



Electronic readers vs. printed books

A comparison of reading behaviour in New Zealand and USA

Foreword

At a certain type of Wellington BBQ or dinner party the printed book versus e-reader debate is always likely to break out. A frequent dynamic of this debate is for the printed book defenders to be more passionate and emotional in their advocacy. Their preference for the printed book is based on intangible factors such as the feel of a book and the smell of a book. Arguments are not always well articulated but the passion that it is the right way to read is evident. E-reader advocates tend to see it as a no-brainer and point to more functional advantages such as light, weight and cost. A UMR Research online survey using our SAYit database throws some hard numbers into the mix.

Foreword

21% of New Zealanders surveyed declared they owned a hand-held device used primarily for e-book reading. A very high level of readership of books was declared. 34% of New Zealanders said that they had read or listened to a total of more than 20 print books, e-books, or audio books in the last 12 months. Only 7% had declared they had not read even part of a print or e-book or listened to an audio book. This was much higher levels of declared readership than the USA. An equivalent Pew survey shows only 15% of USA residents declaring they had read more than 20 books and 23% that they had not read even a small part of one book in the last 12 months. Of all those (93% of the sample) who declared they had made a start on at least one printed, e-book or audio book in the last 12 months, 95% declared they had read a printed book, 36% an e-book and 10% that they had listened to an audio book.

Foreword

Now to the crunch question of the best way to read: printed books were the winner. Amongst those who had at least started one book as an e-book, 35% preferred to read books in print, 22% on an e-reader and 44% bailed for the 'prefer both equally' option. Those most in favour of e-books were predictably under 30 year olds who only preferred the printed book by a 28% to 27% margin. Those aged 45 to 49 were the most hostile age cohort for e-books with 42% preferring the printed version and 18% an e-reader.

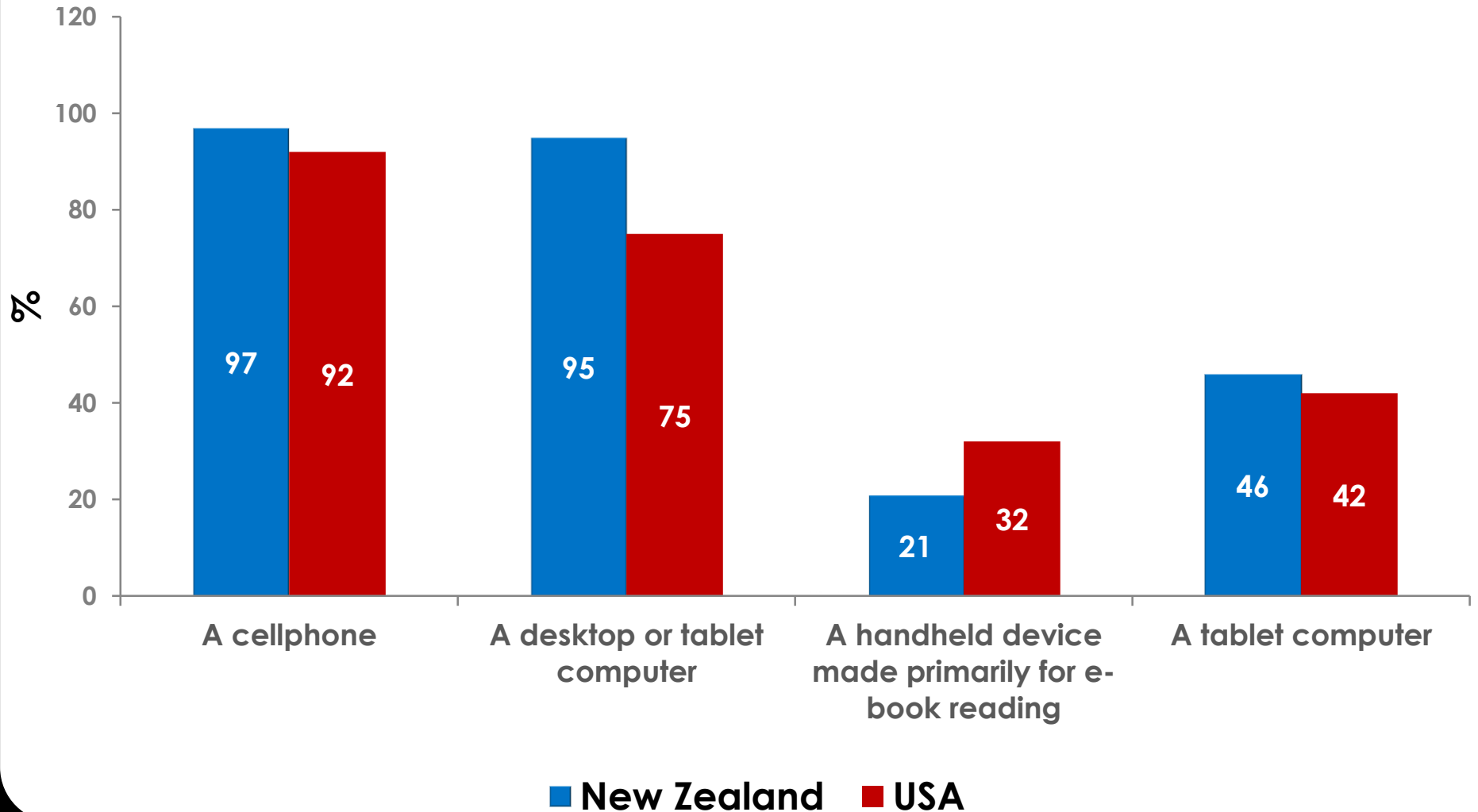
Consistent with the BBQs the major factor cited by those who preferred reading printed books was that they enjoyed the feel and smell. A secondary factor coming through was that there was less strain on the eyes. Lower level factors cited by printed book advocates were that they don't run out of power, it is easier to skip back and forward, habit, and the fact that print books fill bookshelves.

