

Reading Trends of Youth in Pakistan: A Pilot Study

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The present study, a part of researcher's Ph.D. project, aimed at exploring the reading trends of young Pakistani students (i.e., Generation Y: born during the 1980s and early 1990s, also known as internet generation), and the impact of digital media on their reading behavior. It was conducted as a pilot study on final year's master level students of the University of the Punjab. Quantitative research design, based on a survey was used. Convenient sampling technique was used to collect data from 50 students through questionnaire survey. It revealed that the students' reading behavior has been significantly changed during the last five years. Their overall reading time and digital reading time has been increased due to the availability of digital devices and digital reading material. The findings of this study are helpful in identifying the trends of reading behavior as well as in planning and designing library services with regard to the consideration of the behavior of the students.

Keywords Reading Trends, Online reading behavior, Youth reading behavior, Academic Libraries, Digital reading

Introduction

The study aimed at exploring the reading trends of young students of Pakistan. This generation belongs to the people born during the 1980s and early 1990s called millennials, echo boomers, internet generation, iGen, net generation (Business Dictionary, 2014).

Reading has been defined differently in different eras. In the past, reading meant to interpret visual information of any given codes or systems (Lone, 2011). Toit (2001) suggested reading as a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words. There are various formats which have been used as the carriers of knowledge and information. A reader may choose different texts in different forms to read. Reading also depends upon reader's mood (utility, pleasure or self-fulfillment) purpose, and existing knowledge.

It appears that rapid changes are occurring in reading behavior due to the technological development under the digital paradigm. Libraries have been incorporating changes and becoming hybrid due to the need of digital access to full text information. The research on digital reading formats and its impact on modern reading behavior has become an area of interest for international researchers since last decade.

To find out the trends of modern readers under the context of digital environment a number of studies have been carried out since the last decade. A considerable set of studies on the subjects of e-reading, reading in digital environment, impact of ICT on reading habits, print vs digital, and changing role of libraries in digital environment have been carried out (Bodomo, Lam & Lee 2003; Ahuja, Mishra, & Goyal, 2010; Cull, 2011; Lone, 2011; Rainie, 2012; Cumaoglu, Sacici & Torun, 2013; Saaid & Wahab, 2014). Especially the subject of reading behavior of students in digital environment has gained focus in research community.

In Pakistan, a considerable number of studies were found which explored the reading habits of different groups of society i.e. children, adults, men, and women (Awais & Ameen, 2013; Virk, 2009; Kanwal, Afzal, Hussain, Qayyum and Malik, 2008; Tirmizi, 2004; Qureshi, 2004; Abbasi, 1991; Ahmed, 1964; Malik, 1970; Baloch, 1975; Shabab, 1975, and Mumtaz, 1975). However, no local published literature could be found on the “reading trends of youth” (as described in the study) in digital environment.

Only a single study a little closed to the current study could be traced (Mahmood & Saeed, 2014). It explored digital information while seeking the behavior of researchers. However, articles and discussions on changing reading habit in digital environment could be traced on print and online media i.e. daily newspapers, government reports and websites. In these discussions most of the people do believe that reading habit is declining due to the excessive use of modern devices i.e. smart phone, i.pad, laptops and computers (Daily time, 21January, 2014). They believe that the misuse of technology is a big reason of the decline in reading culture among youth. Pakistan Today (11July, 2011) reports that book reading habit is on the verge of decline. The majority of the students take book for reading only in print form rather than the digital one. Gallup Pakistan (2011) conducted a survey and came up with the findings that only 28% Pakistanis across the country claimed to have the habit of reading books (apart from the text books) while this rate was 46% in 2002. However, there are concerns about the representativeness of the sample to generalize the results.

The change in the reading trends in current era is an interesting topic for discussion among library science professionals, educationists, and learned community. In Pakistan, a number of studies are available on reading habit. Especially much has been written on the reading habit of newspapers. However, internationally largely debated subject of the reading behavior in digital environment has so far been neglected in local literature. No empirical research has been

conducted on reading behavior in the specific context. In this sense it seemed desirable to conduct an empirical research on this subject in Pakistan. Therefore, a study has been conducted to investigate the general notion regarding the modern reading trends.

