

A Comprehensive Assessment of the Potential Rebrand of the Dewitt Barnes & Noble

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In reference to Barnes & Noble's intended rebranding strategy to increase customer loyalty and revenue by tailoring specific store locations to their respective audiences, we examined the demographic of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble and its relationship with Syracuse University undergraduate students. We held a focus group and conducted a survey to generate data towards our five research questions: What specific elements and factors currently draw in consumers to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble?; What factors influence Syracuse University students to visit or make purchases at the local Barnes & Noble store?; How can the DeWitt Barnes & Noble effectively employ social media as part of its rebranding efforts to achieve positive outcomes?; How can the DeWitt Barnes & Noble utilize social media in its rebrand to facilitate a positive outcome?; What specific factors could enhance customer loyalty and increase store traffic at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble?

We determined that store atmosphere, specific book curation, and a targeted social media presence will best draw in these students. For them, Barnes & Noble is not just transactional; it is a nostalgic experience. Prioritizing comfortable, nostalgic aesthetics through lighting and seating will increase students' time spent in the store. Ensuring that the genres students read are readily available could cause this location to become students' primary shopping destination. Tailoring the DeWitt Barnes & Noble's social media presence to highlight the store and its products in a way that is digestible to the Gen Z pallet will increase traction on store-specific social media accounts and show that the store prioritizes its customers' specific needs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I-1. Background of Research and Goals of Proposed Research

The first Barnes & Noble store opened on Fifth Avenue in New York City in 1932. This store gradually gained success, satisfying millions of customers and developing a positive reputation around the world. It wasn't until the 1970s that Barnes & Noble expanded as a company and added locations all over the United States, confident that these stores would do well based on the New York location's success (Hartmans, 2023). Barnes & Noble grew to be one of the most beloved and successful bookstore chains in the country.

It appeared as though nothing could challenge the success of this company until around the 2000s, when Amazon began to dominate the market. This change in consumer habits led Barnes & Noble to reconsider their purpose and determine how to reclaim a favorable place in the market (Cohen, 2022). People were no longer drawn into Barnes & Noble stores because they could easily order books online from the comfort of their homes. Additionally, people began to see Barnes & Noble as a power-hungry corporation, lacking the localized charm of an independent bookstore. According to The New York Times, "The book-selling empire, with 600 outposts across all 50 states, was seen by many readers, writers and book lovers as strong-arming publishers and gobbling up independent stores in its quest for market share" (Harris, 2022). It became clear that change was needed to improve Barnes & Noble's reputation and satisfy the desires of customers.

James Daunt, the CEO of Barnes & Noble since 2019, believes a rebrand is essential to become favorable to the market once again. In order to do this, Barnes & Noble stores must understand the preferences of their local consumer base to give the store a personalized edge,

rather than closely resembling every other Barnes & Noble location in America. The best way to understand the wants and needs of customers is through in-depth research.

It's important to understand that the desires of Barnes & Noble customers will vary between each Barnes & Noble location. We will analyze the opinions and attitudes of Syracuse University undergraduate students to better understand what the customers of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble store are looking for. We will conduct a focus group and a survey with insightful questions to gain information that will inform decisions on how this location can improve and curated toward local preferences. Through our quantitative and qualitative research, we will propose recommendations that will differentiate Barnes & Noble from Amazon and other retailers, improve the public's perception of Barnes & Noble, and develop a personalized relationship between the DeWitt Barnes & Noble and its customers.

The goals of this study are to understand what elements of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble could be rebranded to result in improved customer loyalty and public perception. Through analyzing the opinions and attitudes of Syracuse University students, we hope to learn how to develop a successful rebrand that feels authentic to customers as well as to the general public.

I-2. Secondary Research

To supplement our research, it is important to understand the current and past public perception of Barnes & Noble. In the 1990s, they were a fierce competitor to small bookstores, even facing an antitrust lawsuit from the American Booksellers Association (Harris, 2022). However, in the past decade, small booksellers have increasingly supported Barnes & Noble over Amazon, which now dominates with over half of U.S. physical book sales (Harris, 2022). Given that physical books account for 76% of publisher revenue (Harris, 2022), the industry's

dependence on these sales is evident. Amazon's dominance, while convenient, limits the discovery of new authors and lesser-known books. Therefore, many small authors and booksellers are advocating for Barnes & Noble's success in this digital era. Barnes & Noble is a valuable avenue for small authors to expand their reach to readers and enables organic discovery of new books. This shift in public perception of Barnes & Noble from a monopolist corporation to an ally to small booksellers underscores the importance of Barnes & Noble employing creative strategies to draw consumers offline to boost in-store sales and expand literary distribution.

Additionally, to contextualize our research, it is important to understand customer attitudes about books and reading. According to a 2021 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, roughly a quarter of American adults (23%) say they haven't read a book in whole or in part in the past year, whether in print, electronic or audio form (Gelles-Watnick, 2021). Book reading has been on the decline, as a Gallup survey uncovered that "Americans say they read an average of 12.6 books during the past year, a smaller number than Gallup has measured in any prior survey dating back to 1990" (Jones, 2022). Moreover, "U.S. adults are reading roughly two or three fewer books per year than they did between 2001 and 2016" (Jones, 2022). This decline is concerning for a business like Barnes & Noble, which relies on book lovers to come into stores to drive sales. To address this issue, Barnes & Noble should prioritize the engagement of their core readership by targeting the demographic that has the highest reading engagement. The age group that was most likely to have read a book in any format in the last 12 months in the United States was 18-29-year-olds, with 83% (Watson, 2022). With readership on the decline, it is important for Barnes & Noble to identify target audiences and utilize new strategies to draw in young readers to their stores.

Social media is a powerful tool that has increased readership and motivated consumers, particularly young readers. TikTok, in particular, has played a pivotal role in this resurgence. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, many people had excess free time to pick up reading again. #BookTok was a major factor in the discovery of new reads, as 2021 was a bestselling year with 825 million copies of print books sold in the U.S. (Kaplan, 2022). #BookTok is a popular hashtag on the social media platform TikTok where readers share book reviews and foster a community online. Videos under the hashtag have millions of views, with books going viral and topping charts due to the 15-second videos. As of October 8th, 2023, #BookTok on TikTok has over 183.1 billion views. “According to BookScan data, per The New York Times, #BookTok helped authors sell 20 million printed books in 2021 and again in 2022, with sales rising another 50 percent” (TodayShow, 2023). Moreover, “Adult Fiction led the growth of sales in 2021, up 25% from the previous year and driving more than half of 2021’s overall market gains, according to NPD Bookscan, and Young Adult had its best year in NPD Bookscan history, with sales quadrupling compared to 2004 data” (Kaplan, 2022). The sense of community garnered from #BookTok combined with social media’s ability to rapidly spread and share new book finds fueled increased consumer motivation to go out and buy new books. The power of social media and #BookTok to influence sales within a key demographic such as Gen Z is valuable to our research as Barnes & Noble aims to target this audience to garner their attention in this rebrand.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread hardship on small businesses, consumer behavior shifted and turned to support small shops as opposed to large corporations. 56% of consumers are now becoming patrons of neighborhood stores or buying locally sourced products (Thau, 2021). Moreover, one study uncovered that 71% of respondents were willing to shop locally, with 37% even doing so when it was more expensive or less convenient (Uberall,

n.d.). Furthermore, “one of the ‘pivotal’ shifts in spending habits since COVID-19 is a drift toward local shopping and a move away from malls, with 75% of consumers planning to shop more locally over the next year” (Uberall, n.d.). This change in consumer behavior is notable and Barnes & Noble must consider this shift in customer habits when making a branding decision.

This secondary research provides a context for the objective of our study. It is essential to determine whether a rebranding approach centered on localized Barnes & Noble bookstores would connect with the predominant demographic of young adults, who make up the majority of avid readers in the United States.

Research Questions

To focus our research and ensure that the information we collect is productive in determining the success of a Barnes & Noble rebrand, we have outlined specific research questions.

