

Literature as a Preference for Relaxed Reading: Analyzing Reading Habits of College Students

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Abstract: Literature has been educating, refining, cleansing and purging the mankind since times immemorial. In fact, leisure and literature have a deep connection. Literature as a chosen stream for its students is awakening and rewarding but as a leisure choice for the students from other streams is satisfying, therapeutic and purgatory too. The present paper attempts to investigate and understand the reading preferences of undergraduate and post-graduate students from Chitkara University, Rajpura (Chandigarh) and Maharana Pratap National College, Mullana (Ambala). The study undertaken not only attempts to bring the apparently opposite faculties of study closer but also aims to investigate the trend to prefer reading literature for relaxed reading. Apart from this, the study brings forth an analytical comparison of the reading preferences of the students belonging to urban community and rural community.

Index Terms: Digital age, reading habits, relaxed reading, literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is perhaps, the sole technique to learn, unlearn and gain information. It is the food for thought which ultimately makes the reader a wise, sensible, knowledgeable, prudent, well-informed and learned. The advent of digital technology in twenty-first century has unquestionably adversely affected the reading habits of people around the globe and they spend their precious time while scrolling screens of their devices. On the contrary, digital technology has also offered us digital reading which has totally revolutionized the whole game. The digital survey undertaken for the present research does not limit itself to the students of Literature rather it focuses on extracting the information about reading habits of the students, in general, irrespective of their educational streams and inclination towards literature in particular. The present study stands purely for academic purposes and the findings are meant to understand the reading inclinations of youth in the post-truth age.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The digital distraction has made youth terribly vulnerable towards its addiction and therefore, the present study gains a well-deserved urgency and appeal and seeks attention of researchers from the related fields of study so as to offer a new perspective of research in near future. Key objectives of the present study are as follows: 1. To explore and analyse the reading preferences of the students towards Literature irrespective of their streams. 2. To discover and analyse the overlapping of formal and informal modes of consuming literature in a digital age. 3. To explore and extract the reading preferences towards various genres of literature. 4. To discover the preference of students vis-à-vis online/in print reading. 5. To learn the frequency of reading habits. 6. To investigate their inclination towards literature as a preferred leisure activity. 7. To extract their opinion whether literature (Regional/World) is a reflection of life and can it inspire and motivate?

III. METHODOLOGY

With an objective to explore, identify and critically analyse the contemporary reading habits of the students, a questionnaire was framed on Google forms and an on-line survey was steered. The present research undertakes a sample of 112 students between the age-group 17-26 belonging to the streams of Arts, Commerce, Science and Technology. Further, the responses are examined to extract results and to draw conclusion towards the end of the investigation.

IV. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

i. Demography: A total of 112 students took part in the survey. Among the respondents, 6.3% (7) of them are below 18, 62.5% (70) of them are between the age-group of 18-20 years, 25% (28) are between 21-25 age-group and 6.3% (7) are above 25 years out of the whole lot. Further, 89.3% (100) students are pursuing

graduation (Arts/Science/Engineering), 7.1% (8) students are pursuing post-graduation while 3.6% (4) belonged to other stream/faculty.

ii. Preference for kinds of literature: Keeping in view a variety of reading options in the digital age, students are asked to claim their preferred domain out of the wide range of choices namely English literature and magazines, Hindi/Regional literature, English/Hindi newspapers, social media posts or no reading at all. The findings reveal that 68.8% (77) students prefer social media posts while 52.7% (59) students opt for reading English literature and magazines. Also, students love reading English/Hindi newspapers also. Amusingly, 5.4% (6) students do not prefer reading at all.

iii. Preference towards forms of literature: The findings claim that the most preferred genre is novels and short stories as 42.9% (59) students desire reading novels; 17.9% (20) are interested in reading poetry while 17% (19) students crave to read both prose and poetry and 22.3% (25) read whatever comes their way.

iv. Keeness towards type of content: The response clearly shows that 57% (50.9) respondents are inclined towards political and general awareness; 41% (36.6) students are interested in reading biographies, histories and travelogues; 52% (46.4) students tend to consume motivational/life skills/career-based content; 45% (40.2) choose to read romantic/detective/sci-fi/horror fiction while 21.4% (24) read whatever comes their way.

v. Frequency of leisure reading: This part of the survey enquires about the frequency of relaxed reading of the respondents. Relaxed reading often called as pleasure reading which is opted by the reader himself/herself for self-grooming. The benefits of relaxed reading are many, to quote a few here: self-enrichment, personality grooming, stress management, purgation, emotional sustenance, better concentration and learning thereafter etc. The results reveal that 35.7% (40) respondents claim to engage themselves in leisure reading daily; 31.3% (35) pursue leisure reading on weekly basis; 2.7% (3) undertake leisure reading fortnightly; 5.4% (6) prefer leisure reading monthly while 25% (28) respondents are not specific about the frequency of undertaking leisure reading at all.