The major factor cited by those who preferred reading books on an e-reader was portability. This was followed by a number of factors of almost equal importance – it makes finding books easier; e-books are cheaper; e-readers are smaller and lighter; they can be read in all conditions and are generally easier to read.

Some evidence now suggests that the onslaught of e-books against printed book sales has stabilised but it will be interesting to see in future tracking if the printed book retains its lead as the preferred way to read.

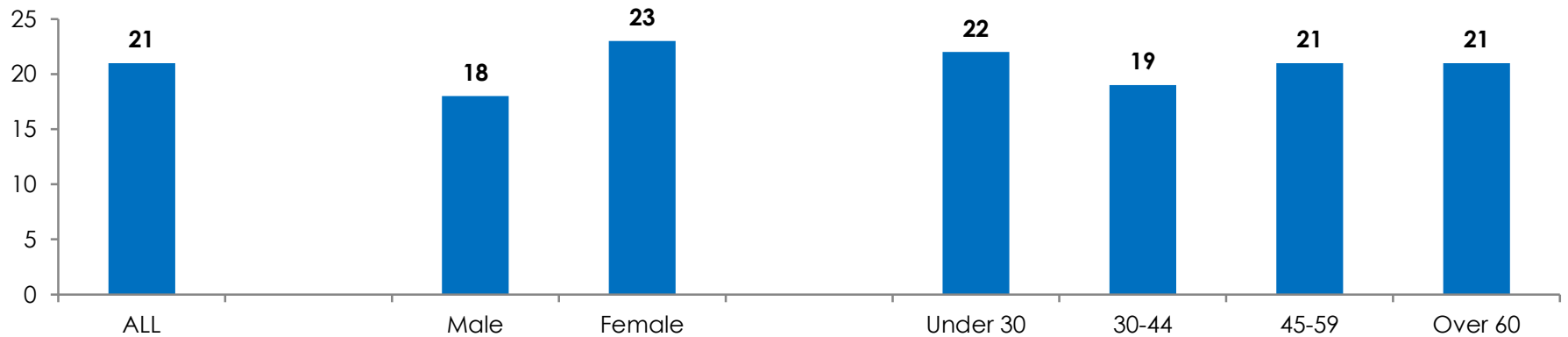
Ownership of devices

Do you own any of the following items?



