

DIMINISHING AUDIENCE OF PAPERBACKS AND HARDCOVERS

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Abstract

Over the passage of time, print media has been one of the most common mediums of information and communication. More than spoken communication, there is a gentry who is more comfortable in writing and expressing themselves and a group of people who find it most relevant to read and seek instead of 'listen or watch and seek'. This eloquence and competence of the written word are the reasons for its evolution and growth over the ages. From scriptures and scrolls to paperbacks and hardcovers, it's been a long journey and progression. Homo sapiens, being highly adaptable to changes, acclimatized to these advancements fluently, moving from one source of information to the other. However, over the last few years, ebooks and audiobooks have taken the market by storm.

This research paper aims to deduce the declining readership of paperbacks and hardcovers along with the reasons behind the preference of the audience in terms of the contemporary books that are now available online. It also reflects upon the small faction who still prefer reading books in hardbound covers and believe in the intake of information through physical written and printed works. This paper includes an in-depth study of the evolution of books over the years and how the audience adapted to them. The research is based on the data collected from the unsaturated and anonymous group of people about their preferences and interest in books. The data was collected through a questionnaire that skimmed over reading preferences, time and information intake through these two forms of books - ebooks and paperbacks.

Keywords: Contemporary, e-books, Audiobook, Paperback

Introduction

Communication which literally means 'to share', is one of the most important aspects of human nature and the world. If explained in simple terms, it is the transmission of a message from a sender to the recipient. Technically, there are a couple of types of communication and several models that are studied by different theorists. The types of communication include-

Verbal communication - This type of communication basically includes the usage of language, symbols, grammar and other rules that helps communicate either through writing and/or speaking. The written forms of communication broadly include books, newspapers,

letters, scrolls, magazines, texts and several more. Furthermore, spoken forms of communication include interviews, one-on-one conversations, group discussions, speeches and a lot more.

Non-verbal communication - This form of communication is done without any usage of language and/or words basically through facial gestures, expressions, hand gestures, body language or acting.

This research paper concentrates on one of the most customary sources of information and communication in verbal written communication i.e. Books. However, it is of utmost importance to learn about the history of written communication that eventually led to books being developed.

The written form of communication first surfaced through pictographs - also known as pictograms and picto - which were symbols and drawings made on wooden surfaces to communicate. Even in recent times, you will find pictograms being used broadly as road signs, in hospitals, posters, or statistical representations. The next step in the world of written communication was clay and/or wax tablets which were flat surfaces made of either molten wax or wet clay which was then dried to take the form of a hard surface. Stylus (A sharp metal tool that is now used for making sculptures to give them a form) was the tool that was used to write over these tablets. It was then done on scrolls which were made from parchments of papyrus where the message was written and those parchments were rolled and then delivered to the desired recipient. The next development was a codex that was almost similar to our present-day books but was made through papyrus (a thick sheet made of papyrus plant) instead of paper. Codex (plural codices) were arranged in a certain way where each side of the sheet is known as the page and the two pages comprise a leaf. This arrangement of codices is followed to date in books as well. Manuscripts were the next invention which was the documents that were handwritten or typewritten. At the onslaught of the 19th century ranging to the 20th century, steam-powered printing presses were developed where the machines could print 1,100 sheets per hour. Monotype and Linotype were the next developments which could print 6000 letters per hour.

Furthermore, it developed into offset lithography - a simple process where the ink is transferred from a plate to a rubber blanket and then to the desired surface. For years it was the conventional way for printing books until people discovered that they can take the books on a digital platform. The idea initially came in the early 2000s when the media and publishers deduced that more than 90% of the masses have an internet connection and smartphone, so if they take the books online or on digital platforms they will be easily

accessible to everyone. Hence came the 'ebooks' or electronic books which are a form of written text that is available on digital platforms and electronic devices like computers, smartphones and tablets. It became so famous that now there are publishing houses that only publish and sell ebooks like Draft2Digital, Smashwords, Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), Kobo and Barnes and Noble Press alongside others. Beyond this, the growing usage and popularity of ebooks have brought various career options to light, like graphic designers, editors and marketers. Clearly, the development that happened over the years is astonishing yet amusing.

In this research paper, it will be deduced whether this sudden development and change in books have caused the audiences to change their preferences (or not) and if yes, why they now have moved to digital forms of reading from printed versions like paperbacks and hardcovers.

Media since its conception has undergone various changes, developments and advancements in a lot of aspects that sometimes the space between history and the new one feels much larger than an ocean. From historical manuscripts to the withered pages of books and now online available pdfs it has been a long tale. If print media and online media is to be compared, both of these have remarkable difference. Each one with its pros and cons. Reasonably, the masses have their preference between both versions according to their needs and priorities.

