

Ebooks in Lithuania

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Research on ebook availability in Lithuania (in national online bookstores and on the websites of academic institutions) was carried out and aspects of the ebook market there in 2014 were analysed. The main ebook retailers and publishers (including academic ones) in Lithuania were identified, ebooks in the Lithuanian language on sale were counted, and ebook formats and pricing were analysed. The results showed that, compared with 2013, the number of ebook titles on sale was growing and had reached 1700. About 1750 titles were also available from the platforms of Lithuanian academic institutions. Finally, the black market and the piracy situation were examined, revealing more than 4000 illegally published ebook titles in Lithuanian.

Keywords: digital publishing, publishing, ebooks, digital books, ebookstores, ebook retailers, ebook publishers, Lithuania

Introduction

The book market in Lithuania has always been small. The population of Lithuania on 1 January 2013 was 2.972 million people,¹ and approximately 0.430 million Lithuanian citizens (Migration Department, 2013) live outside the country (mostly in the UK, Ireland, Canada, and Norway). There is no regulation of the prices of books or ebooks in Lithuania. A reduced VAT (9 per cent) is applied to printed books, whereas ebooks are subject to full VAT (21 per cent), as are audiobooks.

A total of 3356 titles were published in Lithuania in 2013 and 4.4 million copies of printed books and brochures were printed. Thirty-five per cent of all titles are translations from other languages (Markevičienė and Tamulynienė, 2014). The number of printed titles in 2013 was 26 per cent down on 2003 (4559 titles). According to Statistics Lithuania (2013), printed book

retail sales reached €29 million in 2013. Across Lithuania 207 bookshops were operating at the beginning of 2013 (Gudiniavičius and Nagytė, 2014) and about 140 publishing houses were active in 2014 (Macevičiūtė et al., 2014).

It has never been easy for book publishers in Lithuania to sell the number of books required to keep themselves profitable. Since 2001, digital publishing has been growing in the country, and many traditional publishers have faced a new set of challenges—including whether to enter the digital publishing market or not. The first online bookshop for ebooks in the Lithuanian language was opened in 2010 (*skaitykle.lt*). However, there are no official institutions in Lithuania collecting statistical data on published ebooks. The National Library is only collecting statistics about printed books, brochures, and the so-called ‘electronic resources’, which mainly covers CD-ROMs with multimedia content (including multimedia ebooks and audiobooks on CD-ROMs). The purpose of this paper is to determine the number of ebook titles on sale in the country in 2014 and to find the answers to the following questions. What is the trend of ebook publishing in Lithuania? What are the main publishing houses publishing as ebooks? Do academic institutions publish ebooks? How big are ebook sales in Lithuania? What were the average prices of ebooks in 2014? What formats and copy protection are used most often? What is the influence of the black market?

The online research carried out on the sales channels for ebooks in Lithuania revealed that national online bookstores offer the widest choice. There are some ebooks in Lithuanian on Amazon, Apple, Kobo, and other international stores but the number of titles is rather small compared with what is available in the national stores. The data on ebooks available for sale in the biggest online bookstores were collected twice: on 1 July 2013 and 1 July 2014. The data were collected from the four biggest online bookstores in Lithuania, all of them established before 2013: *skaitykle.lt* (January 2010), *knygute.lt* (2011), *knygos.lt/eknygos.lrytas.lt* (November 2012), and *pegasas.ekps.lt/eknygos.delfi.lt* (December 2012). These bookstores are using different strategies. *Skaitykle.lt* and *knygute.lt* sell only ebooks from their online stores. The other two (*knygos.lt* and *pegasas.ekps.lt*) also sell printed books and cooperate with news portals. At the end of 2012, *knygos.lt*, one of the largest online retailers of printed books, introduced an ebookstore in cooperation

with one of the biggest Lithuanian news portals, *lrytas.lt*. In a few months, the same strategy was also followed by *pegasas.ekps.lt* (this ebookstore belongs to the biggest publishing group in Lithuania, Alma Littera). They shared all ebooks with the news portal *delfi.lt*. In 2013 and the first half of 2014, two new online ebookstores appeared: *manoknyga.lt* and *tavoknygos.lt*.

Information about ebook titles (author, title, price, format, year of publication, publisher) was extracted from the online bookstores and processed using statistical tools. The data revealed the approximate number of ebooks in the market, the biggest ebook publishing houses in Lithuania, ebook prices, the most popular ebook formats, and the methods used in digital rights management. Analysis of the data enabled publishing trends to be identified. To investigate the situation of academic publishers and retailers, research was carried out on their websites. Finally, the ebook black market was examined and analysed.

