AN ANALYSIS OF READING PROFILE OF GENERATION-X IN SINGAPORE

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Introduction. Based on generational analysis approach, reading profile of 180 Singaporean indicated that Xers tended to adopt pragmatic and utilitarian approach towards reading. Only slightly more than half of the group read regularly. Top reasons for the lack of reading were time, energy and the preference for television and internet-related activities.

Method. Questionnaire survey was used on Gen-Xers born between years 1965 – 1980 recruited randomly via social network and through emails. A hundred and eighty responses were gathered. Study focused on attitudes, motivation, and preferences for reading. These were cross examined with demographic variables of gender, education, marital status, and parenthood.

Results. Readers tended to adopt pragmatic and utilitarian approach towards reading. Convenience often guided their choice of knowledge acquisition, reading habits and preferences. Their primary goals for reading are information and personal development first, followed by relaxation. Although tradition prints of newspapers and magazines still enjoyed stronghold, reading of Internet pages are a norm to many readers. Reading preferences varied along demographic lines. Education was a strong predictor for attitudes and motivations. Attitude, motivation and reading preferences differed according to gender. Participants with children saw significant changes and preferences.

Conclusion. New media such as Internet and TV and changes in lifestyle have affected the reading patterns. These changing reading trends suggest shift in focus of services offered by libraries.

Introduction

Despite the fact that reading has always held high esteem in literate societies, there have been concerns about falling reading trends. Clammer (1981) suggested that environmental factors influence reading habits. Meyer (1985) highlighted that older readers had less choice of media compared to younger readers who were raised at a time where new media were proliferating. Generational analysis allows researches in the area to extend beyond basic understanding of reading habits to that of social trends and processes that affect reading habits. Generation X is probably the first of generations to experience the impact of television on reading habits. Generation X, otherwise known as Gen-X or Xers, describes "young adults at millennium: the generation of people born roughly during the years 1965 to 1980 in Western countries, especially the United States, often regarded as disillusioned, cynical, or apathetic" (Encarta Online Dictionary, 2008). They have been inculcated with television and radio since childhood. Little is known about the reading patterns of Gen-X and their knowledge seeking behavior. Goldstein & Brown (2004) found one study on Gen-X newspaper readership by Roper Starch Worldwide, showing that more than half of Generation X reads the paper on a given day; but it contrasted with a more recent Pew Center study, which found just half as many Xers, 28%, read the paper the day before and only for about 10 minutes on average (cited in Goldstein & Brown, 2004). Another study published by research firm Yankelovich (1997, cited in Goldstein & Brown, 2004), found that on only 22% of 16- to 32-year-olds "read or look through a newspaper at home" daily. The situation calls for a study to map the reading habits of Generation X.

This paper analyses reading profiles using Generation-X Singaporeans as case study. Profile analysis describes the attitudes, motivations and preferences that Xers have about reading. The paper also reflects on information source preferred, relationship between gender and reading, impact of academic attainment on

reading, and preferences and possible impact of changing trends on focus of library services.

Why Generation X?

Commonly known classifications for generations include the pre-war, baby boomers, Generation-X, Generation-Y, and Millennia. Every generation is about 20 – 30 years apart, and boundaries are appropriated arbitrarily by researchers or census as deem fit. Each generation is presumably different from another in behaviours given its context of social conditions and period.

Generation X is stereotyped as slackers who are constantly on the lookout for instant gratification (Coupland, 1991). They were portrayed as a spontaneous, interactive and unstructured bunch whose beliefs and values were based on lifestyle, fun and no absolutes (McCrindle, 2003). Learning styles were marked by stories, kinesthetic and multi-sensory experiences. Researchers acknowledged that Xers could not be measured using old conventions (U.S. Census, 2003). The Xers accounted for approximately 30% of the population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2007), majority of who were married, well-educated, and were in the phase of career advancement coupled with family commitments. The reading habits of the Xers shall be examined against the backdrop and context.

A recent survey revealed Singaporeans spent most of their leisure time at home watching television and listening to radio (Ngian & Manoo, 2005). Only half of those surveyed enjoyed reading. The top reasons for reading were knowledge, work/study and hobbies. Attitude towards learning was positive, and their choices ranged from books, magazines and newspapers. A nation-wide reading campaign, Read!Singapore, was inaugurated in 2005 to encourage leisure reading especially among working professionals, otherwise known as the 'missing generation' from the libraries (National Library Board of Singapore, 2005).