Print media (Paperbacks & Hardcover) - The older one between the two, this medium in terms of books comes in paperbacks and hardcovers. It is loved and appreciated by a dedicated audience over a long period, who still prefer reading a paperback over an ebook any day. The reason behind this is many people admire the aspect of the tangibility of the pages, turning them and reading a book. The quality of illustrations and graphics as compared to the ebooks seems higher in the print versions. Also, having a long shelf life than any ebook available online. However, the fact that printed books are more expensive and acquire more storage space than ebooks, unforgettably, not that easy to carry is some of the major drawbacks.

A printed book or a 'paperback' differs from an eBook in a lot of ways. Some of the distinguishing features of an eBook are -

1. **Spine Content** - Moving through a library, how do you distinguish or give a name to a book? Through the spine, of course! This feature of paperbacks makes it easy to identify a book in a room full of books like a library and also to customise and order it more effectively. Either try putting it in alphabetical order or even in clusters of different genres.

2. **Front cover** - We all do agree that ‘**Never judge a book by its cover!**’ is just a statement that people rarely follow. For a fact, maximum people choose to read a book only because of an attractive front cover.
3. **Back Cover** - One of the other deciding factors in choosing to read a book is its back cover which includes information about the author and a brief of the plot. If an author successfully manages to sell a plot through the Book Blurb on the back cover, then it is surely a win.
4. **Table of Content** - It can be considered as an index which is usually scrutinised to know the contents of the book.
5. **Print and Margins** - Each page of the book has a text margin at the corners along with different fonts and texts. Even, there is slight variation in the pages of a book as well, where some are pristine white in colour while others are a little beige in shade.
6. **Cover Type** - A book can have different cover types like hardcovers which are book pages bound in a hard or stiff material, mostly cardboard. They can be paperbacks where a material a little thick than normal paper is used for binding.

Online media (eBooks) - The new age of books that are available over the Internet has taken over the market and audience by storm. Even with the printed ones having a loyal following, people have started venturing into Ebooks, even though not completely convinced by the idea of reading a book online. Inarguably, these formats are much more handy and easy to carry, store, and access and also, comparatively a lot cheaper. Moreover, a lot of websites give the audience the liberty to personalise the reading experience through different themes, adjusting fonts, brightness, font size and colour which makes the reading process much more interesting. Still, the effect of sitting in front of a computer screen for long hours, the risk of piracy and plagiarism along with copyright infringements decreases its appeal. Moreover, people still can’t overlook the feeling of holding a novel and reading it.

An eBook has the following distinct features -

1. **Navigation** - An eBook has an easily accessible and clickable table of contents through which people can easily navigate the book and go straight to the desired page.
2. **Search** - People can easily search texts in an eBook which makes it really easy for people to search through the whole book.
3. **Bookmarking** - One can easily bookmark a specific page in an eBook for saving it which is convenient.
4. **External media** - An eBook has a feature of clickable external links as well which can open media in different tabs and externally for reference.

5. **Offline saving** - People can save the eBooks to their computers as well for its offline version, because of which an Internet connection is not always necessary for reading an eBook.

An eBook and paperback have a significant amount of differences in various aspects. Some of these differences are mentioned below -

1. **Material**

A. Paperbacks are printed on paper and are bound together.

2. B. An eBook is in a digital form and uses no material.

3. **Tangibility**

A. People can touch and hold paperbacks in their hands.

B. eBooks cannot be touched but they are only viewed.

4. **Font size and brightness**

A. The font size and brightness of paperbacks are fixed.

B. The font size and brightness of eBooks are changeable.

5. **Protection**

A. Paperbacks need to be protected from humidity and insects, along with wear and tear.

B. eBooks need to be protected from viruses and bugs.

6. **Internet Access**

A. A person doesn't need to have access to the Internet for paperbacks.

B. A person does need Internet access for downloading an eBook, however, once it is available in the online version, one doesn't need to have access further.

In this research paper, it will be deduced whether these different aspects of both the book versions and this sudden development and change in books have caused the audiences to change their preferences (or not) and if yes, why they now have moved to digital forms of reading from printed versions like paperbacks and hardcovers.

Scope and limitations of the study

Scope of this study - This research paper reflects upon one of the most common, effective and conventional sources of information and communication which is a written form that has evolved over the years.

- It will bring to light all the building blocks of books and print media that still has a fair audience.
- It will run over how humans have manoeuvred in step with these advancements and adapted to them.