1. What specific elements and factors currently draw in consumers to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble? (RQ1)
2. What factors influence Syracuse University students to visit or make purchases at the local Barnes & Noble store?(RQ2)
3. What specific factors could enhance customer loyalty and increase store traffic at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble?(RQ3)
4. How does the curated selection of books at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble influence customer satisfaction, loyalty, and frequency of visits?(RQ4)
5. How can the DeWitt Barnes & Noble effectively employ social media as part of its rebranding efforts to achieve positive outcomes?(RQ5)

II. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

II-1. Purpose

The overall purpose of our research is to determine the potential success of a Barnes & Noble rebrand through the reinvention of individual store locations tailored towards the individual needs of each community and target audience variation. Overall, our goal is to increase consumer loyalty as well as sales through rebranding the individual location in ways that mimic a small independent bookstore. Our research will measure the proposed effectiveness of this rebrand at the Barnes & Noble store located in DeWitt, NY. Given its proximity to Syracuse University, the target audience of our research will be undergraduate students at the university. Therefore, to supplement our overall research, our researchers selected a focus group as the method of qualitative research.

A focus group was selected as the method for qualitative research for several reasons. Through the conduction of the focus group, we could facilitate an interactive discussion that stimulated respondents' thoughts and opinions. Another goal of the focus group was to supplement our quantitative data and offer insight into why respondents feel a certain way and prevent a data hubris, or overconfidence in quantitative data. Through the outcomes of the focus group and respondents' feedback, we can shape our survey questions and quantitative research. Our focus group participants consisted of only females, as we believed they would give honest opinions and valuable feedback. Based on these goals, we proposed five research questions to guide our focus group research.

II-2. Research Questions

- What elements of the shopping experience are most pleasing to female college students?
(RQ1)
- What factors do female students at Syracuse University look for in a bookstore? (RQ2)
- What specific factors could be rebranded by the DeWitt Barnes & Noble in order to increase consumer loyalty? (RQ3)
- Does social media play a role in book purchases? (RQ4)
- Does the target demographic feel that the large corporation Barnes & Noble can rebrand authentically as local? (RQ5)

Barnes & Noble rebrand strategy through the lens of a sample of our target audience. Our researchers chose a focus group as a qualitative research method to complement our broader quantitative data collection. This approach has allowed us to gain deeper insights into the perspectives, attitudes, and expectations of our intended audience, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the rebrand's potential impact and effectiveness.

II-3. Methodology

To ensure the success of the focus group, our researchers carefully crafted the methodology of this qualitative study. This careful and thoughtful approach not only reflects our commitment to producing meaningful results, but also underscores the importance of the research process in gathering valuable qualitative insights and data for our analysis.

Researchers selected the respondents of this focus group based on specific parameters. We utilized random sampling to select our participants. We created four lists that each included 10 students' names from every grade, first year to senior year. The grades are the strata. Criteria

for selection was being a female student currently enrolled in Syracuse University between the age of 18-22. After creating four lists of 10, two students from each strata were randomly selected to participate in the focus group. This provided us with a group of 8 total students, 2 from every grade. By randomly selecting the students from each strata, researchers were able to eliminate some elements of bias while still accurately representing our target population of Syracuse University students as a whole.

GS is a freshman majoring in Animation in the school of Visual and Performing Arts from Tenafly, New Jersey. AK is a freshman majoring in Nutrition Science in Falk from Los Angeles, California. JM is a sophomore majoring in Television, Radio, Film in Newhouse from Cary, North Carolina. RM is a sophomore majoring in Television, Radio, Film in Newhouse from Bethesda, Maryland. CA is a junior double majoring in Economics and Geography in the Maxwell school from the San Francisco Bay Area, California. AB is a junior majoring in Marketing in Whitman from Poughkeepsie, NY. NG is a senior at Syracuse University majoring in Advertising in Newhouse and minoring in Marketing in Whitman from San Antonio, Texas. JB is a senior at Syracuse University double majoring in English Textual Studies and Psychology in the Arts and Sciences school from Middlebury, Vermont.

The focus group was performed in a quiet conference room with natural light and chairs arranged in a circle. Researchers provided refreshments to ensure the respondents were comfortable and felt welcomed. The researchers ensured that the respondents did not know the research questions or goal of the study to prevent bias in their responses.

Researchers created a moderator guide to shape the conversation. There were four moderators, three took notes and one guided the conversation. Additionally, the conversation was recorded by phone to ensure accuracy of note-taking. The lead moderator first made an

introductory statement that welcomed the participants, gave an overview of the focus group and ground rules and did an icebreaker. Throughout the study, the lead moderator utilized probing to flesh out key ideas and facilitate deeper discussion.

In conclusion, the methodological approach employed in this focus group has proven to be instrumental in providing our researchers with valuable qualitative insights. As we move forward with our analysis and recommendations, it is evident that the data gathered from this focus group has played a pivotal role in shaping our findings and reinforces the importance of consumer perspectives in evaluating and optimizing rebranding strategies.

II-4. Findings

While conducting our focus group session, we discovered six key findings. These findings are outlined below and gave us useful insights on a DeWitt Barnes & Noble rebranding strategy.

Students value being able to find exactly what they are looking for and price in a bookstore.

When discussing specific factors that Syracuse University students look for in a bookstore, our focus group participants emphasized that they value a wide selection of inventory, reasonable prices and a cozy atmosphere. Most of our participants' main qualm when shopping at independent bookstores is the inability to find the specific books. GS prefers the atmosphere of a smaller bookstore, but is more likely to go to Barnes & Noble to actually purchase a book because it is more likely to have certain books because of the wide selection available. NG detailed that she is more likely to shop at a bookstore that is moderately priced and offers regular deals on its inventory and when bookstores provide a comfortable sitting area. JB agreed, saying she doesn't want her experience at a bookstore to simply be an exchange, but would rather be

able to spend time there and read from the selection of books. She compared the atmosphere at a library, where you are welcomed to sit and read for extended periods of time.

Our participants value the ambiance and layout of the store.

Another main takeaway that we learned is that students value ambiance in a bookstore more than anything else (RQ1). GS explained that she goes to Barnes & Noble for the experience of the location. When she was young she went to immerse herself in the children's section, and she now visits Barnes & Noble to partake in the coffee shop or seating areas. The main aspect of the ambiance that our participants had strong feelings about is the lighting of the store. GS, JM, NG, and JB all mentioned that the new industrial, white lighting deters them shopping, and they preferred the soft, warm toned lighting that Barnes & Noble stores used to have.

The next aspect of ambiance that is important to our target population is the feeling of comfort and seclusion. NG and AB claimed that what brings them into certain bookstores is the feeling of coziness. Picking out books is an experience that people look forward to and they value feeling comfortable while doing so. AB touched on the feeling of solitude, claiming that she enjoys when it feels “comfortable and quiet” when searching for new books.

The last detail of ambiance that our participants were passionate about was the presence of places to sit. JB mentioned that she deeply values the ability to be able to pick up a book and sit down and read. Her ideal bookstore will have more of an emphasis on being a welcoming place to relax and enjoy reading rather than a physical transaction. Similarly, NG claimed that she always looks for a place to sit when she enters a bookstore. Being able to sit down and read or socialize in a bookstore is important for our demographic, as mentioned in RQ1.

Most students do not utilize #BookTok when looking for book recommendations, but rather take time to look at the curated book selections.

When looking at the relationship that students have with social media (RQ4), we discussed the impact of “BookTok” on students' purchasing choices. BookTok is an element of TikTok that caters towards readers, highlighting personal favorites of creators, reviewing recently released books, and most notably, providing recommendations on what to read next. Most of our focus group participants said that they have seen it, but only two have interacted with the platform. RM discussed that, though she is not a frequent BookTok watcher, she is familiar with the way that creators will discuss elements of their favorite books and best recommendations. She also explained that she has seen creators post content of Barnes & Noble stores, taking viewers with them to go shopping and spotlighting the books that they purchased. AB has had a similar experience with BookTok. She has seen some of the recommendations that are being shared online and read one of the books that she saw highlighted on BookTok. However, she does not see this content as regularly anymore.

