



THE READING CULTURE: PAST AND PRESENT

Dr. Swapna Vyawahare

*Associate Professor & Research Supervisor, Pratishthan Mahavidyalaya, Paithan,
Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, MS, India*

Abstract

The reading culture was developed in China, Japan and Korea. The earliest system of the creating books was hand printing. Later in China the new style of the woodblock printing was developed. The imperial rule in China gave preference to the printed material for the recruitment of the bureaucrats through civil service examination. The imperial rule there was in favour of the providing printed books. The reading in Japan was started by the Buddhist missionaries who brought hand printing technology from China around 768 to 770 AD. The first printing press was started by Gutenberg in Germany. With the development in the printing by printing press the books were available to the common readers easily it gave rise to the reading culture. In the 21st century, the reading culture has undergone a drastic transformation, shaped by rapid technological advancements, availability of the different media, changing lifestyles, and evolving educational practices. While traditional reading habits have declined in some areas, new forms of reading material and content consumption have emerged, reflecting the dynamic nature of modern society. The most striking change in reading culture today is the shift from print to screen and digital media. E-books, tele book, audiobooks, and online articles have become popular alternatives to physical books. Devices such as computer, smartphones, tablets, and e-readers allow people to access literature, news, and academic materials anytime and anywhere. This convenience has encouraged many to read more frequently, albeit in shorter and more fragmented sessions. This paper also covers the challenges before the reading culture in the modern age. The reading culture was the source of knowledge and the cultural values now facing different challenges. Now people don't give proper importance to the reading. Most of the students of the literature are also searching the shortest route to the success by just reading the readymade notes. This paper under the name The reading culture past and present is about the challenges and the development of the print media and also focuses on the past and present of the reading culture.

Keywords

Reading culture, Print media, Ebook, Tele book, Audio book, Tablet, E-readers, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

The early reading culture was mainly based on the production of the books and availability of the books. The speed of the production of the books was very slow and only hand written books were available. Such manuscripts were very costly and had only available to the rich people's in the society. The establishment of the educational centres gave rise to the literate middle class. This gave rise to the demands for books. The revolution in the production of the book was brought by the booksellers in Europe. As the demand for the books increased they started exporting books to many different countries. Production of hand written manuscripts was conducted in new ways to meet the expanded demands. The people with beautiful handwriting were appointed by booksellers. But it was not possible to satisfy the ever increasing demand for books moreover



copying was an expensive laborious and time consuming task. The manuscripts too had its problems to handle, were very fragile and could not be carried around or read easily. With the introduction of the woodblock printing it became possible to produce more books. The growing demands needed for even quicker and cheaper reproduction of the books. It gave rise to the print technology. The greatest revolutionary task was done by the Johann Gutenberg who developed the first known printing press (1430). Once invented the printing presses were setup in most of the European countries and also travelled to other countries too. Within the short span of the time millions of the printed books flooded in the market to give rise to the reading culture. Books were available for the common people very easily.

The printed books made its effect and brought revolution. It was the revolution of the change in the lives of people, to change their relationship to knowledge and relationships and with authorities, rulers and institutions too. The printed books became the window of the world and the stream of the knowledge which opened up new ways of looking at the world. Because of print technology a new reading culture emerged. It reduced the cost, time and labour required to produce the books and first time it was possible to produce multiple copies with ease. Markets were flooded with books reaching out to an ever growing reading culture. Earlier it was restricted to the elites and common people just lived in a world of oral culture. They used to listen stories, sacred texts read out, ballads and psalm's recited and folk tales narrated. It was just limited to the oral culture. Before the print technology books were not only expensive but also limited in numbers too. The print culture made it possible to produce more books and could reach out to wider sections of the people. Those who were illiterate those also facilitated by the books which were profusely illustrated with pictures.

Literary and Rise of Reading Culture:

The churches, missionaries and the imperial rulers started schools in the different parts of the world, carried literacy to the peasants, artisans and to the common people it gave rise to the varied reading mania. They started demands for more books and the different forms of the literature. The new forms of popular literature reached in the market to target new readers. The book producers also took care that they searched new ways to reduce the prices of the books. The chapbooks were carried by pedlars and sold for penny so it was easy to poor people to buy it. The Bibliothèque Bleue was small, low-priced books printed on low-quality paper and bound in cheap blue covers. The newspapers, periodicals and journals also were available at cheaper rate and carried information about current events, similarly the ideas of scientific world and philosophy, about wars and trade too.

The 18th century witnessed the real revolution in the reading culture. Along with the industrialization the new class emerged that is working class and also middle class. Those people gave importance to the education and also decreased working hours gave them extra time to read. It gave rise to the new forms of literature like novel. Reading of novel became popular among women. Penny magazines were mainly published to target the women readers. Most of the novels were written in the nineteenth century and women were regarded as important readers. To create more thrill the publishers developed new strategies to sell their publications. In the 19th century periodicals serialised important novels which gave birth to particular way of writing novels in the serialised manners. The cheap series also was one of the efforts to increase the readers. The dust cover or the cheap paperback editions also belonged to the same efforts. Whatever it was but it gave boost to increase the reading culture.

