The Smell of Printed Books: A Qualitative Comparison between Printed and Digital Formats

Ana Alejandra Fuentes Cuiñas and Pablo Augusto Vailati[1]
Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to understand the reading habits and preferences of digital and printed books. A qualitative research was carried out, which analyzed eighty interviews involving people from four different age segments. Deepening guidelines were used to perform the interviews, and a content analysis was conducted. Dissimilarities were found regarding age segments: younger respondents agreed that the computer is an element used to study, while the main functionality of cell phones is communication. They usually read in both formats but prefer traditional support when reading for pleasure. Older respondents take pleasure in involving their senses with reading: touching and smelling their printed books. These results reinforce previous founds concerning the coexistence and complementarity of the formats.

KEYWORDS: E-books, printed books, reading habits, cell phones, content analysis.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have opened new horizons for the creation, storage, and dissemination of information (Divya & Haneefa, 2018). However, they also required people to become accustomed to new ways of receiving and presenting information, creating new trends and preferences regarding the use and consumption of reading formats (Mihajlović, 2011).

This research is inspired by a previous one which addressed the phenomenon from a quali-quantitative point of view, arriving to the conclusion that digital and printed formats of books coexist together and complement each other in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Fuentes Cuiñas & Del Valle Moreno, 2017). For the present research, the sample of interviewees was increased to deeply understand the reasons why people choose different reading formats. It was necessary to take into consideration the book readers' opinions in order to effectively analyze the reasons why they still prefer reading in traditional formats instead of adopting new ones.

It is a curious fact that, differently to what happened in the music industry where people quit using cassettes or CDs, readers still mostly prefer printed books (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Morales & Espinoza, 2003). This may be related with the fact that, while the process and experience of listening to music is similar in both formats, the cognitive load demanded when reading digital books is greater (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002). On the other hand, nowadays the majority of the information generated worldwide has a digital format (Morales & Espinoza, 2003). This is why it seems interesting to undercover the reasons why people still prefer traditional books to digital ones (Fuentes Cuiñas & Del Valle Moreno, 2017).

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[1] Corresponding Author: Assistant professor and researcher at Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE), Lima 775, C1073 CABA, Argentina. E-Mail: pvailati@uade.edu.ar

Literature Review

The technological progress the world is experimenting gave rise to an advance in the quality of digital reading devices such as e-books and smartphones (Hellman, 2010). This could suggest, a priori, a change of reading habits in contemporary societies (Morales & Espinoza, 2003). In order to analyze this phenomenon, the pertinent literature on the subject is examined below. The following literature review provides an introduction to understanding the importance of this qualitative work, which aimed to describe the reading habits for digital and traditional reading materials, and evaluate preferences and emotions involved in the consumption of digital and analog reading materials.

Background

Reading has undergone a great number of transformations throughout the human history, changing the practices and discourses about reading (Hellman, 2010). The emergence of digital content and the generation of an ecosystem around them has changed a tradition of centuries (Cordón, 2016). The technological changes underpinned by the digital revolution of the late twentieth century have transformed the written culture and, thus, the ways of reading (Moya & Gerber, 2016). Vannevar Bush (1945) was the first one to mention the e-book concept in his article 'As we may think,' published in The Atlantic Monthly in 1945. He described it as a mechanical device who gives the possibility to store, retrieve, and display personal books, records, and documents. After the 90´s, some publishers started publishing and selling e-books as well as printed versions (Ramaiah, 2012).

The evolution of the available formats for reading seems inevitable (Morales & Espinoza, 2003). It is relevant to mention that Amazon, the largest online book retailer in the United States, now sells more books in digital format than printed (Hyman et al., 2014). Moreover, Kretzschmar et al. (2013) claim that the sale of electronic books exceeds their print counterparts in the markets of the United States and the United Kingdom. It is estimated that 75% of publishers are implementing digital projects (Costa-Knufinke, 2012).

Book Readers

According to the multivariate analysis carried out by Fernández-Ruiz (2009), a high influence of age, schooling, socioeconomic status and mother's education were relevant variables to explain the probability of people reading books; women appeared to be more prone to reading than men. According to a study carried out by Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte Español (2014), Spanish women say they value reading and libraries more than their male counterparts do. This study states that women present a higher percentage of reading than men (66.5% vs. 57.6%), although most of them are unrelated to the profession in which they perform. Even though there is a small distinction in the practice of digital reading (18.2% in women and 17.2% in men), women reported using the computer for leisure to a lesser extent than men (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte Español, 2014).