Digital Reading Devices

Lithuania offers excellent conditions for digital reading—broadband is used by 64 per cent of households, and 47 per cent of households have access to high-speed broadband (fibre-optic cables to the home) (Verslo žinios, 2014). The internet speed is one of the fastest in the world. There are no statistics on sales of ereaders in Lithuania. Although some sellers say that ereader sales have increased by two to three times in the past few years, the numbers are still very low. For example, according to the 2013 data, the biggest chain of electronics stores in Lithuania, Topo centras, sold 51 ereaders in 2011,

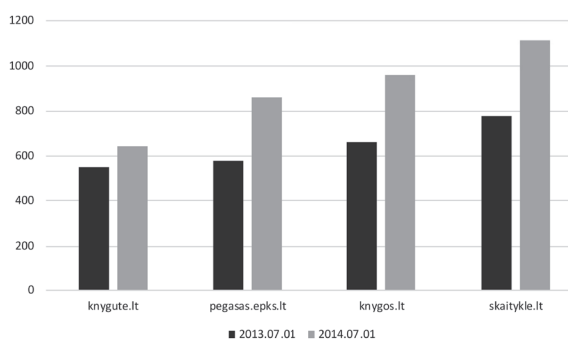


Figure 1. Number of ebook titles on sale in Lithuania (1 July 2013 and 1 July 2014).

115 in 2012, and was expecting the sale of 230–345 in 2013. In 2012, the Lithuanian company Mikrovizata even started selling ereaders under its own brand (eSTAR ER6620 6.0) (Migonytė, 2013). The most popular ereader brands on sale in Lithuania are Prestigio, PocketBook, Sony, Lark, Best Buy, and Amazon. The average price varies from €70 to €140.

Tablet computers are much more popular in Lithuania. In 2013, around 7000 tablets were sold every month, totalling 61 000 tablets in the first nine months of 2013, a growth of about 300 per cent from the previous year. The most popular brands are Samsung, Prestigio, and Apple (Balsas.lt, 2013). According to the latest information, about eight per cent of Lithuanians own a tablet computer (Tele2.lt, 2014).

The Number of Ebooks on Sale

Analysis of the four largest and oldest online ebookstores showed that the number of unique ebook titles on sale increased by approximately 31 per cent between

2013 and 2014. In 2013, about 1300 unique titles were on sale, increasing to about 1700 titles a year later. *Skaitykle.lt* continues to have the highest number of titles (1114). The biggest growth (49 per cent) was recorded in *pegasas.epks.lt* (from 578 titles in 2013 to 862 in 2014), whereas *knygute.lt* was not very successful, showing growth of only 16 per cent (see Figure 1).

About 58 per cent of all titles available could be bought on two or more of the biggest online ebookstores and even the prices were the same. More than 90 per cent of these ebook titles were published in print (mostly earlier) also. Publishers usually provide the year of ebook publication in the information about the ebook. However, they use different approaches: some of them use the same date as the publication date of the printed version, but most of them do not. It is therefore difficult to get a precise picture of the numbers of ebooks published in a specific year. Nevertheless, the trend is obvious: the number of ebook titles is growing and the number of printed books is going down (see Figure 2).