Keeping in view the importance of the subject, and remarkable changes in the reading behavior of students reported by researchers from various countries in digital environment and paperless society, it was considered important to investigate reading trends in Pakistan particularly in academic settings. This is most likely the first empirical study on this subject in Pakistan and will be a valuable contribution to the LIS literature in Pakistan. To knowing the readers’ behavior will help to improve library services. Further, it is exploratory baseline study which will open the doors for other researchers.

Literature Review

The digital revolution has produced a generation of technologically sophisticated people. This generation belongs to the people born during the 1980s and early 1990s called millennials, echo boomers, internet generation, iGen, and net generation (Business Dictionary.com, 2014).

It is through the use of digital media that Net Generation will develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of the society. Educators of the world are drawing attention that this generation is different from previous one therefore they should be treated accordingly. “Luis M. Proenza, president of the University of Akron, clearly states “The time has come for some far reaching changes to the university, our model of pedagogy, how we operate, and our relationship to the rest of the world... But we need to listen to these Net Generation students to see the way forward (Tapscott, 2009, p.127).

Among all of the transformative shifts, the younger generation has experienced the biggest change in reading practices. A survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust in the UK found that children were more likely to own a cell phone than a book. According to the study, 85.5 percent of 7-to-16 year’s old British children had

their own cell phones, compared with 72.6 percent who had their own books (Paton, 2010).

Shofield & Honore (2010) argued that there had been limited research into Generation Y. Many of the literature is being based purely on anecdotal evidence. There is a need to explore the reading behavior of this generation in detail. Shofield & Honore carried out a mixed method research to explore the learning behavior of Generation "Y". They came up with the findings that the visual modes of learning were preferred and especially were important for Generation Y as this generation had grown up with lots of visual stimuli (Weiler, 2005). The results further revealed that Generation "Y" was also described as holistic learners – oriented towards a nonlinear and non-sequential learning. However young generation is lacking deep learning and analytical skills.

Nagaratnam et al. (2012) reported that Gen "Y" students preferred webzines for reading. However, books, for them, were the least preferred choice for the academic or aesthetic purpose. In this regard they suggest that the primary goal of education is to promote long term comprehension and the retrieval of knowledge. Since the computer and internet have become the most favorable possession of these Gen Y students, experiential learning via this mode will support the retention of knowledge.

Mahmood & Saeed (2014) explored digital information while seeking the behavior of researchers. The results revealed that there was a trend to use electronic information as all the respondents were using digital information for their research purposes and there was not even a single research fellow who never used digital information during research. So the majority of the researcher were using digital information for two to three years (33) Authors argued that with the availability of HEC digital library the trend in the using of digital information went upward. The respondents reported that they often used digital information for academic purpose.

Further the respondents reported that they had good digital information skills as well.

The review of the previous research has revealed that the world is experiencing a paradigmatic shift from print to screen. ICT applications have influenced every one. The growth of broadband network and the increased number of Internet users in the last decade has affected the behavior of the information stakeholders. The availability and easy access to information through smart devices have influenced the behavior of information users especially youth around the globe.

Research Methodology

The study was designed on the basis of the quantitative approach for which the survey research method was used to collect data. A number of studies on this subject was successfully adopted for this research method (such as Mahmood & Saeed, 2014; Cumaoglu, Sacici & Torun, 2013; Shabani, Kharaji, & Abedi, 2012; Kacherki & Thombare, 2010; Low & Chaudhry, 2010; Herath, 2010; Mbah, 2010; Karim & Hassan, 2007; Blandford, Rimmer, & Warwick 2006; Liu, 2005; Bodomo, Lam, & Lee, 2003; and Simon, 2001).