The reading rates in Argentina are the highest of Latin America (Dirección Nacional de Industrias Culturales, 2013). Also, the findings of Fuentes Cuiñas and Del Valle Moreno (2017) support the hypothesis of coexistence and complementarity between different formats at the moment of reading: the digital format appears to be more accepted by the younger segments, but it still remains to be a marginal phenomenon (Fuentes Cuiñas & Del Valle Moreno, 2017).

The Adoption of E-books

According to Romero-Otero et al. (2013), in recent years many studies were carried out, posing the importance, the progressive use and penetration of digital books in scientific and academic spaces of universities. The author states that the reasons for this phenomenon are related to the immediate access, ease of keeping information up to date, storage capacity and low costs in some areas such as distribution. Electronic books have renewed the traditional concept of books, favoring the socialization of reading, user participation and breaking the traditional chain of publishing. The publishing companies have adapted to the new context with novel proposals, in which the content is of increasing importance (Cordón-García & Lopes, 2012).

However, Ziefle (1998) reckon that screens generate visual fatigue. Connell et al. (2012) found that printed books are read at higher speeds than their digital formats. The adoption of the digital formats could be associated with the fact that the conceptual form generated by a hypertext is similar to the one which occurs in human memory: authors such as Eveland and Dunwoody (2002) claim that a concept can be psychologically represented as "a node in a network." (p. 23) The properties of a concept are equivalent to the links that leave the node to reach other ones. The term elaboration refers to the process of making mental connections between related pieces of information; and selective scanning refers to the strategy followed by users in which they select their processing of information based on personal criteria of relevance and interest. The conclusion of this analogy is that e-books, in comparison with printed material, may facilitate learning by stimulating further elaboration, but they difficult it by increasing selective scanning.

It is relevant to mention that both in digital and physical environments, readers can essentially take two approaches when reading texts. On the one hand, they can perform a diagonal reading, i.e., reading the titles and subtitles and then the first line of the paragraph without concentrating on the entire sentence (Yakhshibaevna et al., 2022). On the other hand, readers can opt for a horizontal reading, i.e., looking over the entire text, focusing on understanding each and every sentence (Kobayashi & Ogawa, 2022).

Books and Senses

According to Rindisbacher (1992), literature is an art form based on language, but it is also affected by the restrictions of prose. Vision is the leading sense in every culture and the source of the dominant metaphoric reference system underlying language (Hutmacher, 2019). Even though the Western society has a history of distrust of the senses, they cannot be considered apart when reading (Rindisbacher, 1992).

The sense of smell requires special attention: it is a kind of experience that is unalienably personal that cannot be easily yoked to social utility (Classen et al., 2002). In this way, it is the essential and first step to the complex route from perception to cognition (Low, 2005). Smell is an associative and expansive sense, rather than a distributive and limiting sensory mode (Rindisbacher, 1992). Nevertheless, Classen et al. (2002) states that the immediate perception requires a mediation of language in order to enter into the social contract of discourse. In this way, the sense of smell creates a distinct atmosphere at the moment of reading.

Objectives

The proposed objectives of this research were to:

1. Explore the reading habits for digital and traditional reading materials, as well as their contexts of use according to the category of age of the reader.

2. Evaluate preferences and emotions involved in the use of devices for digital reading vs. traditional reading, according to the age range.

Methodology

Type of Qualitative Inquiry

This study was developed through an exploratory design in which 80 in-depth interviews were conducted. A qualitative research was carried out since it provides information and understanding about the situation of the problem faced by the researchers (Malhotra, 2008). Data were collected through interviews, which allowed to achieve a qualitative understanding of the reasons and motivations underlying the sample of the population of interest. In all cases, deepening guidelines were used to ensure the standardization of the research process.

Sampling Method

The sample for this study was taken by convenience, a non-probabilistic sampling technique that seeks to obtain a sample of convenient elements (Malhotra, 2008). The selection of the sampling units was left mainly to the researchers' convenience (ensuring to accomplish a balanced sample in terms of age).

Respondents live, study or work in AMBA (Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina), their age is in the range of 18 to 65, and they use reading materials. The distribution of the respondents was the following: 20 interviews to readers from 18 to 26 years, 20 interviews to the range established between 27 to 35 years old, 20 interviews to people whose ages were from 36 to 50 years old and, finally, 20 interviews to people from ages between 51 to 65. For the purposes of the study, people from middle and upper socioeconomic levels answered the interview, since, in general, they were also the ones who showed the greatest interest at the activity of reading books, which may be due to the sampling method or to the fact that middle- and upper-class individuals may have the means and time to read books.

