

## **'New' Text of the New Era: Reading Books in a Non-Bookish Way**

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*Reading is not at all same in the age of techno-science. Robotics, mechanism in its extreme form and technical dominance in almost every sphere of life have changed the way we think, read and write. Naturally, a new form of culture has appeared - Digital Culture.*

*Digital Culture is not limited within the boundary of one or two particular fields of learning, rather it ranges from Sociology to Literature, Information Science to Aesthetics etc. Modern Capitalism has necessarily something to do with this Digital Culture. Globalization has many ways to make it widespread and 'being digital' has become the ultimate human destiny.*

*Though a comparatively 'new' idea, the theoreticians of this field believe that without a digital culture, digital advancement is impossible. Reading of books, a popularly termed decreasing human habit is connected with the advent of such culture. In this age of 'kindle' reading, we can rethink and reinterpret the issue in a non-bookish way.*

*This paper aims to focus into those possibilities by way of interconnecting these two issues - Digital Culture and Reading in today's world.*

**Keywords:** Capitalism, Digital Culture, Globalization, Reading

### **Introduction**

**D**igital Culture has also changed the scenario of everyday life. The effect of such change, whether good or bad, is out of our purview. Rather we can maintain an aesthetic distance in this regard or play an 'amoral' role. We are in a position to admit that reading is one of many things that has changed today. The way we used to read yesterday differs from today's reading and this new way of reading has a close and inseparable link with the advent of Digital Culture. For the sake of understanding of this comparatively new idea about digital culture we may turn to some theorists whose works throw ample light on the subject.

### **Understanding Digital Culture**

Nicholas Negroponte in his book *Being Digital* says, Digital communication is a determining factor in virtually all of culture and society, and embraces the idea that it sharply divides our age from the past (Negroponte, 1995). Negroponte, popular columnist for *Wired* magazine and founding director for the MIT Media Lab, describes how advancements in computer technology and telecommunications will transform workplaces, households, and educational institutions. He explains how this revolution will change the way we live, think, and interact with one another and with technology and foresees some mind-boggling challenges that lie ahead in developing truly global systems for delivering multimedia and other forms of digitally based information.

Negroponte wrote in 1995, in ten years the digital technology will become wireless from its present wired state. Now, we know that he was not mistaken. Internet communication even in the third world countries has become popular without big modems, joint boxes and jungle of wires. Fashionably enough it is being replaced by wireless data cards or small USB equipments. This is only an example. The same way wireless laser mouse is taking their position soon in place of wired mouse. The list is never ending. New technology creates not only new forms of expression but also, and importantly, new ways to satisfy human cravings.

Digital Culture brings with it a hunger for widespread digital knowledge. Negroponte is not only a theorist in this regard. He is also an active worker in this field of Digital Culture. He worked actively for the sake of knowledge expansion. He is popular for his projects on OLPC or One Laptop Per Child. The aim of the project was to offer the poor children of the third world countries digital access through cheap laptops. The learning process in primary education will become in this way more and more attractive and the children will participate more spontaneously. People now have started thinking about right to digital access which will make them more focused, knowledgeable and well equipped. Before going to the question of birth of new 'text', we must keep in mind this backdrop of overwhelming response to Digital revolution.

In his book *Digital Culture* Charlie Gere articulates the degree to which our everyday lives are becoming dominated by digital technology, whether in terms of leisure, work or bureaucracy. This dominance is reflected in other areas, including the worlds of finance, technology, scientific research, media and telecommunications. Out of this situation a particular set of cultural responses has emerged, for example, in art, music, design, film, literature and elsewhere.

During the last twenty years, digital technology has begun to touch on almost every aspect of our lives. Nowadays most forms of mass media, television, recorded music and film are produced and even distributed digitally; and these media are beginning to converge with digital forms, such as the internet, the World Wide Web, and video games, to produce a seamless digital mediascape. Gere is of the opinion that, at work we are surrounded by technology, whether in offices or in supermarkets and factories, where almost every aspect of planning, design, marketing, production and distribution is monitored or controlled digitally (Gere, 2008).

#### **Reading: Past & Present**

Reading is a cultural activity that has undergone profound changes since its inception. In the standard history of reading entitled *Orality and literacy*, Walter Ong (2008) pointed out that the earliest basic script dates from only about 6,000 years ago. Furthermore, the first full alphabet did not have its beginning until the Greeks developed their alphabet about 750 B.C.