The data were collected through the circulation of self-reporting questionnaire among the respondents. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of published literature along with the help of the research supervisor. Before data collection for pilot study, a panel of experts reviewed the instrument and changes which were made according to their suggestions. The researcher herself administered the questionnaire. Pilot study was conducted on final year masters/Bs students of University of the Punjab other than the sample of actual study. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Fifty questionnaires were filled for pilot study.

Analysis & Results

The results revealed that 26 (52%) of the respondents were male and 24 (48%) of them

were female thus there was the representation of both male and female respondents with equal proportion. The study was aimed at exploring the reading trends of youth in the context of emerging digital paradigm. Therefore, the experience of the students regarding the use of internet was enquired.

Internet Use Experience

The respondents were asked to mention their Internet use experience as it could be an important variable and could have direct relationship with their reading behavior.

Table 1

Internet Use Experience N=50

<i>Statements</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
More than 6 years	12	24
1-5 years	36	72
Less than 1 year	2	04

The results in Table 1 showed that the majority (72%) of the students had 1-5 years' experience of internet use, one fourth (24%) of the students had experience of internet use for more than six years, only two (04%) of the students had internet use experience for less than one year. These findings make it clear that the majority of the students had Internet use experience.

Access to Electronic Devices

Table 3

Frequency of Using Electronic Devices for Reading on Screen N=50

<i>Devices</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
	<i>f (%)</i>	<i>f (%)</i>	<i>f (%)</i>	<i>f (%)</i>	<i>f (%)</i>
1. Desktop	12(24)	04(08)	13(26)	15(30)	06 (12)
2. Mobile with e-reader	08(16)	14(28)	18(36)	06(12)	04 (08)
3. Laptop	38(76)	09(18)	01(02)	01(02)	01(02)
4. Tablet (I-Pad/ Kindle)	03(06)	03(06)	07(14)	05(10)	32(64)

Table 3 represents that a large majority of the students were using lap top for reading digital-based materials, second frequently used device

Since people always required a device to access online materials, the aim of this question was to capture the detail of information regarding the use of their device.

Table 2

Access to Electronic Devices for Reading N=50

<i>Devices</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Desktop	15	30
Mobile/ smart phone	24	48
Laptop	46	92
Tablet (i-pad/Kindle)	07	14

Table 2 revealed that a large majority (92%) of the students had access to laptop, mobile/smart phone was second frequent device and half of them (48%) had access to mobile/smart phone, one third (30%) of them had access to desktop, and only 14 % of them had access to Tablet (i-pad/kindle). The reason behind this extended rate was the access to internet due to the availability of cheap ICTs and the award of laptop to the public sector university students by Government of the Punjab, Pakistan.

Frequency of Use of Electronic Devices

Generally, people have access to more than one electronic devices, therefore students were asked to rate the frequency their use of the electronic reading devices.

was smart phone/mobile. The respondents rated Desktop on third as frequently used device. It can be concluded that electronic publication

devices such as iPad or tablet even being the digital reading devices are still not popular even being as the least common used device for onscreen reading was Tablet/ Kindle.

Frequency of Use of Electronic Resources for Getting Reading Material There are different resources available online for accessing reading material; students were asked to mention the frequency of their use of these resources.

Table 4

Frequency of Using Electronic Resources for Getting Reading Material N=50

Electronic Sources	Always	Often	Some- times	Rarely	Never	M	SD
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1. Social networking websites (e.g. face book, twitter etc.)	20(40)	10(20)	13(26)	04(08)	03(06)	3.80	1.22
2. Other websites for Free book/articles downloading (open access journals etc.)	14(28)	18(36)	12(24)	06(12)	00(0.00)	3.80	.98
3. Google books	17(34)	15(30)	10(20)	08(16)	00(0.00)	3.82	1.08
4. Google Scholar for articles	17(34)	10(20)	15(30)	06(12)	02(04)	3.68	1.18
5. Electronic databases (e.g. HEC digital library, Science Direct, Emerald, etc.)	10(20)	14(28)	15(30)	05(10)	06(12)	3.34	1.25
6. Common search engines other than google (e.g. Ask.com, Bing, yahoo etc.)	02(04)	09(18)	16(32)	11(22)	12(24)	2.56	1.16

