

Presse-Information

Study examines the impact of Germany's digital public library service "Onleihe": "Publishers and authors must be remunerated fairly."

Publishers and authors call for fair framework in online lending system / First-ever comprehensive study published on the use of "Onleihe" / Findings create the basis for forthcoming political dialogue on e-lending

A new study confirms that Germany's "Onleihe" (digital public library service) actually reduces the willingness of target groups to continue buying books, especially groups consisting of enthusiastic book readers with high purchasing power. The study was published under the name "Wer leiht was in Bibliotheken und insbesondere online? Ein 360°-Blick auf die Onleihe" (tr. Who borrows what in libraries and especially online? A 360° look at the digital library service Onleihe) and presented today in Berlin by the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association) together with the GfK market research institute. The study has made it possible for the Börsenverein to present wide-ranging market research data on e-book borrowers at public libraries for the very first time.

A brief overview of the study's core findings::

- A total of 2.6 million people borrow digital books and other media in Germany via the digital library system known as "Onleihe"; a total of 1.9 million people use the service to borrow e-books.
- Two thirds of Onleihe users are under the age of 50, which means they are very young compared to the overall population. They also score above-average in terms of purchasing power and education.
- Although Onleihe users are among the most active buyers on the book market, almost half of them stated that they purchased fewer or no books at all after they started using Onleihe (45 percent in the case of print books; 46 percent in the case of e-books)
- The majority of Onleihe users are satisfied with the scope of Onleihe media products as well as how up-to-date the products are.

The Börsenverein and the Association of German Writers organised in the ver.di labour union drew the following conclusions with regard to the results of the study:

“The study findings show very clearly that the use of Onleihe products and services has a direct influence on consumers’ activity on the book market. In other words, in order for us to be able to continue providing a broad range of books and e-books in Germany, we are going to need to introduce a fair licensing scheme. The copyright exceptions that libraries are calling for in the case of Onleihe do not provide fair remuneration for the work carried out by publishers and authors. For this reason, these provisions are not a viable option that we are willing to pursue. Instead, we ask that libraries be equipped in the future in such a way that allows them to continue to offer their e-book library products, however under fair conditions for all participants”, argued Nadja Kneissler, Chairman of the Börsenverein’s Publishers’ Committee.

Lena Falkenhagen, chairwoman of the Association of German Writers organised in the ver.di labour union added: “One of the most important roles played by public libraries in society is to foster reading and literacy in children and adolescents. Urban libraries, in particular, have a key responsibility when it comes to efforts to promote reading. In order to be able to pursue these efforts, what we need now, above all else, is a strategy geared towards the promotion of digital reading – among others – with the help of digital books. As long as the focus remains limited to the process of merely expanding digital library offerings, it is difficult to understand why the rights of authors are being curtailed, especially when the majority of people benefiting from these digital services are financially well-off, educated middle-aged individuals.”

Background information:

Germany’s federal government is gearing up to examine the legal framework of digital book lending by public libraries (“Onleihe”). Their aim is to create a system that takes into account the interests of users, authors, libraries and publishers in equal measure. The Onleihe study presented today provides the groundwork and basis for the forthcoming dialogue announced by the federal government. It also sets forth a number of different approaches to achieving a sustainable framework that appropriately remunerates the work of publishers and authors.

More Information:

The complete study is available online at www.boersenverein.de/onleihe

Frankfurt am Main/Berlin, 26. November 2019

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