Data Collection

The data collection involved interviewing participants directly in the field (i.e., personal interviews) (Greenwood, 1973). The proper selection, training, supervision and evaluation of the field team helps minimize errors in data collection (Malhotra, 2008), this is why the researchers decided to interview each and every participant themselves.

The guidelines guide was composed by unstructured open questions grouped into the following thematic categories:

- Reading habits: reading topics, literary genres, levels of concentration required, preferred places for reading, common occasions for reading, and frequency of reading.
- Reading supports: type of support, reasons why they are used, advantages and disadvantages of the two formats, projections on the substitution of traditional books by e-books, choice of support by genre, and privacy related with the digital format.
- Electronic devices: reasons for purchasing and future expectations and trends.

Data Analysis

As a main part of data analysis, researchers conducted a condensation of meaning in which extensive paragraphs were summarized in short sentences, analyzing and interpreting them. This allowed to analyze the responses of the interviewees in a more efficient way since

the longer answers were summarized, maintaining the meaning and the essence of the answer, so that the researchers could interpret them and compare them with the rest (Steinar, 1996). Subsequently, similar answers were codified into categories.

After the process of meaning condensation, all the answers were analyzed in a grid that allowed to compare the different cases according to age categories. The methodology used was content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980), which was carried out following these steps:

1. Analysis: Data was analyzed and questions were grouped depending on their topic.
2. Definition of the data: Data was well defined since researchers followed topic guidelines for each and every interview.
3. Population: For budgetary reasons, the sample was taken for convenience.
4. Context of analysis: The guidelines were followed in each and every case and the context of the interviews was similar in all cases, in order to facilitate the later analysis and minimize biases.

Organization of Results

For the presentation of the results of this study, researchers conduct an individual analysis for each of the age segments, in which the various thematic areas proposed are addressed according to the objectives of the study. Subsequently, conclusions of this research are presented, where the most relevant aspects of the different segments are compared. Finally, this text includes a section with additional findings and recommendations on the subject.

Informed Consent

The interviewers explained to the participants the objectives of the interviews, in addition to giving them the possibility of leaving the session if they felt like so. All participants had to sign an informed consent to account for their agreement with participation.

Limitations and Scope

Regarding limitations, as any kind of qualitative research, there is limited quantity of answers. Additionally, the results were not analyzed from a statistical perspective and are not generalizable to the populations studied. Regarding the research scope, it included readers who live, study or work in AMBA (Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina).

Qualitative Results

First Group (18 to 26 Years Old)

The younger group of people shows the greater use of digital type reading compared to the rest of the interviewees. When asked if they prefer digital or printed support to read, most participants of this segment claim to use either digital materials alone or both digital and traditional ones. The answer "digital" is the most popular within this segment.

The interviewees reckon that they are studying at university and, in most cases, also working. Therefore, much of the time devoted to reading is concentrated in the material that their professors ask them to study, as well as in readings related to their jobs (occurring the latter during their working time). This is evidenced in phrases such as: "I usually read academic books during the week, and personal ones depending on the time I have available. If I am reading one that I am very hooked with, I also read it in the week but only when I have time or during weekends."

They recognize the practicality of electronic formats and the fact that they are far cheaper (especially during exams time, when they use to read at the bus), although in several cases they say that their eyes hurt after a while. The digital formats are used primarily to study or to obtain specific information on their academic fields, while the context of reading on printed paper seems to be reserved, in most cases, for reading for pleasure.

Only on weekends or during the holidays do they have the opportunity of reading for pleasure. They are not too much constant at the moment of reading: "I do not know how many books I read per year, perhaps no one last year. At least no one complete, I give it up if I get bored."

Those who do not like the digital format make comments like, "if I read it on a digital way, I feel like if I were not reading a book," which could be interpreted as a certain disconnection with the material and the reader. They assure that the printed book will not disappear, saying phrases like the following one: "The digital book continues being a secondary form of reading. I think that the book on paper will always be more formal, it allows appreciating the text in a better way."

There is no evidence of penetration of specific digital reading devices (such as the Amazon Kindle), since those who read in digital format do so on tablets or cell phones. They also prefer the latter because they claim they would rather have only one device for all functions.

Not many interviewees reckon reading diagonally: "I prefer to read while being concentrated and paying close attention." Neither do they mention to prefer using digital devices to maintain their privacy of reading. This suggests that, despite being a digital format, e-books are not associated with privacy and security.