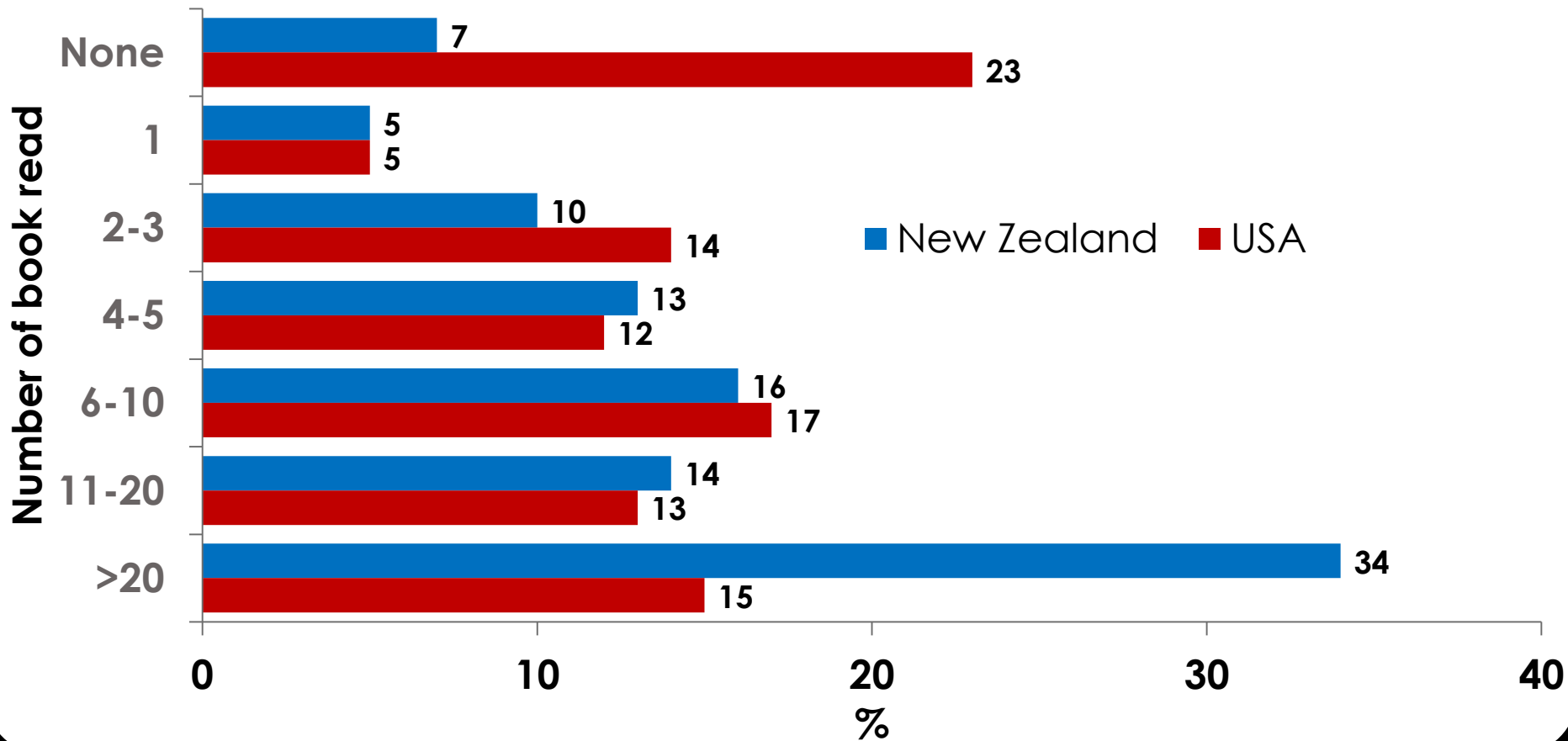
E-reader ownership demographics (NZ)

Do you own any of the following items? - A handheld device made primarily for e-book reading?



