Social Media/E-Books Reading Survey Analysis

Gabriel H. Brown

It’s no secret that reading, particularly the way in which people read, has rapidly evolved over the last decade. There has been a boom of social media and electronic devices that makes reading more accessible and ever more important. Several trends became apparent throughout the course of the interviews.

The first trend was somewhat surprising. Often, if someone’s parents were well-educated and readers themselves, then their children are raised on the importance of reading. This should, in turn, result in an individual that is more prone to developing and maintaining reading habits across a lifetime. However, several of the individuals interviewed had parents that were from relatively poor and generally uneducated backgrounds and occupations. While most were not avid readers, all achieved a complete university education and continue to read at least the news today.

I feel that this speaks to a rising aspiration, across cultures, to set one’s children up for greater success than one’s self. While these children have not necessarily grown up to be readers, they have all completed university educations. However, members of the older generation seem to be generally more reluctant to approach “pleasure reading.” Most of those interviewed were generally interested only in news and more informational forms of text.

The second trend was a definite shift away from reading physical, paper books and toward using electronic sources of reading, such as e-readers, social media, and television. As might be expected in the United Kingdom, BBC was the preferred “large” news network, although most people that were interviewed preferred to use a variety of social media outlets and apps to obtain their news. Only two of the individuals that were interviewed read local newspapers, and one of those was not constant; he traveled frequently and read local newspapers as a matter of course to get a feel for the local environment.

The two above-mentioned cases were the only instances of reading a physical newspaper that were found. Everyone else used, as might be expected with the continuing development of the Internet and other electronic sources of information, Facebook or another social media outlet. In fact, many of the individuals mentioned that they preferred it because, as part of their daily routine, they monitor or review their newsfeeds on these outlets. Because of this, they find it easier if they follow the various news outlets on social media and stumble across the updates on their newsfeeds.

In harmony with this trend is a general lack of regard for libraries. Most of the people that were interviewed stated that they only very rarely visited a library, and often not to read. While many of them have vague recollections of visiting the library as very young children, or perhaps while in school or attending university, they now view it as an unnecessary trip. With modern technology, they can access the Internet, and any books they might desire, from almost anywhere. Many of them feel that print books will soon became a thing of the past, for all purposes antiques. There was some expectation that individuals might view this loss as somewhat tragic or sad, especially with the loss of the social, face-to-face interaction that occurs within a library. However, no one that was interviewed expressed feelings along this line of thought.

The final, most significant trend that was uncovered was the idea that reading is, in general, vanishing. By this, they explained that they felt the reading of fiction, poetry, and other such materials would become less and less important. In their minds, reading is shifting to a much “colder” perspective, in which the unembellished, more factual texts are valued more than longer texts or those geared toward leisure reading. This would mean a world in which only the bare minimum was desired, a “give me the facts and nothing else” mentality. However, to be fair, some people that had to read informational texts and the like as part of their career actually found those texts to be pleasurable. For example, one of the individuals was a nephrologist and genuinely enjoyed keeping up with the journals and other works published that relate to his field.

In all, most of the interviews held very few surprises. It was interesting, however, to note that Edinburgh plays host to a huge body of international travelers from all ethnic and cultural regions. They are drawn to the city because of its own cultural and literary history. This, perhaps, indicates a deep-seated, powerful, and ultimately subconscious desire to cling to some of the old values and ideas. Perhaps people do not want to move away from traditional routines as much as they think they do, despite the shiny new look and feel of modern technology. Maybe, just maybe, people are trying to get themselves lost in an old, dust-filled library where they can stumble across a literary treasure quite by accident and discuss it with the person browsing the shelf next to them. Looking at it like this, reading can be viewed as more than cultural, but cross-cultural, perhaps one of the strongest, most moving influences on the entire planet.