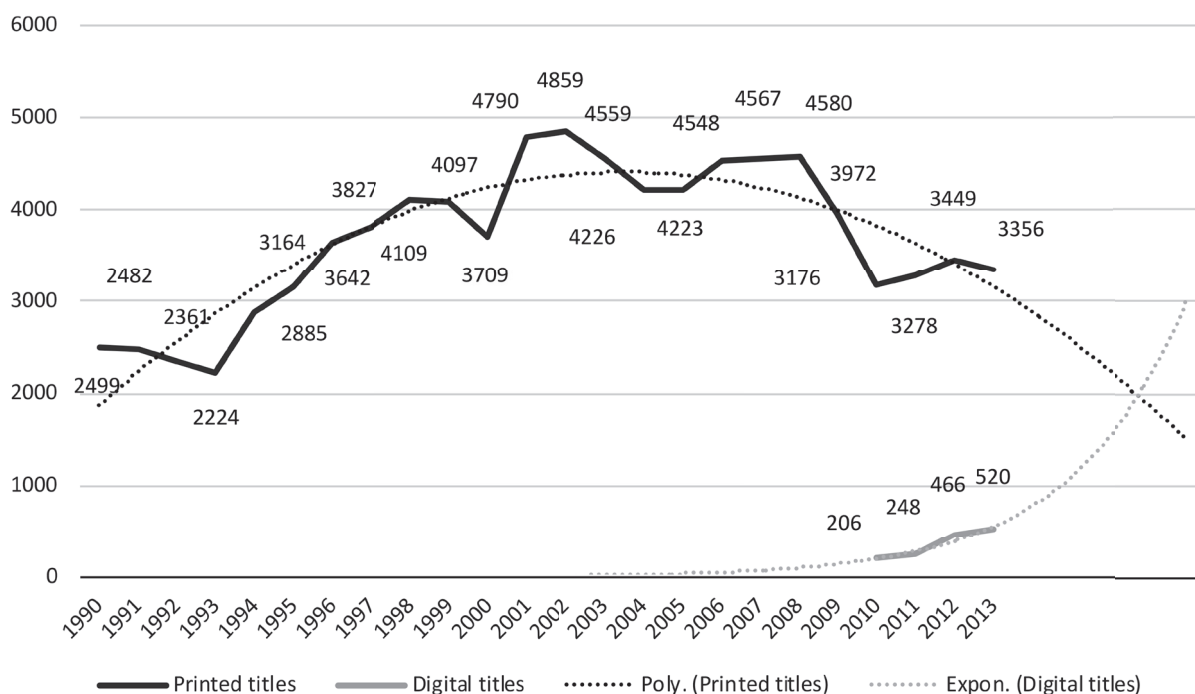


Figure 2. Publishing dynamics in Lithuania (1990–2014). Academic publishers’ ebooks are not included (mainly print-ready PDFs).

Source: Statistical data on printed books from the Lithuanian National Bibliographic Database.

Ebook Publishers

The number of e-publishers (including self-publishers) increased by 38 per cent: in 2013 there were 67 publishers with ebooks on sale; by 2014 the number had increased to 95. Most of them have only a few ebooks on sale. The average number of titles per publisher remains almost the same: 19 in 2013 and 18 in 2014. The number of self-publishers increased—from 22 (2013) to 31 (2014). In 2013, Jonas Mačiukevičius was the top self-publisher with 13 titles (this remained the same in 2014).

Currently, the largest e-publishers in Lithuania are Alma Littera (which is also the biggest publisher of printed books), with 469 titles on sale (up 38 per cent from 2013); Eridanas (no longer active but ebook rights were sold to Litrecords, so 378 ebook titles remain on sale—mostly science fiction—on *knygute.lt* only); and Svajonių knygos, with 241 titles on sale, mostly romance (showing 38 per cent growth on the previous year).

There are 13 e-publishers with 20 or more ebooks on sale in Lithuania (see Figure 3). All of them increased the number of ebooks on sale—except Eridanas and *knygute.lt*, which belong to the same owner and whose activities have been suspended.

Ebook Prices

Over a period of one year, the average ebook price (excluding free titles) went up by nine per cent from €4.19 to €4.56. The main reason was the higher price of newly published ebooks. Almost all ebooks published after 1 July 2013 had the same price one year later. In order to understand ebook pricing strategies, all unique titles were divided into five price ranges. The results showed that most titles are in the €0.01–3.00 range: 45 per cent in 2013 and 52 per cent in 2014 (see Figure 4). In 2013, 26 per cent of ebooks were priced €3.01–6.00, rising to 27 per cent in 2014. Significant growth was seen in the €6.01–10.00 price range: from 19 per cent in 2013 to 23 per cent in 2014. In 2014, two titles (textbooks from the publishing house *Šviesa*) with a price over €20 appeared on the market. The number of free titles is also growing, though these titles form only a small part of the total number.

In order to compare the prices of ebooks and printed books, some simple research was done in online and traditional bookstores. Twenty random ebooks were selected to fill a shopping cart and prices were analysed. It was discovered that the reader can save around 11 per cent if they buy printed books in an online bookstore and 62