Instead of looking to social media, students take time to look at the curated book selections. We found that our target demographic does not directly interact with social media when looking for book recommendations, but instead looks at the curated selections which often draw from social media trends, which relates to RQ4. AB said that she first looks at all of the tables of curated books that are promoted at the front of the store, being drawn to the eye catching displays. Additionally, AB will look at the curated tables for books she recognizes and will seek to discover new books associated with the books she is familiar with. Additionally, the curated book selections feel as though a real person took the time to hand pick books for consumers, which is a common strategy of independent bookstores. Utilizing the curated section at the front of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble will assist the store in rebranding as more authentically local, as mentioned in RQ5.

Rebranding the ambience of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble to seem more comforting would be more beneficial than rebranding to seem authentically as local.

Finally, our research is centered around the perception of the Barnes & Noble rebranding, and if students would identify with changes made to label store location as authentically local. The biggest takeaway from our participants was that they would prefer if Barnes & Noble rebranded to enhance the comfortable, childhood nostalgia students connect with at the store. The Barnes & Noble that GS grew up with was renovated about five years ago, and it had a strong impact on how often she would shop there. The store was reorganized, updated to a more modern feel with white light and a harsh ambience, and the children's section was removed. All of these elements now deter her from shopping at that location because it lacks a sense of comfort. Similarly, JM's hometown Barnes & Noble was remodeled with modern, high ceilings and harsh lighting, and she now only visits that store when necessary.

When discussing specific elements of Barnes & Noble that would benefit from a rebranding, RM outlined how for her, visiting Barnes & Noble is not only about purchasing books. The atmosphere in the store plays a key role in creating a unique experience for store visitors, and it is enjoyable to be in a Barnes & Noble even if purchasing a book is not one's intended goal. Nostalgia is an emotion that many of our participants mentioned, attributing the feeling to being one of the main reasons they choose to shop at Barnes & Noble. When the participants were asked "What are the top 3 words you think of when you hear Barnes & Noble?" half of them said "coffee" or "Starbucks" for one of their words. Their full answers are as follows:

GS: books, coffee, comics; AK: Childhood, graphic novels, camp; RM: Starbucks, books, crafts; JM: Books, music, a shooting at Barnes & Noble; CA: Books, fiction, CDs; AB: Books, coffee, records; JB: Books, warm, friendly; NG: Green, Starbucks, book.

Utilizing the curated book selection to recommend books to students is very effective. Students enjoy the ambience and environment of bookstores the most, and focusing on lighting and the experience of shopping for books is critical while rebranding.

II-5. Takeaways/Insights

Conducting a focus group with Syracuse University students gave us detailed insight on what students value in Barnes & Noble stores as well as how the DeWitt Barnes & Noble could be rebranded to fit the needs of the surrounding community.

Most of our participants feel they can't depend on independent bookstores to have the specific book they are looking for, while Barnes & Noble will usually have exactly what they need. Our customers enjoy perusing these independent stores, but when it comes to a planned-out book purchase, people know they can turn to Barnes & Noble.

Through conducting this focus group, we learned that our participants highly value ambience in bookstores, particularly Barnes & Noble stores. With the ease of ordering books online, it's crucial that Barnes & Noble stores are optimally designed to draw people in. To attract the local community, Barnes & Noble must understand the community values.

Store lighting was very important to our participants, who wished there was soft, comforting lighting in Barnes & Noble rather than harsh, yellow lighting. Our participants also wished there were more quiet, comfortable places to sit and read in Barnes & Noble. Most of all, many of our participants highly value the nostalgic feeling they get when entering a Barnes &

Noble store that reminds them of their childhood. Many of the modern, updated Barnes & Noble stores do not bring our participants this same nostalgia.

Potential rebrand ideas that can be developed from this qualitative research include changing the lighting in the DeWitt Barnes & Noble, adding comfortable couches and chairs to encourage shoppers to sit and read, curate the tables of featured books based on what is currently popular in the area (books by local Syracuse authors), and avoiding decor that makes the store feel overly modern to cater to feelings of nostalgia.

We found the geographic diversity of our focus group helpful in gaining valuable data. Each participant had a unique childhood experience with Barnes & Noble depending on where they were from, which influences their current attitudes towards the DeWitt Barnes & Noble as well as Barnes & Noble in general. We also found it helpful that our participants were from varying academic classes. Having participants from each grade level gave us insight from people of different ages and varying levels of experience with the DeWitt Barnes & Noble.

The qualitative data we gained from this focus group of Syracuse University students will be useful in rebranding the DeWitt Barnes & Noble. Our open conversation with the participants allowed us to understand what SU students value in bookstores and what will draw them into the Dewitt Barnes & Noble store.

III. SURVEY RESEARCH

III-1. The Purpose of the Survey

The overall purpose of our research is to determine the potential success of a Barnes & Noble rebrand through the reinvention of individual store locations tailored towards the individual needs of each community and target audience variation. Specifically, our research

team conducted an online survey to assess the projected success of the rebrand at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble and gauge subsequent consumer response through an analysis of survey data from the target audience of Syracuse University students. The goals of this study are to understand what elements of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble could be rebranded to result in improved customer loyalty, public perception and increases in sales.

Based on our qualitative research, the key takeaways from our focus group shaped our research questions and methodology for our survey design. We discovered that our target demographic values Barnes & Noble's reliability in book selection, as members of the focus group trust that the store will always have the book they are looking for. This takeaway was insightful but left us wondering what aspects of the brand in particular influence customer loyalty and trust. Additionally, the results from the focus group revealed that Syracuse University students heavily value ambiance in Barnes & Noble bookstores. Our focus group respondents reported that they enjoy soft lighting in stores with areas to read and relax. Moreover, these takeaways prompted more questions about what features of Barnes & Noble in-store shopping in particular are most important to customers. The overall ambiance is reportedly valued, but our focus group underscored the value of invoking a nostalgic vibe when shopping, an atmosphere lost in modern stores. In order to better define what nostalgia means to customers, we sought to uncover what features of visiting Barnes & Noble are most pleasing to Syracuse University students. Finally, our target market comprises Syracuse University students, many of whom are from areas outside Syracuse and possess diverse experiences at their hometown Barnes & Noble. Our research team aimed to discover insights from the survey on how Barnes & Noble can revamp its marketing strategy to attract this diverse consumer base to the DeWitt store. Our qualitative research guided us in creating survey questions for a broader sample of our target

audience, enabling us to gain a more holistic view of consumer behavior. Ultimately, this comprehensive understanding will support us in delivering research-backed recommendations to our clients.

In conclusion, the core objective of our survey research is to assess the viability of a Barnes & Noble rebrand strategy through a targeted survey approach supplemented by our qualitative research. This approach allowed us to gain deeper insights into the perspectives, attitudes and expectations of our intended audience, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the rebrand's potential impact and effectiveness.

III-2. Research Questions

The following outlines the five research questions for which we based our qualitative research survey:

- In light of Barnes & Noble's recent transformation to emulate a small independent bookstore, what features of visiting Barnes & Noble are pleasing to most Syracuse University students? (RQ1)
- What factors of shopping at a bookstore are most and least important to Syracuse University students and how will this help DeWitt Barnes & Noble with its rebrand of the DeWitt branch? (RQ2)
- What specific factors could be rebranded by the DeWitt Barnes & Noble in order to increase consumer loyalty? (RQ3)
- In order to determine how Barnes & Noble can rebrand its marketing strategies, how much influence does social media have on Syracuse University students' book purchasing habits? (RQ4)

- To gain insight on how to structure the layout and product offerings at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble, what do most Syracuse University students purchase at Barnes & Noble? (RQ 5)

III-3. Method

Our target population for the survey is Syracuse University students of all grades. Our research is intended to inform the DeWitt Barnes & Noble branch on how they can rebrand successfully to market to the key demographic of Syracuse University students. For the purposes of our survey and research, the students targeted will be from the graduating classes of 2024-2028. These students live both on and off campus and are from different states. We did not consider students' academic majors or performance in our sampling method. We also did not consider students' socioeconomic status or monthly income. We selected survey participants for the sampling frame from students that were accessible to our group, through friends and extracurricular organizations. We did not formulate a list of all possible sample participants but instead distributed the survey to a sample of students who met the criteria of representing our target population. We utilized a convenience sampling method by distributing the survey mostly through social media, advertising the survey on our personal social accounts as well as sending the survey directly to people through online communication platforms. Through this, we utilized a convenience sampling method. This is because the sample participants we distributed the survey to were students to whom we had access. Most of the students are people we know personally. To find some of our participants we also utilized snowball sampling. We asked some of our participants to then distribute our survey to other Syracuse University students that they have access to. Through this method of snowball sampling, we were able to reach more students.