Data Collection

Questionnaire survey was used to profile reading trends among Gen-X Singaporeans. Demographic variables were used to distinguish between reading habits with respect to education, gender and marital status. The study focused on *reading for pleasure*, done in leisure time and unrelated to work or study obligations. The questionnaire comprised of four sections: the first pertained to attitude towards reading; the second was concerned with the motivation to read; the third enquired about reading preferences. Lastly, the fourth part collected demographic information for data analyses purposes.

People born between years 1965 – 1980 were recruited randomly via social network and through emails. They were social contacts by associations – either friends of the author, or friends and colleagues of friends. The sampling method is applicable to Singapore due to his small geographical area and high literacy rate as it dismisses class issues. There were 180 usable responses comprising of 104 females and 76 males. Demographic data segregated participants according to their gender, education, marital status and number of children. Majority of the participants belonged to the tail-tip of the generation spectrum. Nineteen participants were born between 1965 and 1970; 66 were born between 1971 and 1975; and 95 were born between 1976 and 1980. Married individuals surpassed singles. Ninety-nine respondents were married, and 81 were either single or divorced. Only 59 had children under the age of 12. Education-wise, majority of participants attained a minimum university education. A total of 146 had graduate and post-graduate qualifications whereas 34 had diploma or lower qualifications. The survey was conducted over two weeks 8 – 18 March 2008.

Reading Profile

Participants were asked to choose three of their most preferred leisure activities from a given list of activities in a sequential order, beginning from the most preferred. According to the details in Table 1, use of computer/internet and television watching tied in terms of popularity. Reading followed closely after.

Table 1: Distribution of responses by preferred activities
N = 180

	1st -- most preferred activity	2nd – second most preferred activity	3rd – third most preferred activity	Response Count
Hobbies and sports	**53.2 %**	27.7 %	19.1 %	94
Playing on computer or the Internet	39.4 %	37.6 %	23.9 %	**109**
Going out	34.5 %	31.0 %	34.5 %	84
Watching TV	33.0 %	**45.0 %**	22.0 %	**109**
Listening to music	29.6 %	42.6 %	27.8 %	54
Sleeping	28.6 %	31.7 %	39.7 %	63
Reading	**27.5 %**	**37.3 %**	**36.3 %**	102
Other activities	21.4 %	38.1 %	**40.5 %**	42

Hobbies and sports ranked first as the most preferred activities, followed by Internet related activities. The second most preferred activity was television watching. Generally, reading was a popular activity among the Xers, but not a priority. Fifty-seven percent of respondents would read, consistent with the findings of Ngian and Manoo (2005), although more Xers preferred internet-related activities in this study. It could be inferred from results that respondents devoted time to read because they believed that reading was beneficial as suggested by Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Reading was more popular a hobby amongst women, graduates, and those married with children compared to their counterparts, who opted for internet-related activities, watching television and hobbies.

For those who read, they were mostly weak readers, covering five or less books in the past year. There was a minority group of heavy readers who read more than 30 books in the last 12 months, albeit less than 10% of the sample population. The profile of this group tended to be single, female, and graduate, without children. These demographic differences were not significant because all except educational factor registered under 3% difference. Non-graduates had mild attitudes towards reading. They recorded no heavy reading at all while graduates recorded the heaviest reading. Results further ascertained that education was a strong predictor on attitude towards reading. Time could only partially account for the lack of reading among non-graduates. Thirty percent of non-graduates expressed no interest in reading, and 27% revealed that they had no idea what to read.

Women, graduates, married individuals and those with children expressed more positive attitude towards reading, however, the results between ideal and reality revealed contradiction. Those who had expressed lesser interest in reading read more actually. Females registered more interest but males read more consistently. The number of non-readers was slightly higher among the men, but insignificantly. Similarly, singles read significantly more books consistently and reported fewer non-readers as juxtaposed to married readers, despite a quarter of them having no idea.

Respondents indicated lack of resources, cost of material, no idea what to read, work and preference to surf the Internet as reasons for non-reading. Married respondents were engaged in household chores three times more than singles and spent 20 times more time with their family and children. Cross verification confirmed that participants with children devoted most of their energies with family and children whom were all below the age of 12.

