Reading for Pleasure in Young Readers: Shift from Page to Screen

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Reading is an extremely important skill. Reading helps in all-round development of a person from his birth to death. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to the mind. However, in the modern multimedia society, the radio, television, cell phone, computer and the Internet have captured a big slice of time and reading has taken a back seat. All these gadgets have started replacing traditional books. Children, youth and adults alike are more inclined towards new technology for information, entertainment and pleasure. They read, but not from the pages, they do it on screen.

Due to technological development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is going through a major shift. The proportion of young adults, especially students who read a print book has decreased drastically. This is taken over by e-book reading and audio book listening.

Because new media and online literacy are part and parcel of our day-to-day lives, reading researchers and educators have started to view them as a central aspect of literacy research. It is of interest to know if computer technology affects students' reading habits and if we could help them in any respect. Helping more students to become effective readers is one of the goals of educators in modern times. If computers have replaced the traditional literacy world, it is noteworthy that educators, publishers, writers, and software engineers might cooperate with each other to create more interesting and economic online materials for students based on the knowledge of students' reading habits and reading behaviours.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how to cater to the new content and material to suit the need for ever increasing young readers with

the help of technology and at the same time how to retain the importance of traditional book reading

Introduction:

"Over the course of the last two centuries, Western culture has come to be dominated by the visual rather than oral or textual media. Even the bastion of the printed word, the newspaper, has turned to images…" (Introduction to Visual Culture by Martina sturken & Lisa Cartwright)**.**

Major Findings and Implications of the study:

The impact of visual media technology on pleasure reading is very crucial on youngsters. Technology is playing a central role in young people's literacy development and reading choice. While we welcome the positive impact which technology has on bringing further reading opportunities to young people, it's crucial that reading in print is not cast aside. If computers have replaced the traditional literacy world, it is noteworthy that educators, publishers, writers, and software engineers might cooperate with each other to create more interesting and economic online materials for students based on the knowledge of students' reading habits and reading behaviours.

Reading is an extremely important skill. Reading helps in all-round development of a person from his birth to death. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to the mind. A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading. However, in the modern multimedia society, the radio, television, cell phone, computer and the Internet have captured a big slice of time and reading has taken a back seat. All these gadgets have started replacing traditional books. Children, youth and adults alike are more inclined towards new technology for information, entertainment and pleasure. They read, but not from pages, they do it on screen. In addition to personal and mental developments, reading is critical for ensuring one's access to social, economic and civic life. Against the backdrop of rapidly changing nature of life as well as the

society, reading is considered to be crucial for people from all cross-sections of life for successfully coping with the complexities and challenges of the 21st century.

Due to technological development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is going through a major shift. The proportion of young adults, especially students who read a print book has decreased drastically. This is taken over by e-book reading and audio book listening. In recent times, the emergence of digital technologies and various modes of social interaction has resulted in 'reading' facing a number of hurdles. Reading among young people is said to be on the decline because of their interest in social networking, gaming, music, and so on.

In a viral YouTube video in October 2011 a one-year-old girl sweeps her fingers across an iPad's touch screen, shuffling groups of icons. In the following scenes she appears to pinch, swipe and prod the pages of paper magazines as though they too were screens. When nothing happens, she pushes against her leg, confirming that her finger works just fine. This follows with the writer's note: "Technology codes our minds," he writes in the video's description. "Magazines are now useless and impossible to understand, for digital natives"—that is, for people who have been interacting with digital technologies from a very early age.

Because new media and online literacy are part and parcel of our day-to-day lives, reading researchers and educators have started to view them as a central aspect of literacy research. It is of interest to know if computer technology affected students' reading habits and if we could help them in any respect. Helping more students to become effective readers is one of the goals of educators in modern times. The aim of this paper is to discuss how to cater to the new content and material to suit the need for ever increasing young readers with the help of technology and at the same time how to retain the importance of traditional book reading.

Somerset Maugham said, "To acquire the habit of reading is to construct for yourself a refuge from almost all miseries of life." Reading habit has been a great help in developing knowledge. But today, in an age of viral connect browsing the net, playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMS seem to be the order of the day. The internet boom, interactive medium of images, TV and the silver screen are filling the minds of the modern youth, taking up a major part of their free time. It makes one think seriously about how the growing generations will find time to read. While technology is taking control steadily over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air.

