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Impact of New Technology on Reading Habits:

A Glimpse on the World Literature

By

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Abstract

Reading helps in all-round development of a person from his birth to death. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to 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. These new gadgets of technology have become the “Time Eating Machine” and reading has almost become a closed book. Children, youth and adults alike are more inclined towards new technology for information, entertainment and pleasure. This paper attempts to summarise the literature available worldwide on this issue to identify the impact of new technology on reading habits.

Keywords: Reading Habits, Media Habits, Internet Surfing Habits, Media Use.

Introduction

Reading helps in all-round development of a person from his birth to death. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading. Reading loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002). Reading is a tool of acquisitive mind; it is a vehicle for obtaining ideas that cannot be transmitted verbally. The individual who reads well has at his command a means for widening his mental horizons and for multiplying his opportunities

of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Sir Richard Steele has logically quoted, “Reading is to mind what exercise is to body” (Cole, 1994). In the modern education much more reading is required than in the past. Insofar schooling is concerned; reading is the most single study tool. Next to the teacher, the textbook is usually the principal educating agency contributing to pupil’s success. Reading is a key to success in all academic disciplines. Reading is important not only for the individuals, it possess also great social significance. The democracy of any country can survive only if its citizens are habitual readers. Illiteracy leads to ignorance, ignorance leads to deprivation and deprivation leads to disintegration; reading mitigates ignorance and is a potent force for national integration. Reading is also essential for international understanding and world brotherhood. It helps to understand and appreciate the common achievements of the global family.

Impact of New Technology on Reading Habits

Every new media of information and communication technology (ICT) has been a threat to man’s interest in reading. The radio, television, cell phone, computer and the Internet have captured a big slice of time and reading has taken a back seat. It is visible that people have reduced their contacts with the world of books and other reading materials. The children in particular, are carried away by the new media in their leisure time. Therefore, the scholars from all over the world conducted researches to identify how far the new technology has succeeded in effecting/replacing the reading habits. Let us have a look on the scholarly articles of world personalities on this issue.

CopperWiki (2008) reported that reading habits among children are on the decline and the reasons for decline in reading habits among children are offshoots of technological advancements. **Pivec (1998)** investigated teenagers about their surfing habits and reported that that the main rivals for attracting interest of teenagers are TV and Internet. **Korzenny & Korzenny (2007)** conducted a study on media use in five cultural groups and reported that each of these five groups enjoyed old as well as new media and spend close to 20 hours a week on television, and yet another 20 hours on surfing the Internet. **Hastings & Henry (2006)** reported that 85% of children prefer watching television over reading. **Gentile & Walsh (2002)** reported that children in low income families watch

more television, watch more movies, play more video games, listen to the radio and CDs more, read less, and use the computer less than children in higher-income families. **Graham & Kingsley (2005)** estimated that on average, young people spend 3.51 hours a day watching TV and videos, 1.44 hours listening to music, 1.02 hours using computers (0.48 online, 0.14 offline), 0.49 hours playing video games, 0.43 hours reading, and 0.25 hrs watching movies. **Canadian Newspaper Association (2006)** cited the finding of the study *Reading between the Lines* as- the time youth spent on surfing surpassed the time they spent watching television, listening to the radio or reading magazines and newspapers. According to this national report, youth spent 3.5 hours surfing the net, 3.1 hours watching television, 2.4 hours listening to the radio, 1.5 hour reading a book, 0.7 hours reading a newspaper, and 0.6 hours reading a magazine in a day. **Finn (1980)** reported that the average child entering first grade spent 5,000 hours watching TV and the same child by age 18 will have spent more time on watching television than in school. **Holme (1984)** reported that a student spend about 10,800 hours in class-rooms by the time of final years in high school and more than 20,000 hours in front of the television screen in the USA. **Majid & Tan (2007)** found that 57.6% of the children in Singapore prefer playing on computer or surfing the Internet whereas only 44.1% prefers reading as their leisure time activity. **Kamalipour, Robinson & Nortman (1998)** revealed that students spend 45.05% of their waking hours per week attending to both electronic and print media for study and leisure reading activities. On division it is apparent that college students use print media (11.09%) more for study related activities whereas regarding the leisure use of media, electronic media far outdistanced print media (27.83% compared with 3.84%). **Ghimire (n.d.)** collected the information from teachers, intellectuals and guardians of the students about the effects of multi-media on children's reading habits. The findings indicated that 56.25% of the persons ranked it a 50 to 75% decrease and 43.75% of them reckoned between 15-50%.

