activities they did before the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the profile of the book consumer hasn't changed much, as book industry specialists say, those who consumed books during the pandemic are the same as before the pandemic: *"the intellectuals without money and the pensioner from among intellectuals"*. However, specialists appreciate that during this period the corporatists and those who were dependent on mobility, had more free time and devoted it to reading, but this doesn't mean that this category didn't read at all, but only that they began to read more than they did before the pandemic.

Regarding the second objective of the interview with book industry specialists, regarding the radiography and evaluation of the book market during the pandemic, the research results showed that the book market during the pandemic was changeable just like people's lives in general: major changes for some publishing houses, changes that entailed a dramatic decrease in sales, for others it was the end, and for other publishing houses higher sales increases than before the pandemic. Throughout this period, publishing houses, as well as bookstores, had to adapt to the new reality. To survive and get through this severe period, publishers and bookstores have given discounts and promoted themselves more aggressively than usual on social media.

Like any crisis, be it economic or health, it will always destabilize the business environment. During this period of crisis, some publishing houses closed, some remained with a constant income and some grew, but overall, the book market didn't

undergo major changes in terms of the evolution of sales, the number of readers or the types of books read.

Regarding the third objective of the interviews with book industry specialists related to the definition of the book format preferred by Romanians during the pandemic (classic printed/digital format), we identified that the book format preferred and loved by readers during the pandemic, as well as in the period before or after the pandemic, the classic printed format remains.

The fourth and last objective formulated for the research with the group of specialists in the book industry aimed to outline a future or some trends that will define the future of books. Although the e-book segment is very small today in Romania, it has a potential for growth in the future that will come true along with other changes that will occur in this industry.

One of the reasons why this e-book segment is stagnant and is still at a very low level, is the lack of electronic devices in the personal possessions of readers. According to the interviews, only two out of the twenty interviewed own such a device. The price of such a device pretty much limits a young person's decision to switch from a classic printed book to an electronic one. Certainly, young people will still read e-books, but they will use devices such as phones, tablets, or laptop, which will not create as pleasant an experience as an e-reader or Kindle device. Related to the evolution of long-term book volumes, specialists believe that the market will grow, even if more smoothly, as long as people can afford to buy books and their standard of living is not affected.

Related to the first objective formulated for the interviews conducted with the 18-35-year-old consumer group regarding the understanding of book consumer behavior during quarantine and the pandemic, the data analysis showed that during this period there were three essential changes. The first change was the shift from reading for relaxation to reading for escape, the second was the time they spent reading which increased due to the restrictions to limit the Covid-19 virus and the third was the increased interest for motivational and applied psychology books. Out of a desire to find some sort of emotional balance, people sought a reading that would help and support them on an interpersonal level.

The second objective for the interviews conducted with the 18-35-year-old consumer group was to identify possible changes in book consumption in the post-quarantine, pandemic period compared to the previous period. Regarding consumption, the 18-35 age group didn't read more books during the pandemic compared to the previous period. The exit from quarantine or the current context doesn't bring major decreases in terms of book consumption. Even if they have less time, the 18-35-year-old group is trying to adapt to the new normal without affecting the time dedicated to reading.

The third objective of the research conducted through interviews with the 18-35-year-old group was to identify the type of books preferred by book readers. For many readers, interest in certain book types has changed during the pandemic compared to the previous period. Escape reading during the pandemic has turned some readers to

other kinds of books than they were reading in the previous period. Some read more self-help books, some chose fantasy, some chose romance novels, and each reader tried to connect to a new normal at will.

The fourth objective set for the research with the 18-35 year group seeks to understand readers' motivations and what causes them to choose reading over other activities. Books and reading in general are strongly anchored in emotional consumption. Regardless of the context, people see reading as relaxation, a disconnection from everything, and stepping into another world. In addition to relaxation and pleasure, people also read out of the need to quench their thirst for knowledge, learn things, and experience or explore the substrates of their minds.

### **Final considerations and discussions**

Book consumption behavior in Romania hasn't changed significantly during the pandemic, and most likely it will not change much in the coming years either. In response to being constantly connected to technology and social media, people prefer to read books in a classic way, just as they have always done. Not only in Romania, but people also have a common habit, unchanged for decades, that of experiencing a book in a "comfortable way, in an armchair, for a few hours on the weekend or in the evenings during the week, before going to bed, and reading dozens of pages from a classic, printed book - with cardboard covers and the smell of printing ink, an experience that can bring unique emotional and intellectual satisfaction" (Giju, 2021, p. 20).

Despite all the current opportunities, digitization, etc., in Romania, hundreds of thousands of books are printed in the classic format, and publishing houses exhibit their newest editorials annually at local book fairs. Probably just like today, in the future, classic printed books will remain as a relaxation alternative for most people, and e-books will be more accessible alternatives for those who are still in school, who want to study, the future young people, digital natives, those who need to feed their curiosity as quickly as possible and don't have the desire to search and purchase a book in a bookstore.

The future of book consumption in the short to medium term is likely to split between online and offline to respond to new book consumption trends and behaviors, and online is likely to continue to grow. Stores, brick-and-mortar bookstores, and classic printed books will never completely disappear, because readers like to browse, choose, and research several books before making a final choice. Moreover, some brick-and-mortar bookstores don't just offer books, they offer a book-buying experience, they offer ideas, and they offer relaxation to those who cross their threshold. The digitization of books is not the end of classic printed books, but an adaptation of books to the digital world, a way in which the book market adapts to meet the needs of all consumers.

The moment of decline of the book industry was recorded in the first part of the pandemic, namely in quarantine. Being in an unprecedented period, specialists in the book industry were forced to adapt to the conditions imposed by the pandemic. The main challenges for specialists in this industry was to maintain sales at a constant level



and consolidate businesses, rethinking the book promotion strategy, therefore they focused more on online marketing and adapting to a new sales channel, namely the online one.

In the context of the social reset, people turned more to the self, from a desire to disconnect from the uncertain and risky situation around them. Thus, during the pandemic, people sought to read books to help them overcome this unprecedented period. The motivation or self-motivation resulting from the increased interest in motivational books has materialized into building a stronger self, a new self that understands how to overcome this critical period.

In a crisis situation of any kind, regardless of whether we are talking about a financial or health crisis, people will always look for options that will positively influence their mental health, ideally within their reach. Also, people need courage and openness to other worlds, an openness to other perspectives, precisely to move on and accept change.

Regardless of the kind of books that will be read in the future or their formats, people will continue to read to quench their thirst for knowledge, relax, or disconnect from the everyday. Considering the need to protect the environment through sustainable consumption, the future will probably belong to e-books, not that printed books will disappear altogether, but they will probably be more expensive and people will find it easier to consume e-books.

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## Annex

Research codification for professionals (P):

Code	Position
P1	Book editor, publishing house
P2	Editor in chief, publishing house
P3	Head of marketing department, publishing house
P4	Manager, publishing house
P5	Editor, publishing house

Research codification for book consumers (C):

Code	Gender	Age	Code	Gender	Age
C1	Fem.	19	C11	Fem.	20
C2	Fem.	20	C12	Male	27
C3	Fem.	32	C13	Fem.	27
C4	Male	22	C14	Male	35
C5	Fem.	27	C15	Fem.	33

C6	Male	26	C16	Fem.	21
C7	Fem.	34	C17	Male	20
C8	Fem.	21	C18	Fem.	30
C9	Male	34	C19	Fem.	25
C10	Fem.	30	C20	Male	25