Majority of respondents (92.8%) were willing to make a special effort to obtain – buy, borrow, or download – a book that they wish to read. Accessibility posed as an issue for 55% of the participants who responded that they might read more if the libraries or bookstores were closer to their homes. This was especially so for married women with children. When it comes to knowledge acquisition, Xers used a combination of information sources. Information enquiry habits were obtained from the respondents and are depicted in Figure 1. The Internet was almost always used with a combination of other methods for obtaining information. Nine-tenths of the respondents would surf the Internet to seek information

pertaining to topics of interest. This is consistent with the heavy use and choice of computer and internet related choice.
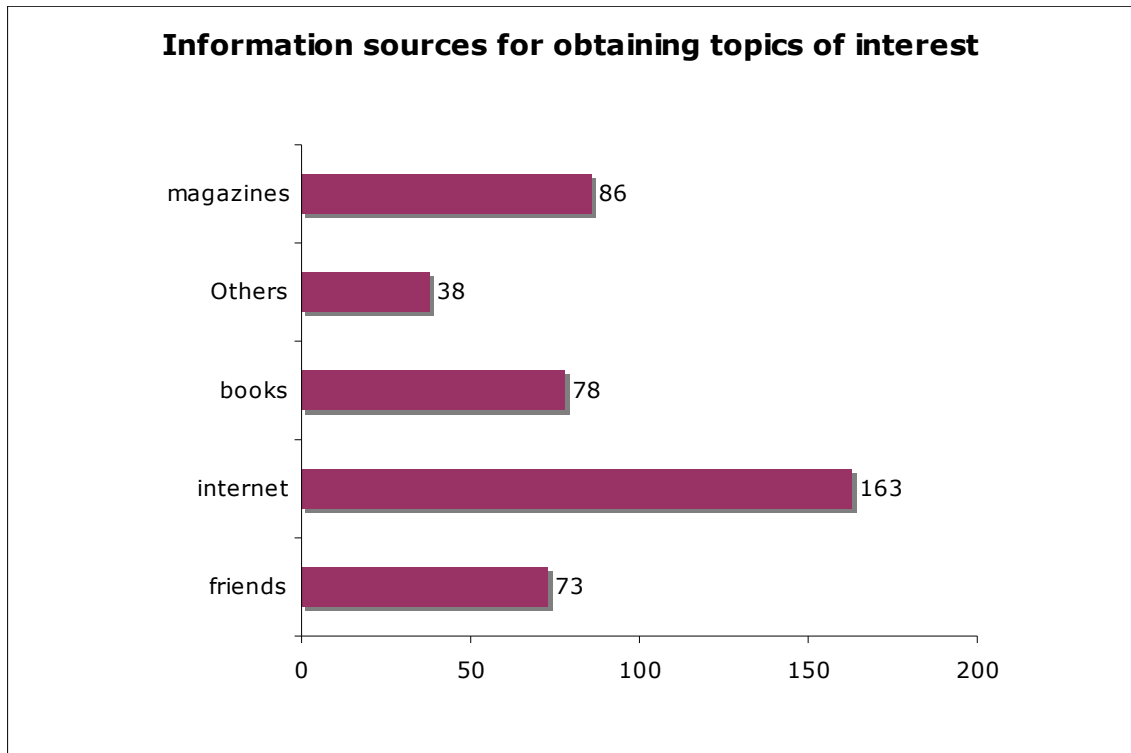
Information sources for obtaining topics of interest

Figure 1: Information sources for obtaining topics of interest

The popularity levels raised the most important factor – convenience. Accessibility and the explosion of information on the Internet made it easy to seek information. Nine out of ten participants across all demographic variables would look up information on the Internet. Reading for information was the primary goal of most participants, and magazines provided up-to-date information on their topics of interest in concise servings. Friends were another popular option because they would provide quick and consolidated information to the enquirer. Furthermore, the means of telecommunication facilitated attainment of information. Convenience extended to proximity of book facilities.

