

case study



Digital Book World

Exploratory Hybrid Research

Background

In partnership with Brock Associates, a research and publishing consultancy, iModerate conducted an exploratory hybrid research study to understand how portable multi-function devices, or MFDs (e.g., iPhone, iPad, Blackberry, tablet PCs, etc...), are changing consumer book reading habits. This research, presented at the 2011 Digital Book World Conference, provided an in-depth look at the consumers who utilize these devices, their usage occasions and their ebook purchasing habits.

Why iModerate?

To accomplish the research objectives and get a detailed read on this hot topic, a hybrid research approach was deemed necessary. iModerate's live, one-on-one conversations were embedded into Brock Associates' online survey, allowing for a more engaging dialogue to develop with MFD users. The conversations gave respondents a private forum in which to candidly express themselves, and they relished the opportunity. As a result of this approach, iModerate and Brock Associates were able to learn a great deal about the MFD owners, their devices and their passion for ebooks.

Our Objectives

- Understand usage and reading behaviors on MFDs
- Explore individuals' perceived benefits and limitations of reading ebooks on MFDs
- Understand how reading ebooks on their MFDs compares to reading print books
- Explore ebook purchasing preferences, including which apps and ebook stores consumers use to buy ebooks, and why

Our Approach

The quantitative study was conducted with over 300 MFD owners who have read an ebook in the past 6 months. In addition, iModerate conducted 60 one-on-one conversations with men and women aged 18+ years who own and use a MFD, and have read at least one ebook on this device in the past six months. Readers were defined as Heavy Readers if they had read 6 or more books/ebooks in the last 6 months, Medium Readers if they had read 3 to 5 books/ebooks in the last 6 months or as Light Readers if they had read 1 or 2 books/ebooks in the last 6 months.

What We Discovered

The iModerate qualitative conversations in conjunction with the online survey uncovered several reasons why MFD users prefer reading ebooks on their devices. These include the convenience, the ease of purchasing ebooks and the functionality of the devices. The research found that these benefits coupled with increased usage opportunities have led to a significant rise in the amount of books read by these individuals. The feedback from the one-on-ones detailed the limitations of reading ebooks on MFDs, and provided insight into the ebook purchasing process. Finally, the insight from the conversations allowed for the creation of two persona's: Sarah the Avid Reader and Mike the Renewed Reader.

Increased Reading and Usage Opportunities

One of the most significant data points to come out of the research was that 66% of respondents have increased their reading habits since they started reading on their MFDs. The conversations made it clear that a main driver behind this increase is the sheer accessibility of these devices - consumers always have one in their purse or pocket, which makes for more reading opportunities. Moreover, respondents continually remarked that it is easier to read ebooks because they weigh less than paper books. Therefore, while many respondents reported that they regularly read ebooks at home, it is not surprising that 73% read on their MFDs while traveling on airplanes, trains and/or buses.

Guest: I travel a lot and like to read so it's very convenient to load books to my iTouch and take them with me. I'm a very light packer so it's a great convenience for me. Recently I was on a business trip and had a long layover at the airport. Having an iPod touch with books loaded entertained me for a couple of hours.

- Light, iPod touch, female, 35-44

Benefits of Reading Ebooks on MFD's

One of the main goals of the market research was to find out what makes reading on a MFD appealing. One primary advantage that kept coming up is the ability to access a wide variety of titles at any given time. Qualitatively, respondents remarked how much they love the convenience of having an entire library of books at their fingertips - to them, it's just there, in their pocket, whenever they need it.

Guest: Being able to read on my iPhone is convenient. It travels everywhere with me and now I always have a book waiting for me whenever I need it. I can get new books instantly and don't have to wait.

- Heavy, iPhone, female, 25-34

Respondents are also attracted to the functional features that make reading on their MFD more convenient. The backlight and font/text adjustment were two of the main features that kept coming up in the chats. In fact, 41% preferred reading on their device because of the backlit screen. Respondents also like the fact that their device allows them to do many things at once. For example, they can read a book, look up unfamiliar terms in a dictionary and check their email all from the same device.

Guest: I like the dictionary option... sometimes you don't know the word (old words or scientific terms) and instead of searching through print I go to the dictionary... or go search using the internet just by clicking one button.
- Medium, iPad, female, 45-54

Limitations of Ebooks on Multi-Function Devices:

While most respondents lauded the benefits of MFDs, there are a few specific limitations and hurdles that did bubble up in the conversations. Specifically, some respondents find MFDs fragile, expensive and difficult to read on outdoors.

Another important finding was that regardless of respondents' overwhelming enthusiasm for ebooks, many still expressed a deep nostalgia and affinity for print books. When asked about this, respondents reflected on the simple pleasure of passing along books to friends and family, and the sensory experience of a hard copy book.

Guest: I miss the tactile feel of paper... and the smell of the book.
- Light, iPad, male, 25-34

Ebook Purchasing

Another objective of the hybrid research was to find out all we could about ebook purchasing. For those that read ebooks, 73% download their ebooks from Amazon. While respondents overall are satisfied with the ebook purchasing process, their feedback did reveal that "browsing" online is much more cumbersome than doing so in a physical store. To overcome this, respondents emphasized the importance of targeted categorization, meaningful book reviews and relevant recommendations, all of which make browsing the vast inventory of ebooks less daunting

Mod: Tell me more about how Amazon.com being a highly used site increases the appeal of purchasing ebooks from them.

Guest: Lots of consumer reviews, lots of products to choose from not available at other site.
- Heavy, iPhone, female, 25-34

Personas

The feedback from the conversations allowed us to create two profiles that represent the types of MFD users that we came across:



Sarah the Avid Reader

Sarah has always been an avid reader. It's her favorite hobby and a big part of her life. She purchased her iPad primarily as an ereader, but also finds its multifunctionality fun and compelling. She churns through book after book while riding the train into the city for work, waiting for her kids during soccer practice, reads in bed long into the night while her husband is asleep (thank you backlit screen!). For Sarah, the draw of her iPad is threefold: it ensures that she always has a myriad of books at hand, allows her 24/7 instant access to any title she can imagine, and saves money because ebooks cost less than print.



Mike the Renewed Reader

Mike was not a big reader before buying his Android phone, but has rediscovered books thanks to an application that came preloaded on it.

Before ebooks, he never would have thought to grab a book for entertainment while commuting or waiting at the tire repair shop, but now, instead of reading the old magazines or listening to music, he reads books.

For Mike, reading is driven more by the device than vice versa. He is motivated to read because his Android makes it accessible, instant and easy. To some extent, Mike thinks of books in the same way he thinks of games or the Internet - entertainment on demand. Also, the fact that ebooks are relatively inexpensive has removed one of his main barriers to purchase. Because of this, he plans to continue reading more in the coming year.

Conclusion

In the end, the market research allowed iModerate and Brock Associates to get a comprehensive read on how MFDs have changed the reading landscape. While the survey provided interesting data points surrounding MFDs and ebooks, iModerate's one-on-one conversations uncovered the reasoning behind those numbers. The presentation of this hybrid research gave Digital Book World attendees a holistic view of how and why respondents have adapted their reading behaviors to technology. The results have been published in a variety of media outlets and have proved valuable for both the book publishing industry and MFD manufacturers.