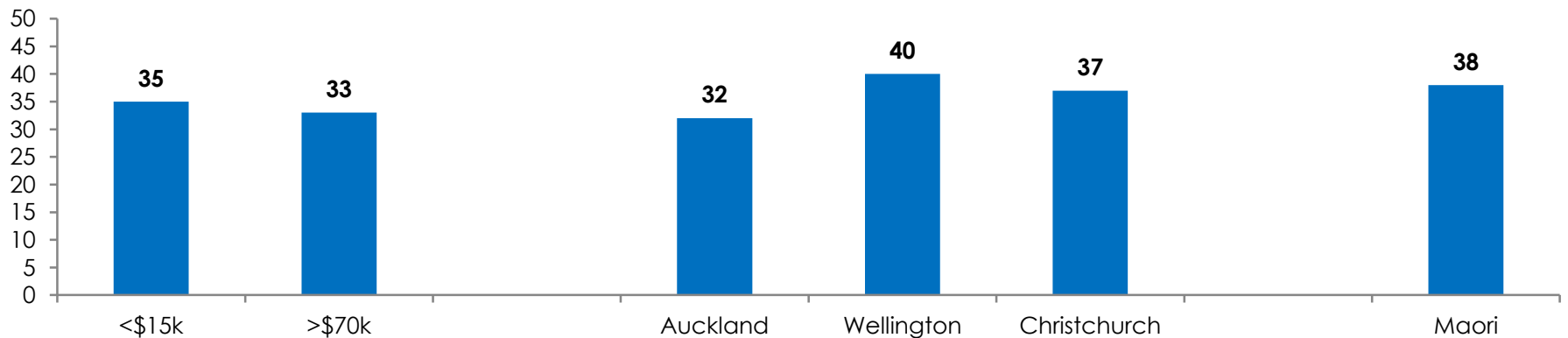
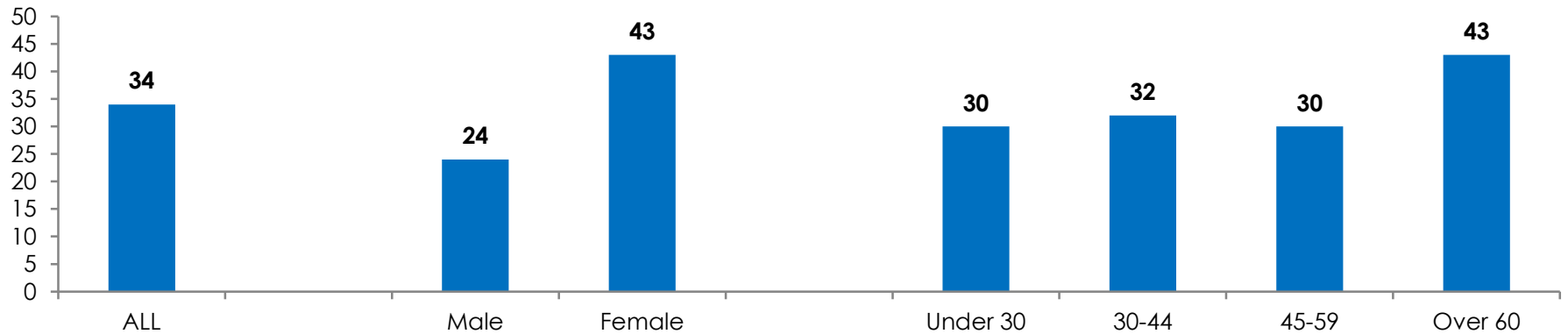
Frequency of reading

During the past 12 months, about how many books did you read either all or part of the way through? Include any print, electronic or audiobooks you may have listened to.



