

A Study on Shifting Perceived Value of E-books in Light of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The research study titled “*A study on shifting perceived value of e-books in light of Covid – 19 pandemics*” aims in exploring the value of e-books among guardians and students. It also aims in understanding the changing behavior of students toward the purchase of e-books. It will also help in comprehending the future preference or trends linked with the format of books purchased. The research study will help the researcher in identifying the variations in everyday life initiated by the pandemic related to the books. Both primary and secondary research methods have been taken into consideration for the evaluation of the research data. Based on the collected data, the researcher has evaluated it and has presented research findings. Here the researcher has highlighted both the perspectives, the traditional books, and e-books. Traditional books tend to have an emotional value compared to e-books. Moreover, with the adoption of various applications of technology, E-books can be searched or accessed easily. E-books are preferred as they are more affordable than the printed copy version.

Keywords: Traditional books; e-books; the perceived value of e-books; the perceived value of e-books during the Covid pandemic; shifting the perceived value in the pandemic.

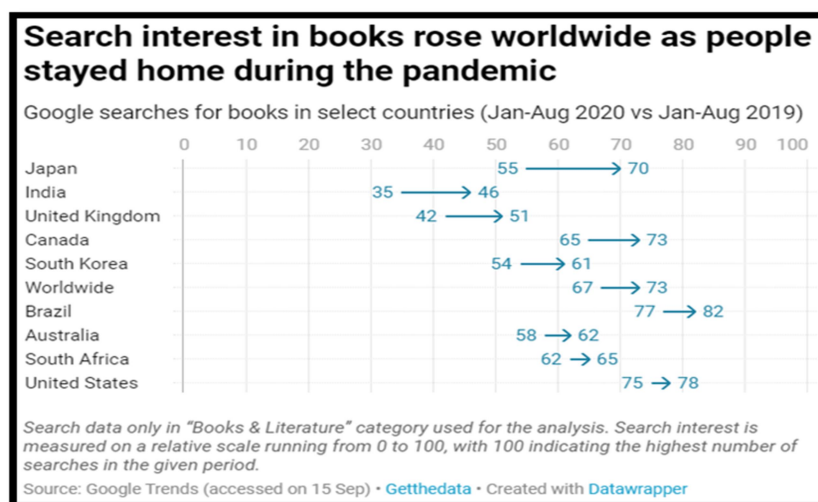
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Introduction

Books have always been a reliable source of information and knowledge for readers, and play a key role in bridging the gap between the dark ages and the hyper-connected telecommunication world. Like most industries, the book industry is undergoing a lot of changes (trade books, educational books). Internet marked the shifts in sales, distribution channels, publishing, and also the means to display the content. With the implementation of new technologies in the mentioned features the industry witnessed a decline in printed book purchases since 2009 (recession) (I.T. Strategies, 2013). Digital concepts of books were first introduced in 1971. It was made more and more relevant and effective with the advent of amazon's Kindle book readers in the year 2007 (Anderson, 2009). In the year 2010 Apple released i-Books, and i-Bookstore on its dedicated app, Google launched its e-bookstore, and Amazon's e-book sales outnumbered its hardcover books (Government Book Talk, 2014). Considering the lockdown limitations, the efforts directed towards reducing human contact e-books were widely in use in place of their printed counterparts. According to UNESCO in April 2020, around 1.5 billion students were out of school and college during the pandemic. Educational institutions had no option but to acclimatize to digital education. Many publishers extended their support by providing digital copies of their books to the students free of cost for a limited period of time to support e-learning during school and college closures. The adoption of e-learning meant easy accessibility, greater reach, a cheaper mode of education, flexibility, and an overall increase in the learning potential of students during the pandemic (Dhawan, 2020).

Fig 1. The search of books during the COVID-19 pandemic



With the onset of the corona pandemic and all businesses, shops, departmental stores, and educational institutions being closed for an undetermined period of time Google trend data shows the online book search this year is comparatively higher than the last year (Sahidi, 2020).

Research Objectives

The objective of the research titled "*A Study on Shifting Perceived Value of E-book in Light of COVID-19 Pandemic*" is as follows:

- To reveal and explore the value of e-books among students and their guardians.
- To explore the changing attitude towards the purchase of e-books.
- To reveal the future trend of preference of the format of the book purchased.
- To explore the variations in daily life brought about by the pandemic with respect to books.

