

Chapter 19

Afar Print: Future Reading in Digital Medias

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ABSTRACT

The growth and development of reader appliances and to get better improvement of screen expertise have made reading on screens less burdensome. The acts of reading are not univocal, as read in many diverse ways with many different target in mind. Reader software can afford different levels of steering support for the exploitation of digital text, presenting potentialities for systematic reading not available in the print-on-paper reading experience and compensating for lack of compass reading and feeling of invincible dominance of text. The parameters of e-text reading and the issues of access remain central to readers and researchers, whether the electronic text is devised and packaged as an “e-book” for portable reading devices, or be located in a server for distribution to library terminals to be downloaded to desktop PCs, laptops or tablet PCs. The power and functionality of reading software – note-taking, highlighting and indexing capabilities, robust open searching across databases – are ultimately linked to open access issues: interoperability, text standards, and digital rights management. These remain key questions for libraries, publishers and researchers.

INTRODUCTION

As of today, our knowledge on the nature of digital reading and of the comparison between print and digital reading, is very limited. Most recent studies focus on digital reading under passive conditions, in which text comprehension is tested, without asking the reader to “act” on the text by editing, recognizing or correcting errors and improving the text’s quality. In light of the present-days increase in situations that require

active digital text-reading in learning (e.g. grading students works or reviewing papers and books), there is a growing importance in shedding light on the comparison between print and digital reading under active conditions. In this pioneering study, we examined the active-reading abilities of students, who were asked to read, edit, recognize errors and improve the quality of short articles, in a print and in a digital format. Surprisingly, and in contrast to the common reported findings from print versus digital reading studies, no significant

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differences were found between the performances of participants in the two formats. A similar no-difference was found for all text-errors categories, as well as for gender differences. We found that digital readers completed their tasks earlier than the print readers, but their performance was not lower. We suggest that the absence of significant differences between print and digital formats indicates that digital reading becomes an everyday practice among users, who gain digital reading proficiency. This process, of closing the gap between print and digital readers is reported in recent literature.

The primary constraints on technological change are neither technical nor economic; they are sociotechnical (EDSF, p. 11). It takes several generations to get past the point of depending on the old medium for a way to think about the new and to get the point of exploiting the new medium artfully in its own right (O'Donnell, 1998, p. 42). As readers in the twenty-first century have to find out reading an increasing amount of electronic text – e-mails, Web pages, cellular/pager messages, online catalogues and databases, e-journal and e-books. Digital text on a screen is a pervasive reality in the public arena, in the office, in libraries and in the home. In point of fact that embraces these developments, tolerate them, or reject those that challenge of comfort zones. Now with the commercial launch of reader devices, may be entering yet another stage in the presentation of electronic text, which has the potential to alter the reading habits, affect the organization of our intellectual life, and change the venues of the reading experiences.

The reading devices – Personal Computers, Pocket PCs, eBookman, readers and their predecessors the Rocket e-book and Softbook – along with the software readers for PCs (Adobe e-book Reader, Microsoft Reader, even the netLibrary proprietary reader) taken together with aggregators have provided a developing environment for publishers to look again at commercializing their

print commodities in electronic format. In many instances these are the same publishers who had virtually abandoned the vehicle of CD-ROM that a decade ago presented yet another alternative for the distribution of electronic text and books. (Hawkins, 2000a, b)

What has changed today? The Web, of course, is an all-engulfing reality, and through the Web some of the publisher dilemmas of distribution have been freed from the print and paper. However, irresolution and hesitation remain, particularly with the standardization of text formats and the release of intellectual property on the freeway of open access. The standardization of digital rights management remains a question not only for publishers, but for libraries and researchers as well, with the more important long-term strategic issue of the interoperability of systems and access to the electronic text of e-books posing a critical concern for our growing digital libraries (Bide, 2001; Mooney, 2001; Neylon, 2001; Association of American Publishers, 2000; Open e-book Forum, n.d.)

In the face of these potentially conflicting developments, libraries, publishers, aggregators and distributors are moving beyond mere experimentation. There are obvious perceived benefits to e-books and yet there remains skepticism about the reading experience. The focus of comments in this article on the changes of readers are experiencing, the advantages and disadvantages in reading books on reader devices, on PC screens, or Web-based presentations of digitized text.

THE TRIUMPH OF VISUAL LITERATURE

Marketers will tell you that visual content carries 40–60 times the impact of text in terms of its ability to draw attention. In the world of literature and entertainment, graphic novels and comics have gone from the fringes of culture and

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