

The challenge of ebooks: Consumption

Briefing for project stakeholders

A summary of research on digital reading undertaken by *CIBER Research Group, Newbury, UK*.

The summary below cover digital reading in general although some specific mention is made of ebooks. It is taken from

'Reading' in the digital environment. By **David Nicholas and David Clark**. Learned Publishing, Vol 25 No2 pages 93–98

http://ciber-research.eu/download/20120328-Reading_in_the_digital_environment.pdf

For ten years CIBER has been studying the logs of scholarly publishers, and what was clear from the very beginning was that scholars conducted very brief visits to websites and spent very little time reading when there

CIBER's research points to the fact that 'lite' reading is in fact endemic: younger people prefer it anyway and older people are getting used to it for the speed and convenience it brings.

Scholarly behaviour, including reading, has fundamentally changed as a result of our migration to the virtual space.

researchers who were asked what they actually considered to be 'reading' for a recent CIBER RIN-funded study said that that this included everything from quickly skimming abstracts – and even searching a document just for images or tables – and the reading of the full-text of articles.¹

[The] RIN study asked researchers how much of the last 'important' article they had read and **40% said they had not read the whole article**

Deep log analysis furnishes robust evidence of what people actually *do* in the digital space and not what they *say* they did or *wished* they did.

..[T]he transforming and liberating force of the digital transition, bringing with it massive and changing choice, and the fact that we knew very little about reading behaviour in the physical environment.

few people spend any significant amounts of time reading in the digital environment.

Most website visits see only 1–3 pages viewed and at least half of all visitors never come back – **they are promiscuous, preferring always to move on to something else**. Typically, a few minutes is spent on a visit and 15 minutes is a very long time to stay in a site, which in the physical world – a library for instance – would not be long at all.

Short articles have a much bigger chance of being viewed.

Squirreling

If the article is long, however, the summary (abstracts are very popular) will only be read and/or it will be squirreled away.....**at least half of the full-text articles they download they never read**, they just keep them as insurance for a day when they might need them.

people tend to view lots of things for very short periods of time. In other words, they have moved from vertical to horizontal information seeking and reading. Their behaviour is variously described as bouncing, flicking, or skittering: they move rapidly along the digital surface, usually with frequent light contacts or changes of direction. Power browsing has replaced reading

In today's digital environment navigating through titles, headings, contents pages, snippets, and abstracts at a huge rate of knots is a pleasurable experience

Articles are not that attractive to read anymore. There has been a drop in the quality of articles as a result of big increases in their production; The market is now saturated with second-rate articles, many lacking genuine interest or novelty and far too many duplicating research published elsewhere.

One of the prime reasons for the brevity of a visit or a read (view) is that most people multitask when online.

Scholars have been conditioned to communicate, disseminate, and digest quickly by email, text messaging, PowerPoint, Twitter, and mobile phones generally. In these circumstances long and disciplined reading is becoming a luxury, a thing of the past. Speed is the essence.

Google generation

Those born digital, and who have been conditioned since birth, are unsurprisingly the ones with the greatest appetite for fast information and skittering

the Google Generation were the quickest searchers, spending the least amount of time on a question – a fraction of the time spent by adults. However, by their own admission, they were the least confident about their answers. Their lack of confidence was explained by their behaviour – they viewed fewer pages and domains and undertook fewer searches in answering questions. It was as though the goal of the experiment was to get past the finishing line first, never mind whether you were carrying the baton (the answer) or not.

Their search statements were much closer textually to the questions posed, making them, not just the fast food generation, but also the 'cut-and-paste' generation.

As for multitasking, which anecdote has it that young people excel at, yes they did a lot of multitasking, but not very well.

The propensity to rush, rely on point-and-click, first-up-on-Google answers, along with an unwillingness to wrestle with uncertainties and an inability to read, digest, and evaluate information, keeps the young especially stuck on the surface of the 'information age'; Skittering on the scale it is currently being conducted (and likely to increase) is thought by commentators like Stephen Carr to be having negative consequences for some of our treasured fundamental skills.

Publishers are going to have to deal with the consequences that result from what is absent from increasing numbers of our digital users, especially the **born digital –lack of a mental map**, no sense of what a collection or index is; they tend to view fragments and disembodied text

The phenomenal rise of **social media, especially among the young, is exacerbating the situation** by reinforcing 'lite' reading, with people preferring to ask a friend rather than research or read something themselves.

Hedgehogs and foxes

Web hedgehogs are careful Internet users, taking their time to find the right information. They prefer to go it alone, rarely relying on social networks and are specialized web users, best suited to concentrating on one thing at a time.

web foxes...are good at finding information quickly. They are highly social, maintaining complex relationships with the other members of their social group, often using social networks, or other sites whose content is created by its users, as sources of information. Web foxes are multitaskers, able to do several things at the same time. They like to know a little about a lot of things. Web foxes tend to be younger (16–24).

EBOOKS

Now that digital information-seeking highways (links) have been opened up within books and between books we shall see similar patterns of reading; everything seems to be conspiring against deep reading and making it easy to snatch small bites of information. In a recent JISC study CIBER found that **there was very little extended reading of e-books; everyone was interested in snippets of information.**²

IMAPCT of Mobile devices & Tablets

Most importantly, because of time, convenience, and preference, much 'reading' is done online, happily in the case of young people and necessarily in the case of older people. **With the advent of reading devices, like the iPad, there will be even more reading conducted online.**

People probably go online to avoid reading, so it should be no surprise that they view rather than read. However, this could change. As a result of the rapid rise of tablet computers (iPads) and reading devices (Kindle)

With the impending big switch from the use of static to mobile platforms to access the Internet – mobile platforms are forecasted to be the platform of choice by 2013 – **big changes in information and reading behaviour are bound to happen**

¹ Research Information Network. E-journals: Their Use, Value and Impact. http://ciberresearch.eu/CIBER_news-201103.html

² JISC National Ebooks Observatory Study. <http://observatory.jiscebooks.org/deeplog-analysis-study/>