Literature Review

A book is no longer just a stack of pages bound together with full of knowledge. In the last several years, e-books became a mainstay of the publishing industry. However, the fall of printed books with the introduction of e-books has not materialized as forecasted. In 2020, the printing industry witnessed a rise in sales of 8.2% over the year to a total of 751 million copies. To understand the adaptation of digital reading it is important to know the advantages of digital books over printed books. E-books come with the benefit of accessibility, and portability and

also has the feature of annotation in case the reader wants to highlight, or note something in the e-book, readers can customize the e-book as per their requirement of changing the font, size, and brightness. They have to schedule reading sessions as battery power is needed to read on e-readers or on their phones (Leonhardt, 2017). Handling a hard copy of a book provides emotional touch (Evensen, 2020). Moreover, e-readers may experience strain on the eye. But, e-books may save readers a fortune as they cost less certain websites and organizations offer some free downloadable books (Mc Maken & Battle, 2021). E-books were preferred due to quick access and easy ownership. Thus, e-books have firmly established a place in people's life due to their convenience of readability (Zhang & Kudva, 2014). Although e-books may seem to help the publishing industry, they can be a bit daunting for readers. The price gap between e-books and print books is closing. The E-book might be priced about the same as the paperback edition but of course less than the hardcover (Mc Maken & Battle, 2021). But the readers may have to deal with the fear of losing their books entirely in case of any technical damages (Mc Learn, 2008). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 45% of people bought a printed book whereas 23% bought an e-book. Smartphones, tablets, and e-readers are using e-books more over the past few years with the help of their electronic devices to read (Richter, 2021). The e-reader version of a book is cheaper than a hardcover or paperback and often online book providers offer discounts on books for attracting first-time buyers. Online books are easily downloadable and can be stored on the device. Due to this pandemic situation, many online service providers started focusing on critical factors that can be detectable and are visible to the readers, also focusing on marketing strategies to increase acceptance of their books in a crowded digital marketplace. Tech-savvy readers are more likely to recommend others online via blogs, social media, etc. (Grand View Research, 2020). In general print books occupied a larger share in the Indian book market but during the covid-19 pandemic, the printing sector has seen a marginal increase in the consumption of the online versions of the book. The factors that facilitated the growth of the consumption to a significant extent can be accessed directly at home; due to the lack of physical form e-books are naturally preferred to physical books as it minimizes the risk of spread of the virus and again cheaper and accessible. With the ongoing of pandemic and a mass layoff in the working force, people were found to be reading books and the cheaper cost of the books seemed to facilitate the process. (Jones, 2020). Audiobook has been reintroduced in such a scenario when

readers are quite astray from traditional books due to unavailability and this worked as a catalyst to make them more inclined to e-book and audiobooks. Audiobooks started increasing in various portals like Audible, Scribd, Google Play Books, Apple Books, etc. (Sarfara, 2021). Listening to podcasts has also accelerated exploration during the Pandemic. There are so many newly launched applications only for listening story, news, and reading books. (Sarfara, 2021).

Hypothesis 1: Due to easy access, availability, and healthy option, e-books will be the first preference for students even in absence of Covid-19.

Hypothesis 2: Hard copies of books are more preferred than their e version due to more comparative emotional attachment of readers.

Hypothesis 3: In the post-pandemic era e-book and e-newspaper will be the first preference due to their low cost.

Hypothesis 4: Fear psychosis during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the purchase of e-books.

Hypothesis 5: Technical complexities of handling is a hindrance for readers to prefer e-books to printed book.

Research Methodology

The current study is all about changing the obligatory perception regarding e-books compared to the traditional book after the Covid-19 pandemic. Since students were compelled to study e-books, our study has concentrated on the preferences of e-books among college students. This study is based on primary and secondary data analysis. Primary data has been collected through the Opinion Survey method, circulated through a google form containing twenty- four questions. 102 students and guardians have given their responses. The opinion of the respondents collected on a 5-point Likert scale anchored from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Strongly disagree was coded as 1, whereas, disagree, maybe, agree, and strongly agree respectively as 2, 3, 4, and 5. The so-coded data were analyzed by using the chi-square test with the help of MS Excel and other software.

Analysis & Findings

It is found that the majority of the respondents, 52.9% and 47.1% are Male and female respectively, 27.5% are from the category of monthly income within 25,000 to 50,000, 22.5% are from below 25,000 and 20.6%, 15.7%, 13.7% are above 75,000 to 1,00,000, within 50,000 to 75,000 and beyond 1,00,000 respectively. The majority of the total respondents (82.4%) are from the age group 18-23 and 8.8% are from 24-29, 77.5% are student and 11.8% are service professionals. 52.9% are pursuing their Bachelor's degree, whereas 38.2% have not yet passed 12th standard and 7.8% are pursuing Master's degree. 45.1% of the respondents agreed and 12.7% strongly agreed. 46.1% and 22.5% have agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Moreover 47.1% of the respondents agreed and 35.3% strongly, again 44.1% of the respondents agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed to the cost effectivity than physical books. 38.2% are undecided, whereas 31.4% have agreed and 10.8% have strongly agreed. 41.2% of the respondents agrees and 21.6% of the respondents strongly agrees to this. Whereas 24.5% are undecided. Although 30.4% and 15.7% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively, but 43.1% of the total respondents could not come to a decision regarding this. 36.3% of the respondents agreed and 20.6% strongly agreed to the frequent need of charging the devices is a hindrance for the readers again 38.2% agreed and 39.2% strongly agreed to the presence of an emotional attachment of physical books.