We acknowledge that through these sampling methods of convenience sampling and snowball sampling, it will be harder to generalize the findings for our target population. There are two main differences between our target population and the accessible population. First, there are differences in gender. Most of the accessible sample participants that completed our survey and reported their gender are female, with 93 identifying as female, 16 identifying as male, and 2 identifying in some other way. Ideally, we would have an equal number of males and females who have taken our survey as part of the sample population. However, we had greater access to females than males. Another difference between our target population and the accessible population is geographic hometown. We would have liked the geographic makeup of our sample population to be as close to the geographic makeup of Syracuse University students as a whole. In total, 35.64% of Syracuse University students are from New York, and 37.3% of our sample population reported to be from New York.

Our research team collected data through a survey questionnaire. In total, we distributed the survey to roughly 610 people. Of the 610 people we sent the survey to, we received 142 responses, giving our survey a 23.3% response rate. We collected responses over the course of 52 hours. After the time period of 52 hours ended, we closed the survey to prevent accepting more responses and to ensure that the data would stay the same during our analysis. Roughly 468 people we distributed the survey to did not fill out the questionnaire. Knowing that we wanted to receive at least 100 responses, we accounted for the fact that many people would not fill out the questionnaire. To ensure that we would still reach our target number of 100 responses, we sent out the survey to as many people as possible within the 52-hour time frame.

Our survey consisted of a variety of different types of questions, with carefully selected measures designed to help us gain insight on our key concepts. We used five different measures:

multiple-select, multiple choice, Likert scale, rank order and bipolar scale questions. We kept survey respondent behavior in mind, understanding that the questions should be easy to comprehend and answer. Important concepts that our survey questions were developed to gain insight on include influences on book purchasing habits, frequency of shopping at Barnes & Noble, motivations to visit Barnes & Noble, and values in bookstores.

Influences on Book Purchasing Habits: Respondents were asked to report the source from which they receive the majority of book recommendations (Q3). Our group decided to make this a multiple choice question, rather than multiple select, to give us the ability to pinpoint the largest influence on our respondents' reading habits. Our group gave eight response options, predicting typical responses, including "best seller lists", "friends/family", and "social media". We also included an "other" option, allowing respondents to type in a customized response. We predicted that "social media" would be the most popular response, so we decided to include a question later on asking how frequently "BookTok" influences our respondents' book purchasing habits (Q6). Our group also made this a multiple choice question, and we listed "never", "rarely," "sometimes", "often", and "always" as response options. Simply Psychology defines these options as the standard for measuring frequency (Mcleod, 2023).

Frequency of Shopping at Barnes & Noble: Respondents were asked to inform us about their frequency of shopping at Barnes & Noble (Q7). Our group made this a multiple choice question, and we listed "never", "rarely," "sometimes", "often", and "always" as response options. For the next question, respondents were then asked to report how frequently they visit the DeWitt Barnes & Noble location per year (Q8). This was also a multiple choice question, and the response options for times per year included "0", "1-2", "3-4", and "5+".

Motivations to visit Barnes & Noble: Respondents were asked to report the importance of various elements to their overall experience at Barnes & Noble (Q9) in a Likert scale format, revealing their motivation to visit a Barnes & Noble store. Simply Psychology states that “Likert Scales have the advantage that they do not expect a simple yes / no answer from the respondent but rather allow for degrees of opinion and even no opinion at all” (Mcleod, 2023). There was a list of nine typical experiences that Barnes & Noble visitors have, including “purchasing a specific book,” “perusing and exploring new items,” “enjoying the environment,” and “going to Starbucks/the cafe.” Respondents would report their attitudes towards these various activities and experiences on the Likert scale by selecting where each experience fell for them on a scale from “not at all important” to “very important”. The five options on the Likert scale included “not at all important”, “slightly important”, “important”, “fairly important”, and “very important”.

Values in Bookstores: Respondents were asked to rank various elements of bookstores (Q12) in a rank-order format. There were six choices that respondents had to rank, including “convenience”, “the ambiance of the store”, and “the books”. Respondents were to rank these six options on a scale of one to six. A research article from Wiley Online Library explains that “rank-ordered choices can provide richer preference information than methods based on selecting only the favorite alternative and/or on partial rankings” (Scarpo et al., 2011). Our participants’ responses revealed what they prioritize the most and the least in a bookstore, as well as the specific order of importance that each element falls for them.

III-4. Key Findings

As displayed in Figure 1, 45% of the respondents of the survey claim they visit Barnes & Noble sometimes. The least amount of respondents claim they visit Barnes & Noble both often

and never (8%). This tells us that most Syracuse University students are not avid and frequent patrons of Barnes & Noble as a whole, however many do still visit on occasion.

61% of our survey respondents have never been to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble, which is revealed in Figure 2. This means that any information asked about the DeWitt Barnes & Noble specifically, 61% of our survey respondents would not be able to answer from experience. This is why the questions on the questionnaire that are of the most value to us are about the participants themselves and their general reading and bookstore experiences and habits, rather than specific questions pertaining only to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble.

Our survey respondents mainly get their book recommendations from social media and friends/family, as displayed in Figure 3. With 43% of the respondents claiming they get their book recommendations from social media, this tells us that the DeWitt Barnes & Noble can utilize social media to connect with Syracuse University students. Whether that be through social media posts or direct connections with students, social media is where many Syracuse University look for book recommendations.

Our survey respondents read a wide variety of genres, as seen in Figure 4, especially romance (55%), young adult (50%), and non-fiction (34%). These genres can be featured the most at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble in order to ensure that the books that are on display are books that our target audience will be interested in.

As displayed in Figure 5, 77% of our survey respondents associate Barnes & Noble with nostalgia. This is an overwhelming majority of our sample population that believes this and can be very insightful for Barnes & Noble when it comes to planning the rebrand. Barnes & Noble can utilize certain aspects of this feeling of nostalgia when designing the ambiance of the DeWitt branch.

The survey respondents have a wide range of levels of interaction with BookTok, with most of our participants claiming that they interact with BookTok “sometimes” (26%), which can be seen in Table 2. This is related to our finding that Syracuse University students receive most of their book recommendations from social media, as BookTok is found on TikTok.

The results shown in Table 3 contradict the findings of our question about where Syracuse University students receive their book recommendations. As mentioned earlier, respondents were asked to report where they get most of their book recommendations in Q3. The majority of respondents, 43%, reported that they get the majority of their recommendations from social media, as exhibited in Figure 3. However, when respondents were asked to report how frequently BookTok influences their book purchases, a large percent claimed that BookTok either never or rarely influences their purchases, as seen in Table 3. This tells us that while social media has a large influence on the book-purchasing habits of Syracuse University students, a large majority of those recommendations are not from BookTok directly.

As exhibited in Figure 6, the survey respondents mostly ranked books as the number one factor that affects their bookstore shopping experience (47%). An emphasis on local authors and interests is not extremely important to Syracuse University students, with 40% of our survey respondents ranking that factor as the lowest importance. Since Barnes & Noble is attempting to rebrand as a small, independent bookstore, this finding is contradictory to that. Most independent bookstores feature works of local authors, but this factor is least important to Syracuse University students and may not be an area of opportunity for the DeWitt Barnes & Noble to capitalize on.