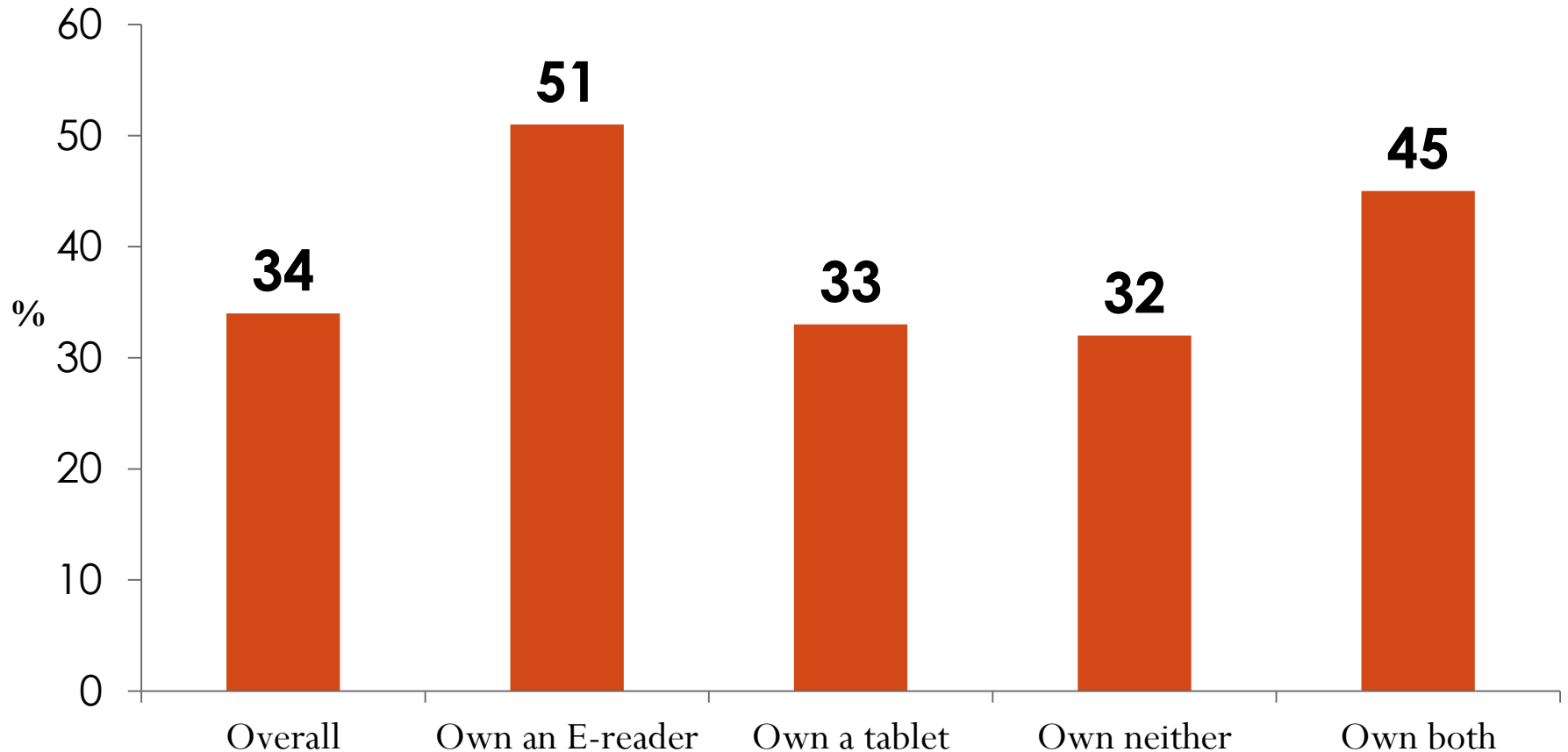
Frequent reader demographics (NZ)

*During the past 12 months, about how many books did you read either all or part of the way through? **More than 20 books***