Five out of ten participants expressed willingness to read more if the bookstores or libraries were closer to their homes. The sentiments correlated with their material acquisition patterns. Half of the surveyed (51%) would buy from bookstores, about a quarter (23%) would borrow from libraries and a fifth would obtain materials online. Men had a higher propensity to acquire materials online and women the least. Thirty-five and a half percent of male respondents chose the web compared to 9.6% female. Responses to the survey showed that generally, women borrowed more from public libraries and friends – 29.8% and 8.7% compared to 13.2% and 1.3% respectively. The findings suggested that practical matters such as convenience played a big role in determining attitude towards reading on top of those mentioned by Stokman (1999), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Reading did not appear to take on feminine persona as in the case of America (Vadon, 2000).

Participants were presented with 13 statements to which they had to indicate the degree of relevance in terms of frequency: most of the time, sometimes or rarely. As shown in Table 2, internal motivations surpassed external factors. One in every two participants read primarily for information and personal development while enjoyment and relaxation came after. There was consensus across demographic variables save for women, who read primarily for relaxation followed by personal development. Motivation could be a better predictor of reading behavior, compared to attitude. External motivations such

as friends and bestseller lists also played important roles. Although not the strongest motivators in influence, many respondents would read upon recommendations.

Table 2: Motivations to read according to frequency of participation

N = 180

	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely
Personal development	**56.1 %**	35.6 %	6.1 %
Information	54.4 %	37.8 %	6.1 %
Relaxation	46.1 %	32.2 %	18.9 %
A hobby since primary school	45.6 %	28.9 %	23.9 %
Keep abreast of current affairs	43.9 %	39.4 %	13.9 %
My favourite author published a new book	23.3 %	31.7 %	40.6 %
Improve language skills	20.6 %	42.2 %	34.4 %
Recommended by friend	20.0 %	**60.0 %**	18.3 %
Highly publicised bestseller	17.8 %	53.9 %	23.9 %
Kill time	13.3 %	40.6 %	41.1 %
Inculcate the habit in the young	10.0 %	17.2 %	**65.6 %**
Hold conversations	10.0 %	38.9 %	47.8 %
Book jacket looks nice	4.4 %	27.2 %	**64.4 %**

The motivations highlighted the pragmatic stance Xers adopted in reading. Reading had to be firstly, functional with tangible rewards. The pace of life and lifestyle seemed to have imbued in participants a utilitarian mentality, such that they expected their investment of time and energies to reap useful knowledge in return. This behavior reinforced the socio-cognitive motivation whereby their upbringing resulted in internalization of reading as a prerequisite to attain knowledge that enabled them to excel in life.

This study attributed those who read as hobby or relaxation as intrinsically motivated. Less than half of the participants enjoyed reading during childhood. While results in this study could ascertain that those who read were influenced by childhood reading pleasures, they were insufficient to determine the intrinsic reading motivation for relaxation in adulthood. This served to suggest that reading motivations for adults are multiple and overlapping, reinforcing the findings of Schutte and Malouff (2007). The other factor for motivation, self-efficacy, did not appear to be an issue as less than one percent of respondents found the words difficult. Almost all participants would have no problems with their capabilities to read or comprehend texts.

Motivations to read were largely internal, findings suggested. They served to fulfill particular needs, be it pleasure, learning or knowledge. External factors did not have much effect on participants as evinced by their responses to bestsellers, design of book jacket, passing time or reading campaigns. Eight in ten would not be encouraged to read more during book reading campaigns. Results found that respondents would occasionally read upon friends' recommendations or if their favorite authors have published new works.

In sum, motivation to read was driven by a combination of socio-cognitive and intrinsic motivations. The quest for knowledge and information were the primary driving forces for most participants, followed by reading for pleasure. Self-efficacy did not apply in this study as participants were capable of handling difficult texts. Women appeared to be driven by intrinsic motivations, reading for pleasure and relaxation first before utility.

Reading Preferences

Nine out of ten participants liked to read in the comfort of their homes. A third (40%) would also read while commuting between places. Haunts such as bookstores and libraries received lukewarm reception, garnering 13% and 10% respectively. One in two respondents would obtain materials from bookstores

compared to a fifth who would borrow from libraries. The preference of bookstores and libraries required further investigation.