Mean score in Table 4 reveals that the students often used social networking websites ($M=3.80$, $SD=1.22$), free websites to download book/article ($M=3.80$, $SD=.98$), and Google books ($M=3.82$, $SD=1.08$). The database; Google scholar ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.18$) was also often used by the students for the downloading of articles. However, the use of electronic databases was low comparatively ($M=3.34$, $SD=1.25$). The researcher in this field knows that all of the academic universities have access to electronic

databases i.e. HEC digital libraries. However, the students reported the low use of these electronic resources. This may be due to the unawareness of students regarding the use of such resources. Common search engines other than Google were rarely used by the university students ($M=2.56$, $SD=1.16$).

Preferred Reading Format

The preferred reading format was gauged to answer the first research question of the study.

Table 5

Preferred Format of Reading N=50

Format	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
1. On paper	28(56)	10(20)	11(22)	1(02)	00(0.00)
2. On screen	09(18)	11(22)	20(40)	10(20)	00(0.00)
3. Any format (Paper/Screen) is fine	13(26)	13(26)	14(28)	08(16)	02(4)

The results in Table 5 indicate that the majority of the students even in this digital era often like to read in print format. However, there is a tendency of reading onscreen as well. Furthermore, as studies reported that the world is experiencing transition from print to digital. At such transformative phase as the use of both the formats still exists, the current study also has explored that the students often like to read

books in any available format.

Preferred Reading Format According to the Purpose of Reading

Reading has various contexts, hence students were asked to report their preferences for reading format in the context of their purpose for reading. They were given three contexts: Academic; Pleasure; and Everyday knowledge.

Table 6

Preferred Format of Reading According to the Purpose of Reading N=50

Purpose of Reading	Format		
	Print	Electronic	Either One is Fine (Print or electronic)
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
1. Academic (e.g. Assignments preparation for class, recommended readings, journal articles, e.books etc.)	19 (38)	17(34)	14(28)
2. Pleasure/ Leisure (for Enjoyment/entertainment i.e. History, Literature, Showbiz etc.)	13(26)	26(52)	11(22)
3. Everyday knowledge (Health, cooking, Current Affair, problem solving etc.)	09(18)	26(52)	15 (30)

Table 6 shows that the majority of the university students equally preferred print and electronic resources regarding the reading for academic purpose. On the contrary, for the reading that

revolves around an aesthetic purpose or the purpose to have the knowledge about everyday life the majority of the students preferred to read in electronic format. However, any

available format, for one forth students, was fine for all kind of purposes regarding the process of reading.

Change in Reading Behavior

It is a common notion prevalent in Pakistan that reading habit is on the decline in digital age. On

the other hand, a diverse range of studies around the globe report that people spend more time on reading in digital paradigm (Liu, 2005, p.704). To envisage the reality, the respondents were asked to report any change in their reading behavior during the last five years.

Table 7

Change in Reading Behavior during the Last Five Years N=50

Reading Behavior	Increased <i>f (%)</i>	Decreased <i>f (%)</i>	No change <i>f (%)</i>
1. The time spent on digital reading is	42 (84)	04(08)	04(08)
2. The time spent on reading in print form is	18(36)	21(42)	11(22)
3. The overall time spent on reading is	37(74)	04(08)	09(18)

Table 7 illustrates a large majority (84%) of the students who reported that their time spent on digital reading had been increased; a few (08%) of them reported the decrease in time spent on digital reading, and similarly only 08% of the students reported that they felt no change in time spent on digital reading, the findings are consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Liu, 2005, p. 705). Even in the present study the majority of the people reported change in their digital reading behavior; and the same number of the respondents (10 %) reported that they felt no change in their digital reading behavior for the last ten years.

One third (36%) of the respondents reported that the time they spent on reading in print format had been increased, and about half of the students (42%) reported a decrease in their time spent on print reading. One fourth of the students (22%) reported no change in their reading behavior since the for the last five years. These results indicate that the students with equal proportion reported the increase and decrease of reading time in print format.