The findings presented in Figure 7 tell us how important varying factors are to Syracuse University students’ experience shopping at Barnes & Noble specifically. 68.8% of students

claim that attending an event is not at all important to them when shopping at Barnes & Noble, so planning events is not an area that Barnes & Noble should be focusing on when rebranding the Dewitt branch. Enjoying the environment is a factor that 32% of students claimed is very important to them, which includes the ambiance of the store itself. With 19% of students claiming that purchasing a specific book is very important, this tells us that students value the environment of the store more than the actual product selection.

Q14 allowed students to rank what would make them more likely to shop at Barnes & Noble. The majority of students ranked having more affordable products as the most important factor that would affect their likelihood of shopping at Barnes & Noble, as demonstrated in Figure 8. Many students are financially dependent on themselves in college and focus a lot of their time on their academics. This means that the DeWitt Barnes & Noble could rebrand in a way that makes books more affordable for students, possibly through a subsidized program for college students to buy books or a used book service.

While the majority of our survey respondents are female, there are insightful comparisons to be made between gender and the influence of BookTok on our survey respondent's purchasing habits. 81.3% of the males who took our survey claimed that BookTok never influences their book-purchasing choices, as exhibited in Table 4. On the other hand, only 22.6% of females claimed that BookTok never influences their book-purchasing choices. The majority of the females who took our survey claimed that BookTok sometimes affects their book-purchasing habits (31.2%). This shows that males do not pay as much attention to BookTok on social media as females do. The Dewitt Barnes & Noble could utilize BookTok to advertise books that are more catered towards a female audience on BookTok and utilize another method of advertisement to advertise books that are more catered towards a male audience.

Looking at graduation year and whether participants associate Barnes & Noble with nostalgia provided insightful data. The respondents of our survey varied in age over the range of five years, which would lead us to believe that a specific age group would associate Barnes & Noble with nostalgia more than another due to the age differences and therefore differences in their environments at the time. However, the findings are extremely similar over the course of every age group, with around 70% of students from every age group claiming they associate Barnes & Noble with nostalgia, as displayed in Table 5. This means that the level of nostalgia that Syracuse University students associate with Barnes & Noble does not vary from year to year and the aspect of nostalgia should be a large factor of consideration for the rebranding efforts of the DeWitt Barnes & Noble.

III-5. Takeaways/Insights

Our key findings determined that our participants rarely or never shop at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble. We learned that store atmosphere and book selection are the two factors that most draw these students into Barnes & Noble. Additionally, pricing is one of the main reasons those surveyed do not purchase books from Barnes & Noble. Our final key finding is that there is not currently strong audience retention from BookTok.

An important statistic is the disconnect between the frequency at which people visit Barnes & Noble in general and how often they visit the DeWitt location. A combined 62% of participants said they visit Barnes & Noble sometimes, always, or often, whereas 61% of participants said they have never visited the DeWitt Barnes & Noble. Students spend about 66% of their year at Syracuse University, so we would expect there to be more traffic at this location.

We must then identify what specific factors draw in these students that the DeWitt Barnes & Noble is currently lacking that would benefit from rebranding.

When we asked participants to rank elements based on their importance during a trip to Barnes & Noble, an enjoyable environment was ranked highest, with 32% of respondents ranking it as very important. The importance of the atmosphere at Barnes & Noble was a key finding developed during our focus group. Some key components that affected the atmosphere of a book store according to our participants were lighting, the layout of the store and the inclusion of an area to sit and read. We saw this reflected in the survey responses, as lighting and additional seating were ranked second and third respectively when ranking what would make students more likely to shop at Barnes & Noble.

The number one aspect that would cause students to shop at Barnes & Noble more often is affordability. 44% of survey respondents ranked “more affordable products” as the change that would most likely increase their shopping frequency. This statistic makes sense, as college students have fewer resources to purchase luxuries such as new books. It is important to also pair this statistic with the following: participants ranked “the books” as the most important element of a bookstore (39%); participants ranked “an emphasis on local authors” as the least important element of a bookstore (33%); participants prefer reading fiction (63%), romance (52%) and young-adult (47%). Given these are the genres that these Syracuse University students are most likely to read and therefore purchase, it would be most beneficial to execute promotional campaigns highlighting these genres. The DeWitt Barnes & Noble would be able to retain more customers from Syracuse University by providing a student discount, hosting sales of these specific genres, and promoting books by local Syracuse authors who write in these genres to increase sales of local authors.

A large area of interest for our group was the intersection between Barnes & Noble and social media, specifically BookTok. A total of 54% of those surveyed reported that they interact with BookTok sometimes, always or often, with the largest group being sometimes at 26%. When we compare these statistics to those describing how BookTok influences book purchasing habits, we see that the largest respondent group is never with 32%. These results contradict the findings of our question asking where Syracuse University students receive their book recommendations. 40% of respondents claimed that they get their book recommendations from social media, and this was the most popular response. This tells us that while social media has a large influence on the book-purchasing habits of Syracuse University students, a large majority of those recommendations are not from BookTok directly.

We would suggest that Barnes & Noble capitalize on students in this demographic's reliance on social media to help increase traction at stores. Since the largest method that those surveyed use to receive book recommendations is social media, but not specifically BookTok, this allows individual Barnes & Noble stores to expand upon the use of Instagram and TikTok. Rather than utilizing a corporate template for promotion, introducing organic content would capture the attention of students further. Tailoring content to highlight the way the atmosphere has been rebranded to reflect the nostalgic, comfortable atmosphere that our participants deemed ideal would encourage them to visit as they can easily see the changes that have been made.

We would also suggest ensuring that the genres these students read are easily accessible to them. Whether this be through store layout and locating these shelves near a comfortable reading area near the front of the store, or through regular discount promotions shared through social media, it is notable that the most influential element of these participants' shopping habits is the specificity of book selection. A simple social media campaign could be to provide

recommendations of specific books in the fiction, romance, and young adult genres on the Barnes & Noble TikTok or Instagram and pair this with a social media-specific coupon for those specific books. Having certain coupons only be available on social media will encourage social media following, and likely develop customer loyalty. This method would utilize multiple key insights we found through our research including the fact that social media is the largest platform for book recommendations, the genres our participants favor, and the detail that increased book affordability is the factor that would most encourage participants to shop more at Barnes & Noble. Marketing the rebrand is just as important as redefining the store's motivations as it increases store traffic.

IV. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IV-1. Discussion

Through our research, we discovered that students do not regularly visit the DeWitt Barnes & Noble, so in order for a rebranding to be successful, we first need to increase the frequency of customer visits. It is important to prioritize the factors that our participants believe to be the best bookstore features to ensure that we are comprehensively fulfilling their needs. The following outlines data points to back up this finding and suggestions of improvements to implement.

Our main limitation with this research is that our data focuses on the opinions of female students. Our focus group was comprised of eight female students. Of the participants that disclosed their gender in our survey, 87.8% of respondents were female-identifying. We are aware that this skews our data; it is not as applicable towards the male population of Syracuse

University. Additionally, we acknowledge that due to the fact that we implemented sampling methods of convenience sampling and snowball sampling, it is harder to generalize our findings

Data from our focus group and survey reveals that many of our participants do not frequently visit Barnes & Noble. Q7 in our survey asked respondents how often they shop at Barnes & Noble. The most popular answer was “sometimes”, with 60 responses. The second most common answer was “rarely” with 30 responses. A similar theme was seen in our focus group. RM had not visited Barnes & Noble recently and does not shop for new books very often.

The majority of our focus group participants and survey respondents have never been to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble (RQ1). Survey respondents were instructed to report how many times a year they visit the DeWitt Barnes & Noble location for Q8. The most frequent answer was “0” times per year, with 81 responses. The second most frequent answer was “1-2”, with 34 responses. Out of the eight participants in our focus group, five students have never been to the DeWitt Barnes & Noble. Only one participant had been to the DeWitt store this semester.