Internet was the favorite information source for participants. Over 90% of male, graduates, married, and respondents without children favored the option, reflecting their trust and comfort using online sources. The results were fairly uniform across demographic groups. Non-graduates were least likely to source the Internet for information. Like females, they were more likely to rely on books. While a majority of the participants would obtain information from the Internet, only a fraction of them would buy material online. Men had the highest propensity to acquire materials online. About a quarter of respondents would borrow from the library. Gender preferences were distinct as females were the heaviest borrowers from libraries and the lightest online acquirers, whereas the opposite was true for men. The results highlighted the differences in demands between the sexes. Convenience seemed more pertinent to men than women. Another factor could be the type of information. Females tended to read fiction, which was traditionally available in print. It was found that participants were unlikely to choose electronic versions of materials that were available traditionally in print format. This point is exemplified shortly.

When prompted to indicate three most preferred type of reading material in either print or electronic format, in accordance to their most preferred to third most preferred from a given list of materials, print newspapers emerged as the most popular and preferred choice. According to the results shown in Figure 2, printed press was ahead by a healthy margin over other materials. An estimated 50 – 60% of respondents would read the press first across all demographic categories. Seventy-three percent of participants favored newspapers as their top three reads. The margin appeared healthy, but in order to determine issue of renewal, comparison with another generation cohort is required. As websites were among the top choices, this highlighted the growing competition between Internet and traditional publications. The respondents preferred fiction to non-fiction when juxtaposed. Electronic magazines enjoyed the least popularity.
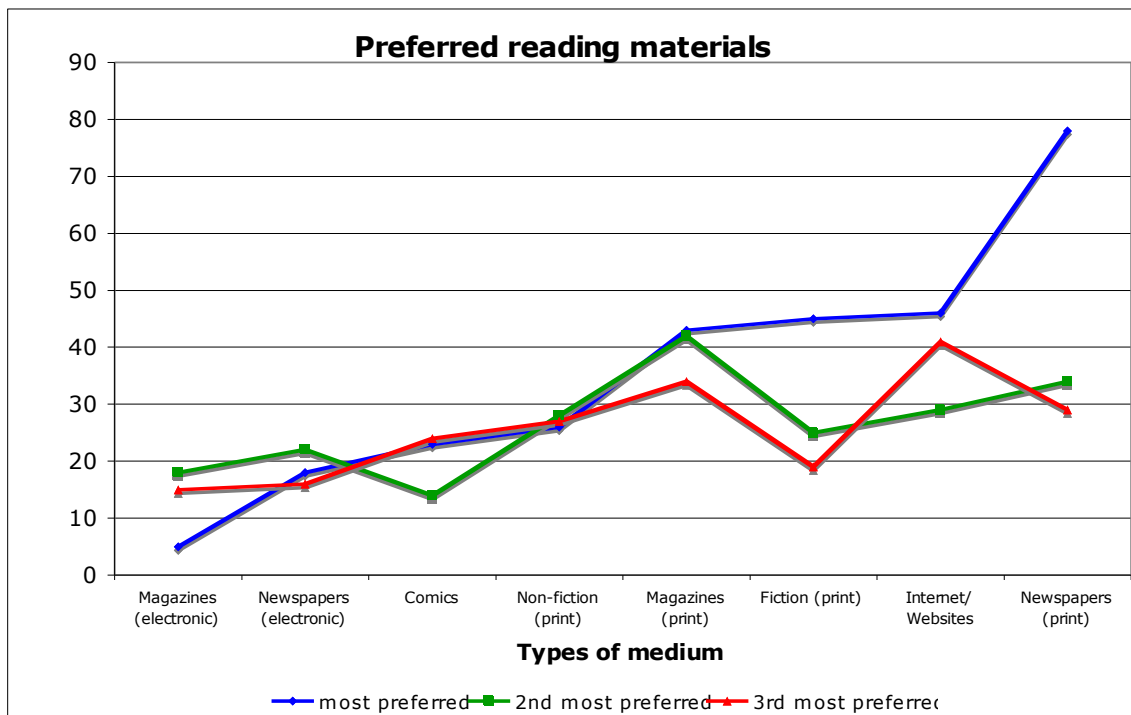

Figure 2: Distribution of preferred reading materials and medium

Electronic news and magazines paled against their print counterparts. This implied that participants might feel more comfortable and familiar with paper, layout and structure of traditional print publications instead of reading off the screens. The low ratings for electronic newspapers and magazines also

highlighted the reading of web pages unrelated to these types of publications. Non-graduates were the heaviest users of websites across demographic variables.