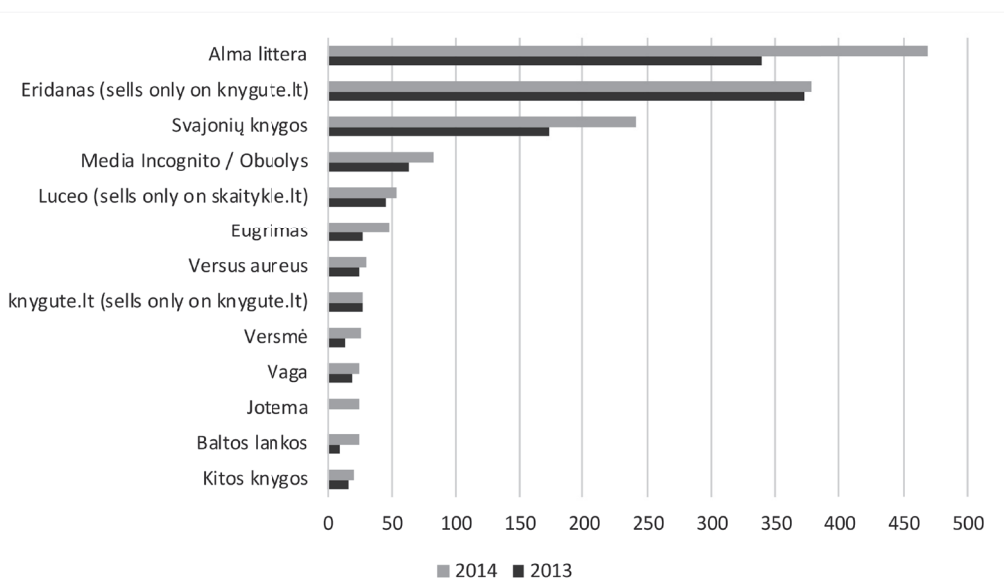


Figure 3. Largest e-publishers by the number of titles on sale in Lithuania (1 July 2013 and 1 July 2014).

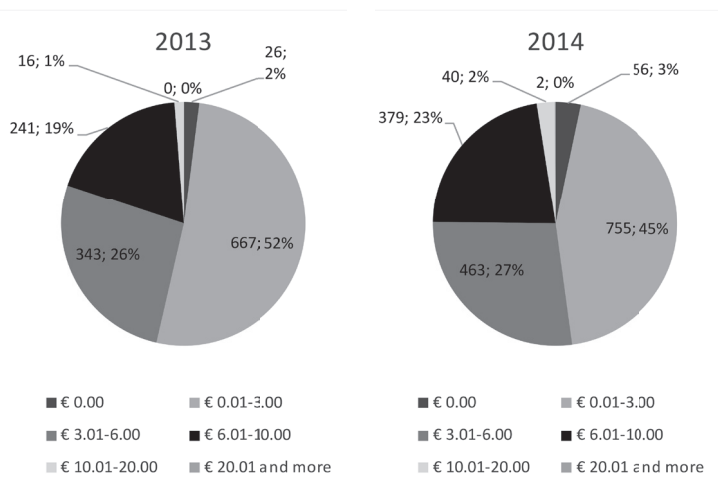


Figure 4. Ebook prices in Lithuania (1 July 2013 and 1 July 2014).

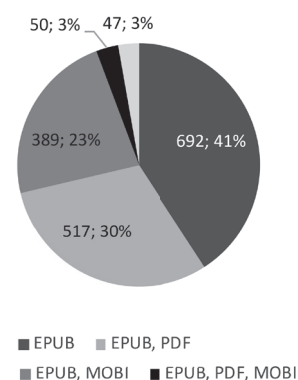


Figure 5. Ebook formats in Lithuania (1 July 2014).

per cent if they buy ebooks. In 2014, three printed books from the 2013 shopping cart were out of stock. All ebooks were still on sale and the price of all 20 ebooks remained exactly the same as in 2013. The price of the shopping cart containing the 17 printed books still in stock went up by slightly more than two per cent.

Publishing Formats

EPUB 2.0 is the most popular ebook format in Lithuania. About 97 per cent of ebooks on sale are in EPUB format, 36 per cent are available in PDF, and 26 per cent in MOBI. Most retailers use EPUB and one of other formats. Only about three per cent of ebooks are available in all three formats (mostly on *knygute.lt*). The distribution of titles by format can be seen in Figure 5; the most popular choice of retailers is to sell ebooks in EPUB format only or in EPUB and PDF.

Ebook Sales

There are no official statistics on the revenues from ebook sales from online bookstores. The main online bookstores were asked to share their sales data, but not all of them agreed to do so. However, some insights could still be gained.