Based on our survey research – specifically Q12, which asked participants to rank what is most to least important when shopping in bookstores – and the insight gained from our focus group, we can infer that our participants value the specific books available at a bookstore, the ambiance, and convenience of the location (RQ2). 54 respondents ranked “the books” as the most important aspect of their shopping experience. In our focus group GS mentioned that she is more likely to go to a Barnes & Noble because she knows that it is more likely to have certain books because of the wide selection available. “The ambiance of the store” and “convenience” were ranked almost equally as the second most important element, with 35 and 34 votes respectively. Though convenience was not discussed in the focus group, we saw store ambiance be a main topic of conversation. RM thinks visiting Barnes & Noble is not just about buying

books, but is also about the experience enjoying the atmosphere. We see this conclusion backed up by Q9. “Enjoying the environment” was deemed the most important by our respondents, with 40 responses ranking it “very important,” 24 respondents ranking it “fairly important,” and 34 respondents ranking it “important.” The next most important statistic was “purchasing a specific book”, with 24 respondents ranking it “very important,” 28 respondents ranking it “fairly important,” and 33 respondents ranking it “important.”

An interesting variance we saw in our data was participants' relationship with social media and BookTok. Five of our focus group participants had heard of BookTok, but only two had interacted with it, and neither with any regularity. This is similar to the data our survey produced: 84% of respondents had heard of BookTok; 24% said they interact with BookTok rarely; 26% interact sometimes; 17% interact often; 11% interact always (Q4, Q5). Though most of the students we talked to have heard of BookTok, not many of them rely on it. When examining Q6 of the survey, “how often has BookTok influenced your book purchases?”, the data breakdown was as follows: 32% reported never; 14% reported rarely, 28% reported sometimes, 20% reported often, 8% reported always. This data is presenting the conclusion that students are less likely to turn to BookTok for book recommendations. However, Q3 reported that 43% of participants say that social media was where they get most of their book recommendations. This was the most popular response.

IV-2. Recommendations

Our first recommendation is to rework the aesthetics of stores to prioritize the development of a cozy, comfortable atmosphere. First, we need to abandon the modern style of the previous rebranding. Transitioning from harsh white lights to ambient yellow lights would

increase the sense of comfort in stores. Providing seating areas for patrons to sit and read would meet the needs expressed by our participants and could increase the time customers spend in stores. These elements are commonly found in independent bookstores, and would fit the criteria of emulating a similar feeling. It's important to keep in mind that Barnes & Noble's element of nostalgia is something that our participants highly value, and this is often what brings them back to Barnes & Noble stores. We would want to avoid making the DeWitt Barnes & Noble feel overly modern and revert to the nostalgic.

Our second recommendation is for the DeWitt Barnes & Noble to create social media accounts specific to their location (RQ3). DeWitt's only current social media account is Facebook, which currently has a small following of 939 followers. Barnes & Noble's general Instagram page currently has 890,000 followers and its general TikTok page has 209,000 followers. Certain Barnes & Noble locations have developed their own Instagram and TikTok pages, which is something the DeWitt location can do to better connect with our target demographic of Syracuse University students. Introducing organic content related to the DeWitt store, its atmosphere, and specific book selection would better capture the attention and meet the interests of students in this demographic.

In order to maintain audience retention in our research demographic, we would suggest executing a social media campaign that provided specific student discounts only available through a code provided on the DeWitt Barnes & Noble social media platforms (RQ4). Having certain discount codes only be available on social media will encourage social media following, and likely develop customer loyalty. NG discussed in our focus group that regular sales or discounts would increase their frequency of shopping at Barnes & Noble. The discount could also feature the genres that students read the most: fiction, romance, and young adult. This

method would utilize multiple key insights we found through our research including the fact that social media is the largest platform for book recommendations, the genres our participants favor, and the detail that increased book affordability is the factor that would most encourage participants to shop more at Barnes & Noble. Marketing the rebrand is just as important as redefining the store's motivations as it increases store traffic.

By developing a comfortable, nostalgic atmosphere, as well as creating store-specific social media accounts to highlight book recommendations and promote student discounts, the DeWitt Barnes & Noble can cater towards the interests of our research participants, which represent our target demographic of Syracuse University students. Following these recommendations will likely increase store traffic and customer loyalty from our target demographic.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Demographic information (N =142)

Demographic Characteristics	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	16	14.4
Female	93	83.8
Other	2	1.8
<i>Graduation year</i>		
2023	2	1.4
2024	24	16.9
2025	40	28.2
2026	37	26.1
2027	8	5.6
<i>State</i>		
California	8	7.3
Colorado	1	.9
Connecticut	5	4.5
Florida	1	.9
Georgia	1	.9
Illinois	1	.9
Kansas	1	.9
Maryland	4	3.6
Massachusetts	4	3.6
New Jersey	11	10.0
New York	53	48.2
North Carolina	1	.9
Ohio	3	2.7
Oregon	1	.9
Pennsylvania	3	2.7
Rhode Island	1	.9
Texas	5	4.5
Vermont	3	2.7
Virginia	2	1.8
I do not reside in the United States	1	7.3

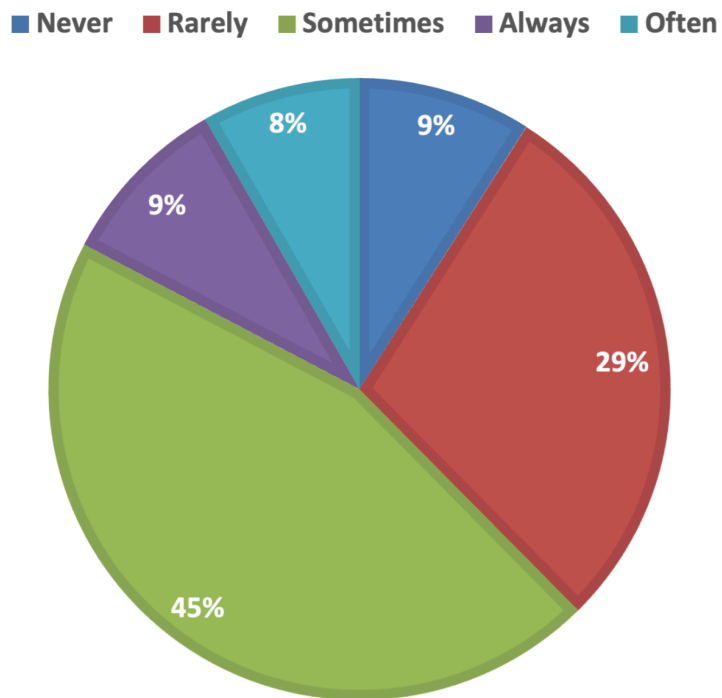
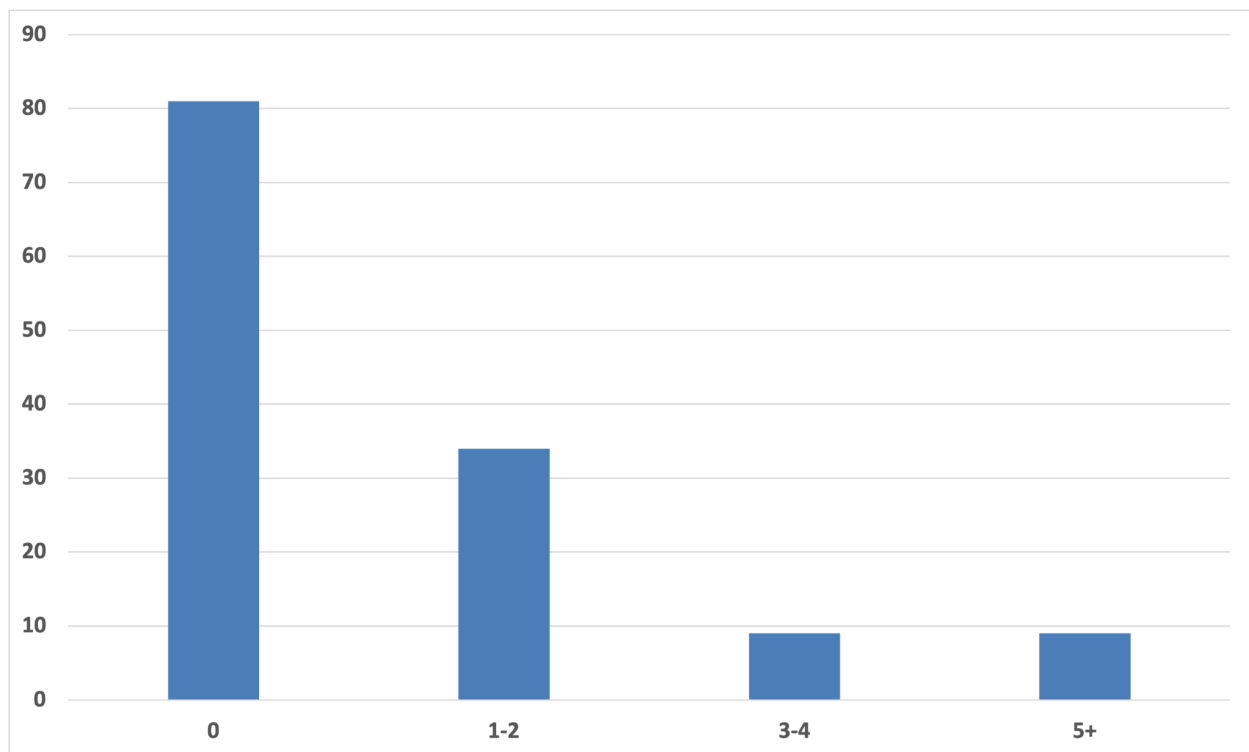
Figure 1. Frequency of Participant Visits to Barnes & Noble**Figure 2.** Frequency of Visits to DeWitt Barnes & Noble