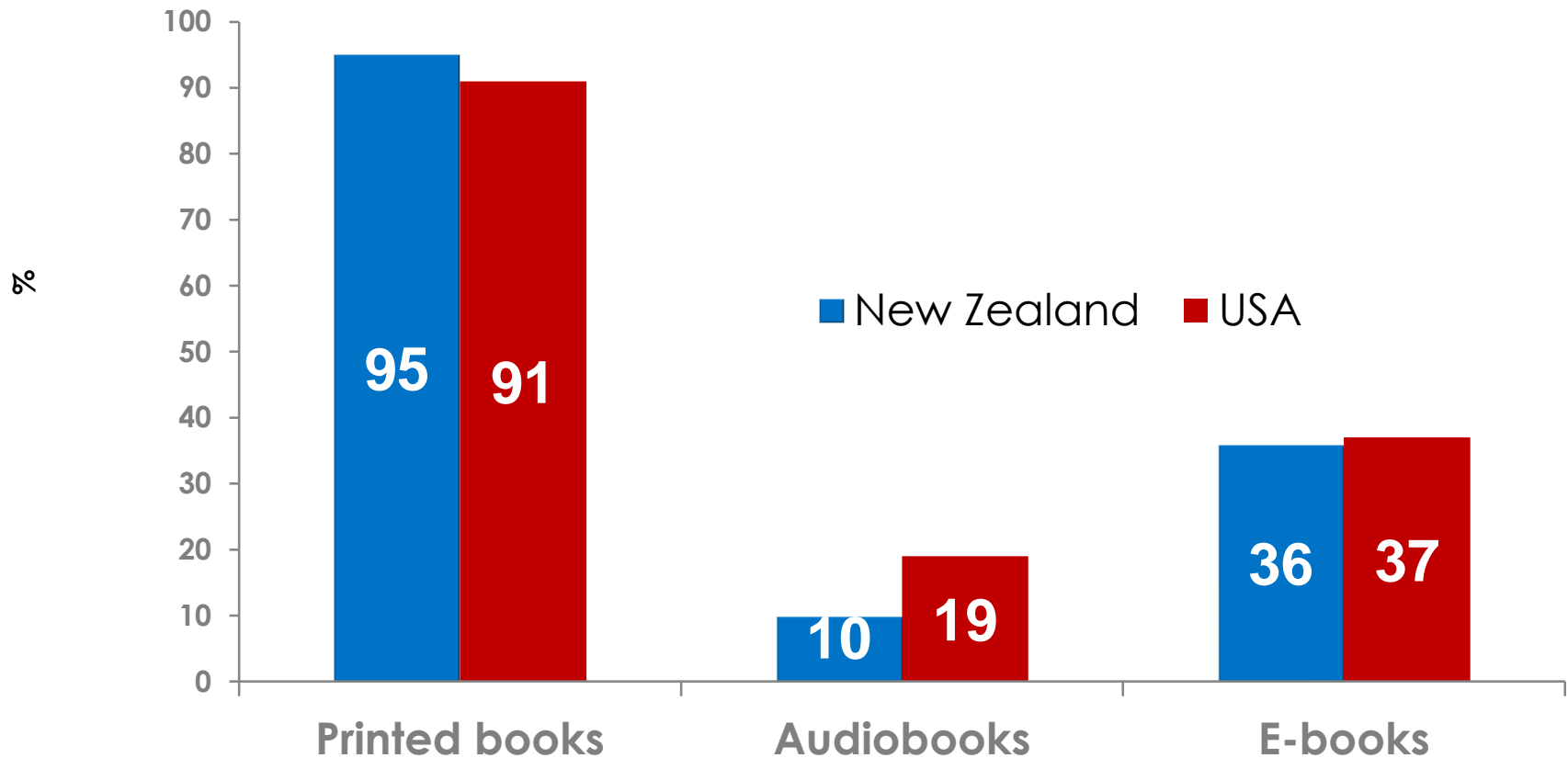
Frequent readers by devices (NZ)

*During the past 12 months, about how many books did you read either all or part of the way through? **More than 20 books***