- It will reflect on the dedicated faction of the audience who still believes in consuming information through printed books instead of moving towards the online format. In lieu, it will also reflect upon the reasons for the declining audience of paperbacks and hardcovers.
- It will throw light on the reasons for these declining readers of printed books and how it affects the market and the authors or writers along with publication houses.
- It aims to give the faction of people who have an interest in reading about the changing world of books and their impact on society. Alongside this, it will give budding authors and writers an in-depth and core sense of the industry.
- It will give publication houses an idea of the contrasting yet related reasons behind the respective sales of ebooks, paperbacks and hardcovers.

Limitations of the study - This research paper since reflecting upon books in terms of paperbacks, hardcovers and e-books will have limitations in terms of other sources of information and communication.

- It is limited to books in terms of print media and will not throw light on the readership statistics of newspapers and journals both in offline and online formats.
- The research is limited in the sense of the number of people who are avid readers and non-avid readers who have different preferences.
- The research needs to be more extensive in terms of other sources of information such as television, radio, and digital communication.

Review of the literature

Through the years, especially since the emergence and rapid increase of Online media, people have studied and researched both mediums trying to deduce the more reliable one and which is preferred by the masses. Some of the published papers by esteemed researchers talked about -

- ❖ **Chen Hao (2022)** - In his research paper on the topic he concluded that it is easier to collect print media that allows more longevity but less productivity than the digital media. The latter, however, can cause health issues if used for a long time.
- ❖ **Kalombe Caroline, Phiri Jackson (2019)** - In their research paper, they highlighted how the availability of digital newspapers acts as a threat to the print industry because people don't need to subscribe or pay for accessing the news online.
- ❖ **Cherian Jacob (2014)** - He published a research that examined if a person's personal attributes correlate with the type of medium preferred. The result stated how personal

qualities didn't play any role in the preferences of the people in terms of print or online publications.

- ❖ **Lochan Ashwarya, Kumar Satish (2018)** - Their published research paper explained how digital media or electronic media might be developing at a rapid rate but print media - in terms of newspapers - is still comparatively cheaper and has wider access since it is also available in rural areas.
- ❖ **Patil Dhanshree (2011)** - In a research paper she highlighted how electronic media is prone to plagiarism with how easy it is to copy and manipulate the data and information available on the digital platform. Furthermore, it also highlights how deeply buried age-old manuscripts tell us stories of our history which electronic media fails to do.
- ❖ **Gutierrez Emanuel, Martinez Miriam, Myrick Mityah** - Their research paper talked about the pros and cons of both print media and online media. The conclusion of the research paper was online media is more spontaneous as compared to print media but the latter ensures more credibility of the facts while online media can have fake or misinterpreted news.
- ❖ **Patel Aleesha (2010)** - The research paper brings to light how the digital medium or e-reading is more interactive as an experience for all readers since it now even includes video and audio elements and people can interact with the sites while print media gives them an 'only reading' experience.
- ❖ **Ratminingsih Ni Made, Budasi Gede (2019)** - These researchers published their paper which observed how students' interest increased both in the control and observatory groups when they were taught with the help of both mediums as it made learning more interesting for them.
- ❖ **Parveen Asima** - Her research paper explained how online media helps in developing better communication skills since it gives the readers a more personalized experience with audio and video references.
- ❖ **Angadi Mallikarjun, Koganuramath MM** - Their research paper discussed how copyright infringement is a serious issue in Internet media where the information is easily accessible to all for free of cost.

Hypothesis

1. **H1** - There is a significant decrease in the number of audiences of paperbacks and hardcovers due to the occurrence of ebooks that are easily available in various aspects like accessibility, piracy, portability, convenience and storage.

2. **H0** - There is no change in the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers due to the occurrence of ebook formats. These two forms of books are alike and akin in terms of audience and readership.

Objectives

This research paper aims to accomplish the following objectives:-

- a) To learn the in-depth history of the evolution of books and their correlation to mankind.
- b) To study the reasons behind the eloquence of verbal written communication and its significant audience.
- c) To analyze the preferences of the audience in terms of printed books and online formats of books.
- d) To see whether there is a decline in the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers and the factors affecting it.
- e) To examine how the declining readership affects the authors and publishers along with the market.

Research Design

- 1) This research paper is designed as a quantitative study to derive whether the new forms of verbal media like ebooks, pdfs, epub and others have diminished the number of people who read printed books like paperbacks and hardcovers. The research is done for the benefit of media personnel associated with the print industry, writers and authors along with readers.
- 2) The research paper uses the survey method as a tool for research regarding the people who still associate themselves with paperbacks and the audience who have shifted from the conventional form of printed books to the new advanced ebooks.
- 3) Through this research paper and the survey method, the aim is also to recognise the reason behind this shift and why/if people prefer the online format over printed formats.
- 4) The survey conducted for this research paper uses data collected from an unsaturated and unbiased audience to ensure accurate, reliable and factual results for this research paper.