Providing insight into the cultural history of reading, Robert Darnton pointed out that up until the third or fourth century A.D., Europeans "had to unroll a book to read it" (Darnton, 1990). Scrolls would eventually evolve into folded pages, which in turn eventually became gathered pages — or the codex — the book as it is recognized today. The popular writer Alberto Manguel has written that early Christians adopted the codex because they found it a convenient format for keeping their spiritual texts hidden from Roman authorities. These early Christians were the forefathers of the men who later read and transcribed their religious texts in monasteries.

Interestingly, these early scribes first did their work by reading out loud to themselves. Not until the ninth century did monastic regulations begin requiring silent reading. By the thirteenth century the practice of men reading silently and alone became commonplace. This shift to silent reading was a profound change, one that Darnton suggested "involved a greater mental adjustment than the shift to printed text".

Yet the coming of printed text did represent a substantial social shift. In the middle of the fifteenth century, the German entrepreneur Johann Gutenberg produced his first printed versions of the Bible using his fantastic invention of movable type. The printing press had been born. However, the printing revolution did not happen overnight.

By the eighteenth century Europeans had largely begun to switch from reading "intensively" to "extensively". Darnton has written that this may be an generalization, but it does make some general

sense, given the emergence of cheaply produced texts, which could be made available to a wider public. Interestingly, with the democratization of the printed text, there was a return to reading aloud. Reading was a solitary silent process only for the educated elite who could afford to buy books.

Book no more means a concrete, printed, particularly sized production. Book can now be virtual, digital, abstract and more flexible. We may or may not touch it. It has made general access to books more wide, easy and cheap too. Open access movement has opened a new vista in this regard. Huge projects like Gutenberg Project is going on to digitize a large number of books. Such large production of e books not only helps to disseminate knowledge among readers but enhances the number of readers as a whole. The costly books can easily become accessible to readers through their community participation in social media. Several academic platforms are working today like 'Scribd', 'Academia.edu' etc. to spread this knowledge sharing activity. None can say that such activities may harm the reading habits. It only changes the way of reading which has become a timely need. Big companies like Amazon has come out with machines devoted for book reading, rather e book reading - 'kindle' and multinational mobile companies like Samsung places in their smart phones apps like 'kindle for Samsung'.

#### **Reading in the Digital Age**

E book reading is not like traditional book reading but it is never monotonous. E book readers allow the readers a kind of experience that is at once attractive, new and has a kind of elasticity. Readers can enjoy the reading by marking, saving a portion for future necessity, taking print outs of selected portions, taking side notes, sharing the important paragraphs with friends and commenting on it. Direct sharing in social media is also possible. Besides that, a kind of traditional feel is also there. We can turn a page in e book reader just in the same way, we turn the page of a printed book. The freedom we enjoy includes consulting internet while reading e books, non linear reading and selective reading. Such flexibility and endless possibility has popularized reading through internet sites, tabs, smart phones, I pads, laptops, e book readers etc. To keep themselves in the race for survival, almost all leading newspapers and magazines have brought out their digital edition. They offer free or paid digital subscription to the subscribers with their traditional subscription. A paperless future is waiting for us which has started projecting new challenges before the reading community.

Another important reason for shifting from paper world to paperless world is the question of longevity. Printed materials cannot last long. But a digital version of a book may remain for generation after generation. Moreover such books may be stored in various places and in various ways. Only with a password anyone can share the book from any corner of the world. Such indestructibility and accessibility have made e books popular with readers of modern age. The matter of environmental consciousness has a key role to play here. The digital version of text is eco-friendly and appeals to the generation, so much disturbed with issues like global warming.

The quality of book production is also responsible for decreasing interest in printed book to some extent. Specially the children do not like to learn from a book, that is monotonous, dull looking and tiresome to finish. Except some famous publication houses, most of the publishers aim at immediate gain. Naturally in the long run, the habit of printed book reading gets a setback. The economic side of this habit of reading has also gone against the printed book. With much less amount an e book is accessible than its printed challenger.

### Conclusion

Digital Culture, a global phenomenon of our century has given us a new life in virtual spaces, full of possibility to explore. It does not limit itself within any limit - geographical, traditional, religious, ethnic or gender. Reading, a cultural habit has nothing to do but to follow the demand of the age. The process of reading was never same, it crossed many historical phases. Naturally, now the time has come that we accept the emergence of alternate reading. A feeling of never ending information revolution has reached the shore of modern life. Reading in our age has become more elastic, flexible and full of possibilities. A future of paperless reading is knocking at our door.

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