As shown in Figure 3, the most popular genres include mysteries, crime and detective stories, with more than half of the respondents (51%) voting it. Humor was next with 46%, followed by sci-fi and fantasy at 43%. The most popular fiction genre garnered votes from less than half of the sample population. In comparison, non-fiction books performed better than fiction books when participants were asked to perform the same task on non-fiction books. Figure 4 showed that 56% of respondents would read books on hobbies such as photography, cooking and crafts; and on travel and food. Science and technology, as well as money and finance; and health and fitness were favored topics too. The former garnered 40%, whereas 36% and 35% of respondents preferred the latter two respectively.
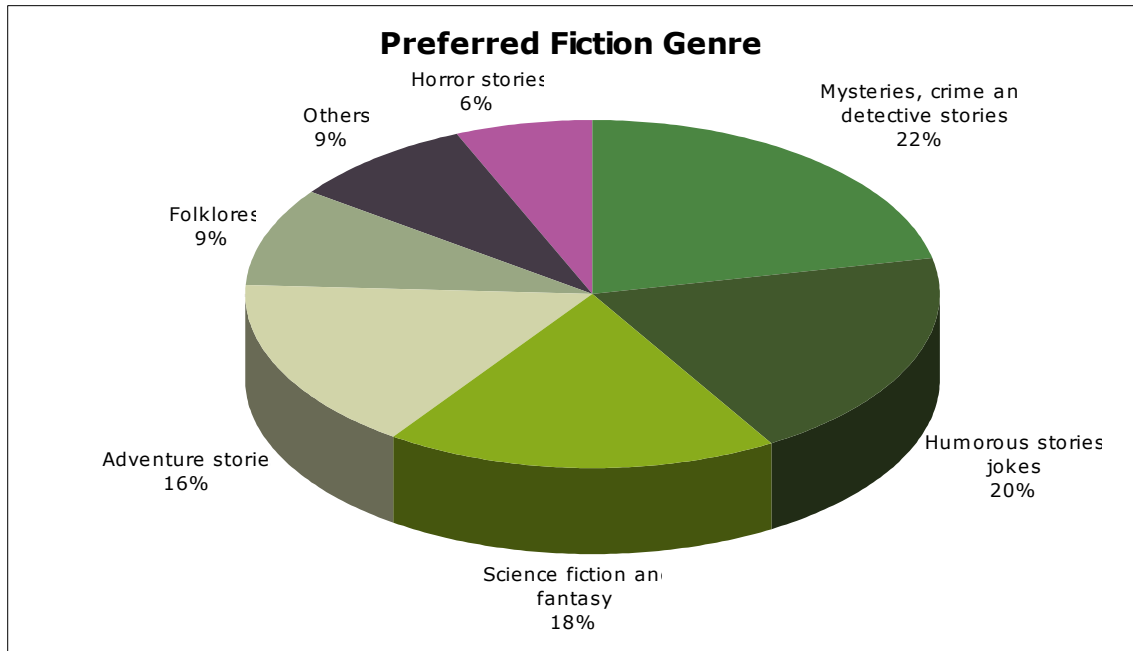