People belonging to this segment demonstrate reading various topics or genres when choosing a book, but mainly novels and books related to their field of study. Therefore, entertainment is one of the most chosen reasons when explaining why they decide to read books, followed by the act of reading for studying.

The preferred place for reading among the interviewees turned out to be at home or while traveling from one place to another (i.e., in public transport). In the first case, it can be observed that reading is used as a relaxation activity, while the latter case suggests that people from this age range also read as a way of spending time they would otherwise lose traveling (i.e., reading as a "time saver"). As for the moment of reading, the preference for nocturnal reading, before going to sleep, is remarked. Also, reading usually takes place in the afternoon, after finishing with daily activities, and as a way of relaxing and getting away from it all.

As mentioned above, this group represents the highest degree of acceptance and reading of digital books, complemented by traditional paper reading. Furthermore, although the interviewees demonstrate reading in both formats, a tendency could be noted which represents the fact that people use digital books for studying and printed books for entertainment and leisure (such as novels, in most cases): "I read the academic material on digital books but I prefer to buy novels and books I like in paper format to have a more traditional reading experience."

Analyzing the level of concentration needed by the participants of this research, a tendency to pay close attention to the books was highlighted in this group. This could be because most of the texts read are study books, which requires maximum concentration to incorporate the topics that are being read in order to learn them.

When consulting the interviewees about the characteristics of both formats, the researchers encountered answers that suggested, in general, an association of the digital formats with the ideas of variety and comfort, and of the printed formats with emotions and the moment of being immersed in lecture. On the one hand, digital books are chosen because they allow "to carry many books together," emphasizing their comfort, the fact that they are cheaper, and the easy accessibility to content through the Internet. On the other hand, the printed book represents a more participative and immersive reading, also highlighting the fact that it does not tire the

eyes (what is seen as an advantage) and that it is not necessary to depend on a battery to be able to read (as it happens with e-books).

Lastly, this group of interviewees does not foresee the substitution of the traditional book by the digital one (this results interesting since this segment is the one which demonstrates major acceptance and consumption of the digital format). In addition, they say to choose the format of the book according to the chosen genres, but this choice seems to be very personal, since a genre tendency could not be observed in this sense. As a general trend, the interviewees believe that the digital book will continue to evolve and grow but that it will never be able to replace the printed format: "I do not think that digital books will replace traditional ones. I could not read only in digital."

Second Group (27 to 35 Years Old)

Although this group uses the digital reading format mainly for working reasons (since most of the interviewees at this age either finished their studies or abandoned formal studies), they prefer to use the traditional format for other aspects of their lives. People from this group consider that one of the main disadvantages is the difficulty and discomfort of the traditional book when it comes to being moved, especially in public transport because of its weight and volume. Men say it results difficult for them to keep it (some of they told the interviewers that they carry books in backpacks), while women, who generally carry them in their bags, find them uncomfortable and heavy: "Sometimes I do not carry the books, not because I do not want to read, but because of the weight of the books."

If the person travels by car to his work, they generally said that they do not carry the book because they do not have the opportunity to use it. Thus, they only carry it if it can be read while the trip is in public transport, and even then, it is not always possible due to the conditions in which it takes place, especially during rush hours.

Those who read in digital format more than the average, mostly say they do not download the material in a legal way, recognizing ethical drawbacks in this regard: "I like to download digital books, but I prefer buying traditional ones." They do not practice too much the act of illegally downloading books since they believe this would also involve acquiring viruses, and they recognize that this also implies certain kind of injustice to the authors.

With respect to the new trends in electronic reading, there is evidence of greater mental openness regarding digital reading in this group, as well as in the previous one. This can be observed in phrases such as: "I believe that there is currently a trend towards digital reading and this continues to evolve." Likewise, they claim not to have exclusive devices for reading but use elements that have other functions (e.g., computers, cell phones, tablets).

When choosing a reading genre, the interviewees of this group do not show a marked trend. Contrarily, the mentioned genres were diverse. Concerning the preferred place and time to read, participants choose to do so on public transport while traveling to their workplaces or returning home.

Third Group (36 to 50 Years Old)

This group prefers to read in traditional support because that is what they did all their lives. They enjoy this format, saying that they like to touch and smell the physical pages of the books. They like to have a big library at home, in a central part of the house, but they are not emotional about the books: "The library is near the sofa, it occupies a central place in my house," "I like to take care of my books, but I do not consider myself a maniac about books." They also like to read in other contexts, like cafés or bars.