vi. Literature as reflection of life: The next segment puts forth the argument that whether literature is a reflection of life. The findings decisively win the argument and endorse the opinion that indeed literature mirrors life. The study reveals that 64.3% (72) respondents agree that literature is a reflection of life; 19.6% (22) are indecisive about the said opinion; 11.6% (13) cannot say while 4.5% (5) do not endorse the opinion at all.

vii. Literature makes better human beings: This section brings alive the opinion that literature yields better human beings and can develop the life skills amongst the readers. Life skills are perhaps the most sought-after core competencies, inter-personal and intra-personal skills which not only enable human beings to lead happier lives but also enable to excel in their respective chosen fields. In the post-truth era, this perception becomes very relevant and appropriate as literature being the reflection of life, necessarily teaches lessons of life through purgation and catharsis. The findings reveal that 69.6% (78) believe that literature can make better human beings and can result in developing life-skills in readers; 16.1% (18) respondents are uncertain about their response; 5.4% (6) cannot say while 8.9% (10) outrightly reject the opinion.

V. DISCUSSION

The survey undertaken clearly indicates that intrusion of digital technology has adversely affected the reading habits of the students. Owing to the twin support of internet and computers/mobiles, new media has re-defined the channels of communication across the globe. New media is an all-inclusive term which engulfs a wide variety of electronic communications that are feasible due to innovation in computer technology [1]. Digital technology has absolutely reformed the process of transfer of information. The traditional way of transferring data through printed copies has been replaced by online data [2] which has eventually unpleasantly affected the reading habits of the students. Social media posts are the most preferred option to be undertaken during leisure time and literature comes at the second slot as per the present study. Further, novels and short stories are the most loved genre of literature amongst the students' community. In the light of the present study, one finds that the respondents show a fragmented opinion

towards the choice of medium. There are almost equal takers for print and online books. Indisputably, digital content has altered the reading behaviour of readers as it opens a variety of newer facilities such as interactivity, non-linearity and easy access to information. [3] While turning to the frequency of reading, (print/online) the present survey claims that majority of students keenly experience it on daily basis. Further, the study concludes that leisure reading apart from relieving stress also calms the mind and soothes the soul. Commenting on literature as a whole, it indisputably reflects human life in its variant shades and hues. It reflects human life and its complexities artfully and relieves us from anxiety, uncertainty, ambiguity, reservations, misgivings, abnormalities, eccentricities, idiosyncrasies, oddities, disquiet and unrest of the contemporary life and living [4]. Though literature has been curing us from the time immemorial but its reputation has amplified in the post-truth times. The responses received through the present survey endorse this fact evidently. Obviously, the findings palpably imply that literature is loved not only by the students who are studying it as their prescribed formal course of education but also by the students who opt for technical/science courses during their formal education. One can clearly see the fluidity and overlapping of margins vis-à-vis consumption of literature in the post-truth age.

VI. CONCLUSION

Post-truth era points at the times, when people tend to make their opinion on the basis of emotions and personal beliefs rather than relying on objective facts. Owing to rise of social media as a news source coupled with twisting of facts presented by the establishment, post-truth is finding its linguistic footing in the contemporary times [5]. In today's era nobody believes anything unless one reads/sees/views it on social media. People want to see/view the posts of their favourite celebrities/ political leaders about a particular news or happening. Undoubtedly, speculations rule our lives and facts carry a little significance for us. Assuredly, we live in a post-truth era. Though carrying a huge wealth of information through new media has made the situation worst and we all are navigating in the world full of lies, falsehoods and delusions but we need to safeguard our sanity in this post-truth era. And when we talk about

keeping our sanity intact who else can safeguard it other than literature? It has been effectively passing on ages-old pearls of wisdom from one generation to the next through oral tradition, written form and now through new media. The medium may have been changing with the changing times but one thing has been staying sturdy all through the times and that is the inclination towards literature whether fiction, poetry, prose, plays or its newer forms. Art and literature contribute not only to an individual's search for elevation but it also contributes to the collective identity of culture. It is literature only which teaches us to identify, confront and overcome our past and contemporary crises. Further, we learn to assert our ideals for future too, through it.[6] While pulling all the threads together and in the light of the present study we can conclude that literature has not only been the most preferred option during leisure time but it continues to heal and calm human body, mind and soul since ages. The paper evidently establishes the fact that leisure and literature have a deep connection and people especially, youngsters dive into myriad forms of literature to conquer the pearls of wisdom, stability and sanity. Though the medium of consuming literature has been exclusively renovated in the contemporary digital era but the love for literature has not diminished at all. Fascinatingly, this trend will witness a rise in future as well because everybody wishes to attain solace and peace in this harsh competitive world and literature comes very handy for the same.

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