A large number (74%) of students reported an increase in their overall reading time for the last five years. These findings are consistent with the finding of the previous research made in this regard (Liu, 2005, p. 705). Only a few (08%) students reported that they felt a decrease in their time spent on reading. Similarly, (18%) of the respondents felt no change in their reading behavior for the last five years

It is quite obvious from these findings that the majority of the youth felt significant change in their reading behavior during the past five years. These results reveal that the time spent by the student on overall reading and on digital reading had been increased during the last five years.

The Frequency of Employing the Functions or Techniques While Reading Onscreen

In order to check the frequency of the use and awareness level of functions and techniques associated with onscreen reading format the responses of the students were recorded.

Table 8

Frequency of use of Functions/Techniques While Reading Onscreen N=50

	Techniques & Functions	Yes	No	Do not know about it
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1.	"Highlight" in pdf files	43(86)	05(10)	02(04)
2.	"Commenting" in pdf files	21(42)	25(50)	04(08)
3.	"Highlight / underline" in Ms word files	33(66)	12(24)	5(10)
4.	'Commenting" in Ms word files	19(38)	26(52)	05(10)
5.	"Take notes" on paper	37(74)	11(22)	02(04)
6.	"Take notes" on computer file (MS Word)	35(70)	13(26)	02(04)
7.	"Book mark"	33(66)	16(32)	01(02)
8.	"Glossary / dictionary" lookups	38(76)	09(18)	03(06)
9.	"Search/find" in pdf files	35(70)	12(24)	03(06)
10.	"Search/find" in Ms word files	37(74)	08(16)	05(10)

Table 8 shows that a large majority of (86%) the university students reported that they used the function of "Highlight" in pdf files. About half of the respondents (42%) used the function of comment in pdf files, and 50 % of them did not use any of these. A wide number of the students (66%) used "Highlight / underline" function in MS Word files.

It is evident from Table 8 that only 38% of the university students used 'Commenting" function in MS Word files and the majority of them did not use this technique. 10% of the students even do not know it or how to operate this function.

In digital environment the majority (74%) of the students take notes on separate paper while reading onscreen. The same behavior of the students has been identified by Shabani, 2012 (p.13) according to whom the majority of the students take print of electronic documents for note taking on a separate paper while reading on screen (Vendenhoek, 2013, p. 40). The majority

(70%) of the respondents are habitual of taking notes on computer file (MS Word). More than half (66%) of the respondents' book mark during online reading, but one third (32%) of the respondents do not have this habit while 02% of the students do not even know about it.

The majority (76%) of the students reported that they used "Glossary / dictionary" lookups while reading onscreen but 18% of them did not use this function. However, 06% of the students showed their unawareness about it. Similarly, as it has been revealed that a substantial number (70%) of students use "Search/find" function in pdf files, 24% of them do not use this function. 06% of the students do not have any information about it. 74% of the respondents use function of "Search/find" in MS Word files, and 16% of these students do not use this function. While 10% of them do not know about it (Table 8).

It can be concluded that overall small number of the students reported their unawareness

regarding the mentioned functions and techniques associated with onscreen reading. However, the function to comment in MS Word and pdf files was not known to half of the respondents. These findings revealed that the use of function; 'highlight', and search/find was common among the students while reading electronic documents. However, less number of students were using the function to comment in both MS Word and pdf files. Half of the respondents even do not know about this function in the formats; MS Word and pdf files. It is also evident that in digital environment the habit of note taking on a separate paper during the reading process is a common behavior among the students as it has been identified by Shabani, 2012, p.13. Even the present study has revealed that the majority of the students has mentioned their habit to have the print of electronic documents for note taking, as well as their behavior to take note on a separate paper while reading on screen (Vandenhoeck, 2013, p. 40).

It has also been observed that the majority of the students also use glossary/ dictionary lookups. It is worth mentioning here that the use of "Highlight" in pdf files, Glossary/dictionary lookups; Bookmarking is reported higher in the current study than the rate reported by Simon, 2001, p.3.