Figure 3: Preferred genre for fiction books

Genre preferences differed along gender lines. The preferred fiction genres for men were sci-fi and fantasy (57.3%), mysteries (52%) and adventure stories (46.7%); whereas females fancied mysteries and humor (49.5% each). The difference was starker in non-fiction genres. Men preferred science and technology (65.8%), hobbies (55.3%), followed by money and finance (50%) while women liked travel and food (65%), hobbies (56.3%), fashion and beauty (51.5%).
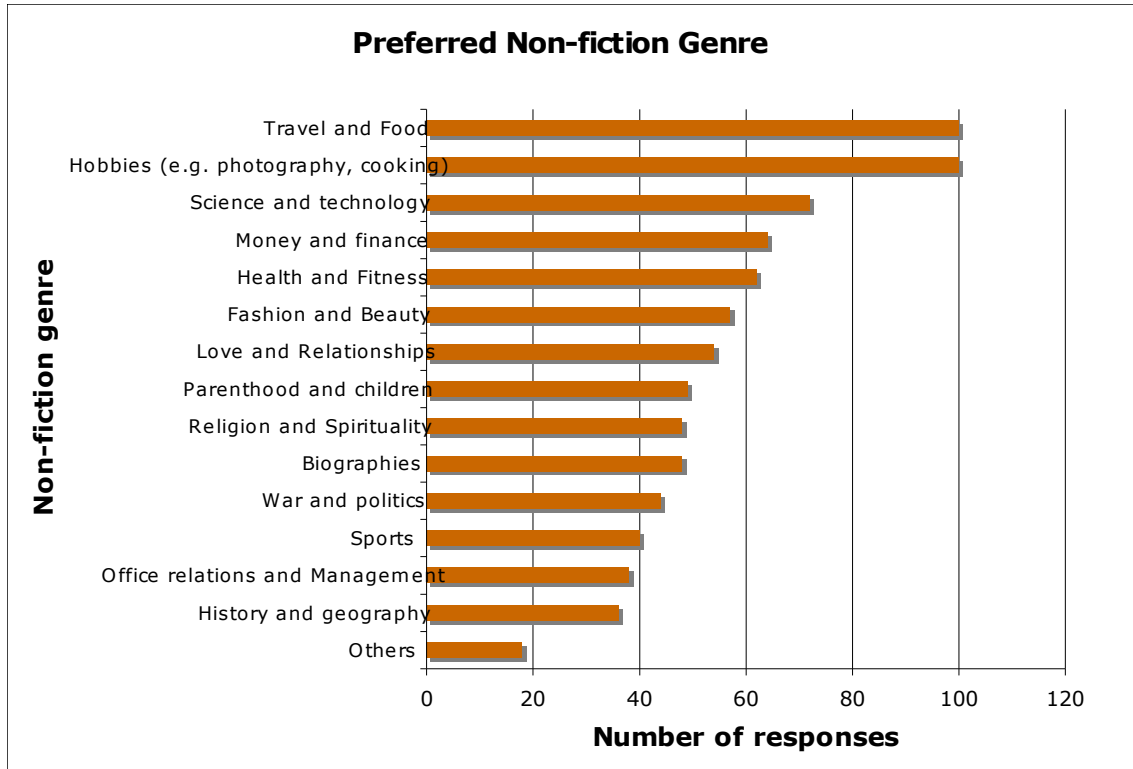
Preferred Non-fiction Genre

Figure 4: Preferred genre for non-fiction books

Discrepancies between genders were unsurprising because of correlation between genre and gender, for example, more men preferred sci-fi than women; more females preferred folklores than males. Non-fiction preferences provided more diversity when dissected demographically. Topic on hobbies was unanimously of most interest across all demographic groups. Gender, more than other demographic groupings, saw the greatest genre exclusivity.

There were five genres that ranked variations between 10 – 15% differences between singles and married respondents These included hobbies, sports, history and geography, health and fitness, as well as travel and food. On all accounts, singles ranked higher on the above topics than married individuals. It suggests that marital lifestyle differences influence preferences. Interestingly, when singles were compared with participants without children, the differences between genre preferences were minute. Lifestyle preferences and mentality for these two groups were similar, as suggested by the findings. Parenthood was a significant factor that altered reading preferences and patterns. Parents read heavily on parenthood and children genre over others. Topics that saw the largest variations between participants with and without children, were those favored by the singles and participants without children. As parents, only a fifth would read to inculcate the habit in their children. Parental reading habits are influential in encouraging reading habits in their young. Xers parents were weak readers and this could result in the perpetuation of weak reading habits.

Influence of Demographic-Differences on Reading

The influences of gender were distinct in a few areas: attitude, motivation, information source, and genre and media preferences. Although males registered lack of interest in reading, they read more consistently in reality. There was unequal distribution of labor at home. Females spent considerably more time doing housework (22.8%) than males (8%). Men preferred to source for materials from the Internet. Thirty-five and a half percent of male respondents chose the web compared to 9.6% female. Responses to the survey showed that generally, women borrowed more from public libraries and friends – 29.8% and 8.7% compared to 13.2% and 1.3% respectively. Locale matters to females as they would read more if the

bookstores or libraries were closer to their homes. Sixty-two and a half percent of females stated that proximity mattered compared to 46.1% males.