According to the statistics on revenues provided by some of the online bookstores, the ebook sales market in Lithuania was about €90 000 in 2013. Each of the two major players has a third of the market, the rest being

shared among the others. It seems that the revenues of online bookstores are very different: the leaders generated up to €30 000 per year (by selling about 4500–5000 ebooks per year), whereas the beginners earned €500–600 (about 90 ebooks per year) in 2013. In all, about 13 000 to 15 000 ebooks were sold in 2013. It is interesting that the average sale price of an ebook (about €6.40) is higher than the average catalogue price (€4.56); this suggests that Lithuanian ebook readers prioritize quality over price.

Ebook Publishing in Academic Institutions

Four of the five largest Lithuanian universities sell and/or provide free of charge a total of 1754 titles for their communities (mostly textbooks, monographs, etc.): Kaunas University of Technology (KUT), Mykolas Romeris University (MRU), Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU), and Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). From 2013 to 2014, the overall number of titles increased by 3.8 per cent. The reason for the slow increase was that MRU, which had recently adopted the iPublish-Central platform (as VGTU did a few years before), reduced the number of their titles by 35 per cent. The other three universities increased the number of titles on sale by 7–11 per cent. The leader is KUT (796 titles on sale) followed by VGTU (498), VMU (319), and MRU (151). Vilnius University (VU), although the biggest Lithuanian university (20 093 students; Aleksandravičiūtė et al., 2014) and

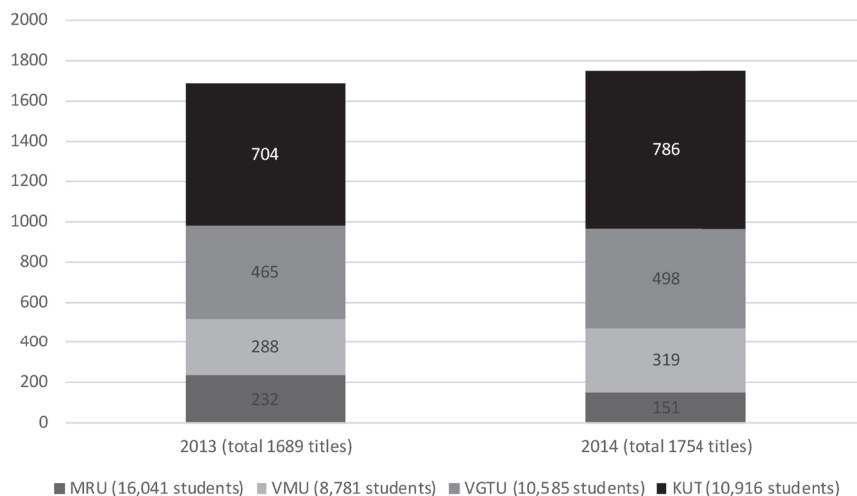


Figure 6. Ebook publishing in academic institutions (1 July 2014 and 1 July 2013).

Source: Student data from Birutė Aleksandravičiūtė et al. (2014).

home of the only Publishing Studies programme, has no ebooks available (Figure 6).

The ebooks of all the academic institutions are available only in PDF, and opportunities to download ebook files to ereaders for offline reading are limited. Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (*ebooks.vgtu.lt*) and MRU (*ebooks.mruni.eu*) have chosen the iPublishCentral platform. Kaunas University of Technology (*ebooks.ktu.lt*) and VMU (*ebooks.vdu.lt*) are using a simple platform offered by the private Lithuanian company Knygininkas.

Black Market

In order to investigate the illegal distribution of ebooks in Lithuania, illegally distributed ebooks in Lithuanian were searched for on Google. Two groups of illegal distribution models were found: dedicated websites with catalogues of downloadable ebooks (with detailed descriptions of titles; sometimes with a monthly subscription); and torrent search and sharing websites with ebook sections (free of charge; registration after the required member invitation).

The four largest ebook-dedicated websites with ebook catalogues were found (cf. the official online ebookstores mentioned above): *pdfknygos.com*, *visosknygos.lt*, *nemokamospdfknygos.lt*, *el-knygos.eu* (see Table 1). Taking duplicates into account, about 3500 titles are available on these websites for illegal download (free or through paid subscription). All these ebooks

were scanned from printed titles and converted to PDF; thus, the majority of them are not from official online ebookstores.