Today's global world has liberated reading from the confines of print medium. The scope of the reading has extended to many other sources like the internet which has changed the traditional notion and culture of the readers across the world. Reading is one of the oldest habits of human race. This common intellectual exercise has been the passion of the greatest personalities of all the times. Old manuscripts found in most of the ancient cultures are the evidence of this habit. With the invention of the printing press of Gutenberg, the reach of the print word spread like never before. Before this invention the oral traditions were practiced but printed words provided a giant leap in the creation of a whole new reading society. But this dependence on print for reading has changed drastically with the invention of new technologies like computer, internet and mobiles. The readers are now largely divided into two broad categories: E- readers and print readers.

The hypertext and hypermedia technologies have provided e-readers to shift from one page to the other by providing various links through surfing. In the world of information overload, the internet surfing enables one to navigate a whole arena of interconnected information, discover new sites, read up-to-date information, and download things of interest or utility. This surfing net has become a regular routine, almost daily for the youngsters all over the world.

A recent survey issued by Scholastic, *'The 2010 Kids & Family Reading Report'*, found that 43 percent of the children of ages 9-11 believe the most important outcome of reading books for fun is to open up the imagination. 62 percent of the same demographic say they read books for fun "to be inspired by storylines and characters." For a group whose numbers were clearly dwindling in the 1990s, it is not surprising that the release of an incredibly imaginative story coincided with a dramatic revival or readership.

In January 2010, the Kaiser Family Foundation published a comprehensive study of the media habits of more than 2,000 eight to eighteen year-old American children. The study found that the average time spent reading books for pleasure in a typical day rose from 21 minutes in 1999 to 23 minutes in 2004, and finally to 25 minutes in 2010. The rise of screen-based media has not melted children's brains, despite ardent warnings otherwise: "It does not appear that time spent using screen media (TV, video games and computers) displaces time spent with print media," the report stated. Teens are not only reading more books, they're involved in communities of like-minded book lovers.

Today, computer technology is integrated into almost every aspect of learning in higher education: textbooks arrive with CD-ROMs; homework is delivered and graded on the World Wide Web (WWW); and assignments are designed to be completed collaboratively through electronic mail. In fact, "the Internet becomes an important part of college students' lives, not only for their studies and daily routines, but as a tool for getting to know other people and the rest of the world"

Reading interest or preferences seemed to be differed with different age levels. A survey was done on the leisure reading choices of rural teenagers, and found that their reasons for leisure reading were for entertainment and for acquiring information. Magazines and newspapers were found to be the most preferred reading materials of teenagers. Informational reading was the main purpose for adult

reading and their most popular books are: adventure, crime, social problems, novels, politics, and sports in ranking sequence. Many students favored reading magazines and newspapers most and novels least, and half of the students read the sports, entertainment, and front-page sections of the newspaper regularly.

Some of the commonly observed reasons for the preference of screen reading over the traditional books are as follows:

· The audio visual medium which also saves time: People think that reading books consume more time than referring in the computers. Computers seem to be more attractive to them than books.

· Cost effective: The question of spending money on books is over-ruled by the thought that everything is available in a computer. People prefer to spend money on something else than spending on books.

· Interactive nature: The contents and programs on internet and TV are more attractive than sitting in a corner and reading a book.

· Lack of free me- time to spend with books in a corner: With the modern life style visiting places and other recreations or hobbies occupy most of our time.

· Higher access to mobile phones, computers and tablet devices now mean that reading is an activity more likely to be on screen than on the printed page.

· Casual and callous attitude towards reading: Today's youngsters have a thousand reasons for avoiding reading books or literatures. People simply avoid it.

· Discomfort of handling physical books: There are risks of losing books while carrying them. Moreover, why to carry a burden unnecessarily when there is a laptop available?

- Money minded materialistic life: Now people are more worried about earning money and spending every second in finding ways to find sources of income.

As Sean Coughlan, BBC News education correspondent describes: "Young people are now much more likely to prefer to read on a computer screen rather than a printed book or magazine, according to a UK survey. The National Literary Trust studied almost 35,000 eight- to 16-year-olds. Its findings suggest a picture of young people who are now immersed in a screen-based culture. As well as social networking and browsing websites, the study indicates almost a third of youngsters read fiction on online devices."

Differences in Ideologies:

One can easily identify that there exists two schools of thought on the subject of paper texts versus the electronic texts. The first holds that paper is far superior and will never be replaced by screens. The argument is frequently supported by reference either to the type of reading scenarios that would currently prove difficult if not impossible to support acceptably with electronic text, e.g., reading a newspaper on the beach or a magazine in bed, or the unique tactile qualities of paper. "but a book is a book is a book. A reassuring, feel-the-weight, take-your-own-time kind of thing..."