Types of books

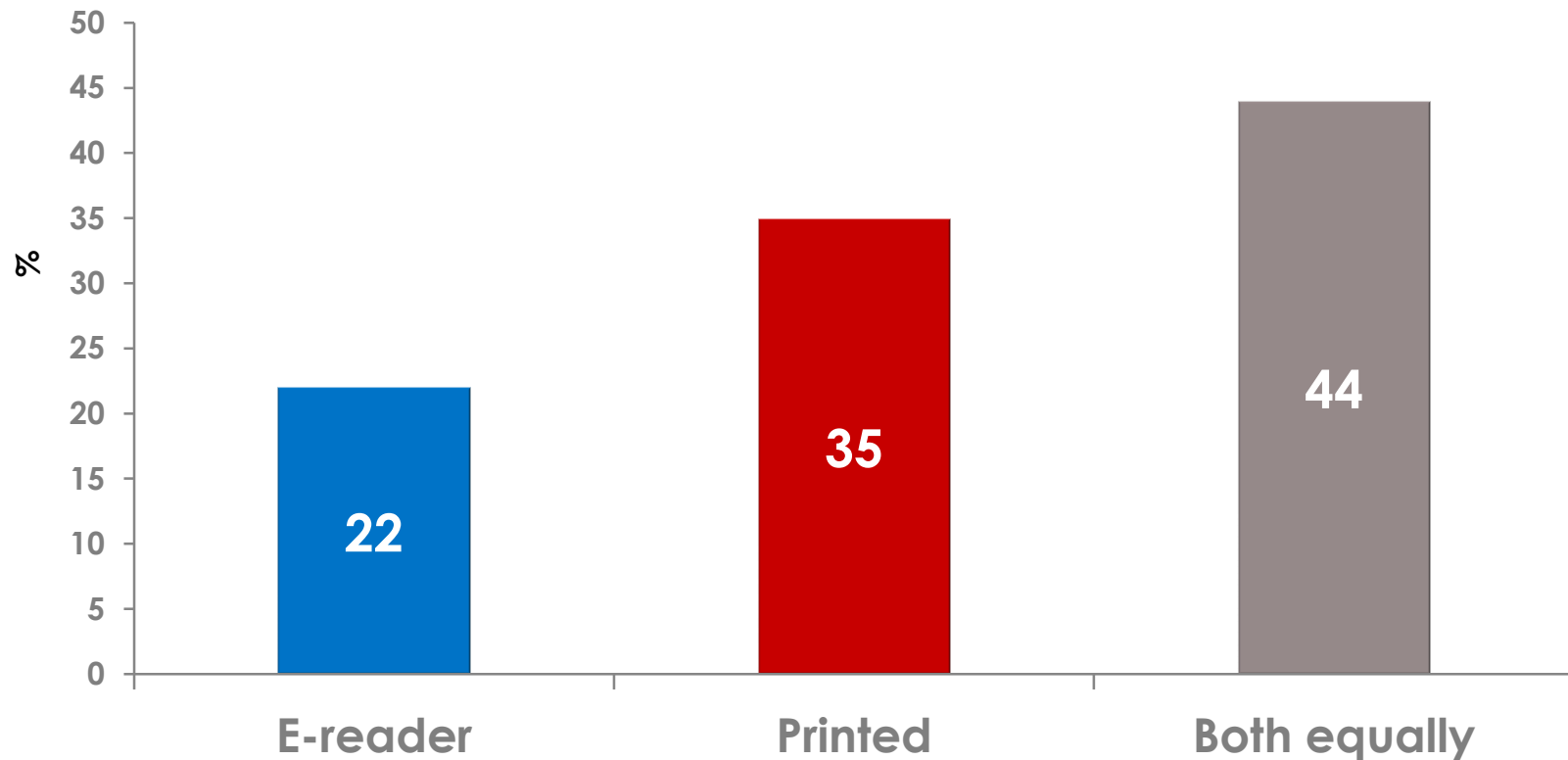
Thinking about all the books you have read in the past 12 months, were any of those...



Base: Those who had read at least one book in the past year

Medium preference (NZ)