With the onset of the modernization and scientific development the television sets gave hard blow to the reading culture. Most of the readers became just watcher. The transition was slow but until the 21st century the reading culture entirely lost its glory. The mobile phone technology



and internet made videos available in plenty and also at cheaper rate now the just watch culture prevalent. The book shops and libraries are empty and just waiting for the readers. The fewest readers who visit the libraries are either for exams or for research. The community of the elite readers now nowhere is to be seen. Now it's very hard to find out the readers. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, short videos, facebook have influenced reading preferences, especially among women and the younger people. Content is now often visual, interactive, and brief. The rise of "BookTok" has surprisingly revived interest in reading among teens and young adults, proving that even in a digital world, storytelling still captivates. The story telling and reading also lost its glory with the idea of the nuclear type of family system.

Listening stories from mother or the bed time stories from the grandparents also lost with the new reforms now it is very easy to see the picture that both parents and children busy to watch rather than to read. It is constant complaint of parents that what to do to develop reading habit among the children. The education system also has its hand in the decrease of the reading culture. The modern evaluation system gave more importance to the marks than to the knowledge. As demand the supply was made by parents too. Instead of reading original text to read notes started getting more importance. It is the shortest route to get good marks. The modern life presents challenges to sustained, focused reading. Constant notifications, entertainment apps, and fast-paced lifestyles reduce attention spans. As a result, many struggle to engage with lengthy or complex texts. The shift toward scanning headlines rather than reading full articles reflects this change in behaviour.

Modernization has transformed societies in remarkable ways, bringing advancements in technology, communication, and lifestyle. One of the areas deeply impacted by these changes is the reading culture. Generally people are very eager to get the fresh news paper only few are there to read entire news or articles but most of them just read the titles of the news or the articles. The speed in the life system made its effect and the reading culture is lost. Traditionally, reading books, newspapers, and magazines was a common and respected habit. However, with the rise of digital technologies and changing lifestyles, the nature and frequency of reading have changed significantly.

Negative Effects of Modernization on Reading Culture:

- **Decline of Traditional Reading Habits:** The shift from paper books to screens has led to a decline in deep, focused reading. Physical books and libraries are less frequented. Many people prefer short-form content like social media posts and reels over long articles or novels.
- **Decreased Attention Span:** With the abundance of fast-paced digital content, people struggle to focus on reading for long durations. Multitasking with gadgets reduces the depth of understanding and retention of what is read.
- **Loss of Reading as a Leisure Activity:** Previously, reading was a popular leisure activity. Today, video games, streaming platforms, and social media dominate free time. Children and teens, in particular, are more attracted to visual media than books.
- **Misinformation and Lack of Quality:** Not all online content is trustworthy or well-written. Modernization has flooded the internet with unverified and low-quality material. The habit of reading critically and analysing information is diminishing.

Modernization and Education:

In educational settings, modernization has brought digital textbooks, smart classrooms, and e-learning platforms. However, this shift also means that students often rely on summaries, videos, or AI tools instead of reading full texts, weakening comprehension skills. As negative side is there it have some positive effects too Positive Effects of Modernization on Reading Culture.



- **Digital Accessibility:** Modernization has led to the rise of e-books, audiobooks, and online articles, making reading material more accessible than ever before. Platforms like Kindle, Google Books, and Audible have enabled people to carry thousands of books in a single device.
- **Wider Reach and Inclusion:** People in remote or rural areas, who once had limited access to libraries or bookstores, can now read through mobile phones and internet services. This has helped in promoting literacy and lifelong learning globally.
- **Customized Reading Experiences:** Readers can now choose formats that suit their lifestyle – visual readers prefer e-books, while others may enjoy audiobooks during commutes or chores. Features like font resizing, night modes, and translation options improve user experience.
- **Interactive and Engaging Content:** Digital reading allows interactive features such as hyperlinks, videos, animations, and quizzes, especially in educational content. Apps and websites for children make reading more enjoyable through games and storytelling.

Reviving the Reading Culture in the Modern World:

To balance the benefits of modernization with the value of traditional reading:

Promote Reading Campaigns: Governments and NGOs should promote reading through public libraries, book fairs, and reading challenges. **Parental and Teacher Involvement:** Encouraging reading at home and in schools can build lifelong habits. **Blend Technology with Reading:** Apps that reward reading, interactive storytelling, and online book clubs can combine modern tools with literary interest. **Limit Screen Time:** Creating time for offline reading can help improve focus and enjoyment.

Education and Reading Habits:

Schools and colleges continue to promote reading through curriculums, libraries, and literacy programs. However, educators now integrate digital texts, e-learning tools, and interactive platforms to make reading more appealing. The focus is not only on reading books but also on developing media literacy, critical thinking, and comprehension skills. To foster a strong reading culture in the 21st century, a balanced approach is needed. Encouraging reading in all its forms—print or digital—is essential. Parents, teachers, and communities must promote the joy of reading by offering diverse materials and creating engaging reading environments. Libraries, both physical and digital, remain vital in this mission.

Conclusion:

Modernization has reshaped reading culture in both constructive and concerning ways. While digital access and variety have expanded, deep reading and traditional book culture have seen a decline. A balanced approach that embraces technological advancement while preserving the love for reading is essential for future generations. Reading in the 21st century is not dying; it is evolving. While the medium and manner have changed, the core value of reading—for knowledge, entertainment, and empathy—remains intact. Embracing both traditional and modern methods can ensure that the love for reading continues to thrive in the digital age.

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