However, 43.1% agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed to the higher accessibility with respect to e-books. 45.1% have agreed to the statement and 25.5% have strongly agreed. 35.3% are undecided whereas another 35.3% have agreed to this. Majority of the respondents (52%) have agreed to the positive influence of free digital books whereas 31.4% are biased to take a decision. 46.1% have agreed and 32.4% are undecided about the influence of online start-ups dealing in e-magazines and e-newspapers. The majority of the respondents (42.2%) are undecided regarding the healthy accessibility of e-books whereas 24.5% and 16.7% have agreed and strongly agreed respectively. The majority (41.2%) are undecided, 25.5% have agreed whereas 20.6% disagreed. The majority (44.1%) are undecided, 20.6% have agreed whereas 19.6% have disagreed. Many respondents (36.3%) have agreed, a major portion (40.2%) are still undecided regarding this. The majority (48%) are undecided whereas 24.5% agreed that the fear induced by covid-19 played a major role in influencing the use of e-books. Majority of the respondents (38.2%) are undecided

regarding this where as 30.4% of all the respondents disagreed. This has been agreed and strongly agreed by 54.9% and 19.6% respectively whereas 22.5% are still biased to take a decision. Majority of the respondents (44.1%) are undecided regarding the use of e-book by offline students. whereas 29.4% agreed and 14.7% disagreed. 47.1% agreed and 20.6% strongly agreed. A majority, 45.1% are biased to take a decision, whereas 14.7% strongly agreed and 34.3% agreed.

Hypothesis Testing

I. O: Accessing e-books is a healthy option as compared to traditional book.

P: In absence of covid-19, the e-book will be the first preference for students rather than physical books.

H0: O isn't associated with P

H1: O is associated with P

We got, p-value = 0.000

Since, $0.000 < 0.05$, the alternate hypothesis can't be rejected.

Therefore, these two statements are associated with each other.

Fig.2 - Output of Hypothesis 1.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	120.404 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	75.905	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	31.138	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 18 cells (72.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .47.

II. D: E-books are more cost-effective than physical books.

I: An emotional attachment to reading a book is missing while reading e-books.

H0: D isn't associated with I.

H1: D is associated with I.

We got, p-value = 0.002

Since, $0.002 < 0.05$, the alternate hypothesis can't be rejected.

Therefore, these two statements are associated with each other.

Fig.3 - Output of Hypothesis 2

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30.512 ^a	12	.002
Likelihood Ratio	30.005	12	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.690	1	.101
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 11 cells (55.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .16.

III. D: E-books are more cost-effective than physical books.

Q: E-newspapers and e-book will replace their respective physical format in post-pandemic situations.

H0: D isn't associated with Q.

H1: D is associated with Q.

We got, p-value = 0.036

Since, $0.036 < 0.05$, alternate hypothesis can't be rejected.

Therefore, these two statements are associated with each other.

Fig. 4 Output of Hypothesis 3

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.489 ^a	16	.036
Likelihood Ratio	26.963	16	.042
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.716	1	.190
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 19 cells (76.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

IV. L: The threat of Corona infection has motivated people to purchase e-books rather than physical books.

S: Covid-19-induced death is creating fear psychosis which is also a motivation to use an e-book.

H0: L isn't associated with S.

H1: L is associated with S.

We got, p-value = 0.000

Since, $0.000 < 0.05$, the alternate hypothesis can't be rejected.

Therefore, these two statements are associated with each other.

Fig. 5 - Output of Hypothesis 4

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	48.940 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	30.774	16	.014
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.546	1	.011
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 19 cells (76.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .12.

- V. J: E-books have a higher rate of search ability and accessibility to traditional books.
- G: E-books are vulnerable to loss with technical failures.

H0: J isn't associated with G.

H1: J is associated with G.

We got, p-value = 0.001

Since, $0.001 < 0.05$, alternate hypothesis can't be rejected.

Therefore, these two statements are associated with each other.

Fig. 6 - Output of Hypothesis 5

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.978 ^a	16	.001
Likelihood Ratio	38.412	16	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.170	1	.680
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 17 cells (68.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .15.

Conclusions

Books are an important part of daily life from the perspective of both education and entertainment. We found that people value e-books over hardcopy because it's a healthy option, also found that fear of death and corona infection worked as a catalyst for people to purchase e-books. In favor of traditional books, some readers still value the emotional attachment of the books rather than the cost-effectivity where e-books are a bit cheaper. But the technical failure is not a hindrance to the purchase and use of e-books. So, summarizing all the data and findings here it can be said that e-books are valued over traditional books in every aspect and this will remain prevalent even when the COVID-related restrictions are lifted.

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