Only some of the interviewees claim to use digital books. However, they recognize that the weight and space are important disadvantages of the traditional format. They also consider

that younger generations have more contact with digital formats because of their age and familiarity with technological environments: "I'm not involved in the digital era, as youngsters are." Many demonstrated that they preferred the printed format because, unlike younger generations, digital books represent a reading context they are not used to and, for that reason, an unwanted one. Some of they did not consider digital books to be "real" books: "I like the book, the real book."

They say they read at home or in cafés, not so much on the means of transport. This is probably due to the difficulties that arise from presbyopia, as one of the interviewees notes. The main reading method is horizontal reading. Some interviewees consider that they would buy digital reading devices in the future in order to modernize. They estimate that the time of purchase will occur during some trip made by them or a family member. They consider that, in the future, digital technologies will have a relevant place in reading.

The literary genre preferred by the members of this group are the novels. On the other hand, the participants also express that they frequently read texts related to their profession, because their work requires it or because of their desire to update their knowledge.

The readers belonging to this segment prefer the traditional format over the digital one mainly because they perceive it as a more comfortable means to read. They also highlight that the main benefit of the printed format is the fact of being able to touch the pages and also the possibility of writing on the paper if they need to make notes about what they are reading.

When describing the digital format, several disadvantages are highlighted. One of them is the fact that reading on devices such as cell phones and tablets has a detrimental effect on one's eyes, which results in one's vision becoming tired. In addition, a disadvantage that arises in this group of interviewees (and not in the other groups) is the problem that, when using those devices, it is impossible to read under sunlight.

The substitution of the printed format by e-books does not seem to be a future possibility for this group. Nor would there seem to be a choice of book format based on the selected genre, contrarily to the case of the segment of people between 18 and 26 years old.

Continuing with the digital format, the participants claim not to have bought a specific device to read, as they usually use their tablets or smartphones if they need to access digital texts. In general, they do not show interest in buying these devices; only a few participants reckon they would consider buying them.

Finally, as an interesting finding on the manipulation and use of printed books, two opposing positions are noted among the interviewees belonging to this group. On the one hand, some people recognize that they sheathe their books to take care of them and preserve them in time. On the other hand, several participants express not doing so because they consider that they enjoy their reading better without covering their books. In the latter case, the paper cover is perceived as a barrier that does not permit a proper immersion in reading, making it difficult to properly touch and feel the book and its pages. This highlights, again, the important of senses in the reading experience for this segment.

Fourth Group (51 to 65 Years Old)

None of the interviewers reckon using digital books regularly. This group needs, more than any other, to touch the pages of the book, feel the smell of ink and have their books at bookshelves at home. They are very sensitive to books, for example: "I rarely ask for a borrowed book, because I fall in love with them and I like to have them at home". They also claim to "love reading in cafes:" "While reading in bars I forget about the time. I love to have a coffee while I read a book in a bar… I usually set an alarm because I lose the sense of time."

The few who admit having read in digital formats claim to prefer the book on paper. They also claim to read less (or none) academic material and more entertainment material, remarking that they are at the last part of their working careers. The usually read news through

traditional printed newspapers. In some cases, the topics of reading depend on the mood of the interviewee. Although the format does not appeal to them, they recognize that digital books will have a great impact in the future.

What motivates the participants of this segment to read is entertainment. They see in reading a means for getting distracted and forgetting about time. This is why they involve high levels of concentration in reading. For example, some participants declare: "I need to be calm to read, accompanied by music on some occasions."

It is also interesting that, despite having claimed to pay close attention while reading, some interviewees admit to read diagonally (which does not require much concentration). Novels were the main chosen literary genre, as it was the case for the other groups.

Regarding the advantages of traditional printed books, the possibility of being in contact with the pages was mentioned as a relevant benefit. Also, the fact that "reading a physical book is something very personal that allows you to better connect with the reading" is remarked by many participants.

There is no belief that the digital book can replace the printed one, and a choice of support based on gender was not highlighted (mainly because almost no digital formats are read in this segment). Most of them claim to love the experience of reading traditional printed books, even the act of sharing their favorite books to friends: "I love to loan my books, taking in consideration the personality of the friends who visit my home and try to recommend the best book according to their personalities."

Nobody has acquired an e-reading device and only a few recognized that they would consider to do so in the future. Those who would consider buying it think that they are currently very expensive and say things like: "The expense is not justified at the moment" and "I would buy it in case of having the necessary purchasing power."