There are two big torrent search and sharing websites with large ebook sections in Lithuania: *linkomanija.net* and *torrent.lt* (see Table 2). *Linkomanija.net* is the oldest and as of 10 August 2014 the site had a total of about 96 000 torrent items, of which 5800 were ebooks in Lithuanian. A few items were packages of ebooks, each of which could contain from tens to hundreds of ebooks. About 400 audiobook, 3400 ebook, and 1200 journal torrents were available. Most of them are in PDF and only about 20 per cent in EPUB. *Torrent.lt* has a higher total number of torrents (about 223 000), but only about 1700 torrents are in the ebook category. Here users can find the torrent files of about 1000 ebooks (mostly textbooks), 400 audiobooks, and 300 journals.

Almost all ebooks found on the aforementioned dedicated websites with ebook catalogues (Table 1) and torrent search websites (Table 2) are duplicates. Therefore, in total, the choice of ebooks and ejournals in Lithuanian on the black market comprises about 4000–4500 titles of ebooks (mostly scanned and OCR'd PDF files), 400 audiobooks (MP3 format), and 1200–1500 journals (PDF).

The torrent sites usually provide downloading information—how many times a specific item has been downloaded. Non-fiction ebooks, textbooks, and audiobooks of classic Lithuanian authors are the most popular for download. The most downloaded (20

<i>Dedicated website with ebook catalogue</i>	<i>PDF titles</i>	<i>Audiobooks</i>	<i>Access</i>
el-knygos.eu	2200	13	Free download
nemokamospdfknygos.lt	1400	104	Paid subscription required
pdfknygos.com	360	10	Free download
visosknygos.lt	330	14	Paid subscription required

Table 1. Dedicated Lithuanian websites with catalogues of illegal ebooks for downloading

<i>Torrent website</i>	<i>PDF and EPUB titles</i>	<i>Audiobooks</i>	<i>Journals</i>	<i>Comments</i>
linkomanija.net	3400	400	1200	Registration after required member invitation
torrent.lt	1000	400	300	Registration after required member invitation

Table 2. Lithuanian torrent websites with illegal ebook catalogues

August 2014) ebooks in Lithuanian are *Rules of the Road. Tests (KET bilietai 2009)*, Allen Carr, *Easy Way to Stop Smoking (Lengvas būdas mesti rūkyti)*, and former president Valdas Adamkus's book *The Last Term of Office (Paskutinė kadencija)*. Recipe ebooks and textbooks for primary and higher education are also very popular, as well as tips to quit smoking.

... there is a bigger choice of ebook titles on the black market than on the official retail websites.

Two interesting and important points can be highlighted. First, there is a bigger choice of ebook titles on the black market than on the official retail websites. Second, there are almost no ebooks from official retailers on the black market. Ebooks available on the black market are published by users themselves—illegally converted from printed books. This is quite surprising because the analysis of official retail online stores showed that in Lithuania it is not popular to protect ebooks with traditional digital rights management (DRM) (for example, Adobe Adept DRM). Most of them are protected with so-called 'social DRM' only, using watermarking.

Conclusions

- The biggest choice of ebooks in Lithuanian can be found in national online stores. About 1700 titles were on sale on 1 July 2014 (31 per cent growth on 2013). It is not popular to sell Lithuanian-language or translated ebooks on international platforms.
- The largest (by number of titles) ebook publishers in Lithuania are Alma Littera, Eridanas, and Svajonių knygos.
- The average ebook price is €4.56. Almost 50 per cent of ebooks titles are in the €0.01–3.00 price range, but growth in the number of titles in a higher price range was discovered. The average price of a sold ebook is higher—about €6.40.
- Almost all ebooks are available in EPUB format. Some retailers are using PDF and MOBI together with EPUB. Despite the fact that traditional DRM is not popular in Lithuania (social DRM is used instead), no officially published ebooks are illegally distributed on the black market. The black market distributes only home-made (scanned and OCR'd) print editions.
- The total number of illegal ebook titles in Lithuanian on the black market is about 4000–4500. This number surpasses the number of titles offered by official retailers: about 3400 (including ebooks of academic institutions).

- In 2013, the ebook sales market in Lithuania amounted to about €90 000. Each of the two biggest players has a third of the market. Around 13 000 to 15 000 ebooks were sold in 2013. Sales are increasing slowly but a strong marketing strategy is required.
- Digital publishing is quite popular in the strongest Lithuanian academic institutions: four of the five

largest universities sell and/or provide free of charge a total of more than 1700 titles for their communities. They employ different models of sales and protection than Lithuanian online bookstores. The ebooks of all academic organizations are available in PDF with limited opportunities to download them to traditional e-readers for offline reading. ■

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Note

- 1 <http://osp.stat.gov.lt>