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Will Print Books Go Away?

Despite the movement towards the digitalization of printed items, print books will never cease to exist. Print books are generally preferred in comparison to e-books after using both, print books are more beneficial to reader health, and print books have been proven to be better learning tools in comparison to those of e-books. According to Pew Research, a survey conducted in 2015 revealed that half of Americans today now own a tablet or e-reader, and the numbers are only rising due to the convenience of traveling with an e-book and the higher cost of printed text. Examining the effects of the rise in popularity of e-books will determine the future of whether moving away from print books is a beneficial effect of things digitizing, or if this effect of technology is detrimental to the future.

First, print books are better for reader health in comparison to e-books. While new technological inventions have made our lives easier, they can also cause various drawbacks. Screens make us read slower, learn less deeply, remember less and sleep worse. Sleep is important because a lack of it can cause “many chronic diseases, and can improve memory and cognitive function” (Kresser 2013). 35% of Americans already report that they are getting less than seven hours of sleep per night. Many experts are claiming that the cause of restless sleep for people today is due to the excessive use of communications technology. How does this relate to e-readers? E-readers have the same “blue” light as communication technologies such as phones and television screens, which emit melatonin-suppressive effects (Kresser 2013). Some may argue that reading print book late at night can strain eyes as equally, if not even more than e-reader devices. However, research has revealed that print books are more so better for eyes than e-readers because people have reported to gain eye discomfort from reading through technological screens, rather than printed books.

Secondly, people generally prefer print books to e-books. Even as e-books continue to gain popularity, studies show that people generally prefer print books. When the kindle and e-reader devices were first coming onto the market, such as the Amazon Kindle in 2007, publishers followed and sold their e-books for cheaper. From 2008 to 2010, e-book sales skyrocketed and people were worried print books would eventually go out of business (Nuwer 2016). However, in recent years, Pew’s newest collected data shows a steady decline in e-book sales. Pew’s data shows that the number of Americans who read at least one print book has fallen from 60% to 63% from 2014 to 2015 (Nuwer 2016). Some may argue that because of the natural currency of how much technology is advancing over time, that e-books will eventually overcome print books even though there is some preference for print books now. However, a study in 2013 shows that when studying reading effort in different media types such as print, e-reader, and tablet computer, the study found that all participants said that they preferred reading on print. (Myrberg, Wiberg 2015). In the study, older participants read faster and with less effort on the tablet computer, but that is due to the back lighting giving a better contrast, therefore being better for older eyes. So while an e-reader type may better for older folks, all people still said that they preferred print books.

Lastly, having physical books have proven to be better learning tools than e-books. In 2013, a study involving tenth graders in Norway split students into two groups to either read two texts (1,400-2,000 words) in print or the same texts as PDFs on a computer screen. In the reading comprehension test give post-study, the students who read on paper scored significantly better than those who read the texts digitally. (Myrberg, Wiberg 2015). This is because it is easier to remember reading through print, due to the spatio-temporal memory networks given when touching and turning print pages. Interacting with texts helps recall memories more easily. Some may argue that e-books are more efficient for reading, such as being able to search for key words for example. However, a downside to e-readers is that they may also propose a potential distraction from readers who are trying to learn from their texts. E-readers have applications and internet browsers attached to the device, encouraging distractions and can be counterproductive when it comes to focused reading and learning.

Although e-readers have gained in popularity due to their convenience and cost compared to print books, there are strong reasons for print books to never disappear. People still prefer e-books in comparison to e-readers. Not only that, but e-books are better for reader health and reader comprehension. Many technological innovations to come may challenge current standards, but some things are better the old fashion way.

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