Figure 3. Source of Book Recommendations

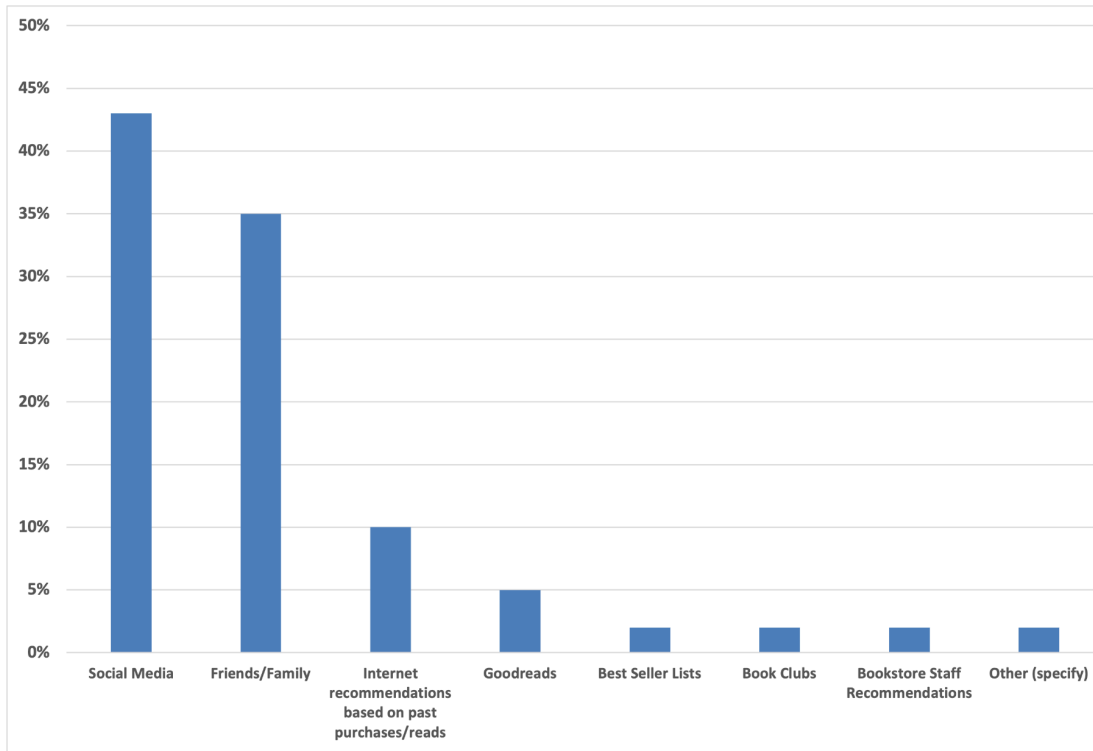


Figure 4. Genres Read by Participants

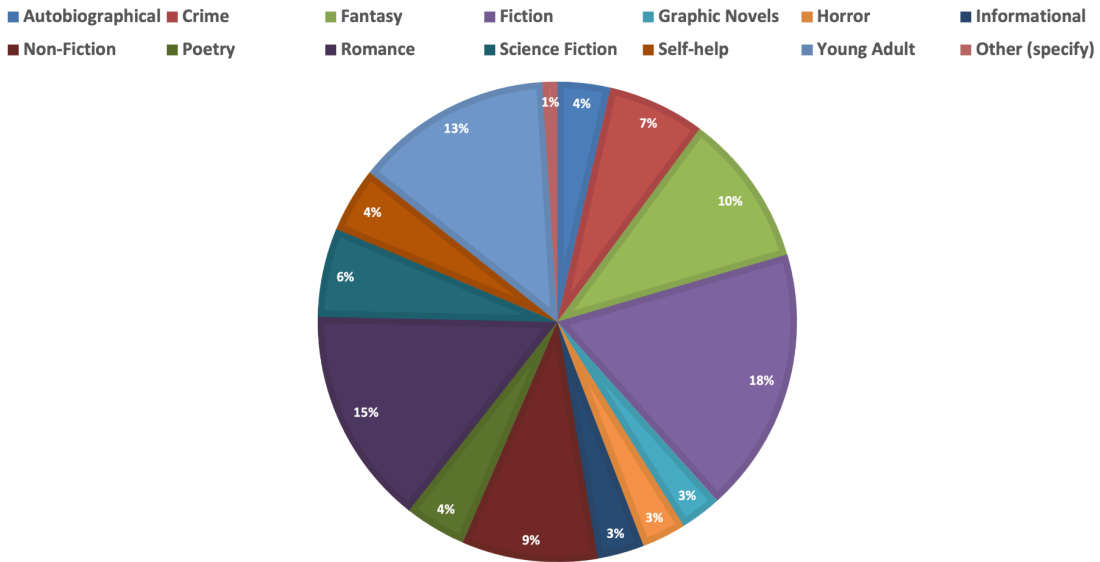
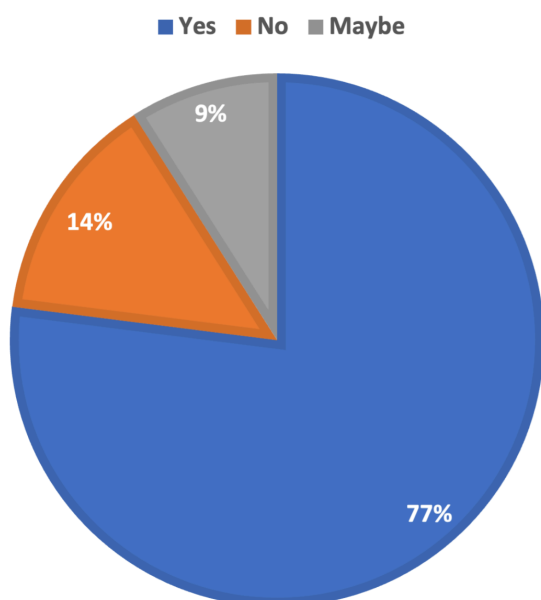


Figure 5. Association of Barnes & Noble with Nostalgia**Table 2.** Interaction with Booktok

Have you ever interacted with BookTok?	Count	Percentage
Never	29	22%
Yes, rarely	32	24%
Yes, sometimes	35	26%
Yes, often	23	17%
Yes, always	14	11%

Table 3. Influence of Booktok on Book Purchases

How often has BookTok influenced your book purchases?	Count	Percentage
Never	42	32%
Rarely	18	14%
Sometimes	37	28%
Often	26	20%
Always	10	8%