The second school of thought favors the use of electronic text, citing ease of storage and retrieval, flexibility of structure and saving of natural resources as major incentives. According to this perspective, electronic text will soon replace paper and in a short time (usually ten years hence) we shall all be reading from screens as a matter of habit.

There is a certain benefit analysis between e-reading and the print reading. Some of the major parameters which influence the reader's choice of medium can be discussed as under:

1. **<u>Speed:</u>** It is observed that readers take different time to complete the same content in print and on screen. Even ignoring the unnatural character size and distance from the screen, the authors reported that the experimental room was "well illuminated by an overhead light source", a factor which by virtue of the possible reflections caused could account for a slow reading speed. Additionally, unless the book used was one of the large format books prepared for the partially sighted, we must assume that the screen text characters were substantially larger than the printed characters.

2. **<u>Accuracy, Error and Concentration</u>**: The researchers have reported that readers using the hypertext performed significantly more accurately than those using the paper text. In an experiment when students' performance was compared on a set of tasks involving a statistics text presented on paper or screen. Students used either the standard textbook or a hypertext version run on SuperBook, a structured browsing system, to search for specific information in the text and write essays with the text open. Incidental learning and subjective ratings were also assessed. The search tasks provide an alternative to, and more realistic measure of reading accuracy than identifying spelling errors. But the concentration is declined possibly because of hyperlinks embedded in the web resources, blinking images on the Web, opening of unwanted web sites and scrolling and turning of pages.

3. **<u>Comfort and Ease versus Fatigue</u>**: The proliferation of information technology has traditionally brought with it fears of harmful or negative side-effects for users who spend a lot of time in front of a visual medium. In the area of screen reading this has manifested itself in speculation of increased visual fatigue and/or eyestrain when reading from screens as opposed to paper. The e reading also is known to have very interactive in nature with lots of hyper texts and various parallel links which can easily distract the reader, especially the young reader who has a natural curiosity to explore more and more.

4. **<u>Comprehension:</u>** The easy availability of content and abundant reference reading has actually added in to the comprehension skills of the average e readers. This benefit proves to be very crucial for the young readers who read for pleasure and gets benefitted with lots of cross references available online.

5. **<u>Navigation and Manipulation</u>**: As S. T. Kerr has reported, "Perhaps the most obvious difference between reading from paper and from screens is the ease with which paper can be manipulated and the corresponding difficulty of so doing with electronic text. Yet manipulation is an intrinsic part of the reading process for most tasks. Manipulating paper is achieved by manual dexterity, using fingers to turn pages, keeping one finger in a section as a location aid, or flicking through tens of pages while browsing the contents of a document, activities difficult or impossible to support electronically"

6. **<u>Movement across the Content</u>**: The scrolling on the screen and the paging on a page are two very distinct exercises. Scrolling (the facility to move the text up or down on the screen smoothly by a fixed increment to reveal information currently out of view) and paging (the facility to move the text up or down in complete screen space - akin to page turning with paper texts) are two of the most common on each medium. Popular wisdom suggests that "bigger is better" but empirical support for this edict is sparse. Readers are much more comfortable with the regular page size in books but when it comes to varied screen sizes on computer or an e-reader (kindle) or a smart phone, the response vary from person to person.

7. **<u>Contexts and References</u>**: Electronic text supports word or term searches at rapid speed and with total accuracy and this is clearly an advantage for users in many reading scenarios e.g. checking references, seeking relevant sections, etc. Indeed it is possible for such facilities to support tasks that would place unreasonable

demands on users of paper texts e.g., searching a large book for a non-indexed term or several volumes of journals for references to a concept.

8. **<u>Other Significant Changes in Reading Pattern</u>**: The internet surfing for regular reading has increased reading of news, views, pornography and sexual content reading, general knowledge reading and decreased reading of classical literature.

Conclusion:

The impact of technology on pleasure reading is very crucial to youngsters. Technology plays a central role in young people's literacy development and reading choice. While we welcome the positive impact which technology has on bringing further reading opportunities to young people, it's crucial that reading in print is not cast aside. If computers have replaced the traditional literacy world, it is noteworthy that educators, publishers, writers, and software engineers might cooperate with each other to create more interesting and economic online materials for students based on the knowledge of students' reading habits and reading behaviors.

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