NielsenIQ BookData

Press Release

Rich metadata key to unlocking book sales, NielsenIQ BookData research finds

New research from NielsenIQ BookData emphasises metadata is no longer merely a supply-chain requirement, but a strategic asset that can improve discoverability, help readers find books, and support stronger sales performance.

For immediate release

LONDON, 4 November 2026 – NielsenIQ BookData today announced the publication of *The Importance of Metadata for Discoverability and Sales 2026*, its latest analysis of the relationship between bibliographic metadata and book sales in the United Kingdom. The report finds that books with richer, more complete and more timely metadata continue to outsell those with sparser records, with long descriptions, keywords and cover images all associated with significantly higher average sales.

The report is the fourth in a series that began with *The Link Between Metadata and Sales* in 2012, followed by updated studies in 2016 and 2020. It blends BookData's bibliographic records with BookScan point-of-sale data for the top 100,000 bestselling printed books of 2025, comparing the average sales of titles with and without numerous metadata elements.

Key findings

- 60% of UK book purchases by volume now take place online, and consumer spending on books reached a record £2.72B in 2025
- Books with a long description sold 119% more on average than those without
- Books containing keyword metadata were associated with 113% higher sales than books without
- Books with a cover image sold 73% more copies on average than those lacking cover imagery
- Meeting the Basic criteria of the Metadata Excellence Award sold 85% more than those that did not, and sales rose at each higher level of accreditation
- Titles that met the Basic standard at least 16 weeks before publication sold 250% more than those that did not meet it or met it only after publication

Discovery has moved online

UK consumers spent £2.72B on books in 2025, buying 345M units across print, ebook and audiobook formats. Some 60% of those sales by volume took place online, rising to 69% for adult fiction, while internet-only retailers accounted for 37% of printed book sales, up from 28% in 2012. NielsenIQ Books & Consumers research shows that the information shoppers see on screen plays a direct role in their decisions: a book's description influenced 17.6% of sales, reviews and recommendations 13.9% and the front cover 12.5%. Almost £325M was spent on books by consumers who said the cover influenced their purchase.

60%

of UK book purchases by volume took place online in 2025

Richer metadata, stronger sales

Long descriptions showed the largest difference, with titles that had one selling 119% more copies on average than those without. Keywords, which retailers use to power search, were associated with 113% higher sales, author biographies with 67% and reviews with 29%.

Standards and timing make a difference

Analysis using the Book Industry Communication (BIC) Metadata Excellence Award criteria, for which NielsenIQ BookData is an approved assessor, shows that sales rise with each level of accreditation. Books meeting the Basic criteria sold 85% more on average than those that did not, with Intermediate (+82%) and Advanced (+78%) titles also outperforming those that missed each standard.

Timeliness matters too. Among the 16,867 titles in the top 100,000 that were published in 2025, books that met the Basic metadata standard at least 16 weeks (112 days) before publication sold 250% more on average than those that never met it or did so only after publication. The higher the standard and the earlier the record was complete, the higher the sales.

Philip Stone, Head of Publisher Account Management at NielsenIQ BookData, who wrote the report said: *“Readers cannot buy books they cannot find. In an increasingly digital marketplace, metadata is no longer simply an operational necessity – it is a strategic asset that helps books reach their full commercial potential.”*

Notes to Editor:

To receive a free copy of the report, complete this form:
https://nielsenbookservicesltd.formstack.com/forms/metadatareportform

For more information email: mediabookresearch@nielseniq.com

About NielsenIQ BookData
NielsenIQ BookData offers a comprehensive range of services to the international book industry, supporting the discovery, purchase, distribution, and sales measurement of books. We proudly manage the ISBN and SAN Agencies for the UK & Ireland, providing publishers with a suite of services, from assigning ISBNs to adding metadata to our database, along with promotional tools to help market your book effectively.

For booksellers and libraries, we offer access to our database of over 54 million book records for title look-up, enriching websites, and managing internal systems. Our research services deliver retail sales analysis for both print and e-books across 19 territories, complemented by insights from our Books and Consumers Survey, as well as Country and Genre-specific reports.

For more information: nielseniq.com/bookdata

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About NIQ
NIQ (NYSE: NIQ) is a leading consumer intelligence company, delivering the most complete and trusted understanding of consumer buying behavior and revealing new pathways to growth. By combining an unmatched global data footprint and granular consumer and retail measurement with decades of AI modeling expertise, NIQ builds decision systems that help companies turn complex data into confident action.

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With operations in more than 90 countries, NIQ covers approximately 82% of the world's population and more than $7.4 trillion in global consumer spend. Through cloud-based platforms, advanced analytics and AI-driven insights, NIQ delivers The Full View™—helping brands and retailers understand what consumers buy, why they buy it, and what to do next.

For more information, please visit niq.com

Forward Looking Statement for Press Release

This press release announcing the publication of The Importance of Metadata for Discoverability and Sales 2026 may contain forward-looking statements regarding anticipated consumer behaviors, market trends, and industry developments. These statements reflect current expectations and projections based on available data, historical patterns, and various assumptions. Words such as "expects," "anticipates," "projects," "believes," "forecasts," and similar expressions are intended to identify such forward-looking statements. These statements are not guarantees of future outcomes and are subject to inherent uncertainties, including changes in consumer preferences, economic conditions, technological advancements, and competitive dynamics. Actual results may differ materially from those expressed or implied in these statements. While we strive to base our insights on reliable data and sound methodologies, we undertake no obligation to update any forward-looking statements to reflect future events or circumstances, except to the extent required by applicable law.

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