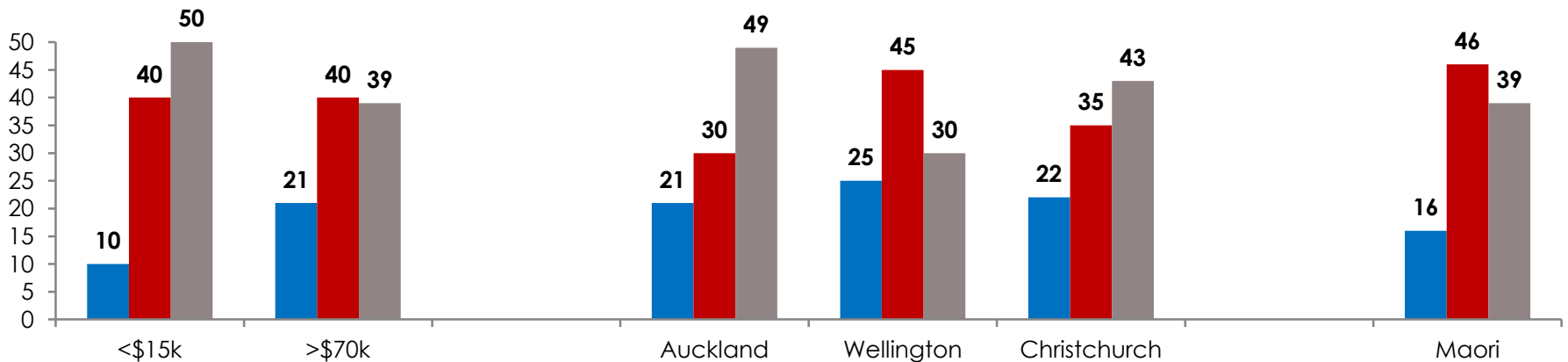
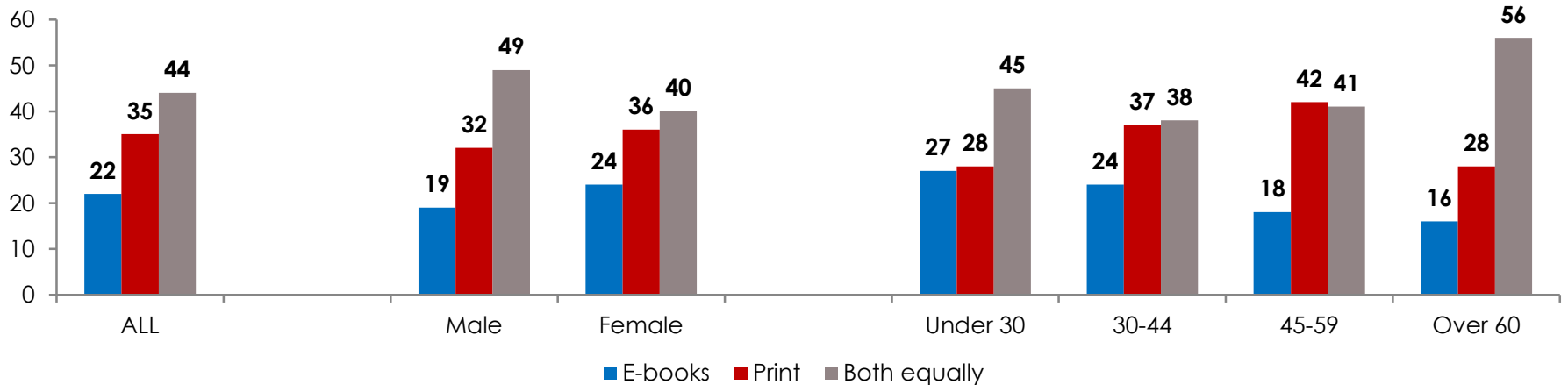
Do you prefer to read books in print or on an e-reader?



Base: Those who had read at least one e-book in the past year

Medium preference demographics (NZ)

Do you prefer to read books in print or on an e-reader?



Base: Those who had read at least one e-book in the past year

Reasons for preferring e-books

*What are the main reasons you prefer reading books on an e-reader?
(Most frequently cited reasons at the top)*

Portability (39%)

Makes finding books easier (25%)

Cheaper books (23%)

Small/Compact/Less weight (23%)

General convenience (23%)

Backlit/Can read in all conditions (21%)

Easier to read (15%)

Reasons for preferring print books

*What are the main reasons you prefer reading printed books?
(Most frequently cited reasons at top)*

Tactile/ Enjoy the feel and smell (41%)

Less eye-strain (23%)

Better experience (20%)

Cannot run out of battery (12%)

Easier to skip back and forward (11%)

Out of habit/tradition (10%)

Fills bookshelves (5%)

Methodology

- The New Zealand data cited is from UMR's April Online Omnibus Survey. This is a nationally representative online survey of 1000 New Zealanders aged 18 or over, conducted monthly. The margin for error for a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level for a sample size of 1000 is $\pm 3.1\%$. Fieldwork for this Survey was conducted between 30th April and 12th May 2014.
- Data for the USA is sourced from a Pew Research Center study. This was a nationally representative telephone survey of 1005 adults living in the continental United States. This survey has a margin for error of $\pm 3.5\%$.