Findings and Discussion

The objective of the research was to investigate the current reading trends and the behavior of students under digital paradigm. Data revealed that the use of ICTs among students was common as all of the students had internet use experience for at least one year and more than a year. A large majority of the students had access to electronic reading devices, and this is one of the factors which affected students' reading behavior from print to digital. The majority of the students were using laptops for reading digital contents. Saaid & Wahab, 2014 also explored that laptop was most frequently used device for digital based reading. The use of e-readers like Ipad/Kindle was not common among the

students. The use of social networking websites, free websites for book/article downloading, Google books and Google scholar for getting digital reading material were common among these students. However, the use of electronic databases was low comparatively. Soroya (2011) and Omeluzor et al. (2013) mentioned lack of users' awareness with existing information sources. Common search engines other than Google were used rarely by university students. So this finding confirms the popularity of "Google" as a substantial search engine.

The results expose that the majority of the students still often like to read in print format, and previous researches support these results (Bodomo, 2003, p.41, & Liu, 2005, p. 709, Vandenhoeck, 2013, p.40). On the other hand, their time spent on digital reading has been increased during the last five years. These findings show that despite being their preference for print reading material they read in digital form, this is perhaps due to easy access and the availability of reading material in electronic format. Cumaoglu, Sacici & Torun, 2013 and Saaid & Wahab, 2014 also reported that students prefer print format to read but in practice they more read onscreen. The findings further revealed that students were spending more time on reading as compared to their reading trend recorded in the last five years ago.

It is evident from the results that reading purpose affects the choice of reading format. For academic reading any available format by the students was considered fine. However electronic format was preferred for pleasure reading and everyday knowledge by the university students. It is quite obvious from these findings that the majority of the youth felt significant changes which have occurred in their reading behavior for the past five years; this finding is aligned with the previous research findings (Liu, 2005, p. 705; Herath, 2010, p.69). Only a little number of students reported no change in their reading behavior. These results reveal that the time spent by the student on digital reading and overall reading has been increased during the last five years.

A majority of the students reported that they were aware of functions and techniques which were supposed to be used during on screen reading. The use of 'highlight', and search/find function was common among the students during the reading of electronic documents. However half of the students were unaware of 'comment' function in MS Word and pdf files. It is also evident that in digital environment to take note on separate paper during the process of digital reading is a common behavior among the students. Whereas to take note on separate MS Word file was also in practice by the majority of the students. Most of the students also used glossary/dictionary lookups. These students, though have appeared to be familiar with the techniques and functions used for digital reading, they need some instructions to effectively use the function to comment in MS word or Pdf file format.

Conclusion

The common notion that in Pakistan reading is declining due to the frequent use of smart devices (Daily time, 21January, 2014; Dawn, 31July, 2012; Gallup Pakistan, 2011) is not true about the students at least as they reported that the time span they spent on reading was higher as compared to the reading done by them five years ago as. They owned electronic devices and they reported that they were familiar with the functions and techniques associated with the onscreen reading material. Although they preferred to read in print format yet in practice they were using digital material more frequently. The results reveals that the students want to see a hybrid library with both print and online collection to have access to a wide variety of information sources. Libraries and library professionals have to perform their role according to the changing preferences of the young students.

Research Implications

The findings of this study are helpful in identifying the trends of reading behavior of the young generation as well as in planning and designing library services through the

consideration of their behavior. The findings demonstrate values for both academics and practitioners. Academics, information professionals and policy makers will be better informed on the reading behavior of the users and benefit when designing reading materials, library services and trainings for university students.

Limitations

The study is based on self-reported experience of the respondents. The scope of this research project did not include online media (e.g. emails, blogs) specific use; it rather obtained a holistic view of the impact of the digital environment on human reading trends. However, the findings have proved that the digital environment has created a significant impact on individuals' reading behavior, which needs to be further explored and considered by academics, practitioners, and the individuals as well.

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