Research Method

This research paper analyses if the emergence of Ebooks has diminished the audience of hardcovers and paperbacks through the quantitative method of survey research. The research began with forming a questionnaire that ran over the interest of the masses and their preferences for reading different types of books online or offline. The questionnaire was then shared through different platforms where the responses of the samples were undertaken and

analysed. The sample size was 50 including people from different age groups ranging from 13 years to 60 years of age.

Summary

This research paper titled 'Diminishing audience of paperbacks and hardcovers' aims to study the relationship between changing human tendencies and books as new technology emerges. The paper from the initialising stage started by establishing what are eBooks and paperbacks in general. It touched both forms of books in depth, highlighting their distinct features. The difference between both the forms was significant ranging from how they all look, their tangibility, their features like covers, accessible links and a lot more. It ran through various aspects of the publishing industry alongside the mass's preference between paperbacks/hardcovers and ebooks as a medium of print.

After the research topic introduction, the societal relevance of the research topic which stated how the study will help the general public in life along with the scope and limitations were highlighted. The scope was widely about how it will give the audience a perspective on the different forms of eBooks and paperbacks. It will also help them in knowing about the print industry in general. Furthermore, it will give an unbiased perspective to budding authors as well. However, this research won't help in shedding light on different forms of media or even forms of books that were left undiscussed here, for instance, audiobooks.

Following the social relevance, this research paper included a brief of numerous research studies conducted on topics similar to this one which revolved around books and print media from different researchers and publishers not only in the Indian market but overseas as well.

Objectives of the research paper were then built which stated how this research paper aimed to see if the development in books which came in the form of eBooks has any bad, negative effect, mainly the decrease in the audience, for paperbacks and hardcovers. Moreover, it aimed to infer who had a larger audience between the both.

On the basis of the aforementioned aspects, two hypotheses concurred which were -

1. **H1** - There is a significant decrease in the number of audiences of paperbacks and hardcovers due to the occurrence of ebooks that are easily available in various aspects like accessibility, piracy, portability, convenience and storage.

2. **H0** - There is no change in the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers due to the occurrence of ebook formats. These two forms of books are alike and akin in terms of audience and readership.

After building these two possible hypotheses, the research was properly designed for the collection of the data. First, the method of Probability sampling was chosen giving an equal opportunity for the population to be the respondents. In Probability sampling, the method of Voluntary Sampling was chosen further so that people who have a keen interest in books and are avid readers can be the respondent of their free will.

Following the sampling method, a questionnaire of around 30 different statistical qualitative and quantitative questions was formed including questions of demographic relevance, their interests in books, their opinion on different aspects of the books and finally if eBooks actually decreased the readership of the paperbacks and hardcovers. The people had varying opinions on both of them, some found paperbacks to be more easily accessible, easily available, more prone to wear and tear and less harmful to eyesight. A lot of people couldn't form an opinion on the plagiarised versions of books, pirated books and if publishers in recent times include attractive eBook publications in their packages for budding writers. However, more than half of them were definite that eBooks didn't decrease the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers. Some stated that since eBooks are comparatively cheaper and easy to access they prefer eBooks over paperbacks. On the other hand, others stated that people still prefer to have a physical book rather than read one online.

This data was later analysed through the SPSS software along with testing the hypotheses. Instead of computing the whole data format, the question responses directly related to the hypothesis were used which were 'Do you believe that the emergence of eBooks declined the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers?' The question was a close-ended one with three options that were 'Yes', 'No' and 'Maybe'. In SPSS these three were assigned numeric codes which were then tested using the One Sample Test owing to a single sample group.

The results that came out were in the favour of print form clearly showing that the emergence of ebooks has no relation, or an effect, on the audience of paperbacks and hardcovers. Furthermore, these are completely two different entities going parallel in the world of books, each having a loyal audience.

Conclusion

Through this research on ‘Diminishing audience of paperbacks and hardcovers’ that was conducted through collective data analysis, using data from an unsaturated voluntary audience, it can be concluded that technology might have soared high in the sky during the last few years bringing new alternatives to almost every aspect. This conclusion was drawn based on the data that was collected from the sample audience and later analysed through the SPSS software using the statistical and logical non-parametric One sample test. The analysis resulted in the null hypothesis needing to be retained which means that the variables have no relationship between them whatsoever. Hence, our hypothesis - There is no significant decrease and no change in the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers due to the emergence of eBooks was concluded as correct. The emergence and birth of eBooks created no negative impact on the readership of paperbacks and hardcovers. There was no decrease in the audience who still prefer to read a book in an offline format even with the benefits of having an online version. The mass audience has stayed loyal to this entity as a whole and still admires the book form over the digital form, any day.

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