Figure 6. Ranking of Factors Important for Bookstore Shopping Experience

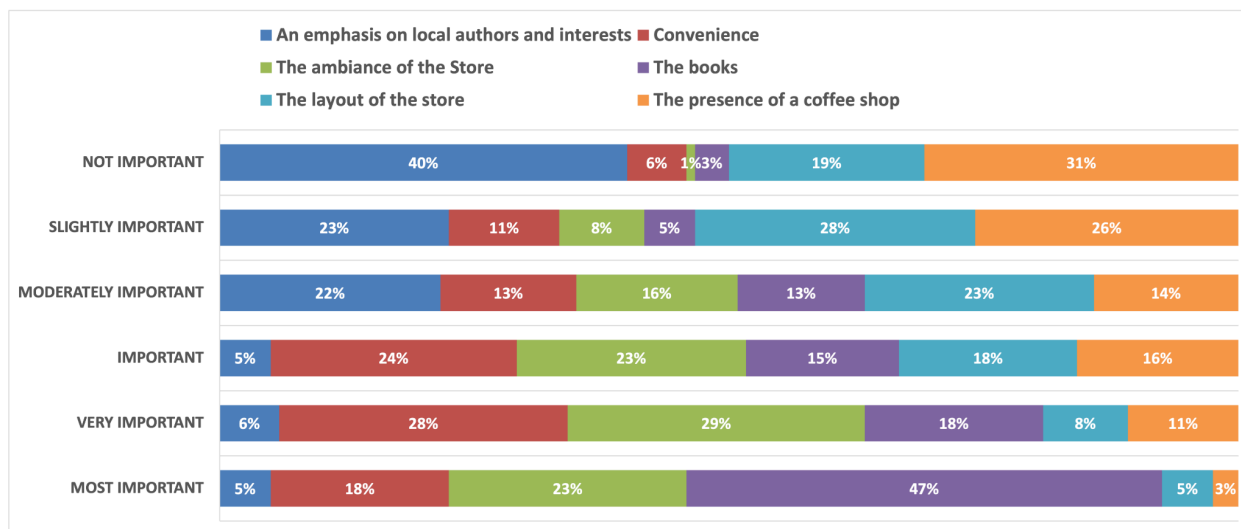


Figure 7. Factors Important for Barnes & Noble Experience

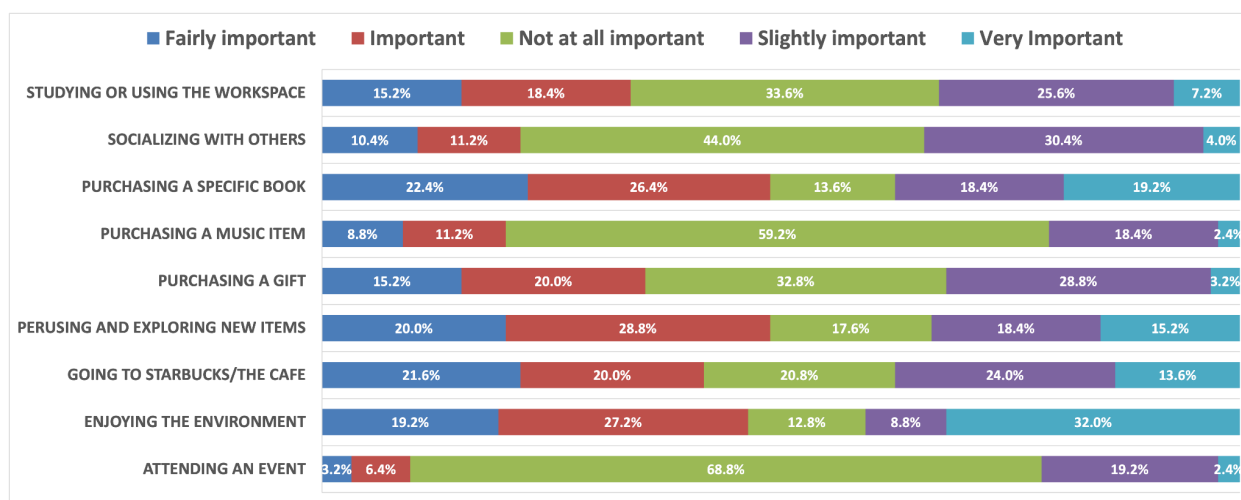
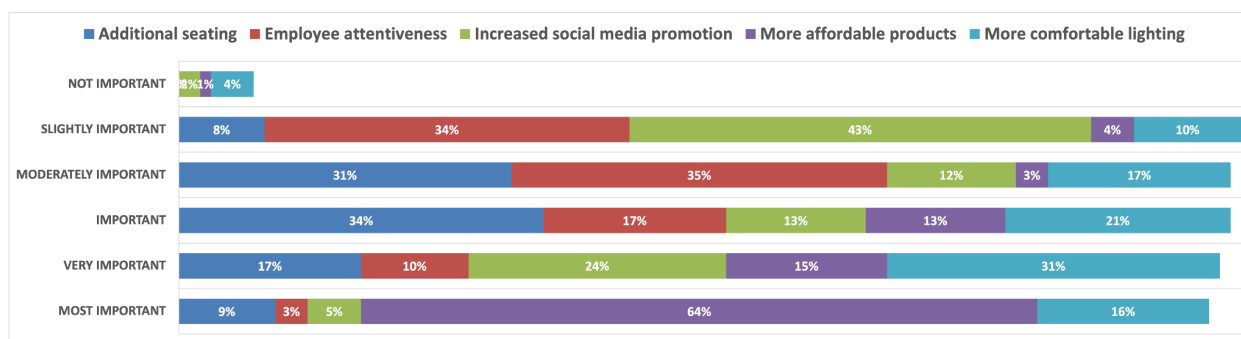


Figure 8. Ranking of Factors Influencing Barnes & Noble Experience



III-3. Subgroup analysis (Crosstab analysis)

Table 4. Gender vs. Booktok

Gender		How often has BookTok influenced your book purchases?				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Male	Count	13	1	2	0	0
	Percentage	81.3%	6.3%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Female	Count	21	13	29	22	8
	Percentage	22.6%	14.0%	31.2%	23.7%	8.6%

Table 5. Graduation Year vs. Nostalgia

What is your Graduation Year?		Do you associate Barnes & Noble with Nostalgia?		
		Yes	No	Maybe
2024	Count	16	3	2
	Percentage	76.2%	14.3%	9.5%
2025	Count	19	3	3
	Percentage	76.0%	12.0%	12.0%
2026	Count	22	7	2
	Percentage	71.0%	22.6%	6.5%
2027	Count	3	0	1
	Percentage	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%

Focus Group Moderator Guide

- When was the last time you shopped at the DeWitt Barnes & Noble?
 - Describe how you felt while shopping there.
 - What brought you in?
- What are the top 3 words you think of when you hear Barnes & Noble?
- How does the DeWitt Barnes & Noble bookstore compare to the store located in your local area or hometown?
 - What is something unique about your local bookstore?
 - What do you like the most there?

- When you decide to go to a bookstore, do you go to whatever is closer or do you consciously choose to go to a particular bookstore?
 - Do you prioritize shopping locally or do you like Barnes & Noble more?
- Have you ever seen anything about Barnes & Noble on social media?
 - If yes, what was it?
 - If not, why do you think you haven't?

BookTok

- Where do you look for book recommendations?
- What is your experience with BookTok?

Purchase experience

- Describe your typical shopping experience at Barnes & Noble?
- Do you prefer shopping at Barnes & Noble, in store or online?
- How do you decide what books to buy?

Impact of curation/book selection

- What about the curated and promoted selections do you notice?
- How would a rebrand shift your view of Barnes & Noble as a company and affect your shopping habits?

Gain insight on how to rebrand

- To shift gears, what aspects of a bookstore draw you in?
 - Can you elaborate on that?
- What do you think of when you think of an independent bookstore?
 - What feelings or “vibes” do you associate?
- What is your ideal bookstore environment?

- What is it about these aspects that you like?
- Is there anything that deters you from specific bookstores?

We recorded the audio from our focus group in addition to taking notes to ensure that no qualitative information was missed. Below is the audio recording of our focus group session.

[Focus Group Recording](#)

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