Impact on reading of books

Hawkins (2000) noted that despite advances in production and delivery of electronic information, the printed book publishing industry continues to thrive. People read books actively or passively, focusing on one or multiple texts, for a variety of reasons. **Schilit**

(1999) noted that printed books are a long-lasting cultural icon because they are easy to use, generally portable and resistant to damage. **Churchill & Johnson (1997)** advocated that new media are still no match for the book and new technology has not yet made any impact on people's reading habits. They reported that Surveys in 1989 and 1995 found the same proportion of people - 39% - had finished reading a book for pleasure within the last two weeks and the number who bought more than 16 books a year increased from 28% in 1989 to 30% in 1995. **Moyes (2000)** reported that the long-heralded death of the book is still fictional. Britain remains a nation of book lovers, with novels and non-fiction books read in 90% of homes. On average, adults read books for five hours a week and 15% read for at least 11 hours. **Ring (2003)** observed that book is not challenged in any essential way by the Internet, it does not take a prophet to predict that media and reading habits are about to experience radical changes. The technology of printing on paper has been optimized step by step over more than 500 years and there is no reason to suppose today that its potential for further development is exhausted. The book will continue to maintain its unique and indispensable position within the media mix and alongside the screen media. However, the new researches tell completely different story. The new comers are willingly using new technologies and reading new resources and the traditional book reading is on decline. **Koskimaa (2003)** is of the opinion that reading of books might be decreasing, people are reading other types of texts instead, most notably magazines and Internet pages. The China Research Institute of Publishing Science surveyed a number of people and found that the number of Chinese reading traditional books has fallen while the number reading Internet publications has increased sharply. The investigation found that people's reading rate was 60.4% in 1999, 51.7% in 2003, and 48.7% in 2005, falling 11% in six years. Although the popularity of book reading continues to fall, online reading has grown rapidly, from 3.7% in 1999 to 18.3% in 2003 to 27.8% in 2005 (**People's Daily Online, 2007**). **Perryman (1997)** reported that Americans book reading habits is decreasing as the results of a study showed that those who did not read a single book in a year doubled from 1975 to 1990 (8 percent to 16 percent). **Dykeman (2008)** observed that the World Wide Web has had a negative impact only on certain kinds of reading like, magazine and newspaper reading. However, the time spent reading books for pleasure has stayed constant, although people are managing

to read fewer books per year (from 24.4 books per year in 1991 to 16.6 books per year by 2005). **Broddason (2006)** in his 35 years of long study conducted in Iceland indicated the constant increase in the percentage of non-readers from 11% in 1968 to 33% in 2003. The demishing numbers of heavy readers of books are also apparent, with the most dramatic downturn from 8% to 3% occurring from 1997 to 2003. He argued that there is not only decrease in book reading but overall print reading due to the introduction of Internet.

The findings of the relevant data provide confirmed information that the reading habits are declining parallel to advancement of new technology. Now it is the duty of policy planners of the concerned field to frame strategies for creating and developing the reading culture in the present multimedia society.

Conclusion

In nutshell, the introduction of new technology especially television, cinema, cell phone, computer and the Internet- has posed threat to reading habits. These new gadgets of technology have become the “**Time Eating Machines**” and all are thrilling with one another for their supremacy. In this media war, reading has almost become a closed book. Now to keep balance in the use of old and new technology, the planners especially librarians have to attract new generation towards reading.

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