When asked about current and future trends, many interviewees mention the fact that, currently, young people would seem to be the ones who prefer digital formats. But it is also believed that, in general, the crowds prefer reading in printed books and that this would continue for several more years.

Discussion and Conclusions

According to Fernández-Ruiz (2009), age is a relevant variable to explain the probability of people reading books. This reinforces the researchers' decision to analyze consumers according to their age range. However, even though differences were found regarding perceptions and habits, all participants claimed to be active readers (i.e., people who read frequently). It is relevant to note that reading rates in Argentina are the highest of Latin America (Dirección Nacional de Industrias Culturales, 2013).

The first (18 to 26 years old) and second (27 to 35 years old) groups present similarities in their answers, given the fact that, according to this study, they are the ones who most use digital formats, reinforcing the idea that the digital format appears to be more accepted by younger people (Fuentes Cuiñas & Del Valle Moreno, 2017). Regarding the use of electronic devices, younger respondents agree that the computer is an element used to study, while cell phones primarily have the function of communication. They say they read both academic and non-academic material in both formats, preferring traditional support for reading for pleasure. They also recognize that electronic devices can be easily transported. However, they express their preference and highlight the virtues of traditional support. They have not bought or have planned to buy devices for exclusive use for reading, but use tablets, phones and computers to read digital information.

The main benefits the first group perceive from e-books are their practicality and the fact that they permit them to access their study material in an inexpensive way. Following this line, the second group associate the printed books with the discomfort they represent (e.g., while

carrying them around), but still continue to prefer the traditional format. Both groups read because they need to (for work or study) and because they see in reading a way of relaxing and getting distracted from the routine.

The last two groups also show similarities, probably due to their ages. They reckon that they do not have too much access to the digital world, neither do they care too much about it. They need the contact with the physical books, touching its pages and maintaining them in large libraries. Lending books to close friends and relatives seems to be an important habit highlighted by these segments. They prefer the traditional reading context; although they recognize that it is probable that in the future the e-reading tendency will continue to grow, following the idea that information and communication technologies require people to get used to new ways of receiving (Divya & Haneefa, 2018; Moya & Gerber, 2016). Moreover, a few of them also would consider purchasing digital reading devices in the future.

According to Rindisbacher (1992), literature is an art form based on language, but it is also affected by the restrictions of prose. This may be why people belonging to the third and fourth groups (36 to 50 and 51 to 65 years old, respectively), claim that the main reason for deciding to read printed books is the involvement of their senses: they enjoy touching and smelling them, they need the physical contact in order to get immerse in the reading. They take pleasure in writing in their books, and keeping the books they finished reading in their homes. The main emerging of these groups is the importance they give to the involvement of the senses in reading. Being able to touch and, above all, smell printed books represents an essential habit that enhances their ability to immerse oneself in reading.

The third group read for getting entertained and because they associate reading with knowledge, prestige and status. On the other hand, the fourth group read because they love getting immersed in the story and they see in reading a way to forget about time and just enjoy.

All in all, neither group believe that, in the near future, the digital formats would replace the traditional printed books, which agrees with Fuentes Cuiñas and Del Valle Moreno (2017) who state that digital and printed formats of books coexist together and complement each other in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Interviewees highlight some benefits of the digital formats, mainly the possibility of transporting such devices and carrying several books in one. In this sense, Romero-Otero et al. (2013) conclude that the main benefits of this format are the following ones: immediate access, ease of keeping information up to date, storage capacity and low costs. But participants also mentioned some disadvantages such as the fact that reading on certain devices tires the eyes and generate visual fatigue, in line with the findings of Ziefle (1998).

Another important consideration of the digital formats is that the cognitive load demanded when reading digital books is greater than when reading printed ones (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002). However, none of the interviewees mentioned such a disadvantage as this one. Future research could approach this topic from a quantitative perspective, taking the results of this qualitative approach as hypothesis, in order to test them.

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Notes on Contributors

Fuentes Cuiñas, Ana Alejandra. MS in Psychology. Adjunct professor and researcher at Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE). Research consultant. She specializes in research methodology and consumer behavior.

Vailati, Pablo Augusto. BS in Marketing and International Business. Assistant professor and researcher at Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE). Marketing and Research Consultant. He has experience in consumer research and marketing strategy.

ORCID

Fuentes Cuiñas, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9349-4577
Vailati, Pablo Augusto, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5067-5338