The top motivations for women to read were for relaxation (58.4%), followed by personal development (55.4%) while men read firstly for information (60.8%), then personal development (60%). The pragmatism in males was seen in their preference for publications. Apart from newspapers, 44.2% chose Internet websites as their preferred material and medium, which only garnered 35.9% from females. Another noteworthy point was women's preferences for fiction books (55.9%) compared to men (40%).

Genre preferences differed along gender lines. Masculine reads included non-fiction topics such as war and politics, sports, science and technology, history and geography, as well as money and finance; while feminine reads encompassed health and fitness, fashion and beauty, religion and spiritual, travel and food, love and relationships, as well as parenthood and children. Then, there were the 'neutral' genres of hobbies, office relations and management.

Non-graduates were less interested in reading. They were likely to read to improve language skills. More graduates (49%) inculcated a reading habit from young age as compared to non-graduates (35.3%). Non-graduates seemed to have a penchant for electronic publications. They also surpassed graduates in preferences for magazines, comics, non-fiction, and Internet websites. In sum, this section showed that education did make a difference in reading habits, attitudes and motives.

Among all participants, 42% were single, and 55% were married. The remaining 3% were divorced or separated. Although time spent and the quantity of books read were similar between the two groups, singles were more directionless as to what books to read -- 23% singles expressed so versus 6.1% married respondents. Marital status did not have significant impact on reading except in cases where participants had children. Singles and those married without children displayed similar patterns. There were 59 participants with children, which accounted for 32% of the sample population. Reading habits did not differ significantly for those with children and those without, except that the former spent more time with family, and read more children or parenthood-related books.

Conclusions

Among Xers in Singapore, reading was a popular leisure activity, after television and Internet. However, it was not a priority. Slightly more than half of the participants included reading in their leisure activities. Their attitudes, motivations and preferences in demographic segmentation offered deeper insight to Xers' reading habits. Xers were generally positive, more so among females, graduates, married, and those with children. Males, singles and respondents without children read more despite expressing greater lack of interest. Reading attitude was also correlated to practicality and convenience. Males, singles and non-graduates read for information and self-development, using the Internet platform. Females were driven by needs. They saw reading fulfilling their affective needs of enjoyment and escape. Deterrents to reading were plenty, main being lack of time and energy. Education was a predictor of reading. Non-graduates were reluctant readers in general. They lacked interest and an idea of what to read.

Newspapers were the most preferred and popular publication. Results showed that three-quarters of respondents would include newspapers in their reading repertoire. Finally, fiction was favored over non-fiction. Genre preferences highlighted distinct gender discrepancies that rendered genres masculine and feminine. Reading motivation was a better predictor of the number of books read among the Xers. Deterrents were varied, but the main grouse was lack of time and energy. Work and family were the main barriers to reading, and include other competing activities such as television watching, engaged on the Internet and hobbies. The most preferred reading locale was home. Some of those who needed to commute via public transport read on the journey. While Internet was the top choice for sourcing information, participants tend to acquire their materials from bookstores, followed by libraries. Participants trusted online sources and were comfortable navigating for information. Reflecting on their pragmatic stance, reliance on Internet stemmed likely from convenience. However, most of them still chose the conventional bookstore to acquire their reading materials. Pragmatic and functional reading habits seemed to guide material choices. The preference of materials followed in the sequence of newspapers, magazines, websites,

and books.

Demographic variables revealed that gender did not have a significant effect on the number of books read; however, it had effect on reading preferences, different motivation, and attitude. Education was strong predictor for attitude, motivation and number of books read. Marital status was less significant unless it was paired with children. Singles were found to have similar reading patterns with respondents without children. Children or family were strong barriers to reading. Parents' priority in reading was largely focused on family-related topic – parenthood and children. This topic was unique to this demographic segment.

Analyses of reading patterns showed Xers' reliance on the Internet, which was not the trend a decade ago. They were comfortable looking up information on the Internet, and regarded it as one of the main sources of infotainment. Newspapers and web pages could be read from the comfort of the home, thus causing no need for them to use the library services. In other words, this cohort would abandon the library unless their services were indispensable and deliverable virtually or in the most accessible methods. Pragmatism and utilitarianism could be the guiding principles in policymaking when planning for this group of readers.

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